BEYOND THE GLOBAL CULTURE WAR

ADAM K. WEBB

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Beyond the Global Culture War

Adam K. Webb

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To my mother,

Barbara Wheat,

in appreciation of her love and unflagging support over the years,

often in challenging circumstances.

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Introduction

History, it is said, now draws to a close. Socialism collapsed over a decade ago. Globalized markets are everywhere wiping out what lingers of traditional life. Heralds of the "end of history" hold that liberal modernity has all but won a final victory. Sooner or later, it will complete delivery of the peace and prosperity it promised us. While historical events will still succeed one another, "history" in the sense of grand clashes of ideas is over.

While antimodern zealots have lashed out lately, by crashing airplanes into skyscrapers and bombing trains and nightclubs, they are easily dismissed. Even after 9/11, none other than Francis Fukuyama, author of the 1992 book *The End of History and the Last Man*, insisted that "History is still going our way."[1] He voiced the sentiments of many enthusiasts of liberal globalization. No one seriously expects the likes of al-Qā'idah to bring more than bloodshed and turbulence at the margins. Liberal modernity will continue advancing apace. In the eyes of its beneficiaries, both Western and non-Western, those who resist are just ill-willed and benighted, blind to the futility of their efforts. History has already picked the victors and the vanquished. Probably by 2050, certainly by 2100, such antiliberal manifestos will have joined others on the ashheap of quaint conceits.

Or so we are led to believe. The present global order has certainly forced those who oppose it into retreat. Those traditionally minded folk whom rapid change has cast to the margins—from the rusting hinterlands of Siberia, to North African shantytowns, to the remotest hamlets of the Andes—mostly just resign themselves to being on the losing side of history. Rather more fortunate souls fall prey to an intoxicating consumer culture. Many progress-minded young people expect this century to finish the job of distributing mobile phones and sneakers and DVDs to the last backwaters of our planet. Embracing a vapid modern self-understanding seems to them the price of prosperity. And at the heights of the new world order, where the modern liberal outlook reigns supreme, still others clink their glasses and smile on history's generosity. In the long term, they think nothing will block the world they want to build.

Of course, no one says today's world is already a Utopia. Even the enthusiasts of liberal globalization see that the present order often fails to live up to its own aspirations. Modernity's gift may be en route, but it has yet to arrive for many people. Policymakers and intellectuals who acknowledge this usually have in mind the deprivation that the liberal order leaves untouched. Even the gold-paved streets of Europe, North America, and the Pacific Rim have a few pariahs living on them. And the wrenching changes that the world's poorest countries are experiencing are still harder to ignore, even if most in power think those changes are necessary.

Some critics prod their complacent fellows to tackle poverty and disen-franchisement more eagerly. They argue that the liberal vision needs to be rescued from shortfalls in how it has been realized so far. Pushed further, this logic also resonates with leftist activists, like those who flocked to "anti-globalization" protests at Seattle and Genoa in recent years. They think present global economic and political structures compromise individual rights, equality, democracy, and

the like. The system must be radically transformed, perhaps at the expense of the bankers and CEOs. They also hope the heavy-handed interventions by Western powers abroad, in places like Afghanistan and Iraq, will give way to humane governance and legal accountability. These critics think that the liberal ideal can ignite efforts against injustice in the liberal reality.

Such reformers are right to note that the present world order, because of the deprivation and abuse that persist, fails even to live up to its own standards. But such critics from within take for granted that a more fully liberal world—a more fully "modern" world, in the usual sense—would be better than the imperfect one we now see. From shortcomings, they conclude that we just need more of the same: more energy, more foresight, more openness, more activism, all in service to the same ends. They never question the core vision of liberalism itself. Beneath their candor about shortcomings lurks a plea that we continue striving toward their vision, rather than opening up a broader debate about alternatives.

But consider for a moment: What if the problem does lie with the vision itself, with the gift of liberal modernity? Perhaps choices, comforts, and peace will amount to a jaded and well-fed stupor. If history ends, and the centuries stretch out before us like a desert of the spirit, shall we finally think ourselves accursed and wonder if we can return that gift? What if the choices are as shallow as they are broad, as meretricious as they are kaleidoscopic? What if the comforts fill our stomachs but leave another gnawing hunger that no gluttony will cure? And what if the peace is not one in which we get answers to the great questions, but one in which we stop asking them?

Liberals dismiss those of us who look askance at modern culture in this way as mere peddlers of nostalgia, out of touch with human nature and the realities of how history must unfold. It is from us that they imagine they are liberating humanity. Yet with so much turning on what happens in the coming decades, we should not crumple under the rhetoric of history's end. Nor should we just agree when well-meaning liberals acknowledge the flaws in their own system, and work to perfect it. How well that system *performs*, now or in future, has little bearing on how we assess its deeper *cultural project*. Before racing to a destination, any sensible person should want to know why it is a destination. If a perfect liberal order would still be doing humanity a disservice, as many of us believe, then efforts to bring the reality closer to the ideal are beside the point.

From one angle, indeed, perfecting liberal modernity by pushing it further could make matters worse. The more ground liberalism gains, the less cultural raw material will remain for even discussing alternatives. Our villages give way to shopping centers, and our temples to rave clubs. Harsh though this may sound, a well-fed and peaceful world would not necessarily be better than the present one. People can be well-fed but spiritually impoverished. Peace can rest on numb complacency and a mass forgetting of what it means to demand the best of oneself. Ending famine and bringing world peace are worthy aims, of course. But we must be careful what we ask for. We may get it, and it alone, on the wrong terms, and forever.

While I believe history should not end in this way, I fear it will do so unless a challenge arises to put things right. A global culture war rages, between those who aspire to end history and those whom they would consign to history. Notwithstanding the complacency of the powers that be, matters are not yet decided. Most of humanity remains unconverted to their vision. I shall argue in this book that the great traditions' steady loss of ground to global liberalism over the last

century should not dishearten us. It should inspire us to rethink our diagnosis of what ails the modern world; to make sense of why liberal culture has swept over the earth like a plague, and where its vulnerabilities lie; and to imagine how we might roll it back by offering a very different image of the future. This book proposes not retreating more slowly in the global culture war, but rather winning it on new terrain.

What is the global liberal order, exactly? I am talking here mainly about a cultural force, not just a set of economic or political arrangements. Indeed, the most sophisticated voices of history's end see their vision mainly as a cultural project. The essence of liberal power is a shift, worldwide in scope and noxious in effect, in how people understand themselves and public life. This shift reflects the mentality of the world's most powerful social groups.

The nuances of liberalism in this sense will become clearer as the book unfolds. But for now it should be clear that liberalism here does not have any of the narrower meanings people often associate with it. It is not just liberal capitalism (a particular kind of economic system). Nor is it just pro-market electoral democracy (as it was in nineteenth-century thought, and still is in ordinary political usage in many countries). Nor is it just a vaguely left of center kind of social democratic leaning (as in much of the English speaking world, and especially the United States). Many of those things are connected with it, but they are not all of it. To speak of liberalism in this broader sense means casting a critical glance farther afield—indeed, questioning much that is taken for granted as simply modern.

While treating liberalism as a global cultural force, I acknowledge that it has many other dimensions. There are many lenses through which we can view the pathology of our time, some economic, some political, some cultural. Those radical leftists who say the global order lets people suffer in appalling poverty are quite right, for example. This book is far from sympathetic to capitalism. The world s dominant classes today are serving their own interests, often at the expense of the poor and sickly, and can thank the last century for making cutthroat individualism so respectable. For anyone who wants to overcome present arrangements, a top concern must surely be improving the lot of the hundreds of millions around the world whose corrugated-tin shacks let rain drip on to mud floors.

But the economic ills of liberal modernity are only part of the story. The greatest and most insidious pressure behind liberalisms spread is not greed. If it were, it would be too simpleminded to pose a threat. Greedy people have existed in all eras and have usually been frowned upon and kept in check. Rather, the driving force today is a self-understanding, whose bearers genuinely believe they are acting for the sake of good. Their mentality is far harder to crack than the economic structures associated with it. Anything that blunted exploitation but left that mentality reigning supreme would fail to address the real problem. We could smooth capitalisms rough edges and still leave the human spirit in misery.

In this way, global liberalism is ultimately much more about ideas than about interests. But it is not *only* about ideas on the most abstract level. Just as I part company with Marxists and others who focus on capitalist exploitation, so must I part company with a different set of critics: those who see the struggle against liberal modernity as a sort of intellectual game. In Anglo-American political thought, for example, the word “antiliberal” usually describes a kind of highly abstract attack on liberalism only as a theory, rather than as a cultural force too. These

thinkers come from many angles, but they write for the same academic audience and in the same dense style as do most liberal political philosophers. Specifically, they focus on the philosophical bases of liberal thought, and how liberal thinkers get from those bases to certain conclusions. They then methodically pull liberalism apart for misplaced assumptions or faulty logic or the like. Typical examples would be arcane arguments over whether there is a self independent of its chosen identity, or whether individuals own their talents, or how one can justify toleration of intolerance.

Of course, liberal political philosophers can be profitably engaged on their own abstract terrain. But when it comes to understanding liberalism's global cultural offensive—to put it bluntly, why liberalism dominates publicly rather than just in universities and think tanks—the abstract approach falls short. Antiliberal philosophers pay at most passing attention to the culture wars being waged in society. Indeed, in a kind of academic hubris, they seem to think modern liberalism rests on an intellectual error. Once enough learned articles are published, once the scholarly debate is won, once the error is cleared up, all else should right itself. This same problem of over-abstraction also plagues theological critiques of liberalism. Conservative theologians, in Christianity and Islam especially, often rely on such abstract claims about human nature or the universe. All these purely intellectual arguments lose touch with lived social conflicts. Anemic hairsplitting crowds out a vigorous engagement with how people on the ground really think about what is at stake.

Ideas matter most where they intersect with cultural forces. Some of the best thinking about our present plight takes place on this level. In every country, we find committed intellectuals who write about culture wars, about struggles between people with rival visions and ways of life. Their books range from thoughtful histories of how those struggles have unfolded, to polemical efforts to speak for one or another social current. Some such writings are inspired by a religious sensibility at odds with modern liberalism, and describe the world as torn between the forces of piety and apostasy. Some affirm the values of plain folk against yuppies, technocrats, and globalizers. Still others lament the decline of higher ideals, besieged by a stultifying consumer culture. Whatever the exact flavor, they offer a healthy mix of historical perspective, astute observation, and social conscience. Ideas and social forces overlap. Inspired political action has something concrete on which to work.

As will become clear, in writing this book I align much more with these culture-war writers than with the liberal reformists who only want more and better of the same, or with the radical leftists who focus on class conflict and exploitation to the exclusion of all else, or with the antiliberal philosophers and theologians whose abstractions lose touch with reality. But for all their strengths, I differ with the culture-war writers in one important respect. They are too place-bound. However rich their accounts may be, they usually speak of and to only one setting: to the Islamic world, or China, or America, and so on. They rarely tie local trends into anything more universal, even though most of what is happening *is* universal. To inspire and sustain a challenge to *global* liberal culture, we need to address more universal concerns. We might well lose the global culture war in several theaters separately, but we surely can win it only everywhere at once.

For good or ill, this book's critique of global liberal culture comes from a standpoint rarely seen today. My position contains many paradoxes that will be resolved only as the chapters

unfold. I oppose most of what goes under the heading of globalization, yet am a cosmopolitan. I speak for neither left nor right. I talk about history a lot, yet see no real boundary between the ethical questions of the past and those of the present. I am troubled by huge economic inequalities, yet reject Marxism and believe that a better world starts more with ideas than with structures. I am hostile to global liberalism, yet unmoved by today's nationalisms and religious fundamentalisms. I want to give more space to the values of plain folk, yet also lament the decline of old high-culture elites and suggest the latter have a crucial role to play in any society. And not least, I have a distaste for much of modern life, yet think that nostalgia only distracts us from seizing the future to put things right.

Convinced liberals will dismiss these views as the mere confessions of a malcontent. Be that as it may, I am not alone in holding them, separately or even in combination. Most of humanity is discontented with the present liberal order, even though that discontent comes from varying directions and is not always consciously articulated. Even among people of an intellectual bent, discontent today tends to be rather shapeless. Readers who share some of my outlook often wonder where they fit in the present ideological landscape.

A cultural chasm now cleaves the world. On one side stand the technocrats and yuppies, who seize modernity's comforts and disdain older truths. They confidently announce history's end even if they know they still have decades of loose ends to tie up. This camp includes most leftist activists who relive the tiedyed enthusiasm of the 1960s, because they offer a challenge within liberal modernity rather than truly against it. From the other side of the chasm shout back a motley assortment of fundamentalists and nationalists and populists. Whatever the surface differences among heartland evangelicals, bearded shantytown militants, and right-minded truck drivers, they are everywhere kindred spirits far more than they realize.

This bleak terrain leaves little space for those of us who reject both liberalism's “end of history,” on the one hand, and the narrow place-bound reactions against it, on the other. Over the last couple of decades, nothing has been added to the same tired clash between the liberalism of the self-indulgent and the provincialism of the benighted. But a certain space begs to be filled, if only because a critical mass of discerning people have yet to put some definite stamp on their grievances and hopes. Of course, no one can speak persuasively to all of them. Nor shall I offer here more than the merest sketch of a proposal. Even so, this book is written for what I hope is a suitable time. I trust that even readers who dislike my answers can still benefit from reflecting on the right questions. Why has the liberal vision of the world come to dominate, why does todays resistance fail, and how might we craft a more promising alternative and strategy?

My answers to these three intertwined questions will unfold in stages. But the crux of my argument is that we must understand what is happening now from a much more timeless and universal perspective. Just as the history-enders show a present-minded complacency, so do their critics get bogged down in the concerns of their own settings. To raise a proper challenge to today's order, we need the leverage that can only come from a vantage point both outside modernity and outside any one culture. Viewed properly, the global culture war that rages in our time is just the latest version of a permanent contest among visions and ways of life. That contest recurs across all civilizations and extends back across the watershed between modern and premodern life.

As I shall explain in due course, this timeless contest unfolds among four ethoses: loosely, character ideals or ways of life. Every culture has had them in varying forms, and they have interacted everywhere in much the same way. In modern times, one ethos—the one at the core of liberal culture—that was kept in check historically has escaped those checks and come to dominate globally. The other three ethoses, which I shall introduce later, have ended up on the defensive and have failed to offer a convincing alternative vision of humanity's future.

The most vivid cultural critiques of liberalism fall short because they only speak to one setting, and do not map local fault lines on to the world as a whole. Resistance nowadays tends to be parochial, to say the least. Those who challenge Goliath in the name of one religion or one people have got nowhere, and will get nowhere. They are rightly dismissed as mere provincials, at odds with the scale of modernity. Thinking about these four universal ethoses instead will help us make sense of the culture war *globally*, not just in one theater. Since they are *rival universalisms*, liberalism loses its monopoly on the widest horizons. The other three ethoses are building blocks for a postliberal world. As timeless poles of the human experience, they can get us started thinking about a cultural grand strategy for taking back history.

In coming chapters, I first flesh out the four ethoses with some vivid illustrations from the past. This is the best way to develop a vantage point outside modernity: by introducing the actors before the ills of the last two centuries contaminated them. Liberal modernity is the aberration, not the standard. In history, however musty it might seem at first, we can breathe freely and regain consciousness. Later I explore exactly what liberal modernity means and how it imposed itself on the world. To put history right, we must figure out how it went wrong in the first place. I trace how this cultural pathology escaped checks everywhere in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. I also explain how, up to the 1960s and 1970s, it managed to outmaneuver reactions against it that tried to give modernity a very different flavor. By the 1980s and 1990s, it could entertain thoughts of locking in its victory everywhere.

All this history may seem quite distant from the concerns of our own time, perhaps even a detour from the urgent questions at hand. But I believe we must first step back from our own time, to gain the leverage to push beyond it. If that first part of the book creaks with age, like a well-rusted door hinge, remember that the louder the creaking the more likely one is to be jarred awake. It will become clear not only how much is at stake, but also the battles that were lost before we came to our present predicament. Liberalism's dominance is not natural or inevitable. It came from a series of maneuvers that, with difficulty, we can still undo.

This argument is what theorists call a metanarrative: a sweeping frame-work for understanding the ideas and social forces that drive history. The book tries to make sense of global liberalism and the currents that might coalesce against it. Anything of this sort is quite unfashionable in some circles. Some postmodern writers and activists say that metanarratives only bring trouble, by compressing human experience into monoliths of religion, class, or nation. Sweeping histories can crowd out diverse voices, and leave little room for individuals to change the world around them. However well-intentioned, metanarratives just oppress and exclude. I disagree. While any metanarrative can have ill effects, the world suffers now mainly from the *lack* of good metanarratives to inspire resistance to global liberalism. Nibbling unsystematically from below, as some postmodern activists seem to prefer, has never overcome any oppressive order. Only a

proper challenge, with all of the reckless sweep and confidence that implies, can remake the world.

Here the story I shall tell, of ethoses permanently in tension with one another, has something to offer. If ethoses contend across time and space, then people not only have room to act but also something on which to act. The political and cultural climate in any setting is a momentary balance of forces. Those who dominate a given society cannot truly "claim" it, in other words. This applies both to every part of the world and to the world as a whole. Conditions lose the aura of resilience and matter-of-factness that too often stunts the imagination. A metanarrative does not squash agency; it fosters agency.

After the first third of the book, I turn to our own time. First I cast a critical glance over global liberal culture: its peculiar denizens, its sources of strength, its insecurities, its grand strategy for locking out and wearing down those who oppose it. Then I look at the other side of the coin, the main clusters of resistance: a menagerie of populists, fundamentalists, and nationalists. While some of the latter s grievances overlap with my own, I shall explain how they have shortcomings of both scale and content. They inadvertently leave the present order intact, because they are all so insular that they have nothing to offer the world as a whole. Moreover, they do not draw from the full range of the alternative ideals that liberal modernity assaults. Theirs are flat critiques that can meet narrow needs at best. With their one-dimensional and stifling visions, they cannot inspire a postliberal order responsive to all the demands of the human spirit.

Finally, at the end of the book I draw all these reflections together. I suggest a way of linking the three non-atomist ethoses in a rich and compelling alternative vision. I also argue that this alternative allows—nay, demands—the replacement of the present order globally. *Not a few niches for social experiments, not a precarious patch of territory that fends off pressure from outside, not gradual reforms: nothing but a rupture everywhere at once can accomplish these ends.* I suggest how a postliberal order might work, and how those sympathetic to it should begin devising a strategy for bringing it about. This is a radical vision, of course. This book does not counsel moderation or halfhearted vagueness. To the reader I can say only that I move unapologetically from my premises to my conclusions.

I assume no more than a general familiarity with world history and politics, and an eagerness to reflect on the crisis and promise of our time. From start to finish, I illustrate my argument with examples from many parts of the world, which even if unfamiliar—as some will be to even the best informed of readers—should be self-explanatory in context. This is a global book, in spirit and content. I try to engage the concerns of people in all civilizations, and to translate those concerns into more universal language. My argument must travel well, with each tradition as a resource, not a perimeter. The great civilizations have all enriched my thinking, whether as historical legacies or as more recent personal experiences.

Now the placelessness of my audience does raise complicated questions. By trying to speak to everyone, I run the risk of sounding like an outsider everywhere. Such is, perhaps, the fate of anyone who asks these questions. But the attempt is what matters. This book should be seen as an experiment in urging liberalism's opponents on to wider terrain. To think about every civilization as humanity's resource, as an arena for universal clashes, is a prerequisite for seizing the high ground again. No one book can create a cosmopolitan impulse and yearning among the

world's malcontents. At least, however, I might convince a few to imagine that such a thing is possible, and to reflect on those otherwise alien readers elsewhere who might be probing their own cultural frontiers. But for now, let us first turn back to history, to the fulcrum on which the rest of the book turns.

Chapter 1

Ethoses Across Time and Space

I am going to describe a struggle of ethoses in the modern world. The word *ethos* (*êthê* in the Greek plural) originally meant the way of life of a people, and the temperament that set them apart from other groups. On an individual level, it could also mean the permanent features of character. Unlike *pathos*, a momentary state of emotion induced by drama that tugged at the heartstrings, *ethos* endured beneath any changes. I shall refer in this book to four ethoses—four self-understandings, four images of the ideal character. Each of these ethoses is universal, cropping up repeatedly in different civilizations and eras. As permanent focal points of human culture, they have existed in creative tension with one another. But in modern times, one of those four has gone on the offensive and wrought havoc across the globe.

This account departs from the prevailing way of thinking about what moves people to act politically. Among the global upper-middle class, comfortable at history's end, the whole idea of a history-shaping clash of world-views seems alien. The writing of history has tended to move away from tales of heroic drama, of leaders who decisively alter the path of human events. In the grand sweep of history, most of what happens is now thought to rest on how impersonal forces add up. That more broad-based approach has its advantages, no doubt. Heroes probably do count for less, in the long run, than the trends and pressures that affect millions: commerce, technology, disease, and the like.

But along with the colorful heroism of "history on the surface," something more important has also been lost in recent decades. No longer do enough educated people take seriously the role of ideas in shaping society. Everything supposedly comes down instead to some interplay of economic interests or power-seeking or institutional design. This way of looking at the world has much to do with the experience of the educated classes in our time. For several reasons, deep ethical commitments and clashing visions do not tend to resonate much with them. Working in a market-driven economy inclines such people toward a certain hard-headedness when it comes to making sense of human motivations. Many think it naive to imagine others are moved by principles rather than by some kind of raw self-interest.

Other versions of this outlook do not ooze suspicion quite so much, but they agree that ethical visions are too often overrated. They say that ideological fervor and clashes between people with different ways of life reflect ignorance of a common human nature. Human beings would get along better if they did not take themselves so seriously, if they put their heated rhetoric aside and met on the terrain of life, peace, and happiness. Now most people who look at the world this way are well-intentioned, to be sure, and some conflict over principles is indeed shortsighted. But it is also obvious that these sentiments reflect a culture that has difficulty relating to deep ethical clashes.

Baldly put, these layers of global society are besotted by consumerism and compromise. Heated struggles in history, principles for which fervent people fought and died, have no parallel in today's experience for the upper-middle classes. Even the ideas to which they themselves subscribe—the ideological core of liberal modernity—are not a matter for bloody-minded struggle. For one thing, their own vision is reigning supreme and seems well on its way to

finishing off any rivals. And opponents who hurl moral thunder at them, such as fundamentalists or enthusiasts of equality, are readily dismissed as psychologically warped and in need of a mellowing encounter with "reality." Liberal culture treats such ethically driven critics either as suffering from a constipation of the conscience, or as having sinister oppressive designs that their rhetoric only obscures. Liberals aspire to a world in which pedestrian souls will docilely split the difference along some yardstick of self-interest. Fervor will be thankfully laid to rest.

These assumptions and hopes are also built into academic social science nowadays. Western (or Westernized) social scientists work in this cultural milieu, and their descriptions of the world are more imprinted by it than they usually acknowledge. Much like the rest of the global upper-middle class, they have thrust ethical visions to the margins. At most they speak of "values": a catch-all category to dump all human motivations that do not fit into economics or power or biology. Values are then treated as just superficial "preferences." For many social scientists in recent decades, a persons ideas about virtue have sadly been on a plane with his or her tastes in clothing or soft drinks.

This shortsightedness has many obvious causes. An obsession with easily measurable behavior has let many mainstream social scientists blind themselves to differences in what moves peoples hearts. Far better to measure than to delve inward. Making sense of deep ethical motivations also requires a sensitivity to the self-understandings of people quite unlike oneself. In a global society that does not take inner self-cultivation as seriously as past civilizations did, these skills do not come naturally. Being told that everyone is self-interested, that ideas are masks for interests, and that all human beings are psychologically more or less the same, one might just come to believe it too fully for one's own good.

This book is not just at odds with global liberal culture in its purpose, therefore. It also diverges from how modern liberals—whether mainstream social scientists or ordinary people reflecting on events—now explain the world. My argument will delve deeper than mere "values," into the realm of comprehensive self-understandings. In taking such things seriously as ultimate forces in politics, it harks back to older approaches. In the early twentieth century, for example, European social theory engaged people's deepest sensibilities more imaginatively. The German sociologist Karl Mannheim and others spoke then of "total" worldviews, rooted in the ideas and experiences of "organic" social groups.[1]

When social theorists expressed such views a century ago, of course, they treated each mentality as the product of unique historical circumstances. Most of the European scholars thus focused on Europe's peculiarities as a civilization past and present. Often they were trying to make sense of how that civilization had metamorphosed into the strange modern world around them. Given the issues of their time, they saw no need to outline patterns that cut across cultures and eras. This broader aim, finding what ethoses recur as permanent alternatives, is my point of departure here. The much larger scale of global modernity now allows and inspires this question. Indeed, I think addressing the sweeping challenges of our own time demands it.

Before properly introducing the four ethoses, I should make a few things clear. While I think these basic worldviews often shape social conflict, I realize that other motives can sometimes outweigh them. Economic interests or biological drives, for instance, are real enough. But even when these other motives prevail, ethical ideals still serve as a lens through which people make

sense of their motives and how to act on them. This point is obvious to anyone other than those social scientists who assume that a "real," "hard" motive such as economic self-interest must underlie everything else. Moreover, the intense sentiments that move people to vigorous political action rarely arise from material interests, however weighty. Nor do those sentiments arise simply from the fact that two groups of people differ from one another. The mere existence of different group labels, for example, does not itself lead to conflict apart from the diverging ways of life involved. A civil war between blue-eyed and green-eyed people has yet to happen, for the simple reason that blue-eyed people and green-eyed people have no ethical differences. Conflicts arise over meanings, not facts.

The most intense motives to protest, or repress, or do battle come from knowing that personal ethoses and social visions intersect. Given the chance, people naturally turn their own self-understandings, their own character ideals, into designs on society at large. When poor and rich peasants struggle over land-use customs, they may be doing so for reasons involving both principles and interests; likewise with ethnically different settlers and natives in any number of places. But if a visceral rage explodes between opposing groups, and sets loose mobs with pitchforks, it usually means the immediate issues fit into a larger contest: between rival ways of life and rival self-understandings. A victory for the other side means not just having one's grain yield reduced or ones rent raised, for instance, even if that might be part of the story. It would also mean a triumph for the bearers of an alien mentality.

The four ethoses in this book are mainly group identities, not individual ones. I am not offering a way to classify individuals into "types," as personality tests do. To be sure, some people's self-understandings are clear-cut enough that we can pigeonhole them quite easily. Some of the thinkers I shall mention are good examples. When I speak of one or another ethos here, however, I am talking mainly about groups whose ways of life reflect such self-understandings overall.

Still, even though ethoses can best be considered on a group level, the issues are deeply personal. Each ethos bridges the personal and the social. If publicly visible, rival ethoses unsettle people because they call into question their own self-understanding. Moreover, each ethos implies a vision of society as a whole. People want their own self-understanding translated into arrangements that reflect it and promote it publicly. When any ethos dominates in the public realm, other ethoses are always somewhat limited in how far their expression can go.

An ethos crystallizes in shared experience. Long ago, the German social theorist Max Weber used the term "status group" to refer to a group of people with its own defining way of life and standards of honor.[2] In principle, one can point out an almost infinite number of status groups. To speak of four ethoses, as in this book, I must map such variety into a few broad categories. In Weberian parlance, this means creating "ideal-types"—categories that simplify reality. We must step back from the peculiarities of so many status groups, to focus on the much more limited number of underlying character ideals that they reflect. Beneath variety on the surface, a few deeper mentalities can be said to recur.

Importantly, this means that some status groups from different cultures, even if they have no contact, can belong to the same ethos. Time and place do matter, and societies do differ. But those differences are differences of detail, of how the ethos is expressed, rather than of the

underlying ethos itself. Inevitably, some detail is lost in painting with a broad brush this way. But that is the price we must pay to start thinking about a universal response to today's universal onslaught.

Let us start with the simplest ethos, which I call *demoticism*. The classical Greek word *demos* referred to the common people as a whole, and *demot* to the member of an ancient township. Demoticism is the simplest ethos because we all know it when we see it. Most people who have ever lived have been demots. In the smallest and most isolated communities, such as jungle villages or nomadic shepherds' camps, demots are the only ethos-bearers around. The demot is the traditional peasant, or the loyal pillar of neighborhood life, or the member of a tightly knit egalitarian brotherhood. Demots take comradeship seriously, and believe in the basic sameness of human nature. In a demotic subculture, styles of life overlap enough to sustain a common experience. Relationships merge several aspects of life: work, kinship, festivities, and so on.

Most demots have been settled peasants, of course, and this is the image that most easily comes to mind. Modern anthropology tells us much about such ways of life, which have often changed little since time immemorial. Still, demots appear in many other settings too. Nomads like the Bedouin often seemed fiercely independent, living off trade and plunder. Yet internally their tribes had little real hierarchy among members, and myths of each tribe's common descent kept loyalty firm. In urban areas, civic associations have often given people the same sort of anchor. In the premodern Middle East, for example, the *futuwwah* clubs—a kind of militia brotherhood—replicated much of the flavor of rural life in the cities.[3] Histories of such groups give us one way to explore the demotic mind.

All these ways of knowing demoticism run into difficulty, however. Society tends to screen a lot of demotic sensibilities from view. Demots usually control very little public space: village councils, kinship networks, festivals, or perhaps even less in some societies. Before modernity, high illiteracy rates also meant that few frank statements of demotic vision passed from one generation to another. Despite their numbers, demots have lived almost invisibly in the public record. Some of these issues have been explored in political scientist James C. Scott's contrast between the “public transcripts” of those in power, and the often starkly different “hidden transcripts” of oppressed groups. He describes how slaves said all kinds of irreverent things out of earshot of their masters, for example.[4] Of course, demots do not *have* to be oppressed to be demots. Their ethos is the same whether given full sway or almost none, whether they never encounter another ethos or meet scorn every day. But the fact that conditions have often forced demotic subcultures to hide their true beliefs does make it harder to describe their thinking fully.

Some of the best insights into demoticism come from moments when it has exploded into public view. Before modern times, popular revolts often gave short-lived voice to this current. How demots organized their affairs when in revolt shows something about their latent hopes. In a few very revealing cases, demotic uprisings left behind written statements of their philosophy and aims. We find what looks like a more assertive version of the sensibilities that, under quieter conditions, demots have lived out as best they can in their villages, camps, and clubs. Premodern popular revolts had a range of motives, to be sure, and it would be wrong to cast them just as outlets for demotic philosophy. Many peasants have undoubtedly gone on a rampage just because landlords squeezed them into near starvation. But by looking at the ideas expressed in such uprisings, we do get some sense of the kind of world demots would like.

One good example is the Digger movement that arose in southern England in the late 1640s. It seized a chance for revolt that the English civil war of the time had opened up. The Diggers took over unenclosed land for cultivation in common by poor peasants and landless laborers. The movement rode on longstanding kinship networks, most of its members coming from within a few miles of the "digging" site on a Surrey hilltop. The uprising occurred against a background of pressure by wealthier and more acquisitive neighbors, who had tried to make traditional decencies yield to a harder competition. Parallel circumstances have moved demots to action countless times elsewhere, of course. But the Diggers are an especially good case because their leader, a bankrupt named Gerrard Winstanley, published several tracts expounding on their worldview.[5] From the record of movements like this, and other histories and anthropological studies, we can piece together an outline of the demotic ethos.

Loyalty and small decencies go a long way for demots. Their self-respect comes from fulfilling their duties toward kin, companions, and the community at large. While not all demots have lived at the edge of subsistence, peasants and others with precarious livelihoods have often seen quite vividly that everyone in their community has a stake in mutual aid. Because everyone is in the same boat, the thinking goes, they owe a lot to one another. As Winstanley put it, "Is thy neighbor hungry and naked today? Do thou feed and clothe him, it may be thy case tomorrow, and then he will be ready to help thee."[6] Traditional peasants value the more unassuming virtues. Among traits that Winstanley listed as good were "humility," "patience," and "tenderness," while bad traits included "unfaithful rashness," "self-honoring," and "covetousness."[7] The demotic ethos reflects the lifelong ties and face-to-face contact of community life on a small scale. Relationships extend across everything from kinship, to mutual aid in work, to the distinct atmosphere of demotic leisure in the village festival, the neighborhood tavern, or perhaps the chewing of *qāt* or coca leaves. Some egalitarian brotherhoods involve the same mentality. In ancient Chinese folklore, for example, we find tales of secret societies and bands of swordsmen. Their oaths of initiation bound members' fates to one another.[8] Sometimes demotic ties create strong boundaries, and even hostility toward those outside the community. More often, demots just show a benign lack of interest in people beyond their own small universes.

While solidarity among demots involves a sense of sameness, their social arrangements do not make them wholly interchangeable. One community can have different roles within it. But true demotic specialization has a peculiar logic that only reinforces the sense of sameness. Take a classic demotic setting that survives to this day, sometimes almost unscathed: the *ayllú*, or traditional Andean hamlet. Villagers are ranked by seniority. In some aylliis, meetings have a rigid seating arrangement with elders at the top. The structure stays constant while individuals shift positions as they advance through the life cycle.[9]

Winstanley's writings imply much the same view of age hierarchies. Even though the Diggers wanted to flatten other inequalities, his Utopian vision set age limits for community officers, and gave the special status of overseer to elders over sixty. Children would be "trained up in subjection to parents and elder people more than now they are."[10] Modern blue-collar unions, which draw from residues of demotic sentiment, have carried on these same habits of mind. They tend to be suspicious of competitive piece rates for work, while endorsing wage differences according to seniority. Across time and space, demots allow and even welcome an age hierarchy. It rests on the life cycle and thus on a basic sameness of individuals. The common life

sequence—roles succeeding one another as individuals age—often imprints itself on their image of the social world and the universe in general. The demotic mind thinks in cycles, whether about nature or history or village lore. Change takes place within a just and self-correcting recurrence.

Another basis for demotic role differences is gender. That male and female roles have differed since time immemorial is obvious, whether we speak of work responsibilities or upbringing or family dynamics. For demots, gender roles are as natural as an age hierarchy. Two middle-aged peasant women at different ends of the same village would typically have very similar status and duties. Sameness stays intact alongside a practical specialization of tasks. From a modern liberal standpoint, demotic gender roles may seem inherently unequal, but demots do not think so. Demotic marriage, for example, works as a partnership of duties between husband and wife, a shared point in cyclical family and community life. In Andean villages, a male officeholder in effect shares the post with his wife. Demots also think of men and women as carrying out equal but complementary duties. In practice, some demotic attitudes have led to gender inequality. Many a peasant woman has been under the thumb of her husband, no matter how important her role in a functional sense. But we should not misread history by projecting back the arrangements of early capitalism, which empowered breadwinners and marginalized housewives.

Depending on the religious and other ideas at hand, demots have many ways of describing the nature of sameness among people. Demots tend to adapt the language and symbols of a society, to match their own experience and to support their own vision of equality and cooperation. Winstanley, for example, took Christian themes and turned them into a kind of pantheism. Divine reason infused all people and moved them to practice the small decencies. Conscience worked sometimes on that intuitive level, and sometimes through "the mouths of others," as the social pressure of peers came to bear. "The world is mankind," he wrote. Meaning rested in human fellowship. Conscience bridged intuition and duty.[11]

Much the same outlook appeared in the Taki Onqoy movement, an uprising in 1560s Peru against the Spanish colonial authorities. Those highland peasants had a spiritual language very different from their Christian rulers. Against them, they reasserted an indigenous Andean worldview. Like Winstanley, they saw a divine presence in every oppressed peasant. They believed their movement arose because *wakas*, spirits that inhabited peaks and springs and other features of a village landscape, had suddenly taken up residence in people. The movement revived traditional animist rites and foresaw a pan-Andean army of wakas that would drive out the contaminating influence of Spanish settlers. Villagers who had abandoned community norms and cast in their lot with the colonizers were to be reabsorbed.[12]

Demots' stress on equality makes them suspicious of overly intellectual approaches to ethics. The simple virtues do not need any elite to contemplate them, interpret them, or inject them into society as part of a mission. Win-stanley expressed this sentiment quite clearly. He had little patience for the clergy, so in his Utopian commonwealth "one sort of children [would] not be trained up only to book learning."[13] Abstract philosophy divorced from the gritty reality of life was just misguided. As some histories of the Diggers recount, Winstanley s "bitter anticlericalism" reacted in part to the clergy's alliance with wealthy landowners who were trying to crush his movement.[14] But beyond the political reasons, his outlook tied into demots' visceral dislike of any group that sets itself above common sense and human equality. The clergy had laid claim to a higher perspective, but were merely out of touch.

Intellectual and clerical minorities are one threat to demots. Another threat is trade that violates norms of reciprocity and goodwill. Demots do not reject economic inequalities altogether, providing they stay within a common way of life. Inequality just cannot arise from trampling over the small decencies. Winstanley bitterly complained about traders whose greed led them to "cheat some simple plain-hearted man or other."[15] His words would resonate with demots the world over, who often see eager profit-seekers as parasites who take away from the limited resources of their fellows.[16] Digger practice reflected this suspicion of trade too. Hoping to avoid outside interference as much as possible, they cultivated the land they had occupied in common. Winstanley s Utopian vision for England as a whole took this principle further. A network of public storehouses would take in and distribute goods, though he would not do away with households as a focus of human relationships. The profit motive would yield to norms about honest work and not wasting what one consumed.[17]

Yet another example of this communal vision comes from the Qarāmiṭah revolt, which like the Digger movement has often been called an early socialist experiment. The movement spread across Arabia and the Levant in the tenth century, drawing in peasants and urban laborers who believed that a divine kingdom was about to emerge. Ownership of everything in nature had reverted to humanity as a whole, they thought. The Qarāmitah wore uniformly white clothing to erase distinctions among them, and kept only weapons and the like as personal belongings. A trustworthy elder in each village was appointed to manage property and aid the needy.[18]

Similar popular uprisings abound in history—in Iran in the early sixth century, Mazdak's "Zoroastrian communism" during the German Peasants' War of the 1520s, Thomas Münzers Utopian experiment at Mühlhausen; in some ways, the Taiping Rebellion in southern China in the 1850s; and so on. Whenever they broke free of a more hierarchical society's constraints, demotic movements offered a vision of austere common life and put it into practice as far as possible. Demotic Utopias of this sort have been the exception rather than the rule in history, of course. But they reveal much, as more assertive versions of how demots think even in less favored times. In very isolated settlements, where they need not deal with bearers of other ethoses at all, demots have lived out these principles fully. Whether flourishing unmolested in remote niches, or invisible because suppressed, or flaring across the landscape of history in occasional revolts, the demotic ethos is history's largest but least vocal current.

The second of the four ethoses is *perfectionism*. In ordinary usage, of course, a perfectionist is someone satisfied with only the highest standards. In the more technical parlance of moral philosophy, perfectionism sometimes refers to the idea that life revolves around reaching some ultimate level of personal cultivation. Here I shall use the label to describe a self-understanding that we might call the mirror image of demoticism.

Perfectionists reject the demotic ideas of sameness across all human be-ings, as well as individuals' embeddedness in roles and duties. Instead, they cultivate themselves apart from most people and in contrast to them. The perfectionist ethos has had two main flavors, aristocratic and mystical. Aristocratic perfectionists have included citizens of the ancient Athenian *polis*, the Japanese *samurai*, the *adīb* literati of Persian high culture, or the Indian *kṣatriya* warrior caste. Among mystical perfectionists have been the forest dwellers of the Upanisadic scriptures, as well as some Christian gnostics and the more esoteric Daoists and Sufis. While aristocratic perfectionists seek self-cultivation *within* the world, mystical perfectionists seek it *beyond* the

world. Beneath this difference, both types of perfectionists share a common self-understanding. They focus on refining the best elements within them-selves, elements that set them apart from humanity's common denominator. Perfectionists' ways of life supposedly offer an image of human potential fully realized in its best specimens. Excellence and distinction, not solidarity and sameness, count here.

While the aristocratic perfectionist lives in the world, he or she has little in common with a demot who is embedded in a set of roles. The perfectionist's social setting is just an arena that enables special individuals to show their qualities. As Aristotle put it in describing the ideal Greek polis, a community exists to help individual citizens develop a noble character.[19] For aristocratic perfectionists, such an arena has three purposes. First, it offers cultural standards of excellence. One learns from youth onward which qualities to cultivate, and how to know them when one sees them in others. Second, such an arena gives opportunities to shine publicly, through heroism or refined manners or the like. Third, it allows for lasting recognition of greatness, with esteem in the present and a name impressed on posterity.

These three functions appear in any arena for aristocratic perfectionists: standards, opportunities, and recognition. Only the cultural details vary. A literary aesthete may lack the political vigor of an Athenian citizen, for example, but still has visibility as in a polis. Likewise with a medieval errant knight, who despite a less structured and public life than an Athenian, still felt a heroic fellowship with other knights. Even in warrior cultures without a proper public sphere, such as the Wari empire of the early Andes, heroic portraits on pottery are signs of something like a perfectionist arena.[20]

A perfectionist arena differs from a demotic community. The arena is just a means to an end, a place for expressing the right sort of individuality. Unlike the demot, whose self melts into roles and duties, the aristocratic perfectionist takes a more detached view of society. Aristotle wrote that “a city, by its very nature, is some sort of plurality.”[21] The polis brought citizens together not for the sake of the polis itself, but for the sake of their cultivation as individuals. Distinction trumps solidarity. Indeed, some kinds of perfectionist self-expression have little to do with social pursuits. Aristotle's “life of action” did not have to imply heroism or oratory or the like, important though such things were to many Greeks. It could mean contemplation and “trains of reflection followed purely for their own sake.”[22] Whatever its flavor, aristocratic perfectionism has these three features: individual detachment from suffocating social bonds, transcendence of ordinary human nature, and some arena for recognizing virtue.

Perfectionists believe that their identity rests on personal qualities intrinsic enough not to ebb and flow with changing fortunes. They see their excellence as one of inner character rather than outer position. While demots live out a cyclical unity of *roles*, aristocratic perfectionists live out a narrative unity of *qualities* that, because of their durability, do not bend to circumstance. Aristotle wrote that “the goods of the soul are not gained or maintained by external goods.”[23] We see the same idea in honor cultures where an individual can meet with economic disaster or violent oppression, yet care not a whit because only inner integrity counts. Aristocratic perfectionists have a supreme self-confidence, rooted in how they see their own character and place in the world.

Aristocratic perfectionists have a complex view of what equality means. As we have seen, they think self-cultivation is for a minority. Often they want nothing to do with "lower" sorts of people who do not pursue such aims. In other settings, the herd turns into a mundane base that frees the happy few from necessity. This was roughly how ancient Greeks saw the relationship between slaves and citizens. As perfectionists would put it, better for a few to reach the highest plane at the expense of most, than to sink into a flattened culture where more exalted pursuits have no place. Even in these cases, however, perfectionists do not simply have it in for the rest of humanity. Their outlook does not value domination for its own sake. Moreover, most perfectionists would agree with Aristotle on "an equality for those who are equal."[24] At least in principle, higher qualities should be recognized wherever found. Since those qualities are intrinsic rather than a matter of external position, one cannot fake them. One gains nothing by clinging to undeserved honor. Only ossified castes, which have fallen away from true perfectionism, convince themselves that virtue coincides exactly with social rank.

Aristocratic perfectionists also want parity *among* the cultivated few. An arena allows for worthy pursuits in common, among members who are roughly equal. In the Greek polis, equality meant rotation of citizens in office, an "interchange of ruling and being ruled" that preserved everyone's dignity.[25] In cultures without an idea of citizenship, elaborate manners and mutual respect can create much the same space. The "honorific individualism" of Japanese samurai is one example. Their hierarchical loyalties to one another rested, in the end, on a sense of freedom and personal honor for all samurai.[26] Such an outlook, jealous of one's dignity, contrasts starkly with the unassuming small decencies of demotic life.

So far I have described aristocratic perfectionists. Many of the same traits appear in mystical perfectionists, such as Daoists, Sufis, and Christian and Upanisadic gnostics. I mean only the esoteric branches of these traditions, of course, and not the practitioners of folk spiritualism who are basically demots. Mystical perfectionists believe the world conceals a higher spiritual truth, which they must discover via certain personal experiences that most people cannot manage. They differ from aristocratic perfectionists in that, instead of seeking virtue within the world, they want to escape the world and into an absolute spiritual reality. The world's unceasing flux "maddens the mind," as Laozi put it.[27] Across the scriptures of mysticism, we find a theme of withdrawing into oneself so that one can "pierce through this magic veil [and] see the One who appears as many."[28] Nature, convention, duty—all evaporate once the mystic escapes appearances and "perfects his Heaven alone."[29] Just as their aristocratic counterparts float loose from a deadened herd, so do mystical perfectionists float loose from the world of material phenomena. At least in the human dimension of their experience, they do not negate the self by entering this spiritual absolute, as it might seem. Rather, they relate to the divine much the same way aristocratic perfectionists relate to an arena for cultivation. It provides a yardstick of self-perfection. Channels leading to it also lead away from more vulgar layers of reality.

Like aristocratic perfectionists, mystical perfectionists are a minority. "Hard to reach is the state of the illumined man," say the Upanisads. "Only a few attain it. But even one is enough. For he is the pure Self of the scriptures."[30] Again we see that all humanity is redeemed through the few people at the pinnacle of personal development. While aristocratic perfectionists make themselves an aesthetic embodiment of the highest worldly qualities, mystical perfectionists abandon the world for a personal voyage into what lies behind the observable universe.

The mystic's self is both a means to this end, and a microcosm of it. As the Sufi master Muḥammad ibn al-'Arabī explained eight centuries ago, "man's knowledge of himself comes before his knowledge of his Lord, the latter being the result of the former."[31] Meditation leads inward, but arrives at something grander than the universe itself. Properly understood, the mystical self is but a microcosm of God. This mental map splits the self into higher and lower natures. Instead of exalting virtue or reason over the passions, as their aristocratic counterparts do, mystical perfectionists draw a line between the earthly and the spiritual. The mystic realizes a true self more permanent than the body, by journeying inward and away from mundane social roles. At the same time, he or she journeys beneath worldly phenomena to find that those phenomena are but ripples radiating out from a deeper reality.

Since the inner world is more real than illusions outside, the mystical perfectionist takes a dim view of acting on the world beyond oneself. Even trying to convey one's insights to the unenlightened is a waste of time. "Why should he wear himself out over the affairs of the world?" asked Zhuangzi. "Do not be an undertaker of projects."[32] Perfection lies within, not in carrying out duties or righting society. Unlike aristocratic perfectionists who live in the world and seek some kind of recognition from their fellows, mystical perfectionists put little stock in outward esteem. Outward learning and rituals only deceive, or at best keep the ignorant busy. The Upanisads thus dismiss ancient Vedic rituals as "lower knowledge" that the sages wisely abandon.[33]

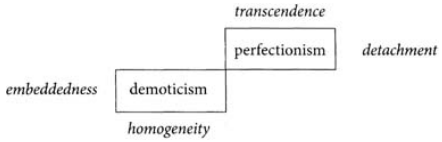
In revealed religions such as Islam, mystics have put even more stress on this difference between higher and lower knowledge. Ibn al-'Arabī was typical in believing that texts had two meanings: an obvious one for the masses and a hidden one for the enlightened.[34] People who know spiritual truth first-hand can step back from petty moralizing. Earlier, we saw the contrast between demotic roles and perfectionist qualities. With this layering of higher and lower knowledge, mystical perfectionists just take their detachment from outward behavior to its logical conclusion. Conventions lose all hold on the happy few who see past the world and the rule-bound herds who inhabit it.

Just as conventions evaporate, so do the categories with which rational thought tries to carve up the cosmos. All mystical traditions reject an intellectual approach to divine truth, and say that no verbal description can capture it.[35] This outlook carries over into seeing the boundaries among religions as artificial. Hinduism and Islam have generated some of the most sophisticated thought along these lines, perhaps because their geographic position in the middle of Eurasia has allowed intense encounters with neighboring faiths. The Upaniṣads call the absolute "the supreme source of all religions." Ibn al-'Arabī took the idea to its obvious end: the mystical minority need not limit themselves to one religious tradition.[36] Since all religions spring from the same source, all objects of worship contain a spark of divinity. Mystics everywhere have seen spiritual truth as universal, cutting across the divides of doctrine and scripture.

Both aristocratic and mystical perfectionists see their ultimate end as a unified truth, as the peak of either character development or spiritual sensitivity. They stratify the world and people within it, as well as higher and lower impulses within themselves. They also see their pursuits as much more than a matter of personal taste, as rooted in timeless facts of human nature and the cosmos.

We can now see all the ways perfectionism and demoticism contrast with one another. Polar opposites, they are two basic streams of self-understand-ing that cut across space and time. Demots see perfectionists as impractical, contemptuous of most people, and wrapped up in ethereal pursuits alien to human warmth. In perfectionist eyes, demots are unimaginative, bound by deadening conformity, resentful of higher natures, and unable to escape their social roles. To judge between them would be comparing apples and oranges. For all their obvious blind spots, both ethoses capture vital dimensions of the human experience. Demoticism and perfectionism have molded and enriched billions of lives through history. The tension between them has propelled key debates in every culture.

Each of these ethoses has two main pillars, around which all parts of its worldview cluster. For demots, they are (1) *embeddedness* in a community and a set of roles and duties, and (2) faith in the basic *homogeneity* of human nature. For perfectionists, they are (1) *transcendence* of a minority of people based on their special qualities or insights, and (2) some *detachment* from social roles and boundaries. Loosely, embeddedness and detachment are opposites, as are transcendence and homogeneity. These four pillar principles (two for each ethos) capture the underlying logic of demoticism and perfectionism. The other features of each ethos branch off from them.



To take the scheme a step further, the first principle in each pair (embeddedness and transcendence, respectively) has priority. This means the second one usually serves as just a means to the first one, and thus can vary more. For instance, demots tend to value homogeneity since it assures common experience as a source of loyalty. At the same time, however, they allow differentiation so long as it does not imperil the core principle of embeddedness, or solidarity. Such things as age hierarchies and gender roles do not bring that risk, the logic goes. Likewise, perfectionists detach themselves from too encompassing a social context, for the sake of higher goals that a person needs some self-containment to pursue. In service to those goals, the social ties that remain can range from the publicity of a polis to quiet meditation in a Sufi tariqah. No one could say that demots are mainly levelers, or that perfectionists are mainly individualists. Rather, demots are first and foremost loyal companions; perfectionists are transcenders of the herd.

The third ethos I call *virtuocracy*. The word combines the Latin *virtus* (virtue) and the Greek *kratia* (ruling). It already exists in English in only very rare usage, mainly as a loose translation of the Chinese term *dézhì*, meaning any general combination of virtue and ruling. Here, just as with demoticism and perfectionism earlier, I shall be using it in a very specific way to refer to one of the four ethoses.

Historically, virtuocrats have included the Catholic clergy, the Islamic *'ulamā*, the Hindu brahmins, the Confucian mandarin literati, and other clerics and publicly minded intellectuals. All such groups had a self-understanding in common, and brought a similar sense of mission to

bear on the world around them. Unlike demoticism or perfectionism, virtuocracy is not a freestanding ethos, for it draws from the other two ethoses previously described. From perfectionists, it takes the idea of transcendence, of special qualities and insights that distinguish a minority from most people. With demots, it shares embeddedness in a social world where one can realize oneself by affecting others. As we just saw, transcendence and embeddedness are the main pillar principles for perfectionists and demots respectively. In this sense, virtuocrats blend the highest aims of both ethoses.

Virtuocrats share with perfectionists the idea that certain qualities set them apart from most people. Here we again find the contrast between the noble and base parts of one's inner self. Ranks in an ideal society correspond to high and low elements within a cultivated person. People who occupy the highest echelons of humanity do so because they are governed by the best within themselves. Thinkers have described these admirable qualities in different ways, of course. For Mencius, the key virtue was benevolence, the opposite of passions and pettiness. Plato wrote of reason as a check on the appetites.[37] Whatever the emphasis, virtuocrats ground their self-understanding in certain enduring, intrinsic virtues.

So far, virtuocracy parallels the perfectionist sense of a true self that events and disorder cannot shake, an enduring set of qualities that define a virtuous life. But virtuocrats shift the focus slightly, to an integrity of moral perceptiveness. Plato's philosopher-kings would contemplate “eternal and unchanging” truths in the universe. Then they could descend bearing those insights into an orderless world. Mencius put the matter as a stability of moral compass in adversity. Where most people saw chaos as an opportunity for “depravity” and “licence,” gentlemen would keep a “fixed heart” regardless.[38] Unlike the perfectionist, the virtuocrat does not stop at contemplation or virtuous excellence for their own sake. Higher truths are not just a private aim, sought and enjoyed apart from the herd. Rather, they are part of a self that finds fulfillment by acting upon the world. Often this action involves the power of example, as a virtuous minority raises the tone of a whole society. Both Mencius and the *Bhagavad Gita* note that people in high stations will spread their own character, whether virtuous or wicked, among people at large.[39]

Virtuocrats need not limit their actions to the power of example, though. Whenever virtuocratic groups have ruled, as the Confucian mandarins did through most of Chinas history, they have handled concrete tasks as well. But they have always resisted seeing themselves as mere functionaries. Their qualities of character, however different cultures might think someone acquires them, are something of a special gift. Seeing oneself as just a bearer of skills strikes the virtuocrat as degrading. Confucian officials of the Ming dynasty, for instance, always frustrated the emperor's efforts to turn them into mere managers. They made much of dabbling in the fine arts and other forms of amateur spontaneity, as expressions of a refined inner self. The gentleman's character prevailed over his performance.[40] The same mindset has appeared in religious traditions with systematic legal codes like the Islamic *sharī'ah*. Shi'ite clerics found early on that they had to apply rules that often seemed dry and formulaic. Yet as virtuocrats, they saw themselves as having a kind of charismatic sympathy with the truths that lay behind the law. Such insight let them deal with the spirit, not just the letter.[41] The enlightened do not traffic in crass details.

On a more abstract plane, the *Bhagavad Gita* hints at how virtuocrats relate to their own actions. The *Gita* appeared in an epoch when world-renouncing mystics were challenging the rituals and duties of traditional tribal life. Loosely, those two poles mapped on to perfectionist and demotic ethoses respectively. One side wanted to abandon social obligations altogether, for the sake of inner truth. The other side remained attached to duties and to the rewards they brought. In the *Gita*, we read of a middle ground where virtuocracy bridges the two aims. One reveals one's character through a mission of "maintaining the world." But doing so does not mean being motivated by the concrete effects of one's actions, or even identifying with those effects.[42] Again, the virtuocrat acts instead of withdrawing, but sees action as mainly an ethical exercise.

Virtuocrats thus have a complex link between their inner and outer selves. They blend the transcendence of perfectionists and the embeddedness of demots. This duality creates a split in the character, a tugging from two directions that any virtuocratic subculture must resolve. Several civilizations independently came up with ideas about this tension. For example, Islamic theology distinguished between *wilāyah* (sainthood) and *nubuwwah* (prophethood), when describing Muhammad and other religious figures. Sainthood meant inner-oriented mysticism and the receipt of divine revelation. Prophethood meant the outward mission of inspiring a people and founding a just and godly society. Chinese mandarins likewise saw the ideal person as practicing *xiūshēn* (rectifying oneself) inwardly, and *zhìguó pìng tiānxià* (governing the country and pacifying what lies under Heaven) outwardly.[43]

This split gives virtuocracy a lot of flexibility. The balance between these two poles has varied over time, and from place to place. Confucianism first focused on inner virtue and limited action to the power of example, for instance. Later, it gave political responsibility pride of place. By the Song dynasty, trends had swung the other way again. In the words of one historian, neo-Confucians "viewed the arena of public action primarily as a field for exercising their own moral musculatures."[44]

This inner-outer split spills over from how virtuocrats understand themselves, into how they understand the world in which their missions unfold. They think that most people, lacking the virtuocrats inner qualities and moral compass, are exempt from the special burdens involved. This means that most people neither need nor want to know certain truths about the social order relevant only to the virtuocracy. Even in the same culture and tradition, truth has layers. Plato hinted at as much at the end of *The Laws*, a blueprint for a Utopian community. Most of the book laid down a painstakingly detailed scheme of laws and customs, which ordinary inhabitants of the Utopia should take for granted. But beyond this created tradition, a handful of guardians—a body called the "nocturnal council"—would debate abstract philosophy and guide the state. Those enlightened souls would have a fuller understanding of the community's purpose. They could travel abroad, for example, comparing foreign practices with their own and revising the latter accordingly.[45] The Confucian philosopher Xunzi held a similar view of the rituals that were so central to Chinese culture at the time. Common people thought such rituals had a magical effect, by affecting cosmic harmony and the like. Gentlemen, according to Xunzi, knew the value of rituals really lay in "embellishing" good attitudes.[46] This layered outlook contrasts with what we saw earlier of demots' stress on a common morality for everyone. The Diggers thought truth had no layers and needed no sophisticated interpretation.

This contrast between obvious and hidden truths developed most fully in religions like Islam. Unlike Confucian or Platonic philosophy, they have had sacred texts directed to all individuals. Virtuocrats insist, however, that all is not as it seems. For example, take the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' (Brethren of Purity), an obscure circle of thinkers who flourished by the Persian Gulf in the late 900s. They understood scriptures like the Qur'ān to be aimed at everyone, but in different ways. On the one hand, the outer meaning dealt with rites, charity, and knowing God on a concrete level. Loosely, this meaning mapped on to the plainer virtues that demots hold dear. Pursuing the religion's inner meaning, on the other hand, demanded much more commitment. A minority could read another intent behind the symbols of scripture. They could help each other understand hidden truths, and carry out a mission that the faiths inner message implied.

For the Ikhwān at least, that mission meant educating people. They claimed a network of comrades scattered through the Persian Gulf and Fertile Crescent, charged with spreading knowledge. Different messages went to different groups. People who could grasp the inner message were recruited to the elites mission. A "middling group" were taught to reflect on doctrines and analyze them. Even the least discerning people still were helped to believe in a more reasoned way than lazy orthodoxy allowed. The Ikhwān's mission meant serving everyone with a soul, in the way most fitting.[47] It bears noting that in this sort of venture, virtuocrats tend to show a healthy restraint. They never try to create a world of only virtuocrats, because a culture cannot rest on just one version of human nature. This awareness tempers any missionary zeal that might obliterate rival ways of life.

Of course, this managing of truth does mean that virtuocrats set themselves up as guardians of society's fate. Such a hierarchical worldview always unsettles modern liberals, who think any elite sense of mission betrays an underlying arrogance. It can even seem like a license for abuse. To be sure, both historical reality and the internal *ésprit de corps* of virtuocracies give plenty of ammunition for such charges. We must take the risks of any world-view seriously. But this ethos should also be understood on its own terms, as a mentality and an ideal. Practiced properly, virtuocracy has nothing to do with contempt for most people. Virtues and insights are always tied up with a duty to serve humanity. The Ikhwān, for instance, wrote that they were mere craftworkers, though their raw material was society rather than wood or metal.[48] We should also remember that all complex societies have had elites of one sort or another. Virtuocrats just take seriously the question of what those in high places should demand of themselves.

Virtuocracy can honor demotic and perfectionist ways of life, because it can recognize they are best left intact. This magnanimity can also shape virtuocrats' dealings with one another. Now some virtuocrats have indeed found it hard to relate to other virtuocrats who do not share their own beliefs. But despite the liberal assumption that all missions must clash and give rise to the worst sort of bloodthirsty zeal, virtuocracy sometimes allows peace across diversity. When a virtuocrat focuses on the underlying ethos itself, he or she can step back from the details of how it is expressed: the symbols or religious doctrines or political arrangements. This involves being able to recognize oneself in other, equally committed virtuocrats.

The medieval world around the Ikhwān, for example, was torn along sectarian lines. They bridged such divisions by arguing that all prophets and philosophers were really after the same truth.[49] Prophecy and philosophy might differ on an abstract level—one resting on revelation, the other on reason—but not in the self-understanding of people carrying out either mission. The

Ikhwān put aside details to witness all virtuocrats, whether inspired or just thoughtful, in a wide mirror of themselves. They believed that this spiritual elites insights passed from teacher to teacher through the ages as a kind of inheritance. Their own writings thus reaffirmed "an old viewpoint already posed by sages and philosophers and esteemed people." The elite's mission demanded that they band together and leave aside petty squabbles over detail.[50]

I do not mean to paint an overly rosy picture—merely to show that the will to act on history need not lead virtuocrats into a bloodbath of all against all. Focusing on a mission can let one trace out a broad scope for comradeship. At its best, virtuocracy denounces only those who reject ethical missions altogether. We shall meet the latter next.

We have seen that virtuocracy bridges demoticism and perfectionism by pulling together the highest aims of each: embeddedness and transcendence. The fourth ethos, which I call *atomism*, also bridges the two poles but in the opposite way. It combines the lesser principles of homogeneity and detachment. Atomism is thus the opposite of virtuocracy. Each of the four ethoses is richer than just two intersecting traits, of course, but by arraying them along these two axes we end up with the full diagram.

atomism	perfectionism	*detachment*
demoticism	virtuocracy	*embeddedness*
homogeneity	*transcendence*	

Atomism rests on the two principles of homogeneity and detachment. Since those principles are originally—for demots and perfectionists—only means to an end, we might put the matter more bluntly: atomism's two pillar principles are a *lack* of transcendence and a *lack* of embeddedness. This ethos thus starts off with a negative identity. Despite the overall thrust of this book, my point here is neutral. It means atomists neither possess nor recognize any of the commitments that bearers of the three other ethoses hold. The strong ties of demots, the absolute standards of self-cultivation that perfectionists pursue, the missions that make virtuocrats move from insights to acting on history—those ideals strike atomists as alien, even threatening. In their place stands a kind of stripped-down self. The atomist most values autonomy, raw authenticity, and adaptability to ever shifting circumstances.

Of course, an atomist does not have to be an "atom" in one sense of the word: selfish, calculating, and without any social ties. He or she can operate in a social context, can follow the Golden Rule, and can even show some generosity in wanting other people to develop a fulfilled atomist character. Atomism does not have to mean behaving in a narrowly self-regarding and amoral way. We should think of it more as a character ideal that sees human nature as the same across all people, and takes a pedestrian sort of individuality as its trump card. The liberal self no doubt comes to mind. As I shall argue throughout this book, however, the atomist is a timeless creature and liberalism just one costume.

I introduce atomists last among the four ethoses for a couple of reasons. First, as just noted, they define themselves largely by what they lack. I had to describe the other three ethoses before the one that negates them all could make any sense. Second, for most of history atomists were only a residual category. They did not have either cultural prestige or the weight of numbers. Only in modern times has atomism commanded public life and brought so many people under its

sway. Before liberal modernity, it tended to be the identity only of quite unfortunate and marginal social groups. Some uprooted souls, such as migrant artisans, bore this ethos because of their precarious way of life. Without the anchors of the other three ethoses, many fell back on a peculiar flavor of Salvationist religion. Just as they met uncontrollable moments of luck and disaster in life, so might they take up the idea of a self without social ties or special qualities, subject to otherworldly rewards and penalties by a vengeful version of the divine. Some merchants lived with much the same mentality. The longstanding prejudice against merchants as crass and shrewd should not be overdone, though. Most premodern merchants were more likely to be demots, such as good-hearted shopkeepers and pillars of neighborhood life, who kept commerce fenced off from their moral universe.

Some institutions of absolutist rule also produced atomists: rule-bound bureaucrats, janissaries, court eunuchs, and the like. Just as material gain or a certain kind of afterlife filled psychological needs for other atomists, these people sought the esteem of figures in authority. Their psyches bore the imprints of the rewards and penalties with which absolutism prodded its functionaries and subjects. Atomism had some hold over slaves too. As a leading historian of slavery has noted, slavery inflicted a "social death" on its victims. Unlike other premodern people, they had no permanent social ties, no sensitivity to honor, few limits on movement across ritual boundaries, and no continuity in their identities over time.[51] It may seem odd to link slavery and modern liberalism to the same ethos, but the underlying character structure does have some overlap as we shall see later.

These social groups were the usual reservoirs of atomism before modern times. All were outside mainstream culture. They often saw themselves as afflicted by misfortune, and longed for the anchors that bearers of other ethoses enjoyed. Most would probably weep over the thought of anyone celebrating atomism centuries later. To explore the nuances of this ethos properly, therefore, we have to look at the few instances when premodern atomists advanced their worldview publicly. Two prominent atomist currents in ancient times were the Cārvāka nihilists of India and the Sophists of Greece. The Cārvāka school arose around the sixth century bc, and persisted as a murky undercurrent in Indian philosophy until the middle ages. It espoused materialism and hedonism, putting itself at odds with the idealistic and world-renouncing temper of Hindu orthodoxy. It denied the existence of God and the soul in any form. The Sophists were itinerant teachers and orators in the second half of the fifth century bc. They taught rhetorical skills to wealthy Athenian youths for pay, and urged moral relativism and political expediency. For these reasons, their opponents saw them as suspect.[52]

Some good illustrations will come from the Sophists and the Cārvāka school. But as historians of both movements point out, no complete texts laying out their thinking survive. We have only fragments and some perhaps unreliable paraphrasing by opponents. A third case rounds out the picture of ancient atomism with some more fully preserved writings. This ethos inspired some works on statecraft and absolute rule, such as Kauṭilya's *Arthaśāstra* and Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan*. Here I shall refer a good deal to the writings and environment of the ancient Chinese Legalists.[53] In contrast to the ethical idealism of Confucian thought, officials such as Shen Buhai, Shang Yang, and Han Fei outlined harshly realistic administrative techniques. The short-lived Qin dynasty (221–206 BC) used those methods to unify China after the Warring States period.

Legalist rule would later be seen as one of the most brutal episodes in Chinese history. But at the time, it did reflect the mindset of thousands of officials. Apart from being well preserved, these atomist statecraft texts also show a face of premodern atomism slightly different from that of the Sophists and the Cārvāka school. Compared to them, the Legalists spent less energy on debunking rival beliefs. Rather, they had the power to set up a social order in line with their own sensibilities. Perhaps they can be called more constructive, albeit in an unappealing way. In any event, the common ground among these three examples gives us a full picture of premodern atomism. Their thinking also shows striking parallels to much that afflicts us in today's culture. Like the other three ethoses, atomism echoes across history.

Atomists focus not on ideals, which strike them as soft or ethereal, but on raw human nature as they find it. For the Cārvāka school, this meant doubting the spirituality so crucial to how other ethoses were understood in ancient India. Cārvāka thinkers argued for what one historian has called a "primitive proto-materialism." They denied any spiritual cause or reality behind the observable phenomena of the world. Only what the senses could detect really existed. Anything more, such as God or the soul or ethical duty, was conjured up through lines of reasoning that took too much for granted. As nihilists, the Cārvāka writers did not just take advantage of the ample room Indian thought gave for speculation and debate. They tried to discredit the very framework of spirituality itself.[54] The Sophists showed the same hard-headed and iconoclastic temper. The leading Sophist Protagoras declared that "man is the measure of all things." Only sense impressions, readily available to everyone, gave a reliable yardstick of truth. More broadly, the Sophists undermined established Greek religion by relentless skepticism. They were seen at the time as a cause of the eras cultural disruption, purveyors of amo-rality and hedonism among the younger generation.[55]

Important though debunking prevailing belief systems is, the goal of an atomist assault on ideals does not ultimately lie there. Atomists probably do not much care that non-atomist ideals float above gritty reality, even if they often use that accusation to cast doubt on them. The Sophist Gorgias of Leontini meant something more when he called beliefs "treacherous and insecure," easily distorted by the druglike effect of the spoken word.[56] Atomist nihilism or realism ties in with a deeper self-understanding. Whether demots' earthy sense of belonging, or the more rarefied virtues of perfectionists and virtuocrats, non-atomist belief systems unnerve atomists because of the demands involved. The other three ethoses imagine the truly human as reached only through a hard remaking of oneself, for the sake of something greater. For demots, that something greater is usually a sacred complex of roles and duties. A community is larger and more enduring than ones own initially untutored impulses. For perfectionists, the something greater is an ideally cultivated image of oneself, or a breakthrough to spiritual insight. Either comes into salutary tension with one's existing self and pulls one beyond it. And for virtuocrats, grandeur comes forth at the intersection between the two. Active virtue meets virtuous action.

All this strikes atomists as alien. They see the truly human as something that lies in the raw existing self and not beyond it. Any commitments that enshroud that self and pull it in one or another direction are accessories, so to speak—sometimes helpful, sometimes harmful, sometimes amusing, but never indispensable to being a proper human being. Dealing with people does not mean demanding the best of them, as the other three ethoses take for granted. Atomists ask instead how to manage unsavory traits as they exist.

Along these lines, the Legalists put little stock in the "tearful longings" of traditional morality. Once in power, a mentality roughly akin to that of the Sophists and the Cärväka school favored harsh realism. When it came to political leadership, the Legalists paid little attention to what thinkers like Mencius stressed most. They gave no weight to virtue and the power of example. "Rule of men" was to yield to "rule of law." Undercutting the role of any elite that might interpret morality, they thought laws should be self-explanatory and require no discretion. Character turned into administration. Ordinary people likewise would be managed not by calling forth their decent instincts, but by using punishments to prod them away from misdeeds.[57] While harsher than the Sophists and the Cārvāka school, the Legalists followed the same logic. A society *has* to rest on atomist law, once one discards both absolute standards of inner virtue and the moral bonds that inspire sacrifice and reciprocity.

Atomists also tend to favor meritocracy in a narrow sense. The royal officials who took Legalist thought to heart, for example, had been recruited specially for their military and administrative skills, useful in a time of cutthroat competition among the warring states. Naturally, such men saw little of worth in Confucian talk of virtue.[58] Life revolved instead around measurable performance. One strove to fulfill whatever standards the authorities might lay down. For the atomist mind, the ethical content of actions matters less than the consistency with which actions are judged and then rewarded or punished. The Legalists were not just realists who wanted to get jobs done, as some might see them. Even the most idealistic Confucian hardly smiled on ineptness, after all. Rather, the Legalist project was all about removing ethics from how society ranked its members. Won by ability alone, positions in a hierarchy would have little to do with their occupants' character. Han Fei thus favored "discrimination between the stupid and the wise, but not between the blamed and the praised." Few statements are more revealing than the one that in a proper social order, "the unworthy man can by his position rule over the worthy."[59]

This narrow version of meritocracy spilled over into Legalist economics. The Legalists were quite well-disposed to trade as long as it did not disrupt governance. They had little sense of charity. Giving alms to the poor would only reward people who had not taken advantage of available opportunities.[60] Unlike some modern atomists, the Legalists were more concerned with power than with profit, but their sympathy for commerce does bear noting. This harsh competitive edge appeared among the Sophists too, many of whom felt that the arbitrariness of morality made for survival of the fittest.[61]

Unsurprisingly, this mentality gave ancient atomists a quite narrow view of the public good. They put little if any stress on the state's duty to offer moral education. Politics just ensured a stable framework within which self-interest could be pursued, and chaos and invasion prevented. The Sophists, for example, built their theories of morality up from self-interest. Cooperating in society was the most prudent way for people to prosper and avoid harm.[62] The Cārvāka writers were part of a similar realist current in ancient India. First they plucked *artha* (wealth/power) and *kāma* (pleasure) out of the usual constraints of *dharma* (ethical conduct). Then, descending a slippery slope, they began treating artha and käma as the overriding human goals.[63] Likewise, the Legalist bureaucracy was to work only for *fùguó qiángbīng*, or a rich country and strong army. The corrupt "private righteousness" of Confucian officials who did charitable favors had to be rooted out.[64] The Legalists wrote of only one context in which the state should act vigorously for

the sake of a vision. Occasionally, wrenching changes had to occur for the sake of *long-term* interests that most people were too shortsighted to grasp. Han Fei vividly likened such firmness to the lancing of a child's boil for its own good.[65] This view of political action appealed to the usual atomist level of interests, except this time future interests. Conveniently, people who stood in the way of such state vigor could be ignored, as blindly blocking progress from which they themselves would benefit in the end.

The atomist character ideal comes through quite clearly in how ancient atomists described rulership. The Sophist Thrasymachus saw standards of justice as arbitrary, imposed by powerholders for their own benefit. Pleas for benevolence could appeal to no standard beyond the self-interest of the ruler or ruling class.[66] Cārvāka thinkers also felt the only real political knowledge dealt with how to administer punishments that tapped into people's self-interest.[67] Legalist thinkers and practitioners held even more adamantly that a ruler should stress method over conscience, and force over virtue. Turning the ruler into a mere manager meant the messy business of carrying out ideals could be avoided. Only trouble could come from a Confucian monarch "fond of twisting laws by virtue of his own wisdom." Qualities had to give way to functions.[68]

This underlying atomist logic has recurred across space and time. It starts from the idea that the higher traits of perfectionists and virtuocrats do not really exist. It then concludes, conveniently, that they cannot be demanded of anyone. Many writers have noted the authoritarian upshot in the case of the Legalists. By severing power from personality, they undermined the Mencian style of critique, which condemned unvirtuous rulers and allowed revolt against them.[69] The Legalist version of rulership also reinforced a certain mindset among subjects. Just as it denied the ruler himself a sense of virtue and mission, so did its impersonal flavor rule out vigorous action from below. Han Fei wrote that such a ruler "seems to dwell nowhere at all… and below his ministers tremble in fear."[70] From the vantage point of subjects, the ruler as arbiter gathered in himself the only standards of evaluation. Against him, moral critique counted for naught. Heroism and principle had no place beneath the shadow of authority. Rewards and punishments penetrated and vitiated the souls of those prompted by them.

These ancient cases also show something of how atomists treat history. We have seen that demots imagine roles and relationships succeeding one another in cycles. Perfectionists—at least aristocratic perfectionists—see heroic inspiration in the past and a name for themselves in posterity. Virtuocrats draw insights from ethical traditions and then act upon history like raw material. Atomists have very little sense of meaning in history, however. The Sophists, for example, played up the diversity of cultures past and present. Doing so let them regard all beliefs as relative, and deny those beliefs a firm hold on people in their own time.[71] The Legalists agreed that because beliefs had varied, history gave few lessons. They added that even if the past had contained a consensus, it still would not have mattered because conditions had changed. Practices had to adapt to new realities. Idealists who thought otherwise were "simply timid about altering what the people have grown used to." Even worse, Confucian scholars and others enamored of history would only use it to nitpick against the expediency of the moment.[72]

Several timeless atomist impulses lurked beneath these attitudes. History naturally matters little to those who strip down human nature itself. In doing so they deprive history of the substance that makes it interesting. Moreover, by denying the claims of history, the rawness of

atomist self-interest and pliancy in the present can stand unchallenged. People cannot be blamed for unseemly shrewdness and passivity if trends larger than anyone lift responsibility. Atomist practices seem more real, more inevitable, more timeless, if idealism fades into an irrelevant past.

The power of ancient atomist realism lay mainly in how it shrank horizons. In all these cases the atomist self appears, detached from moral bonds in one dimension and bereft of transcendent qualities in the other. Bounded in imagination, this creature takes refuge in mere standards and incentives. Rival ethoses become a target for atomist attack, because they clash with this view of human nature and would add baggage to it. The Legalist writers loathed the kinship ties of demotic life, for instance. They saw family loyalties as a hindrance to making people think only of self-interest and obedience.[73] The Cārvāka school likewise declared hedonism the only proper end in life. They called openly for people to abandon the Vedic rituals and follow their own physical desires instead.[74] Roughly the same view was voiced in the fifth century bc by the Chinese hedonist Yang Zhu, who made self-preservation and disentanglement from duty the highest good. He said that unlike what Confucians demanded, he would not even pull out one of his own hairs to save the world.[75]

Ancient atomists reserved by far their most bitter attacks for high-culture figures who did not fit into their order and who wanted to put atomism back in check. The Legalists had special scorn for intellectuals and other sources of troubling heroism. Perfectionism and especially virtuocracy offended them. “The strong should be broken and the sharp blunted,” wrote Shang Yang. The kind of moral critiques that Confucian literati posed would have to be eradicated for the sake of good order.[76] The matter went well beyond hard practicality, however. In one passage, Han Fei endorsed the execution of some respected hermits who had set a bad example by declining to enter government service and bend to rewards and penalties.[77] Whether or not they agree on the harsh methods of the Legalists, atomists find deeply troubling anything at odds with their own pedestrian standards of character. Idealists must be discredited, unmasked, and cut down to the raw level of atomist human nature.

In this vein, Cārvāka writers argued that pretentious clerics were really concealing an innate human impulse to hedonism, which anyone would indulge if given the chance. Then claimed that religious doctrines and duties were “only the incoherent rhapsodies of knaves.” Priests had supposedly invented such myths to serve their own interests in wealth and status.[78] Alone among bearers of the four ethoses, atomists take comfort in instances when others show themselves to have motives more base than ideal. A raw view of human nature is compelling only if it is general enough not to be seen as just laxness and moral rot, as the other three ethoses treat such impulses.

By this point, liberals will begin objecting that I have chosen some of the most unsavory schools of thought in world history, to illustrate the ethos that also underlies modern liberalism. But I do not aim to tar them by association. Quite frankly, these ancient examples were typical of premodern atomism whenever it posed philosophical claims or exercised power. It may well be true that modern atomism, including the versions of liberalism so central to it, has often had a different and more appealing temper than the examples we have seen so far. But those differences should not blind us to the common ground between liberalism and its forerunners.

Despite varying methods, there is much overlap in how all atomists view human nature and political life.

Of course, all cases of atomist assertion before modernity failed. They were then duly cursed by non-atomist keepers of the historical record. Bearers of other ethoses put atomists back in check, and came to treat their moments of self-assertion as episodes of pathology and enfeebled conscience. Later generations wrote few kind words about the likes of the Cārvāka school, the Legalists, or the Sophists. As far as the differences between ancient and modern atomism go, those historical failures are precisely the point. Working under different circumstances and in a different way, more recently, has let modern atomists bypass the mechanisms that blocked them for so long. Atomism always endured in pockets here and there, but on the defensive. It would break through worldwide only after another two millennia, once modern atomists learned to offer honey instead of vinegar.

I have now described all four ethoses separately. To round out the picture, it is worth noting some patterns in how the ethoses relate to one another. As the diagram suggests, diagonally opposite ethoses—demoticism and perfectionism, virtuocracy and atomism—have the least in common, since both their pillar principles differ. Concretely, this manifests itself as the mutual suspicion of the peasant and the aesthete, or the priest and the trader, and so on.

atomism	perfectionism	*detachment*
demoticism	virtuocracy	*embeddedness*
homogeneity	*transcendence*	

But for all their differences of outlook, diagonally opposite ethoses do have some unexpected common ground. As previously explained, demoticism and perfectionism can be thought of as "pure" types, while virtuocracy and atomism bridge parts of each. Virtuocracy derives a mission from the blend of cultivation and duty. Atomism bounces off both poles, to avoid the baggage they would add to its stripped-down self-understanding. Trying to blend or avoid two poles makes people think about which one is the means and which the end, and about how the inner self and its outer roles relate. Virtuocracy and atomism end up rather more rationalistic in temper than the other two ethoses.

Virtuocratic and atomist flavors of rationality do differ, of course. Virtuocrats' rationality focuses on a system of ideas—a religion or a philosophy— through which one can gain access to truth. A rational social order, in turn, emerges from design and action inspired by that truth. Atomists' rationality, by contrast, deals not with coherent truth, but with practical verification and efficient means. For them, a rational social order involves uniform rules, which let people seek predictable rewards and avoid penalties.

The whole four-ethos scheme perhaps gives rise to one objection, at least as I have presented it so far. Describing each ethos separately at first may suggest that the boundaries between them are more rigid than human experience. It is worth stressing, therefore, that the ethoses do flow into one another and interact. Some of the most interesting patterns involve what we might call migration and alliances. Migration means moving from one ethos to another, remaking one's self-understanding in the process. A perfectionist might stay a perfectionist for life, or might become a virtuocrat, an atomist, or even a demot. An alliance occurs when two ethoses make

concessions to one another in how they pose their public claims. Usually alliances arise in opposition to a third ethos, such as if demots and atomists join forces against virtuocrats. Both migration and alliances happen most easily between ethoses that are neighbors in the diagram, because neighbors share a pillar principle. In this way, a person can hold part of his or her self-understanding constant while migrating; or two ethoses can ally by stressing the principle they have in common.

Interactions among the ethoses are also shaped by power. Here we might think of two levels, integration and hegemony. *Integration* means that a person subscribes to a given set of values. We can flesh out what this involves by asking three questions. First, does the person have a stable self-understanding, anchored in one of the four ethoses? Such a self-understanding could unravel in a couple of ways. One could consistently fall short of even the minimal standards that bearers of that ethos have in mind. A demot could be wholly out of place in a village and do a poor job of fulfilling duties, even something as simple as being attuned to what reciprocity demands in the way of helping neighbors in need. Or a perfectionist might prove spiritually insensible or bereft of whatever traits fellow perfectionists consider honorable. One does not have to excel, but one should at least be able to live passably well by the standards of one's environment.

Another kind of pressure that remakes one's self-understanding comes from the experience of living in certain ways. If an experience goes on long enough, it might bring about a restructuring of one's character. It might even mean that one's self-understanding gradually came to match up better with an ethos different than that with which one started. In both these scenarios of identity crisis—one from poor performance and one from a changed way of life—the solution is straightforward. Consciously or unconsciously, a person can restore a coherent sense of self by "migrating" from one to another of the ethoses.

Now we can move on to the second question. Does the persons own ethos—whichever of the four it is—match up with the ethos that dominates the larger society? A virtuocrat living in an officially virtuocratic society has a different experience than a virtuocrat living in an officially atomist society, for instance. When the personal ethos and the public ethos coincide, the person has a stake in the social order. The public realm upholds his or her own character ideal officially, and reinforces it against bearers of rival ethoses. But when the personal ethos and the public ethos do not coincide, we must ask a third question. How does the person deal with the mismatch? Someone in this situation has two choices. Bearers of a marginalized, suppressed ethos can challenge official sentiment, through subversive symbols or alternative myths or even open revolt. Or they can retreat, leaving the larger social order undisturbed, and focus on protecting the social spaces in which their own ideals do hold sway. Many such spaces exist in kinship networks or religious sects or educational institutions.

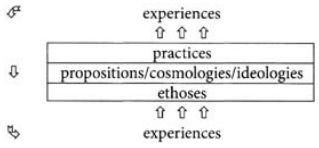
The second level of interaction among ethoses is *hegemony*: which ethos dominates in a society. Hegemony means the social groups bearing the ethos in question have enough power to shape society at large. They can disseminate their views with some stamp of official legitimacy. The ethos also defines the contours of public debate. If bearers of other ethoses challenge it, they feel compelled to engage it directly rather than, more tangentially, one another. In a virtuocrat-ruled society (e.g., Confucian China), perfectionists (e.g., Daoists), demots (e.g., peasants), and

atomists (e.g., Legalists) will all be talking about virtuocracy (e.g., high-culture Confucianism) a good deal of the time, even if only to subvert it.

Beneath hegemony, however solid it looks on the surface, rival currents persist and can reemerge. Any culture is just a climate of hegemony, a setting in which these universal forces relate a certain way. Prolonged hegemony of one ethos can imprint a culture, to be sure. Premodern China is often thought of as simply Confucian, almost as the property of the mandarin literati. In extreme cases, long-silenced ethoses might not develop the philosophical and rhetorical tools to express a rival vision properly. But even then, whichever ethos dominates cannot claim the whole culture as such. Above the smallest scale, there is no such thing as an atomist culture, or a perfectionist culture, or a virtuocratic culture, or a demotic culture. There are only cultures in which atomists, perfectionists, virtuocrats, or demots happen to keep their rivals more or less quiet.

Hegemony links back to integration as well. If events like cultural shifts or disruption by invaders put enough individuals through an identity crisis at once, that critical mass can affect hegemony itself. The movements or schools of thought that come from such discontent can have many goals. Much depends on whether they come from inside or outside the dominant ethos. If they come from within, the pressures aim at refining hegemony. Perhaps they would change its idiom or methods; perhaps they would form or break an alliance with another ethos. If they come from outside, they try to displace hegemony and remake their culture more drastically.

Personal ethos and broader social patterns thus flow into one another. Think of it also as a cycle of cause and effect playing out on several levels. Experiences socialize a person into one of the four ethoses. If the person is an original thinker, that ethos then gives rise to *propositions* and *cosmologies*. For most people, it just inclines them to accept certain propositions and cosmologies that are already floating around in their culture. By propositions, I mean abstract ideas that express the ethos in a way fitting for the time and place. They might deal with human nature or social arrangements. Some examples have been original sin in Christianity, or caste purity in brahminical Hinduism, or human rights in liberalism. Cosmologies are mental maps of ethical conflict across space and time: views of historical progress or decline, the boundaries of a community, how to think of good and evil forces, and so on. Propositions and cosmologies together become the building blocks of *ideologies*, or systematic social visions. Finally, at the most concrete level, practices such as rituals or government policies emerge. Then everything comes full circle, because practices add up to shape the experiences that socialize and resocialize people. The cycle repeats itself over the generations.



These different levels also affect how people handle diversity. The more specific we get, as we move from the four ethoses up to the thousands of practices that everywhere shape daily life, the more diversity we find. To translate across that diversity, people who differ have to move back to a more basic level. Within the same society or culture, often they can do so just by moving back

from practices or ideologies to propositions that they share. Two Confucians who disagree on how to choose officials—by inheritance or by examination, say—can still agree on the traits that those officials should have. With that background, they can discuss the effects of each way of choosing officials, and arrive at a compromise or at least respect each other's reasoning. Many worthwhile political and philosophical debates happen that way. But in the end, ethoses are the most universal and translatable level. They are the fewest in number and cut across cultures.

Before we move on to the peculiarities of recent history, two final themes need introducing. They will prove crucial later in making sense of why the modern clash of ethoses unfolded the way it did.

First is how the four ethoses treat *agency*. By agency, I mean the sense one has of acting beyond oneself, to affect people around one and the course of events more broadly. The opposite of agency would be passive withdrawal, or perhaps believing one is at the mercy of forces larger than oneself. Remember that perfectionists are always inclined to distance themselves from the world. If they act on the world at all, they do so to exercise their qualities and gain recognition, as a warrior or poet or cultivated sage or the like. They may show great independence and resolve, but action for its own sake matters little. Virtuocrats have a far stronger sense of agency. Their inner compass gives the self-confidence to overcome other people's doubts, and their missions oblige them to act on history. Agency is born from the marriage of transcendence and embeddedness. Atomists have the weakest sense of agency, unless we count as a peculiar sort of agency their regard for self-interest and tastes. In any case, atomist action does not involve vigorously acting on history.

Demots have the most complex view of agency. Agency operates well enough in community life, where belonging can give demots a righteous confidence. Being a thread in the social fabric means one has plenty of pull. By exercising their roles and duties, demots affect others all the time. They can also check injustices by appealing to shared norms. Many a village has cut an over-grazer or swindling shopkeeper down to size. Furthermore, even if the larger social order is hostile to demots, their way of life can keep flames of resistance alive for generations. Conquerors in many countries have installed lavish court cultures, but never quite mastered the turbulent clans and tribes.

Still, several limits and blind spots are built into demotic agency, at least for movements that operate without allies. One weakness is scale. Demotic life rests on face-to-face ties that do not translate very well into large-scale visions. The Diggers, for example, vacillated between timid localism and wanting to remake England as a whole. Winstanley's Utopia only hinted at a national political order, and even then it was to be little more than an association of villages. How one might get from peasants digging on a hilltop to national revolution never became clear.[79] Part of the problem for demotic upsurges is that a large-scale vision would inevitably complicate—and dilute—the localism and equality that demots hold dear. On a practical and strategic level, this inability to meet rival ethoses on their own scale has always spelled disaster.

Demotic agency also suffers from demots' inability to act politically in a compelling way. This point goes beyond the obvious fact that demotic social groups have less institutional power, and less political efficacy, than do elites. Rather, I mean that demoticism inhibits revolutionary agency on a psychological level. To flesh out the problem, let us look at how the Diggers and

Taki Onqoy hoped to achieve victory. Winstanley apparently saw his digging experiment less as a revolt that would make history, than as a sign that divine intervention drew near. The movement itself was at least as much about a spirit rising up in its participants, as it was about how their adventure would ruin their oppressors. One historian has even suggested that digging tied into a kind of alchemy in which Winstanley imagined social disorder would correspond to a cosmic shift.[80] The same logic appeared in the Taki Onqoy movement. The waka spirits who took up residence in people were the real agents, so to speak, not Andean villagers themselves. Small wonder, then, that accounts of that revolt note a "curious inner vulnerability to defeat or submission."[81] Andean resistance later took an even more passive and impersonal form, in fact. Peasants began putting faith in the resurrection of the last Inka emperor, to lift the burdens afflicting them. Real political action dissolved into folklore.

Demotic movements tend to leave victory to a *deus ex machina*, to forces grander than any one participant. To understand why, remember the homogeneity of demotic human nature. Demots' embeddedness gives them agency enough on a small scale where meanings are shared. But no demot has the leverage to act more recklessly, beyond the consensus of peers. Imagine what most villagers would say to one of their own who strode out into the square and started shouting that, no matter how timid and shortsighted everyone else was, someone had to get rid of the local chieftain, and he had no doubt he was the one to do it. Whatever the merits of the case, ridicule and earthy irreverence—"Who does he think he is?"—would surely be murmured from one end of his village to the other. The hated chieftain would be more likely to face a pitchfork-brandishing mob after a prolonged town meeting, starting with hesitant consensus-seeking and looking around for approval at each sentence uttered, and slowly rising to a fever pitch of fervor strengthened by numbers.

But imagine if, in an assembly of priests or nobles, one of their number rose to his feet and, with a rhetorical flair that harked back to some ancient orator, denounced a tyrant king and said that he must urge revolt even if it cost him his life. More often than not, his fellows would regard his courage and initiative highly, even if they disagreed with his views, or even if out of prudence they sat uneasily mute rather than applauding. Perhaps they would secretly envy his deed as something their own better selves should have done to live up to the demands of their station. In the end, only a transcendent self-understanding—an identity ordered around special insights or qualities, often but not necessarily made concrete by a certain standing in the world—can give someone a license to grasp society's fate from above. This point will prove important later in the book, when we look at the psychological roots of why today's resistance movements are going nowhere.

The last theme to introduce is universalism and dialogue among cultures. Earlier I explained that virtuocracy involves a faculty of moral perception. Action rests on eternal truths. Historically, those truths have crystallized in the social thought of each civilization. Virtuocrats master and apply a classical heritage. This foundation has led virtuocrats to a special kind of universalism, in which they see themselves as part of a "world" civilization that cuts across local customs and ethnicities. For Confucian literati, it was the *tiānxià*, or "world under Heaven." Islamic thinkers spoke of the *ummah*, or community of believers. Much the same pattern appeared for the Catholic clergy during the Middle Ages, and for Hindu brahmins in southern and southeastern Asia.[82]

In practice, each civilization was limited to only one part of the world. Confucianism stopped at the central Asian steppes, *romanitas* at the Rhine and the Sahara, Hinduism at the Himalayas, and so on. But virtuocrats always saw their ethical traditions as universalizable, as "Civilization" with a capital C. In principle, any refined person would gravitate toward the tradition in question. Only virtuocrats think in these terms, of course, since the whole outlook takes for granted that inner qualities and insights intersect with a worldly mission: that beliefs occupy social space. Virtuocrats have had a range of attitudes toward other civilizations. Some have been zealously intolerant of other traditions as rivals. Others have taken a more open view, in which all traditions spring from the same universal truth. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, for example, Krishna is depicted saying that "even those who are devotees of other gods, and sacrifice to them full of faith, really sacrifice to me."[83]

The latter kind of openness fades, at the margins, into a true ecumeni-cism. Instead of a placeless "Civilization" that radiates out, this ecumeni-cism is a looser sense of kinship across settings. It assumes that bearers of any ethos—usually virtuocrats or perfectionists, sometimes atomists, rarely demots—have more in common with their counterparts, even in distant cultures, than they do with bearers of other ethoses at home. History has plenty of examples. When ancient Greek warriors invaded India, local *kṣatriya* elites saw them as decayed versions of their own kind. French *philosophes* in the Enlightenment admired Chinese mandarins and regarded their political system as a model for Europe.[84] This dialogue across settings does not usually "aim" at much, the way virtuocrats otherwise try to export their civilization to the ends of the earth. It mostly just reflects a spirit of openness and goodwill.

To understand this kind of dialogue more concretely, take one of the most important early efforts to bridge civilizations. In the late 1500s, Akbar ascended the throne of the Mughal empire. India had a long history of religious pluralism, but Akbar's court took dialogue among faiths to a new level. The largely Muslim elite became quite open to other religions, especially the Hinduism of India's majority. Akbar set up a forum for debate among clerics of different traditions, and eventually founded a short-lived syncretic religion called *tawḥīd-i ilāhī*, or "divine monotheism." The experiment's leading intellectual defender was Abū'l-Fażl ibn Mubārak 'Allāmī, a court official from a Sufi family that had often clashed with orthodox Muslim theologians.[85]

This interreligious encounter proceeded on several fronts. Abū'l-Fażl oversaw translations into Persian, the court language, of religious and philosophical works from Sanskrit, Greek, and other tongues. His own interest in bringing civilizations together had deep roots. Even as a youth he had wanted to seek wisdom from as far afield as Tibet and the Jesuits. Other religious traditions mattered to him mainly where they contained parallels to the mystical depth of Sufism. Exposing esoteric currents of thought to one another would reveal a universal essence that each tradition had "encrusted with ever-during rust, layer upon layer."[86] Abū'l-Fażl thought theologians had killed spiritual truths once they tried to codify them. Looked at in this way, the *external* encounter among religions was tied into a *domestic* debate over the nature of spirituality.

To open up psychological space, Abū'l-Fażl's circle had to weaken the hold of Islam as an all-enfolding civilization. Some ways to do this were deliberately provocative. In front of the translations, Abū'l-Fażl often put non-Islamic ritual prefaces from the traditions of origin. He also organized the emperor's expanding library so Arabic works were ranked last.[87] Since Arabic

was the carrier language of Islamic civilization, such measures symbolically revoked a religious monopoly. The same logic underlay the abolition of the Islamic calendar, and the mixing of prayer rituals from several religions.[88] More orthodox souls naturally lashed out at the whole venture. They accused Abū'l-Fażl of heresy, of betraying Islam when he "took up a lamp in broad daylight" and sought truth beyond it. He in turn heaped scorn on "formalists who dwell within the four walls of routine."[89]

In the end, dialogue in this case was not *about* the other civilizations being engaged. On the one hand, dialogue would strengthen mystics in their domestic battle with theologians by making the latter seem provincial. On the other hand, it would let the enlightened converse over the heads of the narrow-minded multitude and share discoveries. Abū'l-Fażl's cosmopolitanism loosed him and his circle from the fetters of their own civilization. But he did not really want a synthesis of traditions. Dialogue meant exploring parallel insights, not forging a "super-civilization" that would impose new constraints. No such goal could be entertained by a thinker who wrote, as did Abū'l-Fażl, of "the spicery of varied traditions," or of Akbar's debate forum as "the rendezvous of the elite of the earth," of "the solitary ones of the seven climes."[90]

By and large, this pattern held true for most premodern dialogue among cultures. Ecumenical efforts were the refuge of perfectionists who wanted to escape insular and hidebound traditions, or of virtuocrats who wanted to revive old insights. Certainly the material conditions centuries ago, with travel unimaginably hard by modern standards, made more sustained cultural and political encounters well-nigh impossible. Dialogue hardly ever aimed at a merging of many civilizations into one.

One thinker who took the idea of translating truths as far as possible before modernity was the medieval Islamic political philosopher Abū Nasr al-Fārābī. He held that truth cut across all civilizations, but that only a few people could appreciate it. Most people could understand truth only indirectly, via concrete symbols of faith. Because such religious symbols varied across cultures, they often fuelled conflict. Yet discerning thinkers could step back from their respective traditions and seek in philosophy the higher truth that lay behind the symbols. Al-Fārābī wrote that, at least in principle, an ideal state should cover the whole known world and lead everyone in it to virtue and felicity.[91]

Naturally, hardly anyone talked of such things in an age of horses and carts. But one pattern does stand out. The cosmopolitan impulse in the past never assumed different beliefs were to be respected simply on grounds of personal taste. Thinkers like Abū'l-Fażl and al-Fārābī took contact seriously as a search for truth. They hoped insights would become clearer once distilled from local customs and compared to one another. Or perhaps inner virtues would be enriched if people understood how they had been expressed in other settings. Whatever the details of the goal, those seeking it were confident of its absolute truth. Universalism did not rest on empty tolerance and abdication of judgment. The emphasis was on building rather than eroding.

All these themes, including agency and universalism, will recur throughout this book. Starting in the next chapter, we shall see how modernity's wider scale let atomism escape the checks other ethoses had long placed on it. By redefining both agency and universalism, atomists would manage to set humanity on a course that few in history could have foreseen.

Chapter 2

The Atomist Revolt

Wearing the mantle of liberalism, atomists now reign on all continents and gain converts by the day. Just as inevitably as modern technology speeds up contact among cultures, so is "globalization" thought to bring liberalism as its natural baggage. People in today's comfortable strata find it hard to imagine that anything global could be nonliberal, or that anything nonliberal could be more than a parochial residue.

Atomism has not always put its stamp on public life or enthralled such a multitude. In a time when short memories comfort their bearers, it is worth stressing that history did not have to turn out this way. How did an ethos limited for most of history to marginal groups—absolutist bureaucrats, uprooted salvation-seekers, court eunuchs, and the like—gain ground? How did it manage, against all that had long kept it in check, to imprint itself on humanity's takeoff to modernity and global unity?

This and the next chapter try to answer these questions. They sketch out an account of global atomisms rise between roughly the late 1800s and the 1960s—an account quite unlike the one that liberals and their kindred spirits take for granted. Two themes stand out here. First is the contest among ethoses, as modern atomists clashed with bearers of the three rival ethoses and outmaneuvered them. Second is the accelerating contact among civilizations: a merging of terrain that atomists shaped to their own advantage. While it may seem odd to go back so many decades, in a book written for the present and future, it is the necessary starting point. Only by seeing how timeless checks on atomism were evaded, and why atomism now takes the form it does, can we identify pressure points against it.

Most of us know the prevailing story of how globalization quickened over the last century and a half. Mainstream liberal historians and social scientists observe that what were once more or less self-contained cultures have merged into one multicultural panorama. Globalizations pace has varied: faster before World War I and since the Cold War, slower from the 1920s to the 1970s. Such observers mostly take as articles of faith that the process is driven by technological development, such as steamships and aviation and the Internet, and that it favors the emergence of a liberal universalism.[1] This history of globalization muffles intent.

Here I offer a very different account. The central issue here is not the revolution of technological modernity and its spread. That would have happened sooner or later anyway, perhaps with quite different cultural baggage. Rather, atomism attached itself to those vast changes and rode them to power. Modern world history has been a war of position among timeless ethoses. Technology renovated the stage, but the same actors still made the play. Atomism fought equally universal and equally timeless currents that offered their own visions of a new world civilization. Those alternatives, which aimed to marry modernity to what liberals mock as "backward" values, did not fail because of any historical inevitability. They failed—for the time being—because they were outmaneuvered on shifting terrain.

Since atomisms rise occurred over more than a century, I shall trace only the main contours of global trends. I take much of the background political and social change for granted, and let the

thinkers and movements mentioned here stand in for broader pressures. All readers should have enough familiarity with whatever parts of the world they know best, to add some local color and detail to my sketch.

Much of what follows focuses on what is now the global South, especially Latin America, China, India, and the Middle East. My aim in doing this is twofold. First, the global reach of my argument means restoring some balance in treatment of the world's cultures. Proportionately, there is no reason why the developed West should get most of the coverage in any discussion of global trends. Second, some issues are much more clear-cut if we focus on how they played out outside the West. This is why I basically ignore what was happening in Europe and North America in the late nineteenth century. Of course, changes in the West mattered a lot. Things like the ideology of liberalism did arise in western Europe and its offshoots. In this sense, Europe had a special role as springboard for global atomism. Or perhaps as a European I can afford to put matters more bluntly. I suspect some features of European culture—the political fragmentation, the individualism of the Protestant Reformation, the inability to keep commerce in its proper place—made it the weak link in the chain of world civilizations. Such vulnerabilities made the glorious Europe of medieval and Renaissance times falter, and then yield to the first signs of atomist pathology, even before industrial takeoff in the 1800s added social vertigo to the mix. We should not read too much into this, though. A strong atomist minority might have broken through anywhere and encouraged its counterparts worldwide. Japanese or Persians or Aztecs *could* have inflicted an atomist breakthrough on the rest of us just as easily.

In any case, the cultural transformation of Europe and its offshoots, however important, does not highlight the issues very well for our purposes. The atomist breakthrough in Europe happened slowly, over a couple of centuries. It had an air of contingency about it. Non-atomists' good intentions, in doing such things as freeing up intellectual debate and broadening democracy, often led to unforeseen power shifts that let atomism gain ground. Many non-atomists barely realized what was at stake until the damage was already done. Histories of Europe's own crisis do not shed enough light on the place-less impulses in question. Outside greater Europe, the clash of ethoses was more compressed and thus more vivid. By the end of the 1800s, atomists and non-atomists everywhere knew how much hung in the balance.

In the first half of this chapter, I cover the emergence of a global atom-ist movement during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as exemplified in the global South: Westernizing reformers in India, secularists and Muslim liberals in the Middle East, positivists in Latin America, and May Fourth liberals in China. Then I turn to anti-atomist reactions that peaked between the early 1900s and the 1930s, in a worldwide cultural crisis.

In itself, atomists' breakthrough in greater Europe by the nineteenth century did not create a *global* atomist cultural bloc. Such a novelty required more than just atomist dominance in the world's most powerful region. Three hundred years earlier, after all, European colonial expansion had hardly converted the other major civilizations to Christianity. Just because a belief prevails in one powerful society does not mean it spreads well. It needs a “pull,” not just a “push.” Without atomist pressures elsewhere in the nineteenth century, greater Europe would still have been both atomist and powerful. But its cultural decay would also have been unique: misery without company.

Global atomism did not "spread" like a contagion from Europe. Submerged atomist currents had existed everywhere before most people had even heard of Europe. New conditions just let those atomist minorities seek a transformation vaster than any they had imagined before. An atomist globe depended mainly on struggles that those minorities waged outside Europe, for their own ends. Such people everywhere had to engage modernity on their own terms, and drive bridgeheads into cultures that had long looked askance at atomists and their designs. Those bridgeheads then had to be linked together, to imprint atomism on the encounter of civilizations.

These atomist minorities, whom I call *bridgehead atomists*, went under different labels in different parts of the world. In Latin America they adapted the positivist banner of the French philosopher Auguste Comte. They held that the political independence their countries had won from Spain and Portugal in the 1820s did not go far enough. Both Iberian high culture and backward indigenous peasant life had to be wiped out for the sake of "order and progress." Two typical positivist public intellectuals were the Mexican educational reformer Gabino Barreda and the exiled Chilean revolutionary leader Francisco Bilbao. In India at the same time, reformist liberals like Sayyid Ahmad Khān saw British colonial rule as a chance to remake traditional society. Middle Eastern bridgehead atomists at the turn of the twentieth century included the Egyptian journalist Muḥammad Farīd Wajdī, and the Kurdish-Egyptian judge and social critic Qāsim 'Amīn. The Chinese "new culture movement" started later than its counterparts, in 1919, but I treat it as part of the same wave. Radical iconoclasts like Hu Shi worked to overturn the values of both the traditional literati and ordinary people.

While such bridgehead atomists barely dealt with one another across regions, they had many similarities. Some of their common vocabulary undoubtedly came from having received some education in Europe and North America, or at least having traveled there. But these intellectuals did not merely ape foreign fashion. Indeed, they often wrestled with issues that European thought did not address: Hindu-Muslim fault lines in India, a loose overlap of ethos and ethnicity in Latin America, Christian minority status in the Middle East, a robust Confucian virtuocratic heritage in China, and so on. Bridgehead atomists took advantage of the new global forces without unthinkingly copying the West. They had to overcome most of what made up their own civilizations, but build on marginal currents within them at the same time. Their common project linked both backward to the premodern kinds of atomism we saw in the last chapter, and forward to today's global culture.

The leading intellectuals of the time gave voice to this mentality, though none of what follows is a mere history of ideas. These movements had social roots as well. Chinese iconoclasts came mostly from the new population of urban students, cut loose from the moorings of the Confucian literati. Modern education gave a standard of achievement, an anchor amid the uncertainty of the times, but imposed few ethical demands. In the Arab world, their counterparts were usually bureaucrats, journalists, and others who floated between traditional and modern education systems. And historians have often seen Latin American positivists as spokesmen for a new business class, at odds with the clergy and seeking an order more to its own tastes. Their origins often lay among merchants, bureaucrats, immigrant entrepreneurs, and the like. On occasion, bridgehead atomists everywhere allied with business interests.[2]

Still, we should not think of them as mere idea-mongers for capitalism. They took support from capitalist economic interests when they could get it. Like premodern atomists, however,

they mainly saw in commerce a kind of hardheaded self-interest that lined up with their own mentality. Their global project really involved spreading a new self-understanding. For example, they delighted in the idea that authority would now rest on technical performance, narrowly understood. They devised and recruited from new educational systems that cast off ethical traditions and self-cultivation, in favor of the measurable and "useful." They needed institutions that would instill atomist character. Barreda, for instance, gleefully wrote that his proposed Mexican educational standards would dethrone the aristocrats and priests who were impractical and not sensitive enough to evaluations of their performance.[3]

Bridgehead atomists' cultural vision led them to choose a distinct strategy. They mostly rejected direct political action, in favor of remaking culture in civil society, especially through education. Chinese liberals worked beneath politics in the 1910s and 1920s, ignoring warlord rivalries and the struggles for social justice that the Communists had taken up. In colonial India, liberals like Ahmad Khān welcomed British rule as a force for stability that would let him and his comrades wage a war of hearts and minds among India's millions. Latin American positivists likewise saw their own postindependence states as irrelevant, even if constitutions paid lip service to liberalism. With short-lived exceptions in Brazil and Mexico, therefore, positivists rarely tried to capture the state itself. A culture war against all that had long held atomism in check had to come first. As Bilbao put it, the "internal enemy," the "virus" of illiberal sentiment, had to be "torn out of the soul" of the populace.[4] Such activists everywhere focused on culture more than on politics. Arenas for this struggle included remaking primary and secondary education, attacking folk religion, using gender and family life as pressure points for cultural revolution, even enlisting art as a weapon to "put our sentiments in harmony with our convictions."[5] The solvent of cultural change had to burn through all layers of society. Rival ethoses had to be challenged and eroded.

Such surgery on the psyche often meant having to restrain the patient. A benighted populace could not be trusted with political power. In India, Aḥmad Khān wanted to keep British rule, even though he welcomed local elections and an advisory role for Indians in legislation. Such limited politics mainly let the unenlightened learn by doing. Meanwhile, liberal restructuring could go on apace in civil society, while the Raj kept dangerous Hindu and Islamic ideas from stirring up politics.[6] This reasoning appealed to Latin American positivists too. Since the Spaniards had left decades earlier, they could not rely on a colonial overseer as their counterparts in India could. But they thought political participation needed managing carefully lest it run amok. Lacking faith in the unpolished instincts of Latin American voters, they wanted democracy only to inculcate liberal habits, and perhaps to erode the power of non-atomist elites.[7] Amīn likewise scorned the "ignorant general public" in the Middle East, as led astray by clerics and unreceptive to his new version of Islam.[8] And one historian has noted the Chinese liberal intelligentsias wont, as far back as the 1910s, to see itself as the epitome of modern consciousness.[9] Bridgehead atomists everywhere imagined their own outlook as an oasis of enlightenment. As a global vanguard, they jointly set out to excise from their cultures the sentiments that had long held their forerunners in check.

Part of this project naturally meant disdaining the past. They thought what most of humanity held dear was dated and irrelevant. Amīn wrote that people who measured the shortcomings of their own era against past ideals had a mental deficiency, in which nostalgia blocked them from

thinking for themselves.[10] The vitriol that bridgehead atomists poured on history is striking: "unmitigated slavery," "illusory traditions," "ocean of blood and pitch darkness." Studying ethical traditions was a waste of time, they thought. At most, it could help activists on their own side know the enemy better. As Bilbao inimitably put it, "we familiarize ourselves with history in order to know how to curse it."[11]

Particularly in China and Latin America, atomists tended to bundle every custom that offended them in one package before flinging it on the ashheap. For Chinese like Hu Shi—purveyors of what one historian has called "totalistic antitraditionalism"—the past was an organic whole tied up with Confucianism. Tradition was one evil after another. Anything decent in the Chinese past had arisen in other cultures too. Thus good things had nothing to do with Confucianism, whose time was up.[12] For positivists in Latin America, Spain symbolized the same repression and backwardness.[13] "Spain" was not the country itself, but rather a whole heritage resting on the classics and medieval Catholic thought. Indeed, these parallel loathings of history made bridgehead atomists see traditions *everywhere* as noxious. While each group focused on demolishing its own heritage, the ultimate enemy was universal. Bilbao condemned Hinduism and Islam in passing, for the same reasons as Catholic Spain, and Hu Shi portrayed all premodern civilizations as barriers to human ingenuity.[14]

This iconoclastic temper was not just the drunkenness of novelty. Bridgehead atomists were fighting a war against rival ethoses. Naturally they singled out for attack age-old virtuocratic ways of life. Barreda, for instance, claimed that access to truth—of the sort claimed by prophets and, on a more prosaic level, by priests and mandarins—always turned into abuse of others. The past was a dungeon of horrors, in other words, because virtuocratic energy could mean only horror. Against such truths crystallized in action, he favored a more matter-of-fact grounding of values on facts.[15] Aḥmad Khān's reinterpretation of Islam showed the same atomist loathing of virtuocracy. Accumulated traditions within Islam were to be thrown out, so the Qur an could stand alone. Indeed, Islam should probably be reduced from a social blueprint to a mere voluntary standard for one's personal life. His Arab counterparts agreed that religious principles should be more subject to proof, as in the natural sciences, and that a liberal Islam would let all believers judge truth for themselves.[16] Muslim clerics needed humbling.

Premodern atomists like the Sophists and Legalists would have recognized this more flexible and flattened view of ethics. Virtuocratic clerics and jurists had to lose their role of interpreting truth. Topmost in bridgehead atomists' minds, for strategic reasons, was wiping out any mandarinate that took itself too seriously. On those revised terms, without interpreters and public vigor, what survived of traditional beliefs could be left standing. Hu Shi declared years later that "probably I am a Confucianist—now that Confucianism is dead." Once taken away from the robe-clad traditionalists who thought beliefs demanded action on a grand scale, modern religion could turn into a search for inspiration according to people's ever changing tastes.[17]

Bridgehead atomists' targeting of the *virtuocratic* past in particular comes through quite clearly in the case of Hu Shi's literary reforms. He and other Chinese liberals pushed vernacularization—replacement of classical Chinese with the plain language of speech and popular novels. After 1920, education at all levels stressed the vernacular. New fiction also had a starkly realist tone, serving up immediate images of life in a spirit of "protest and self-consolation" rather than ethical insight. Language and literature had to live and adapt to

changing times, the argument went.[18] Yet literary reform meant much more than making the Chinese language more efficient or more suited to circumstances. After all, many Confucian writers of the same era also started writing in a more straightforward style. The conservative scholar Gu Hongming pointed out the real upshot of the iconoclasts' project. The new literature would "make men become ethically dwarfed" by abandoning Confucianism. Turning the reformers' argument upside down, he said that a "living" language was not, as they claimed, one that could change with the winds. Rather, it was one that voiced undying, eternal principles. New vernacular texts, ethically unconscious, were truly lifeless.[19] Just as Barreda and Aḥmad Khān saw pedestrian morality as a safeguard against virtuocratic abuse, so did Hu Shi's circle see literary reform as a way to undercut the character-forming purpose of the classics. The world's virtuocracies—everywhere the bulwark against atomism—were to yield to a flattened morality of circumstance.

Bridgehead atomists also saw that they needed to remap the world. Earlier in the book, I noted that virtuocrats everywhere regard the civilizations they represent as universal. Each is defined by principles, not by territory. Bridgehead atomists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries of- fered a rival geography of truth. Muslim reformers like Aḥmad Khān rejected any loyalty to the Ottoman caliphate at Constantinople, symbol of a unified Islamic *ummah*. They wanted it broken up into multiple caliphates, each at the nation-state level where rulers actually held power. Similarly, Barredas new curriculum for Mexican secondary education did away with Latin, which transmitted religion and philosophy, in favor of English and French, which transmitted science.[20] Now one need not be an atomist to take seriously arguments for political reorganization, or against an excess of Latin in education. But the important point is that bridgehead atomists did not argue for such things as a better way to serve a given purpose. They did so because they wanted to change the purpose itself. Universal ethical traditions had to collapse into the narrower horizons of institutional fact. And language as a medium for ethical insights gave way to language as a vehicle of science, unburdened by tradition.

What, then, could remain of the great civilizations? Most bridgehead atomists just celebrated the collapse and marched into a liberal hereafter. A few, Muslims especially, wanted some continuity on the surface. Aḥmad Khān saw being a Muslim mainly as something in which one could take pride by working for quite pedestrian goals, such as improving living standards. Doing so would uplift Muslims, as a community, in the esteem of others.[21] A civilization as a lodestar of inspiration was turning into something quite different: almost an ethnicity. Bounded identities now jostled one another for relative status.

We come to a key point. Most of what I have described so far was similar to moments of atomist self-assertion before modern times. Bridgehead atomists showed no great novelty in their attacks on timeless principles, on virtuocrats' mix of qualities and agency, and on the great ethical traditions. Rarely had premodern atomists like the Sophists and the Legalists and the Cärväka nihilists had the chance to stake grand claims, but whenever they had the same tone had appeared. Bridgehead atomists differed from their forerunners in that they now had new leverage: cultural variety on a grand scale. Premodern civilizations were not ignorant of one another, as al-Fārābīs and Abü'l-Fazl's explorations showed. But modernity made such global diversity more vivid and raised the stakes.

From cultural and religious differences, bridgehead atomists drew conclusions that served their own aims quite well. Aḥmad Khān, for instance, saw "India" as a cluster of religious communities that could only coexist under British colonial rule, with its liberalizing agenda.[22] As with "India," so with the world. Barreda hoped diversity of beliefs would be flattened before the new unity of "liberty, order, and progress." Foreshadowing much of modern atomism, Bilbao announced that "Religions go. Religion comes. Historical-local revelations disappear before the revelation that is omnipresent in space and time."[23] Such people did not want to enrich traditions by exposing them to one another, or to highlight truths that recurred across them. In atomist eyes, diversity was a bewildering plethora of tastes, of untranslatable residues. It gave them a license to assert global atomism as the only workable common denominator.

Differences among the great traditions struck bridgehead atomists as proof that the content of any one of them was arbitrary. Unity could come only from cutting human thought down to a bedrock of "indisputable" truths: science and a liberal version of "justice." Barreda expressed the goal best. He proposed an educational system that would impart a common stock of knowledge, scientific in tone, as a "prerequisite of peace and social order." Opinions would converge once thought shriveled to a fixation on methods and incontestable facts. A matter-of-fact morality would link all professions and erode barriers of ethnicity and social origin.[24] According to one historian, Barreda and other positivists used science to lend a legitimizing mystique to the new bourgeoisie.[25] Yet class interests did not drive everything, because bridgehead atomists said the same things elsewhere, even where conditions were quite different. Take Hu Shi—hardly an apologist for Chinas bourgeoisie, marginal in an age of warlords and corruption. He thought "blind rivalries" among religions should yield to a common empirical morality, drawn from new "non-religious instrumentalities." Science trumped religion and philosophy. Amīn, too, saw peace coming at last among bearers of different beliefs, for scientific truths applied worldwide. All countries were converging on the same techniques and standards of daily life.[26] Regardless of their class bases, bridgehead atomists agreed that arbitrary traditions were giving way to a new, bedrock morality.

We can understand this atomist bedrock more fully by looking at what it would *replace*. What an ideology omits or opposes often says a lot. Hu Shi criticized two habits in traditional Chinese thought: that it dealt only with human affairs and neglected hard science, and that it treated ideas as more important than reality. Barreda likewise took issue with Catholic intellectuals' wont to see facts through a lens of universal truth. He saw those who reflected on old truths as wasting time in "the chipmunks' work of constantly turning over aged texts." Facts should give rise to morality instead of vice versa. Positivist morality would embody the practical sense of the new men of scientific temper, uncorrupted by classical education. Moral training would mean practicing desirable behaviors and appealing to "the well understood interest of the individual." Aḥmad Khān took an equally earthy view of moral behavior, as practiced by unperfectible human beings torn between conflicting impulses.[27]

All these bridgehead atomists objected, therefore, to too absolute a system of ethics. Ideas independent of facts, just like virtuocrats loyal to a great tradition, offended atomist sensibilities. The new morality brought two quite different aims together. On the one hand, it would let people off easily by demanding less in the way of character cultivation. On the other hand, it would discipline thought by keeping it within the horizons of fact. This cramping of ethical vigor

carried over into politics. When Brazilian positivists briefly tried to capture the state, for example, they treated politics as a kind of technical management, undisturbed by lofty moralizing.[28]

This emptying of ethical substance from public life played out in several ways. Wajdī, for instance, moved away from the older Islamic version of interreligious tolerance as a *ẓimmah* (pact) among people from two or more divinely inspired traditions, who could respect one another as sincere worshippers of God. Instead he took up a vaguely liberal notion of "respect for human beings." He directed tolerance neither at truth, nor at members of the communities that pursued truth, but at individuals who happened to hold beliefs. The substance or truth of those beliefs, along with the communities that grouped like-minded believers together, did not count.[29] Whatever the details in each setting, bridgehead atomists around the world had a common logic: beliefs needed fettering so their bearers could go free. Virtuocrats especially needed thrusting aside, lest they try to bring too much morality into public debate.

Having cut beliefs down to a pedestrian level and expelled them from public life, of course, bridgehead atomists had not entirely solved the problem. Even thinned-out beliefs need an outlet. To provide a safe one, a split had to open up between outer life and inner opinion. As long as opinions did not disturb public order, they could flourish unmolested in peoples inner conscience. Certain conclusions about political life followed. Religions could coexist if faith became just an inward personal matter, invisible in public. If a colonial regime allowed the natives freedom of worship, for example, its rule in more worldly matters could not rightly be questioned. Such passive indifference before modern authority was built into bridgehead atomism. Aḥmad Khān felt that political demonstrations against the British Raj were improper. He also favored vaccinating peasants by force, if their ignorance of modern medicine made them resist progress. Barreda likewise said that just because positivist "order and progress" left some room for people's beliefs, did not mean those beliefs should gain any public ground. The new firewall between inner and outer life would make "impossible any commotion that is not purely spiritual, any revolution that is not merely intellectual."[30] Bridgehead atomists married inner freedom to outer authoritarianism.

Perhaps it will seem that so far I have painted too uniform a picture of bridgehead atomists' hostility to all public ethical vigor. To be sure, they did carry on the timeless atomist wish to see conscience truncated in its impact. One historian was roughly on the mark when he wrote that positivist ist education in Latin America created "egoists and unbelievers, materialist and without ideals."[31] But despite this pattern, it is obvious that bridgehead atomists did frame some of their principles in novel ways. In one maneuver, as we saw already, they used the worlds cultural diversity to pitch atomism as the lowest common denominator. In a second maneuver, they put forth a twist on what conscience and ethical initiative really meant. By reinterpreting freedom itself, they could unexpectedly take up the banner of conscience and brandish it against their enemies.

This maneuver meant turning a longstanding pattern upside down. Before modern times, the great traditions had always been sources of ethical critique and inspiration to act against injustice, against tyrants and hypocrites. Ancient atomists, in contrast, had crushed individual thought as a menace to public order. For centuries, the likes of the Platonists and the Confucians,

not the Sophists and the Legalists, were the truly reflective and questioning souls. Everyone took this pattern of virtuocratic conscience and atomist authoritarianism for granted.

Now bridgehead atomists did carry forward some of the same old assumptions, to be sure. They still preferred an unimaginative "order" over the "commotion" of ethical vigor. But in a larger sense, they cleverly abandoned the age-old image of atomists as they laid claim to the modern world. Now they argued that the great traditions were "hypnotic" and allowed only "blind partisans of routine" to flourish. Dogmas and "delusion" had been imposed for centuries on people who might otherwise have thought independently.[32] This maneuver—one of history s great reversals—meant bridgehead atomists set themselves up as the voice of conscience *against* the great traditions.

Bilbao, for instance, wanted to abolish first priestly interpretation and then any kind of textual authority for beliefs. Individual reason instead would reign supreme.[33] On one level this goal might seem sensible enough. No one has ever praised rigidity and complacency as a sign of health. But what this new sort of individual conscience might involve, beyond indulging one's tastes, such thinkers did not say. It surely rested on nothing mystical, the old perfectionist alternative to rigid ethical systems. Nor was it heroic enough to make history advance at its prodding. When Barreda wrote of history's march toward liberalism, he made the process one of impersonal laws and trends, not heroic agency.[34] The limits of bridgehead atomist "liberty" came through just as clearly in China. The iconoclasts there trumpeted individual freedom when it served as a weapon against Confucianism. But once the wave of demolition had passed in the early 1920s, freedom no longer got so much attention.[35]

Bridgehead atomists' use of appeals to conscience was no simple matter, therefore. Despite their vitriol against virtuocratic "backward spirits," their own view of agency was far from inspiring. Looked at from one angle, it just meant flattening the personal qualities on which virtuocrats' more genuine ethical vigor had long rested. Yet taking up individual conscience as a cause also strengthened their hands as they began drawing the map of an atomist world order. Their stripped-down version of "conscience" helped clear away traditional barriers to their vision. "Freedom" served mainly as a way for bridgehead atomists to toss older truths on the ashheap.

Remember that freedom *alone* never has an ethical content. By and large, we should look with suspicion on people who praise a disembodied freedom that leads nowhere. Freedom acquires ethical content only as it ties in with how one sees one's place in the world. Bridgehead atomists interpreted it so it meant not the demotic freedom of communities to live in fellowship and without domination, or the perfectionist freedom of a few from necessity so they might fulfill their higher natures, or the virtuocratic freedom to move from inspiration to acting nobly on the world. The freedom of bridgehead atomists—whether in the guise of liberals, positivists, secularists, or iconoclasts—meant extracting a raw individual essence from beneath the weight of history. In Bilbao's imagery, the denuded individual, an "intelligent atom," was emerging from millennia of abuse and deception. Atomist freedom was the "omnipresent essence" and "eternal imperative" latent across the ages.[36] Just as arbitrary cultural differences would yield to an atomist bedrock, so would an odd version of individual conscience help dissolve rival ethoses. With these two maneuvers, bridgehead atomists set up modernity's enlarged stage as a place to turn history upside down.

Atomism became something beneath the accretions of history, something raw but authentic that the great traditions had suppressed. That said, however, bridgehead atomists could not reject the past wholesale. They had to identify suppressed atomist forerunners in it. How they found such precursors of their own project varied. Some chose to project atomism back on to the source of the traditions around them. Bilbao tried to claim Jesus as a liberal whose true message had been distorted by Saint Paul and Catholicism. Muslim reformers in the Middle East and southern Asia held that if one went back to look at the Qur'ān alone, Islam was truly liberal, unlike the layers of repression clerics had laid over it.[37] Civilizations had abandoned their own roots, in other words. While vague, this account of history worked well enough for some audiences.

A more interesting tactic—with a larger grain of truth in it—was to focus on some marginal episodes in history. Hu Shi went furthest among these thinkers. He argued that liberal modernity needed to take root in China not as an "abrupt displacement," but as an "organic assimilation" to the heritage. The non-Confucian schools of thought would be the most "congenial soil" for such a project. Daoism had some use, for example, given its irreverence toward Confucian political philosophy. But Hu seized in particular on a branch of the austere ancient Mohist school. As he saw it, such thinkers had shown a promising practical temper in tune with liberalism. Notably, he dared mention the Legalists only in passing, saying that their impersonal laws were progressive but that their brutality had played into the hands of Confucian opponents.[38]

Two themes stand out here. One is that these atomists a century ago were at least hinting at a fact crucial to my argument: the timelessness of atomism as an ethos. The other is that, just as they turned the ideas of agency and universalism upside down, so too did they reverse the verdict on much of history. What most premodern people had seen, quite rightly, as moments of pathology were now recast as tragically failed breakthroughs of conscience.

This vague awareness that atomism lay latent everywhere raised one major problem, given the unevenness of liberalism's advance at the time. How did bridgehead atomists see Europe, and the modern West in general? What did they make of the fact that the new atomist project had broken through first and gone furthest there? Some had a clear inferiority complex toward Europe, perhaps not as a permanently superior civilization—it had had to break away from its own past too—but at least as a model of progress. They readily called most of their non-European compatriots lethargic, or even "imbecile brutes."[39] Some of this attitude was just a natural reaction to economic backwardness, but it also had roots in a timeless atomist psychology. As I observed earlier, atomists need an impersonal authority, a standard for performance that simply exists rather than requiring deep reflection and ethical engagement. Things like a profit-and-loss ledger, or the favor of an absolute ruler, have often served that purpose. A century ago, Europe and North America filled that psychological space for many bridgehead atomists elsewhere in the world. They could measure their own "modernness" against the folkways of a distant society.

At the same time, bridgehead atomists were not just lackeys and imitators. Latin American positivists denounced the heavy-handed foreign policy of the United States, Aḥmad Khān urged the British colonial government to move toward race-blindness in making official appointments, and Arab secularists found Europe alien even if they respected its accomplishments.[40] In general, such people saw the West mainly as first among equals. Hu Shi argued that it just had a head start in escaping from the "universal medievalism" that had afflicted all civilizations. 'Amīn held likewise that differences in "civilization" showed only that scientific truth had spread unevenly

so far. And the Japanese liberal Anesaki Masaharu agreed that modernity itself was a human, not a European, good: “Occidentals should not regard civilization as their monopoly, nor Orientals put obstructions to its spread.”[41]

Bridgehead atomists were confident that their principles transcended time and place. Of course they were still a minority, precarious and unevenly entrenched around the globe. But their first step had more or less succeeded between the mid-1800s and the 1920s. A global atomist culture had emerged for the first time. Opponents who had kept them in check within each civilization had been put on the defensive on a new, expanded stage. History now had to decide how hardy their vision would prove, once rival ethoses began to marshal their own forces.

Between roughly the turn of the century and the 1930s, depending on the region, reactions began to form against the global atomist project. Mainstream liberal historians tend to put such reactions down to mere nostalgia, or cold feet about the pace of social change. But that first round of challenges makes sense as part of the global war of position. The ethoses on which those challenges rested, the scale on which they posed their claims, the strategies they chose—all would eventually force atomists to redefine their project. Only by tracing the contours of the anti-atomist resistance can we understand how atomists managed to outmaneuver it. The global resistance fell into two clusters, one with a high-culture and one with a popular support base.

At the forefront of high-culture resistance stood what I call *civilizational virtuocrats*. Loosely, these were the humanistic intellectuals and the old-style upper-middle classes allied with them. Their ranks included the remnants of the clergy and premodern literati, the ethically minded educators, and those refined pillars of society who tried to preserve standards even as atomism closed in around them. I dub these people civilizational virtuocrats because in resisting atomism, they tended to focus their concern on one or another besieged civilization. They defended the great traditions against atomism's onslaught, against what one of them called a society “worm-eaten with Liberalism.”[42]

To be sure, such people were a minority as small as bridgehead atomists. Even counting generously, they probably added up to no more than one in fifty of the world s population. But they carried immense weight as a cultural force, as the bearers of tradition and respectability. Like bridgehead atomists a little earlier, civilizational virtuocrats also showed worldwide similarities. Given the temper of this book, my sympathy with much of what these critics said should be clear. They offered the most promising resistance modern atomism has yet faced. While in the end they failed to overturn it—and their failure has an air of tragedy about it—they do offer valuable lessons for those of us reflecting on how to challenge atomist culture in our own time.

The intellectuals who gave voice to this response were well known within their own societies at the time, though a little less so outside and today. In greater Europe, they included the Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset, the German historian Oswald Spengler, and the Anglo-American poet and critic T.S. Eliot.[43] The currents that these thinkers represented in Europe aligned with the reactions forming against bridgehead atomism elsewhere. The European part of the culture war can now merge into our *global* story, therefore, even though most examples still properly come from elsewhere. The Uruguayan literary critic José Enrique Rodó published a withering attack on materialism that made him Latin America's most prominent intellectual of

the early twentieth century. The so-called “last Confucian,” Liang Shuming, launched a movement for “rural reconstruction” in the 1930s as part of a third alternative to the Guomindang and the Communists. Muhammad Iqbāl, Punjabi lawyer and philosopher, argued for a renewed Islam that drew from mysticism. The Bengali poet and Nobel Prize winner Rabindranath Tagore also founded several experimental movements in education and rural development. Figures like these were quite cosmopolitan, and linked ideas and social action. Their challenge to bridgehead atomism was a natural virtuocratic response to the forces arrayed against them. They showed they could answer bridgehead atomism point by point, while taking into account the demands of modernity.

These thinkers held much the same self-understanding as virtuocrats through the ages. In varying language, they all celebrated the vital link between inner qualities and outer mission, and the energy of a cultivated minority to be refracted through all spheres of society. Rodó spoke of passing back and forth between “contemplation” and “action” Iqbāl drew on Sufi imagery of an “appreciative” self that gazed on eternity, and an “efficient” self that acted in history.[44] They all made much of a rich inner life. Liang, for instance, was careful to stress the self-cultivation in Mencian thought, in contrast to the rituals that had become so dear to more hidebound types of Confucianism. Where bridgehead atomists saw the inner self as just a reservoir of arbitrary tastes, civilizational virtuocrats found in it something much richer. They took their empirically minded opponents to task for being “absorbed in the ‘fact,’” “cut off from the unplumbed depths of [their] own being,” and out of touch with “all the eternal inner voices.” Apart from stunting the imagination, atomists' fact-obsession left them searching in vain for meaning outside, when the wisdom of the classics showed one had to start with an inner ethical sense. Only character could ground action.[45]

This rich inner life centered on a sense of permanence and unity. Iqbāl insisted that true personality was not just the psychologists' “bits of consciousness, mutually reporting to one another.” Instead it had “the unity of a directive purpose,” and could endure the vicissitudes around it. Rodó agreed that change should submit to “a guiding force in the realm of the will.” Such “plasticity of superior characters,” with its “conscious and ordered change,” had nothing in common with the “irresolute and unstable” atomist personality. The latter, victim of unordered tastes, had “but the indefinite desire for renovation, deprived of an idea to govern and direct it and cheated by paralysis of the will.”[46] Even though the details differed among thinkers, their observations clustered around a common theme. They were reacting to bridgehead atomists' claim that all truths had evaporated with modernization, that all a stripped-down individual could do was adapt. Modern atomism was just laxity and flux, an indulgence of tastes, devoid of a robust inner life.

Taking oneself seriously meant making demands of oneself. Tagore noted that the truest path—developing one's higher faculties—was by definition not the easiest path. Liang wrote of “inward-directed effort,” using the example of his own typically Confucian efforts toward “self-rectification” since childhood. He urged his audience to be generous in their assessment of others while unsparing of their own shortcomings.[47] This attitude bears stressing, since many liberals might be tempted to impugn the intentions of people who use such language. In liberal eyes, people either should not preach self-cultivation at all, or if they do should at least be humbly relativistic about it. One persons degeneracy is another's enlightenment, so to speak. Anyone

who takes older standards of virtue too seriously must be using them as banners for a nefarious snobbery. From that angle, these anti-atomist critics were mere apologists for privilege and self-congratulation.

Nonetheless, the substance of what they were saying hardly bears out such a dismissal. They never claimed to be paragons of virtue themselves. Rodó, for instance, made clear that *possessing* such qualities mattered less than the spirit of *seeking* them along the most arduous of roads. He cautioned against either extreme: "blind confidence in oneself," or the empty humility that saw the goal itself as futile.[48] This outlook differs starkly from atomist individuality, which flattens absolute qualities into irrelevance. A gulf divides those who counsel humility on the path to grandeur, from those who counsel humility to turn our eyes away from grandeur altogether.

The demands civilizational virtuocrats placed on themselves were not, therefore, just proxies for culture and status. Yet at the same time, there clearly was a social upshot. The anti-atomist critique went well beyond abstractions, to point out bluntly that the wrong sort of people had come to power and had infected society at large. Ultimately, the enemy was timeless, but its influence unprecedented. Tagore pointed out that great figures of the past, calling forth the best in themselves and others, had always had to face "unbelievers" and the "prudent" who mocked such higher goals as unrealistic. The views of ancient atomists like the Legalists and the Cārvāka school should spring to mind. In a more direct remark on his own time, Liang lamented the insipidness of urban Chinese youth. Under Western influence, those lax and disordered personalities had succumbed to mere desire-seeking. Rodó, too, noted this trend in atomist modernity. The only vaguely moral demand it raised was a blend of honesty and prudence, which "although it may…lend conscience support along the everyday paths of life is a frail staff indeed when it comes to scaling the peaks."[49]

In other words, bridgehead atomists had created a culture that discouraged people from placing demands on themselves for the sake of something higher. As Ortega y Gasset put it, true superiority meant not clinging to aristocratic privilege, but rather servitude to a rigorous project of self-cultivation. The moral inertia of the masses was now suffocating any higher aspirations.[50] Recall how bridgehead atomists had redefined morality: as channeling pedestrian human instincts to bring moderately good effects. The natural virtuocratic response was to point out that if one sets one's sights low, one gets what one sees. The philosophical debate reflected a clash between rival ways of life.

Civilizational virtuocrats did not lament only the laxity that bridgehead atomists had spread. They were also uneasy about the new "mechanistic" society. Liang contrasted Chinese "ethical rationality," an emotional and moral understanding of behavior, with modern Western behavior based on impersonal rules and supposedly understood through "social science." When Tagore condemned the "cult of the machine," he meant this overall climate of modernity rather than technology as such. The "gigantic sordidness" of modern organization, devoid of ethical content, had wrought havoc. Internationally, it had led to "financial leapfrog" and a mere "federation of steam-boilers." Countries like Japan had entered the age of industry and empire-building by selling their souls for a "gregariousness of gluttony." As did Rodó in Latin America, Tagore regretted this material striving bereft of any goal beyond itself, "addition" instead of "synthesis." Psychically, too, science and atomist liberalism degraded and fragmented. As Tagore put it, the

"moral man" had a unity of character absent in the "limited purpose" of the "political and the commercial man."[51]

A pathology had arisen that no earlier culture would have abided. Tagore saw in atomist modernity a reversal of earlier values, for "we were not always this kind of a market crowd." Commerce and the like had been known since time immemorial for their "ugly vulgarity." A new social order had displaced "the scholar and the sage, the hero and the philanthropist," with "a man who has no margin round him beyond his bare utility." The defeat of decency had occurred, Tagore thought, largely because intellect had shifted from checking the base passions to siding with them. Modern education gave people a "rigid crust" of unthinking specialization, a "barbarism whose path is lit up by the lurid light of intellect." Rodó also saw that the heroic had been supplanted by "mere cleverness placed at the service of an instinctive repugnance for greatness…a rancorous and implacable hostility toward everything that is beautiful and dignified and refined in the human spirit." This anti-atomist critique was strongest in Europe, where the empirical temper had gone furthest. Ortega called the technical specialist a "learned ignoramus." German intellectuals of the same era lamented the wedge being driven between facts and deeper meanings. True intellect drew as much from inspiration and spiritual sensitivity, they insisted, as it did from what specialists got bogged down in measuring.[52]

Civilizational virtuocrats did not speak directly of a clash among permanent, rival ethoses, of course. But everything they said suggests they would agree with most of the account I have offered so far. And while bridgehead atomists would no doubt bridle at the caustic indictments by their opponents, they could not well say that the content of the critique was wrong. They had indeed turned intellect into calculation, and knowledge into technique. They had celebrated that move as a clearing away of needless pretensions so that only raw facts remained.

While civilizational virtuocrats all disdained spiritless technique, what would they have put in its place? For one thing, they saw education as a process of forming the right sort of person. Decaying high cultures had to be revived. Liang described classical Chinese education as an engagement with the emotions, a drawing-out of instincts of benevolence into a polished ethical sense. Conversely, only inner disorder could come from imparting technical competence without a moral anchor. In his own experimental school in rural Bengal, Tagore revived traditional Indian education "founded on the eternal truths of human nature" and attuned to duty. Eliot wrote in England of how mere "instruction" differed from true "education," and called for basing the latter on "a Christian philosophy of life." In a similar vein, Iqbāl thought science had its uses but that taken alone it fragmented the world "like so many vultures falling on the dead body of Nature." Only religion could bring "the unitary character of purposive experience." All these thinkers felt life revolved around character rather than raw brainpower.[53] Where bridgehead atomists saw the will as a source of abuse if not cut down to the shrewd pursuit of self-interest, their critics saw it as a meeting-place of character and mission.

This ethical vigor came out of a timeless virtuocratic self-understanding. For Iqbāl, a human being was "a germ of infinite power" and a source of "the ego-sustaining deed." He argued that in Islam, the human spirit was a force for rolling back evil in the world. Rodó similarly saw the will as key in the founding of civilizations. Such an outlook did not stay on an abstract level; it was made concrete in the lives of these thinkers and activists. Take Liangs own experiences as a public figure, for example. He intended his rural reconstruction movement in part as an exercise

in will. On a more personal note, he once wrote that his ethical commitments gave him a serene stubbornness and an aversion to compromising his principles. Decades later, Maoist cadres would hurl attacks at him for just that reason. His unwillingness humbly to revise his views offended their sense of populist conformity.[54]

Most of what we have seen so far shows how traditional these thinkers were. But we should not get the impression that they looked at the past with unthinking admiration. As Eliot put it, "a tradition without intelligence is not worth having." And Liang freely found fault with some traits of Chinese culture: childish superstitions, stagnation, lack of precise logic, and the like. He also felt Chinese society lacked good habits of organization. Little public spiritedness filled the gap between the rarefied realm of the literati and the firm but narrow bonds of peasant life. As one of his biographers has noted, Liang was more willing than rigid Confucian conservatives to rescue truth from custom, and to rethink social practices from the ground up. Iqbāl likewise wanted to apply Islam to modern life, keeping core principles in mind but probing the frontiers of how to realize them. The habits of traditional life, upheld by "intellectual mediocrities," had to face an honest reassessment. In the same spirit, Tagore regretted the ossification that over centuries had turned Hinduism into "a paralyzed limb on the body of the universal man."[55] As civilizational virtuocrats surveyed a single, global stage, this theme kept recurring. A civilization had become too rigid and lost its vitality, but could be saved.

On specific issues, these thinkers were often quite radical. Modernity gave a chance to free core principles from how they had been misapplied in premodern life. The new spirit of social equality was a case in point. While civilizational virtuocrats hated leveling and stressed the cultivation of superior qualities, they also knew that qualities did not always overlap with social background. The frozen stratification of caste and aristocratic societies should give way to more fluid arrangements that brought out "true superiorities" wherever found.[56] Note the difference from how bridgehead atomists saw social equality. The latter had let a hard-headed obsession with performance crowd out any serious thinking about virtue as such.

Civilizational virtuocrats had mixed feelings about democracy. Among the thinkers mentioned so far, Liang and Iqbāl addressed it most fully. They respectively claimed that Confucianism and Islam were "democratic," in demanding respect for other people, fairness, reasoned deliberation rather than force, and personal moral responsibility rather than blind following of others. Both thought an ideal society would use democratic arrangements to embody "ethical rationality" and "consensus." Yet they did not bend over backward in praise of democracy in the liberal sense. They hardly saw majority rule as a moral absolute, for it often showed itself mistaken, ill informed, and unstable. Democracy also put too much emphasis on mere institutions and nose-counting, and not enough on character.[57]

In a larger sense, of course, such people were interested less in political arrangements than in the spirit imbuing them. In the global culture war, the key issue was not whether minorities or majorities should rule. It was what sort of public culture should mould those who *did* rule, whether many or few. Where bridgehead atomists thought electorates liberal enough to be trusted—unlike the benighted peasants they scorned—they used democracy to undercut rival elites such as the clergy and gentry. Their sort of democracy was a weapon against truth, a way to enthrone tastes at the collective as well as the individual level. Civilizational virtuocrats, in contrast, saw democracy as a way to realize age-old principles more fully. Rising levels of public

awareness—and the expansion of the suffrage in many countries—made them realize politics could expand to include more people, so long as vertigo did not lead to rejecting the core truths about human nature and a decent society. Of course, the position atomists had staked out, as challengers of authority, put civilizational virtuocrats in a politically awkward position. They often came across as backward elitists when they voiced doubts about democracy, at least as democracy was being used.

Economic development also proved a difficult question. Many civilizational virtuocrats were appalled by how the poor fared under capitalism, and blamed it on atomists' pursuit of wealth as a goal in itself. Tagore, for example, observed that modernity had turned into "a vast catering establishment…for a whole population of gluttons." Asserting the primacy of the ethical over the material, however courageous and sensible, played into the hands of opponents. Civilizational virtuocrats were portrayed by liberals as enemies of prosperity, by nationalists as bucolic foes of their countries' "catching-up" with the West, and by Marxists as obstacles to class-based organizing.

Such charges were unfair at best. None of these thinkers saw poverty as a virtue in itself, and they did acknowledge that modern science had much to offer. If ethically grounded, development would free the soul from material burdens and smooth the roughness born of scarcity. This vision carried over into practice, as when both Tagore and Liang launched ventures in rural development. Liang's "Confucian socialism," rather than just handing out pottage, aimed to build a humane alternative way of life that cut across economics, politics, and society.[58] While not all bridgehead atomists were in fact gluttons for development—fighting the culture war ranked more highly for most, as we have seen—the difference of mentality was stark. For atomists, material comforts offered most people an easy yardstick of aspiration, untaxing for the soul. For virtuocrats, development widened room for what was still a very traditional kind of human flourishing.

So far we have seen what civilizational virtuocrats wanted and how they fitted into the global culture war of the early twentieth century. But we still have to make sense of their strategic failure. Coming up with a vision that could engage both timeless truths and modern possibilities was not enough to bring victory. Losing the war of position against modern atomism reflected two weaknesses: one of scale and one of strategy.

The problem of scale involved failing to meet the atomist project on an equally universal plane. To be sure, civilizational virtuocrats were far from parochial in spirit. Their roots in the major civilizations inclined them to see any true principles as universal, as human rather than European, Chinese, Indian, or Middle Eastern. Tagore insisted that the boundaries among traditions were "imaginary lines," and should yield to a higher synthesis. He and others welcomed an encounter with the foreign as an opportunity to reconcile the best of all worlds. They also tended to agree that true dialogue had to center on the rich, inner spirituality at the heart of all faiths. Rodó called this effort "the conveyance of one's own personality … to the soul of all sincere doctrines."[59] The idea of tolerance as translation harked back to premodern cosmopolitans like Abū'l-Fazl. While these thinkers of the early twentieth century did not develop it much more, they did show that it could apply to the dazzling diversity of the world as a whole.

But despite their promise, civilizational virtuocrats' scale of vision did not quite match what history demanded. They opposed both the “colorless vagueness” of global atomism, on the one hand, and nationalism and “the race-idea,” on the other. Their mistake lay in picking a third frame of reference: the middle ground of civilizations with “distinct personalities.” A global synthesis, to the extent they spoke of it, would still take civilizations as its building blocks and affirm each one's uniqueness.[60] Especially outside Europe, these critics slid into projecting their soaring ideals on to their own civilizations, often at the expense of the real diversity within each tradition. At best, this meant misreading relative influence *within* a civilization—say, literati Confucianism in China—as the *essence* of that civilization.

Oversimplifying matters that way encouraged like-minded people to think they spoke for their own civilization as a whole, but it did little to shed light on how history had gone wrong in the first place. It overlooked how bridgehead atomism had tapped into existing cultural currents all over the world. Ignoring the base of atomism at home meant these critics outside the West had a warped sense of their enemy. Europe was often misunderstood as the source of global crisis, rather than just its first victim.[61] No one could deny, of course, that greater Europe bore more blame for atomisms gains than any other world region, because it surrendered first. But just as civilizational virtuocrats blurred the fault lines around them, so too did they neglect the pressure points for change within the West itself.

Even dialogue suffered from this wont to attribute essences to different civilizations. Unlike many of today's xenophobic nationalists and fundamentalists, these thinkers showed plenty of open-mindedness and goodwill. Some, like Tagore, traveled to several continents, met their counterparts, and strove for common ground. But in the end none went far enough. When Liang met Tagore during the latter s visit to China, he slipped into a rather tiresome effort to lecture him on Mencius. And Eliot briefly studied Indian philosophy and professed respect for China, but decided both traditions were too alien to add much to his own thinking.[62]

In hindsight, we might say all these thinkers shrank back from an obvious conclusion. They failed to go beyond a kind of distant respect for one another, and tie all their grievances into a common vision. The “essences” of different civilizations have few real points of contact. Only parallels *across* settings could take up a real dialogue and wipe out boundaries altogether. Bridgehead atomists had already set up a world with one type of common ground, the atomist bedrock of appetites and institutions. Civilizational virtuocrats hinted at another, that of translatable inner richness, but left it underexplored.

Their failure also teaches us lessons about strategy. We should remember that even within each country, civilizational virtuocrats could not defeat their opponents. As in Tagore's and Liang s rural cooperatives, change was to come mainly via small-scale exercises in education and moral leadership.[63] Working in civil society had been a favorite strategy of bridgehead atomists too. But bridgehead atomists had at least operated in global and national contexts that helped. Without linking up as a critical mass across borders, civilizational virtuocrats could hardly overcome the forces stacked against them. Rolling back atomism had to occur globally; that much they knew. Yet talk of civilizational essences meant that political agency worldwide had no unit to which it could attach itself. They implied that remaking the world as a whole would have to wait until the pathology of atomism had run its course. The European critics idly hoped some good would come of the cultural crisis that steadily deepened in the 1920s and

1930s. Outside Europe, their counterparts expected the West to collapse and thereby clear the way for the more genuine humanity preserved in China, India, the Islamic world, or Latin America. The civilizations under threat would offer their essences for a resurrection of decency everywhere, including in the defunct core. “Domestically,” change meant small-scale ventures in civil society. Globally, it waited for the ethical truths latent in history to triumph over the folly of the moment.

Overall, civilizational virtuocrats did not see how they might fight the culture war with atomists on the same scale as atomists were doing with them. These thinkers and activists, and ultimately the declining social groups whose sentiments they voiced, would have had to see one another everywhere as allies. Could the parsons and schoolmasters of Devon have imagined kindred spirits in the besieged gentry of Hunan, for example? That would have meant projecting their grievances and hopes on to a common political project: the founding of a *world* civilization to carry forward the truths of the past.

Entertain for a moment a quite different unfolding of twentieth-century history. Imagine that in the West of the 1930s, figures like Eliot and Ortega came to power, instead of Hitler, Stalin, and Roosevelt. Or that leaders like Iqbāl and Tagore won the independence of an unpartitioned southern Asia in 1947, instead of the Muslim League and the Indian National Congress. Or that traditionalists like Liang ejected the Guomindang in 1949, instead of the Chinese Communist Party. With even a couple of such twists, the effects would have snowballed. The integration of high-culture traditions worldwide would have quickened. We might now be looking back on atomist dominance as the misguidedness of a mere half century, as we venture forth into a new world civilization. Without the necessary focus and resolve, however, civilizational virtuocrats' encounters with one another remained shallow, and the global fault lines blurred.

Global atomism's survival reflected much more than just the mistakes of its high-culture opponents, however. It also had to do with how other forces were coming into the picture in the 1920s and 1930s. Leaving civilizational virtuocrats aside, another cluster of challenges to global atomism came from a popular direction, and was made up of two intertwined currents: a popular upsurge and a variety of nationalisms.

The *popular upsurge* was a demotic assertion that tried to adapt its values to the larger scale of modernity. Two major figures, one Latin American and one Indian, show what it involved. José Carlos Mariátegui was a largely self-educated Peruvian journalist and polemicist. Where Rodó had drawn from Latin America's Iberian high culture, Mariátegui took up the banner of the “Indoamerican” poor. His vision rested on a peculiar blend of socialism and Andean identity. He felt that the “austere” spirit of the Andean peasantry had kept alive, in highland practices, “the empirical expression of a communist spirit.” First colonialism and then capitalism had destroyed a humane social order, which the Amerindian should now resurrect from “the dark depths of his soul.” Mariátegui's vision was avowedly hostile to airy philosophy and high culture in general. Intellectuals should serve only as the vanguard of a new working class consciousness. While Mariátegui declared the “consanguinity of the Indian movement with world revolutionary currents,” he thought the communist spirit specially built into Amerindian experience.[64]

A second prominent example was Mohandas Gandhi, the Indian independence activist who challenged not only Britain but also much of modern life. He likened consumerism to “a mouse

gnawing while it is soothing us." Gandhi identified the real India as the "teeming millions" whose way of life had endured for centuries. This authentic popular culture had to rise up non-violently and rid the country of the mentality of a tiny Westernized minority. Far less cosmopolitan than Tagore, Gandhi declared that India "has nothing to learn from anybody else, and this is as it should be." Mere national sovereignty, independence with Western institutions, would be "the tiger s nature, but not the tiger." True self-rule would mean the triumph of a folk culture based on simple virtues and the face-to-face ties of premodern life.[65]

In spirit, this upsurge had much in common with earlier demotic visions: the populist tone, the fondness for small-scale ways of life, the pointing out of a "true" folk culture beneath all the grandiose pretensions of elites. The same themes appeared in various movements around the world at the time. Some such movements stood alone, and some allied with other forces. The Chinese insurgency led by Mao Zedong and based at Yan'an in the late 1930s was typical—at least if we have in mind the Mao who was inspired less by Marx's tomes than by the age-old folk legends of swordsmen and secret brotherhoods.

The gulf separating these figures from civilizational virtuocrats comes through clearly in the personal contrast between Gandhi and Tagore in 1930s India. Gandhi had a habit of self-deprecation and saw his own humble way of life as accessible for all people. Tagore effortlessly projected an aristocratic grandeur. Politically, the former has been called a "practical idealist" focused on "limited goals," and the latter a "romantic idealist" given to "flights of fancy." When Tagore assessed Gandhi's activism, he praised him for speaking to the common people in their own idiom, but condemned the movement's bee-like conformity and the petty symbolism of salt-making and "piles of cotton thread." Tagore wrote that he preferred something grander, more demanding, more intellectual.[66] Other civilizational virtuocrats objected in different ways to the popular upsurge, but the sense that it was too conformist, too shallow, and too stifling cropped up often.

Alongside the popular upsurge bubbled up still another kind of reaction. This one centered on a kind of *nationalism*, a curious alliance of atomist and demotic ethoses. A typical thinker in this vein was Ziya Gökalp, usually considered the most influential voice of modernizing Turkism in the early twentieth century. He thought the nation, meaning a community of "common and homogeneous sentiments," trumped other identities. Each nation had two layers: a "civilization" of ideas and techniques that could be borrowed and discarded, and a primordial folk culture that survived as the national essence beneath all changes. Turkey had belonged to several civilizations in the past, such as the Islamic and the Ottoman. Now, he argued, it must adopt "an up-to-date Muslim Turkism," combining Western modernity, a streamlined version of Islam as a purely personal faith, and the timeless Turkish folk culture that would give a sense of continuity. This vision added up to what we might call a "nationalized" atomist-demotic hybrid. It would let a placeless liberal modernity coexist with strong national units. Concretely, Gökalp urged intellectuals to "go to the people," and rediscover the folk roots that they had abandoned in their effete uprootedness. This spirit of national membership left scant room for standing outside society and critiquing it. It would not do for intellectuals or leaders to distance themselves from the mass of plain folk. Gökalp reduced every great figure to "a symbol of a national effervescence" past or present.[67]

This nationalist challenge took on different guises elsewhere, but with a common logic. For some intellectuals in China, such as Liang Qichao, the sense of Chineseness as *tiānxià* (universal civilization under Heaven) was giving way to that of Chineseness as *guójiā* (ethnic homeland).[68] Ideas came and went; blood endured. Viewed this way, modernization meant finding a space for one's people, *as a people*, on the expanded global stage—even if their values had to be torn away in the process.[69] The ruling Guomindang took up such themes in China, but never quite captured the public imagination. Somewhat earlier, a more successful experiment of this sort had happened in Japan after the 1868 Meiji restoration. And the post-1917 Mexican revolutionary state adopted an ideology of social equality, along with the idea of *mestizaje* (Amerindian and European race-mixing). A people had coalesced and now would march into modernity.

Of course, these kinds of national consciousness were nowhere entirely new. Beneath all the "universal" civilizations, proto-nationalist folk identities had always lurked. Some historians have noted a gradual strengthening of those narrower loyalties over the last thousand years, once the civilizations in question had lost some of their early momentum.[70] But as a modern phenomenon, this type of nationalism played an important role in the global culture war. The international system had broken the world up into territorial chunks, each of which was competing for status in the global hierarchy. And bridgehead atomists' assault on tradition had driven a wedge between demots and virtuocrats, thus opening space for some demots and some atomists to find common ground.

Taken together, these two preconditions led into a set of precarious alliances between some newly assertive atomists and parts of the demotic majority. Where they arose, these national alliances offered more stability, and a broader base, than either atomist minorities or the popular upsurge could enjoy alone. Yet they lacked a global framework in which to link the many nationalisms to one another, to give them a reason not to come into bloody conflict. We shall see that a solution had to await an atomist rethinking of world order in the 1940s.

So far I have avoided discussing two other ideologies that were important in the early twentieth century: fascism and Marxism. Indeed, they probably seem conspicuous by their absence. The reason I have not given them a central place in my account is because, odd though it may sound, neither really added anything to the global landscape I have described. Both were "umbrella" ideologies, much like religions or civilizations that include multiple ways of life. Just as medieval Islam meant something different to clerics, mystics, and peasants, so did fascism and Marxism mean different things to different supporters. Individual fascists and Marxists came from a range of ethoses, and projected their own sensibilities on to what they thought the ideology in question really promised. In this respect, these ideologies were quite unlike the contending cultural blocs I have described. They are better seen as arenas within which these various tendencies competed.

Fascism contained two strands that would have clashed in the long run. One was a nationalism of popular solidarity. The German or Italian or Japanese nation was to absorb individuals into a mass and then lash out internationally. This was the fascism of the besieged lower-middle class, the brownshirts, the kamikaze pilots, and so on. Its antimodern impulses focused on blood and soil, on restoring a bucolic national community that could hold its head up in the world.

The other strand within fascism was a kind of strident perfectionism. Some of the fascist leaders, and the upper-middle classes that joined the movements, envisioned the creation of a new aristocracy. Nazism especially had an undercurrent of contempt for the masses, even if the masses were politically useful at first. Pushed far enough, this thinking had a transnational temper at odds with any folk-minded solidarity. Take the SS, Germany's elite corps of warriors that functioned almost like a secret society. During the war, its leaders devised plans to recruit and breed a pan-European master race that would rule over all nations, including Germany. To such people, *lebensraum* (living space) in the Urals would probably not have looked like the American Midwest, with average German farmers setting up homesteads. It would have looked much more like Latin America in the 1500s, ruled by feudal lords with an exaggerated aristocratic outlook, prolonging the imagery of a bygone era.

Had the Axis won the war, the tension between popular and aristocratic strands of fascism would have come to the fore, in German-occupied Europe particularly. Which would have triumphed, and with what implications for political culture in the long term, is really beside the point. In the context of the global culture war, fascism amounted to little more than a microcosm of the antiliberal forces contending all over the world. Popular fascism was akin to the demotic popular upsurge and the modernizing nationalisms, though more violent and xenophobic. Elitist fascism shared some themes of the high-culture resistance, such as the view of modernity as pedestrian and undemanding. But it harbored an anti-intellectual bent at odds with the likes of Eliot and Ortega. It also took up premodern aristocratic symbols—Teutonic knighthood and the samurai code of honor, for example—in strangely selective ways that bordered on farce.

Moreover, even as an umbrella ideology, fascism did not really offer a compelling alternative to liberal modernity, on the level of the other movements and intellectual currents of the time. It lacked the universal temper to travel well, or even to map like-minded political forces on to one another across countries. The popular upsurge and the high-culture resistance appeared nearly everywhere, but few true fascists held forth in places like Bolivia and Afghanistan. Wanting to dominate militarily and geopolitically is not quite the same thing as trying to engage allies everywhere in a global culture war. Indeed, the Axis failure in part reflected this lack of a truly broad-based global coalition. Even at the peak of their power, Germany, Italy, and Japan occupied a fairly small part of the world's landmass.

What about Marxism? It certainly had the universalist temper that fascism lacked. The Communist Internationals also managed to create some formidable global revolutionary networks. But like fascism, Marxism was an umbrella ideology, defined only by an emphasis on class conflict and the idea that capitalism would inevitably give way to socialism and then to world communism. What Marxism meant, concretely, depended on who was speaking for it and who was listening. In different guises, it attracted demots, atomists, and virtuocrats.

Marxism shared with the popular upsurge much of its social base, namely a mix of urban workers and peasants. Demots could support its egalitarianism and vision of a more cooperative society, much as their premodern ancestors had rallied to millennial peasant uprisings. Mao's early insurgency in the 1930s had this flavor, more or less. Among the core membership of Communist parties, two other tendencies competed. Some atomists saw Marxism as a force for modernization, a more radical way to overcome tradition. As party members, they had a noticeable technocratic bent like modernizing liberals and some nationalists. This vision of

socialism appealed to many Marxists in Europe and North America. Culturally, they were much more like the average liberal than they usually acknowledged. The ready alliance between liberals and Marxists during the Spanish civil war of the late 1930s illustrated this kinship. In more traditional parts of the world, still other kinds of Marxists had virtuocratic leanings. Some intellectuals imprinted by a Confucian or Catholic legacy, for example, saw Marxism much as their predecessors had seen a traditional system of ethics. They imagined the heroism of insurgency and the barricades as a way to remake history and overcome the ethical disorder of modern capitalism.

In the end, neither fascism nor Marxism was truly independent of the deeper forces I have already described. Both ideologies rode on those other forces, and the fault lines of the global culture war mapped on to the divisions that fascists and Marxists faced within their own ranks.

Three major forces were thus competing between roughly the 1920s and the 1940s: (1) currents swirling around liberalism and technocracy, the product of bridgehead atomist efforts over two generations; (2) civilizational virtuocrats, the high-culture critics anchored in their several civilizations; and (3) the popular upsurge, the demotic assertion that was broader than its predecessors, but by no means universally framed or able to rule the world alone. Neither the second nor the third reaction came close to displacing the global atomist order, though the second had much more latent potential.

At the same time, atomists had hardly locked in their triumphs, and they knew it all too well. The liberal historian Guido de Ruggiero wrote in the 1920s that liberals had lost their earlier confidence. Now they just asserted their interests as one force among many, without referring to "a higher and unchallenged sphere." The dangers of Marxism and the new nationalisms also alarmed him.[71] As we saw, the pacted atomist-demotic nationalisms of Turkey, Mexico, Japan, and so on, lacked a global framework to link them to one another. Not only did they slide into interstate Darwinism, which gave an outlet to demotic and perfectionist impulses that atomists abhorred. They also failed to guarantee atomist supremacy in each pact. A single world-arena had clearly emerged by the 1930s, culturally speaking. Yet atomist or virtuocratic dominance throughout it, and how the demotic popular upsurge would relate to either, stayed up in the air.

Two scenarios could have followed. Civilizational virtuocrats could have allied with one another in a common political project, and perhaps reached out to the popular upsurge and the less anti-traditional socialists. They failed to do so because of the shortcomings, noted earlier, in both scale and strategy. The other scenario, the one that in fact happened, required atomists to forge new global arrangements that would (1) lock demots into an alliance long enough to deflate the popular upsurge and head off a radical socialist revolution, (2) allow an ordered reconciliation of the national and the global, and (3) begin sweeping social changes that would give their own way of life a more solid support base. Another atomist maneuver drew near.

Chapter 3

Pacts, Progress, and Meritocracy

Much earlier in the book, I observed that a dominant ethos can modify its ideological vision from time to time. In times of crisis, its bearers may alter how they express their ideas and how they make their power seem legitimate. Such a reframing can serve two purposes. It may react to pressures from within, to realize those ideas more fully or with a different emphasis. Or it may react to pressures from without, to challengers trying to elevate a rival ethos. In the latter case, the reframing might involve allying with the challengers so as to absorb and blunt their claims, or allying with another ethos so as to broaden the base resisting them. In the 1940s, atomists worldwide found themselves in just this situation. Under threat from both high-culture critics and the popular upsurge, the atomist project needed reframing.

This chapter explores the prevailing vision that came out of that reframing and lasted until roughly the 1970s. In saying that the reframing was a strategic response to challengers, I do not mean that it was just a cynical adjustment of convenience. Those atomists who lived out the new ideology usually believed in it sincerely, and saw it as a natural maturing of earlier thought. Still, that ideology did emerge from the demands of the global culture war. Once it had outlived its usefulness, it would fade in turn.

The reframing was a global atomist-demotic pact. It stressed the dimension of homogeneity, the sense of a common human nature across all social groups, that atomists and demots share. It also slotted nation-states into a framework of universal modernization. As a coherent ideology, it first appeared in statements of the Allied vision during World War II. The German-American political theorist Carl J. Friedrich captured the new outlook in his 1942 book, *The New Belief in the Common Man*. He wrote that a new faith in the average person was taking hold around the world. The down-to-earth "ethical realism" underlying it would shape a new world order. Nation-states would be linked together in an optimistic internationalism. The Austrian philosopher Karl R. Popper affirmed liberalism's spirit anew at roughly the same time, under the banner of "the open society."[1]

The two decades when this ideology peaked overlapped with the strongest American influence. American economic and geopolitical might, especially in the years of European and Japanese rebuilding from the ravages of war, did help spread what was often seen as an American ideology. But cause and effect ran the other way too. American power benefited from the new ideology as much as vice versa. The cultural heritage of the United States, with its populist mix of traders and farmers and its hard-headed practicality, did fit quite easily into the postwar global climate.

In the global South, the atomist-demotic pact colored postcolonial independence and the optimism that followed. Its exemplary voice in the South was India's postindependence prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru. As Nehru had first urged in his 1944 book *The Discovery of India*, the intellectual descendants of bridgehead atomists "rediscovered" national cultures.[2] Those I shall call *vanguard atomists* went under many labels: liberals, socialists, social democrats, progressive nationalists, and so on. All showed a similar mentality, however. They built demotic themes into a new stress on civic engagement, welfare, and national solidarity. Communist

countries, despite a starting point unlike their counterparts in the West and South, also evolved in the direction of an atomist-demotic pact. While ruling parties in the Soviet bloc still paid lip service to the working class, they steadily fell under the sway of technocrats who were more or less atomist in outlook.[3] Across settings, vanguard atomists shared the goal of national modernization, and justified their own power and prestige as contributors to it.

The atomist-demotic pact was much more than just a deal between economic classes, either between capital and labor or between technocrats and the masses. Whatever economic interests came into play, the new arrangements were held together mainly by a cultural mentality. The vision touched on every field of political and social life. It affected everything from the tone of the welfare state, mass advertising culture, vernacularization of literature and speech, suburban conformity, and comprehensive education, to socialist realism and the likes of Norman Rockwell in art, enforced use of national languages, and defanged but exaggerated patriotism. Examples abounded all over the world. Global culture had far more unity, at a deep level, than ever before. Before it unraveled by the 1970s, this mid-century phase of the global culture war paved the way for much of what we see today.

The atomist-demotic pact played on the homogeneity that both ethoses shared, by affirming the sameness and equality of all people. The inner qualities of character that perfectionists and virtuocrats value had no place, as the focus of life shifted outwards. Institutions, behavior, and conformity mattered more than personality. Inwardness and its higher aims, for instance, Popper thought were "romantically exaggerated" and "nonsensical." Even more than their predecessors in the late nineteenth century, atomists of this era crushed character into mere practiced sociability[4] While proper demots live outside themselves in the face-to-face bonds of kin and community, citizens under the atomist-demotic pacts were hammered into a more stereotyped civic mold.

The civic conformity imprinted a whole generation. In the United States, for example, one political scientist has identified a "long civic generation," the cohort that went through World War II and formed much of its worldview during the 1940s. Throughout its life cycle, it has had much higher rates of voting, volunteering, and the like, than any generation before or since. Likewise, many "modernization theorists" during the 1950s spoke approvingly of the new "civic culture" of participation in many countries. It bears noting that this tendency recurred across political systems that otherwise had little in common. The Soviet ideal of the "new man," for instance, blended a kind of individual responsibility with conformity[5] No doubt these trends reflected many causes, some cultural, some economic, and some social. I hardly want to reduce everything to an alliance of ethoses. Still, the key point is that the prevailing vision had redefined itself in a way that—compared to earlier—balanced detachment with embeddedness, and stressed outer behavior over inner conscience.

Unsurprisingly, political debates among vanguard atomists centered on the terms of the alliance with demots, in particular on how to reconcile individual and group interests. Much of their attention went to what one author called "the pangs of adjustment between the primary rights of the individual and the social discipline and economic regimentation that all democratic societies require." Vanguard atomists wanted "individualism united with altruism," but leaned more toward the former.[6] This grand cultural alliance was formed on atomists' terms, to be sure. Yet they needed to blend ethoses enough to make that alliance work, to absorb the popular

upsurge, and to appropriate the nation-state for their own ends. The compromise with demots marked a breach with the purer atomist thinking of two decades earlier. In the 1920s, de Ruggiero had pleaded for more spontaneous individuality that would erode the "shapeless bulk" of the masses.[7]

The atomist-demotic pacts found their most obvious expression in Western liberalisms new concern with economic equality. Justice now meant fair opportunity and doing away with the arbitrary advantages of social background. Vanguard atomists also showed themselves willing to soften the edges of economic competition. As a gesture to demots' sense of charity and decency, they granted that the weak required protection. Still, such protection had a dry and impersonal flavor, at least by the standards of premodern life. Cradle-to-grave social security is not quite the same thing, psychologically speaking, as villagers pitching in to dig a well for a widow. Whenever atomists seemed to move in a demotic direction, as in the creation of welfare states, they did so in a way that reduced moral practices to institutions, to planning and efficiency. Nehru had no patience for Gandhi s spinning-wheel economy, for example, since it would get in the way of Indian industrialization.

Another shift in economic thought was from "abstract rights" and laisser-faire to "functional organization." Keynesian development planning—the idea that governments should actively manage economic development through a mix of monetary and fiscal policy—became the consensus in most countries after the war. In matters of work and education too, atomists proved quite willing to reconcile themselves to bureaucracy. Friedrich praised "cooperative discipline" and pointed out that modern people often had to become "cogs in a machine."[8] Decades earlier, atomists had appealed to individual conscience when they thought it helped erode tradition. When a new phase in the culture war called for conformity, they swiftly obliged.

"Domestic" pacts were only part of the new ideology. The reframing also had to offer a model of international order. As we saw, the atomist-demotic nationalisms that paved the way earlier in the century had lacked a clear relationship to one another. Liberals knew even before the carnage of World War II that such a system caused international friction, and that nationalism did not serve liberal purposes very well if it slid into mere ethnic chauvinism. The nation-state had to become just one layer of world order, subject to international "protective institutions." In an immediate sense, those who framed that vision during the war were calling for such things as the United Nations and arms control.[9] But at a deeper level, they also wanted to link vanguard atomists *across* countries in one cultural project, and shore up their dominance *within* each national pact. The latter proved especially important to vanguard atomists agitating for independence from colonial rule. As the West rolled back its overseas commitments, atomists like Nehru needed to ground their rule in newly independent states on something ostensibly universal. Otherwise, predominantly non-atomist cultures might have stopped giving them carte blanche to carry out wrenching changes.

The international framework that came out of the 1940s had several themes. At its core lay the idea of a linear march to modernity. Bridgehead atomists like Bilbao and Hu Shi had presented their project as a universal assault on traditions. They had imagined themselves as islands of good sense in a sea of medieval oppression. Vanguard atomists now reversed that image. Everywhere, they saw themselves at the front of national progress toward a universal goal, as an

enlightened minority linking the local and the global. The new story was less *downward erosion* to a common atomist bedrock, than *upward momentum* to a common atomist end state.

For liberals, that end state roughly overlapped with the advanced West: Côte d'Ivoire would evolve into Belgium. For socialists, the advanced countries of the Soviet bloc were the model: Mongolia would evolve into East Germany. The idea of economic development as a systematic human goal dates to this period.[10] Vanguard atomists took over the atomist-demotic nationalisms, in other words, but locked them into a surer context. They also borrowed the distinction that nationalists of the Turkish and Japanese sort had traced earlier, between universal techniques and national sentiments. Technical rationality was "pancultural in meaning and transnational in relevance." Beneath it, cultures could be allowed to endure for continuity's sake."[11]

In the South especially, these hybrid nationalisms meant vanguard atomists had to embark on what Nehru called a "voyage of discovery" to the populace. They had to identify with the still-benighted and acquire "a sense of belonging together and of together facing the rest of mankind." Everywhere they adopted the popular upsurge idea of a national culture that endured beneath history and "held all of us together."[12] Continuity, such as it was, came from this mix of identity and progressive momentum. Kwame Nkrumah, for example, resurrected the ancient name of Ghana for the independent Gold Coast. Undepressed by facts, he proclaimed both that "our people are fundamentally homogeneous" and that "the present has emerged from the past."[13] But the stamp that vanguard atomists put on a lasting national identity was quite different from anything anyone had thought up during the popular upsurge a couple of decades earlier. It was not a demotic authenticity in *contrast* to both high culture and technocracy, as the likes of Gandhi and Mariâtegui had meant. Rather, it obscured ethical differences and cut everything down to a national homogeneity. Even such opposite spirits as Akbar and Gandhi were lumped together in Nehru's narrative as voices of Indian national unity.[14]

One historian has traced such "indigenization," or new love of national heritages, to a postcolonial generation less Westernized than their fathers. Another has said that it reflected structural interests, a "statist-capitalist passive revolution" that mixed nationalism with scientific management.[15] No doubt such explanations shed light on some of what was happening. But on the terrain of the global culture war, this shift to pacts and linear progress served specific ideological purposes.

First, it helped vanguard atomists appeal to demots, by fleshing out the homogeneous common ground that an atomist-demotic alliance had to emphasize. All citizens sank into a flattened national identity. The idea of a continuously evolving collective also tapped into demots' sense of inter-generational ties. Ancestors and atomism allegedly could go together, with the present generation as a bridge. As usual, though, atomists pitched such notions on a vast and impersonal scale: a continuity of *types* rather than *relationships*. A national story was not a chain of kinship and duty from past to present to future, as a peasant might assume. Rather, it took for granted only a sameness of people—making up *a people*—across the generations. The nation stayed constant, at least as a label and a political space, while most cultural patterns within it were gradually dissolved and remade along individualistic lines. Demots would be slowly *converted* into atomists. Atomists' transformative project dug deeper than ever before, taking on the "underdeveloped individuality" of the benighted and illiberal. In an oddly mixed metaphor, "the revolution is reaching to the grass roots, and shifting to low gear for a steep climb." Atomism

could now penetrate ordinary people's ways of life and wreak "a transformation in the very nature of man."[16]

Second, talk of national unity undercut critics of the atomist project itself. High-culture opponents of atomist crassness could be dismissed by saying they did not speak for the "real" version of the culture in question. Chopping the world into ethnically bounded nations would make the great civilizations, with all their placeless insights into human nature, seem even more archaic. Doing away with the non-atomist universalisms of those civilizations meant the atomist universalism of economic development could now occupy the highest ground. Moreover, national unity politically neutered the two high-culture ethoses, virtuocracy and perfectionism, by absorbing them into one flat culture. Those who resisted the historical steamroller were just purveyors of "dogmatism" and "ancient obscurantism."[17]

In the global South, vanguard atomists used such tales of unity and continuity to undercut traditional opponents, and to make the massive changes they were introducing seem less abrupt. In the developed Western core, slightly different imperatives were at work. Vanguard atomists there did not face such strong opposition or such a daunting task. Most of what was good and true had already been wiped out by the early twentieth century, and the likes of Eliot and Ortega had been making a last stand. But Western vanguard atomists still had to link the global project to their own past, and explain why the West could still claim to lead the way.

Continuity in the West generally took the form of the so-called "grand narrative": the myth of a progressive West that had evolved "from Plato to NATO." The ancient, medieval, Renaissance, and Enlightenment phases had built toward mature liberalism, despite many errors en route. Some versions of this history found "pioneers of liberalism" in mainstream European culture. Whatever interests had motivated the absolutist regimes and rising business classes, they had often served the higher ideology of liberalism without even knowing it. Other historians, perhaps more discerning, focused more on marginal groups like the Sophists, whose enemies had "managed to choke the liberal doctrine at its birth." At last, progress had gained the upper hand over "the perennial revolt against freedom." All versions of the grand narrative agreed that the West, because of its unique history, was leading the way to an atomist hereafter.[18]

Another theme during the postwar era was what Nehru called "the new dynamic conception of social progress."[19] Indeed, one nonetheless sympathetic sociologist dryly observed at the time that "'dynamic' is one of the favorite adjectives of the élites of the new states."[20] Progress was more than just optimism born of rapid industrial development. As an ideology, it fitted into the peculiarities of the vanguard atomist mentality. A fetish for progress made it seem improper to stand in the way of history. The Legalists had touched on the idea of motion without agency, as we saw, but vanguard atomists gave progress a much more central place in their ideology. For example, Nehru called religious critiques of modernity "idle fancies, for…there is only oneway traffic in time."[21] And Popper said alienation was just "the price we have to pay" under "the strain of civilization," for turning back the clock would mean a "return to the beasts."[22] Demotic, virtuocratic, or perfectionist opposition was "backward," hence irrelevant. This became a knee-jerk response from vanguard atomists, who thereby exempted themselves from answering the substance of criticism. Vanguard atomists could visit upheaval on demots and disrupt folkways, all the while displacing blame on to progress. Motion crowded out morality, and woe to those who would defy trends.

Note the difference from what bridgehead atomists had preached. They had wanted massive change, but had cast it as *revealing* bedrock truths that lay beneath arbitrary cultural oppression. Vanguard atomists had in mind a more *transformative* project, as inevitable as it was sweeping. In both cases, though, a virtuocratic sort of agency could have no place. The vertigo of progress meant that vigorous ethical action had nothing on which to peg itself. History was no longer a field of inspired action, as virtuocrats had long held. Now it was merely continuous change, immune to judgment.

Just as progress meant moral vertigo, so did absolute ideals come under attack. Bridgehead atomists had pushed a practical and pedestrian view of ethics, but vanguard atomists took pragmatism and moral flexibility much further. They had no patience for people who wanted to impose an inspired "blueprint" on reality. The new goal was instead "freedom to choose ends without claiming eternal validity for them." Vanguard atomists mixed their own distaste for agency with the humility of demots who feel it presumptuous to act in defiance of their fellows. They made much of constraining thought and action within "the unheroic, day-to-day routine of living." Change should be "piecemeal," and bound to facts as one found them. Indeed, vanguard atomists scorned intellectuals who tried to criticize society from a vantage point outside existing conditions. The "how?" of modest, realistic progress would serve worldly needs far better than the "why?" of ultimate values.[23]

In the context of a global culture war, all these views made sense as aspects of a leveled, atomist-demotic homogeneity. Strategically, they helped vanguard atomists' sustained assault on the kind of confident critique that ethoses of transcendence allow. The virtuocratic and perfectionist premium on inner qualities and inspiration especially offended vanguard atomists. Not only did such ways of life affirm a dimension to life that atomists think meaningless, but they also reflected a lack of humility before the facts.

In the same vein, vanguard atomists did much to create a culture of empirical knowledge. The rise of experimental verification as part of modern science dates back centuries, of course. But vanguard atomists, in line with the leveling impulse of the postwar era, pressed empiricism much further as an ideological weapon. Popper was a typical voice. He made much of "intellectual modesty," an approach that put truth outside the mind of the thinker and into the realm of universal, hard verification. Thought on a level removed from the disciplining effect of facts and measurements would be mere "intellectual irresponsibility."[24] Social scientists' obsession with timid number-crunching gained respectability, crowding out rival ways of knowing the world.

Earlier, bridgehead atomists had used appeals to individual conscience as a way of dissolving the great traditions. Now, in turn, vanguard atomists used appeals to humility as a weapon against idealism and transcendence in general. The battle lines shifted into the very psyche of philosophers and influential groups. The point was not just that thinkers should value accuracy, engage in dialogue with one another, and take truth-seeking seriously as a joint mission. Non-atomist traditions already took that for granted. Rather, vanguard atomists aimed to *substitute* "intellectual responsibility" to verification and consensus, for the idea of ethical responsibility to one's own inner character and to absolute values embodied in history. Beneath vanguard atomists' praise of empiricism as the opposite of ungrounded arrogance, lurked a deeper attitude in which empiricism was the opposite of ethical vigor. Number-crunchers and engineers in white

laboratory coats rarely had the imagination or courage to stand in the way of a cultural train-wreck.

Moving from knowledge to ethical agency, we find a similar attack on what lingered of virtuocracy. Bridgehead atomists earlier had portrayed vir-tuocrats as purveyors of dogma that constrained individuals. But given the logic of the atomist-demotic alliance, vanguard atomists now spent more time attacking transcendence than embeddedness. Virtuocrats and perfectionists were presumptuous about their own perspective above the herd. Drawing from the new psychiatry, vanguard atomists called mysticism "self-delusion," and said that non-atomist elites were mentally maladjusted.[25]

If inspiration was indeed empty, then virtuocrats acted on the world only out of a perverse wont to express themselves through atrocity. At times such images bordered on caricature. "The artist-politician," as Popper called a vaguely virtuocratic type, "must purify, purge, expel, deport, and kill."[26] Abuse flowed from the virtuocrats "place outside the social world on which he can take his stand."[27] In the flat ideological climate of the postwar decades, nothing offended more than ethical action founded on timeless truths. The sort of action that vanguard atomists admired instead was much more closely tied to circumstance. Prestige now went to the "social engineer" and piecemeal technician, their spirits fettered by fact and consensus.

This leveling impulse cut across many spheres. In China after the late 1950s, for example, socialist cadres worked hard to erode the Confucian legacy of genteel scholarship. Manual labor was added to elite education. In the United States, anti-intellectualism intensified further in the 1950s, even after the McCarthyist backlash against the Ivy League intelligentsia had passed.[28] In both cases, the matter went far deeper than earthy populism. It was not a war against education so much as a battle between two rival self-understandings. The *technical* intelligentsia—the IBM and Sputnik engineers, for example—were gaining power and prestige, while the *ethically* minded humanists were being discredited. Intellectual culture itself was changing to reflect the war of position among ethoses. Historical writing thus showed the rise of the Annales school and other social historians, who played up impersonal forces and played down personal agency. History supposedly hinged not on inspired leaders and thinkers, but on metalworking techniques, epidemics, and the like. A survey of Indian intellectuals in the 1960s showed that the constraints of modern life had left them "uncommitted, powerless, and politically irrelevant."[29]

In light of all these trends, we see the real meaning of Popper's claim that "we may become the makers of our fate when we have ceased to pose as its prophets."[30] Only the most curtailed kind of personal fate-making could survive the flattening pressures of postwar culture. People would indulge their tastes within the gilded prison of a society that reeked of conformity. Little more robust, more inspiring, would come out unscathed from the pacts' assault on ethical truths and grander scales of agency.

So far I have deliberately left out perhaps the most important part of what vanguard atomists were up to after midcentury. As we have seen, the ato-mist-demotic pacts absorbed the earlier popular upsurge and forced out virtuocracy and perfectionism from legitimate public debate. But vanguard atomists needed more. To lock in their cultural vision everywhere, they had to remake the world in two ways: (1) shore up their own ethos by giving it a firm social base that could

monopolize power, and (2) erode the foundations of rival ways of life. These two goals required the rise and empowerment of the *global meritocracy*.

The English writer Michael Young coined the word "meritocracy" in a 1958 satirical book that purported to describe history up to 2033. He predicted that equal opportunity would remake class hierarchies. Old elites that owed their status to family background would be displaced by new elites screened for measurable intelligence. The new meritocracy would slowly concentrate power in its own hands. Eventually it would undermine democracy, and provoke a revolt by the less intelligent lower orders.[31] Since Young's satire appeared, "meritocracy" has come to denote equal opportunity and selection of elites on ability. Here I want to argue that, during the postwar phase, the rise of something like Youngs meritocracy fitted into the global culture war.

That the second half of the twentieth century saw a trend toward meritocracy is a fairly uncontroversial point. Some of the changes involved even predated the 1940s. Rapidly modernizing countries like Japan had begun developing an ideology of merit in the late nineteenth century. Bridgehead atomists were sympathetic to such ideas, as we saw earlier. Sociological studies in the 1920s and 1930s found a correlation everywhere between social class and measurable intelligence. Before the 1940s, however, such studies showed only a loose link. Without an ideology and education system to let meritocratic pressures operate fully, peoples status and occupation still largely reflected their social origins.

Beginning with the atomist-demotic pacts, however, a new vision of "equal opportunity" brought about massive changes in global social structure. Space will limit me here to a discussion of the most important trends only. While the examples come mostly from developed countries, it bears noting that the same shifts happened, albeit very incompletely, a couple of decades later in the developing world. They also happened in both capitalist and socialist countries at the same time.

The atomist-demotic pacts put access to education on a much more equal footing with regard to social background. Measured ability—either IQ or knowledge-based tests—became the main basis for educational selection and streaming. Educational and occupational mobility led to a major change in the makeup of the upper and upper-middle classes.[32] Much debate lingers over exactly how far the trend to greater mobility has gone, of course. There are plenty of prominent people whose favored backgrounds have helped them greatly, and still some educational disadvantages for the poor even in the most generous societies. Still, the overall direction of change in the social structure is clear. In any case, the extent does not greatly matter for my argument here. The new pattern only had to hold true broadly enough to shift cultural power, and to ensure that most of the global elite passed through the new selection channels. Understood this way, the meritocracy's rise fitted into the global culture war. It let vanguard atomists create a firmer social base and erode rival ways of life.

This view of history is deeply at odds with what many people now take for granted. The meritocracy's beneficiaries have been quite reluctant to see their own rise as anything other than a more just and efficient allocation of fortune. Likewise, liberalism's pretenses about resonating with all human beings as such has made liberals pay little attention to the specific types of people with whom their ideology strikes a chord. They downplay even the fact that liberalism has such a thing as a social base. Such people are unlikely to welcome what I am about to say.

Obviously, one might object that I am reading too much intent into the rise of the meritocracy, which could have happened anyway. But looked at closely, the creation of the global meritocracy did have some quite deliberate thinking behind it. A recent narrative history of the American meritocracy, for example, described the maneuvering and vision behind the growth of mass higher education after World War II. A handful of intellectuals knew society's fate hung in the balance, as they put together the SAT ability testing and other infrastructure of the new selection process.[33] Parallel planning happened elsewhere in the world at the same time, as with the British "eleven-plus" examinations to channel pupils into academic or vocational secondary schools.

Systems are not designed by historical circumstance. They are designed by people who interpret circumstances and opportunities according to their own values. If designers in many different settings design roughly the same system, as happened at midcentury, one might reasonably suspect they bring a common mentality to bear. We have the historical background here for thinking about what drove the design of the meritocracy: vanguard atomists' international alliance, and the demands of the global culture war at the time.

The ideas that swirled around that design illustrate my point. The designers, rejecting both inherited privilege and the total egalitarianism that some socialists would impose, saw individualistic meritocracy as a "third way."[34] All these abstract principles mapped on to the social landscape of the culture war. Vanguard atomists had to meet attacks on two fronts: (1) high-culture virtuocratic and perfectionist resistance, which came largely from the old upper classes; and (2) radical leveling pressures from the popular upsurge and socialists more generally. To deal with both threats in one stroke would solve the global dilemma of the 1920s to 1940s. As the dust from World War II settled, the writings of atomist intellectuals suggested this awareness, albeit in different language. The weak foundations of liberalism, Harvard's president James B. Conant recognized, meant that the war and other disturbances had been "a manifestation of a larger maladjustment." Social history could be redirected if "the members of each new generation rise or fall according to their own efforts."[35]

The rhetoric of meritocracy intensified. Traditional societies were painted as "extravagantly wasteful of talent," and "organized to keep good men and women down." As with the rest of the social transformation vanguard atomists were carrying out, meritocracy was progressive and thus immune to criticism. Berkeley chancellor Clark Kerr declared that "the organized intellect is a great machine that has gained extraordinary momentum….The results cannot be foreseen. It remains to adapt." The rising meritocracy was history's finest elite and the herald of more progress.[36]

Any elite has its mythmaking. This mythmaking just picked a new image to celebrate: the bright teenager of humble roots. But where did the novelty of this social project really lie? Despite the meritocracy's self-portrait, it was hardly the first ruling stratum to want only able people in high offices. China's premodern mandarins, screened in a competitive "examination hell," were the most important example. Historians of imperial China have found high rates of social mobility in many eras, lending some credence to the Chinese observation that no family had three generations of success or three generations of failure. And other parts of the world also had times of social churning, such as in the Islamic world during the late middle ages.[37] The *ideal* itself was even more prevalent, if we count Plato and other philosophers who had called for recognizing excellence wherever it lay.

Of course, no one could deny that most premodern societies wasted a lot of talent. And the demographic shift of the postwar generation, as "equal opportunity" let the meritocracy gather so much measured talent into its own ranks, was a remarkable moment in world history. But other things were really at stake in the middle of the twentieth century. After all, most civilizational virtuocrats had been rethinking how worthy qualities and social position should relate too. Had they won the culture war early on, say in the 1920s, they would probably have brought about a more fluid social structure themselves. In short, the atomist meritocracy's novelty did not lie in a new stress on ability.

The novelty lay, rather, in the belief that merit was made up *only* of ability. If we contrast educational systems under the pacts with the ones they replaced—the ones that atomist policymakers often loathed, to put it bluntly—we find a pattern. In every part of the world, whether in the boarding schools of Victorian England or the academies of Qing China or the Shi'ite seminaries of Ottoman Iraq, traditional education had centered on cultivating a virtuous character.[38] Vanguard atomists abandoned such notions as mere cobwebs of repression. Wherever they shaped educational practice, the system reoriented its young charges away from character and toward measured ability alone. Their passing gestures toward supplementing ability with other good traits were half-hearted, vaguely mentioning such things as "commitment to the highest values of the society." Often they came back full circle to ability, as those traits "that promise to strengthen and guide performance."[39]

By the 1970s, universities worldwide had become training grounds for narrow expertise. Inner qualities seemed quaint if not alien. Embeddedness and especially transcendence gave way to the kind of impersonal performance that atomist subcultures have valued since time immemorial. Honor and gentlemanly decency withered, while the obsession with application dossiers and examination scores gained ground. If this contrast between the atomist meritocracy and earlier ruling strata seems overstated, imagine having to choose, all else being equal, between raising to power someone with questionable but adequate ability (however defined), or someone with questionable but adequate character (however defined). The modern meritocrat, alone among elites in history, would prefer the latter as the only sensible and just course.

Perhaps meritocracy's greatest effects have been psychological. Passage through its screening mechanisms has tended to draw today's educated people into an atomist subculture regardless of their origins. Psychological studies of mobility have explored the oddities of the "achievement syndrome." They have found everything from a subservience to authority, to a weakening of social ties, to the "underdefmition of identity" that comes when one mixes meeting performance standards in public with indulging in private.[40] A week on an elite university campus, or among careerists at the world's law firms and banking houses, would confirm as much. Whatever the clinical labels put on it, meritocracy *of the sort in question* channels its beneficiaries into an atomist sense of self. Of course, meritocracy can have healthier versions that do not produce atomists. Premodern Chinese officials went through competitive examinations in the classics, but that screening process impressed non-atomist ethical commitments on them. Only the character-blind meritocracy of the twentieth century could have produced atomism's new social base.[41]

Beyond favoring a certain "product," the atomist meritocracy has also generated a new view of social responsibility. Young foresaw that equal opportunity would lessen its beneficiaries' sense of duty. Confident that their privileges were won fairly, "no longer weakened by self-doubt

and self-criticism," they would turn out "so impressed with their own importance as to lose sympathy with the people whom they govern." Confirmation of this prophecy came early. Even in the 1950s, a sociologist noted the tempering of social criticism among an intelligentsia ever more absorbed into a "cult of gratitude."[42] Defenders of the modern meritocracy will claim these images are mere caricature, but the shift needs to be taken seriously. Even the language in which liberals now call for a sense of responsibility bespeaks the contrast with earlier, non-atomist elites. Duty has become no more than balance in an exchange between the upwardly mobile and their society. One "gives back" to the system that elevates one to advantage.[43] The meritocracy has had an uneasy, ongoing debate with itself about such issues. Yet the mere fact of that debate shows something in itself. Premodern elites took obligation for granted, as something "built into" the junction between a robust character and its role. Some questions only need asking after a proper self-understanding is lost.

In all these respects, meritocratic ideology and practice created a new social base for atomism worldwide. But the meritocratic vision also had a destructive agenda built in, just as bridgehead atomists' appeals to conscience had aimed to dissolve the old high-culture civilizations. As suggested earlier, vanguard atomists wanted to lock in their rule by eroding the bases for rival ethoses. We should probably not spend too much time lamenting that older ruling strata fell by the wayside, when they were unable to excel by more rigorous standards. But when vanguard atomists used meritocracy as a fulcrum for displacing such strata, they did so with several layers of intent. Not least among such goals was destroying the very *source* of talk about character that was quite alien to vanguard atomists' own ethos. Merely evicting such non-atomist subcultures from power did not suffice. They had to be forced to *embrace* the logic of atomist performance. Few people—certainly not a critical mass—could pass through the new educational screening process successfully without surrendering to its values. Those who did harbor outlooks at odds with the new climate, perhaps for no reason other than idiosyncrasies of temperament, would be few and on the defensive.

This pressure worked on conscious and unconscious levels. As an automatic effect of the system, premeritocratic ruling strata had to adopt performance values to survive. Gentlemen who refused to behave like arrivistes found themselves at a disadvantage. Somewhat more consciously, educational institutions began socializing students based on what has been called "doing," rather than "being" or "being-in-becoming." Perhaps most deliberate was the abandonment of classical, humanistic curricula in favor of adaptable technical expertise. Figures like Kerr justified the latter shift on the ground that "there are no timeless priorities."[44] Curricular details were hardly the real target. At the deepest level, the real target was the robust ethical inwardness of non-atomist humanism.

Such changes mainly affected virtuocrats and perfectionists. Demotic social groups faced other effects. Here the atomist-demotic alliance complicated matters, for it served the logic of meritocracy but was not always well served by it. Vanguard atomists knew the tensions in their new educational system, and asked "how may an aristocracy of intellect justify itself to a democracy of all men?" This tension roughly overlapped with the split between what one sociologist has called the "socialization" and the "allocation" purposes of schooling.[45] On the one hand, pact-era education was supposed to hammer in a sense of flat civic loyalty, which would sustain the atomist-demotic alliance. On the other hand, it was supposed to create an atomist

upper-middle class by sorting students according to performance. Postcolonial states such as India faced this dilemma most. They had to forge a sense of nationhood amid immense diversity, while expanding a very small liberal intelligentsia at the same time.[46]

Demotic groups suffered two main effects. First, peasants and tradesmen in traditional society had at least known that inequalities were somewhat arbitrary, and had found refuge in family, faith, and community. Once supposed equal opportunity came, working class folk who did not rise ended up more frustrated than before. A sociological study of British grammar school selection showed, for example, that self-esteem suffered in students put into lower ability streams. Advocates of meritocracy duly noted such "social hazards," but did so less out of compassion than out of fear. Without gestures to temper competition, a democratic backlash might bring "restraining or defeating countermoves" against their vision. In Maoist China—where vanguard atomists' dominance in the atomist-demotic pact was shaky from the start—that sort of backlash did happen, to the horror of meritocrats. Educational radicalism during the Cultural Revolution was precisely a "countermove" of "red" against "expert." Technocrats had paper caps rammed on their heads before being paraded through the streets by those who resented their airs.

With his usual prescience, Young had foreseen that after a "golden age of equality," in which meritocracy was new and people were optimistic about their prospects, popular resentments would surge up again. Once the hard reality of failure crystallized, he thought, the lower classes would have an identity crisis. They would resent growing inequalities, but turn their resentment inward because they would lack any language for pointing out exactly what was unjust about the new class system. Who could complain if everyone had a fair chance? Young also predicted that the lower classes would eventually become passive and uncritical, as their talented would-be leaders were skimmed off into the meritocracy.[47] After half a century of the new system, we can probably say Young's prediction about drained resistance is more true than not, at least in the developed countries where meritocracy has gone furthest. In any case, some critiques of inequality have clearly been put beyond the pale of public debate, which one suspects is precisely the point. Have the hierarchies of capitalist society ever seemed more resilient than now?

A second effect on demotic groups came where atomist ideas gained ground among ordinary people. Most obviously, upwardly mobile individuals were drawn into atomisms new social base. They rose at the price of abandoning the solidarity of their traditional, working class origins. Sociological studies have shown that upward mobility from such humble roots often inspires strong loyalty to educational institutions and the larger social structure, as well as a weakening of kinship ties and the like.[48] Many a blue-collar college student has come to disdain the old neighborhood, and offer hard-headed defenses of the social inequalities that now look quite different from above.

But interestingly enough, the atomist ethos penetrated even to people who did not rise. Here the *conversion* aspect of the pacts becomes clear. In an early bid to strengthen the atomist-demotic pact, some advocates of meritocracy generalized its principles as "a conception of excellence that may be applied to every degree of ability and to every socially acceptable activity." Making performance a universal cultural principle, not just a channel of individual mobility, would "tone up the whole society."[49] Vanguard atomists probably realized it would also

weaken the demotic ethos on its home ground. Eroding such habits as seniority on the shop floor, or too "constraining" a sense of duty to an extended family, would help dismantle demotic subcultures that had sustained the popular upsurge a generation earlier.

In all these respects, vanguard atomists did tread rather more lightly with their demotic allies than with perfectionists and virtuocrats, whom the pacts had expelled from the public sphere altogether. Yet they were unyielding in their larger aims. They had to strengthen the new order and wipe out the cultural raw material for resistance. If the pacts sank a fishhook into the jaw of demotic strata, then meritocracy slowly reeled in the line.

A few hard-won victories against both popular and high-culture resistance brought atomists to a position where they could think about what to do next. Yet the atomist-demotic pacts and the international vision of linear modernization had plenty of critics. Any adjustment of the global cultural offensive, in a new phase, would have to take into account the range of lingering opposition. We can group reactions during the pacts phase into four clusters, three from outside atomism and one from within: (1) lingering high-culture critiques of conformity, (2) dependency theory, (3) demotic currents that turned the rhetoric about atomist-demotic alliance upside down, especially in the global South, and (4) atomist misgivings about the concessions made to demots. Each of these reactions brought ideas and political pressures together.

The high-culture critiques, weak and residual though they were, came from virtuocrats and especially perfectionists who found "mass society" deadening. Two typical thinkers were the German Jewish philosopher Hannah Arendt and the Hungarian Catholic Thomas Molnar. They took issue with the postwar "conquest of the inner man…and organization of the external man." Socialization and management had crowded out all character and spontaneity. Intellectual life had lost its critical capacity, becoming the preserve of "a kind of glorified public-utilities man." Other evils included the flat consumer culture of suburbia, stereotyped mass entertainment, and the reduction of politics to dull national housekeeping.[50]

Throughout this era, high-culture groups tended to generate only such misgivings. Outmaneuvered in the global culture war, they offered no real alternative. Naturally, atomists took comfort from the shapelessness ofthat "ideology of romantic protest." They noted with glee that high-culture critics could only condemn the atmosphere of society as a whole, because blaming "mass society" on specific social groups like the lower-middle classes would seem merely a defense of dated privilege.[51] High-culture reactions of this sort showed up more often in greater Europe than in the global South, with some exceptions. Among the educated in Iran and Indonesia, an almost existential Sufism had its appeals.[52]

A second critique of the world that vanguard atomists had assembled attacked the image of linear modernization. Most visibly, so-called dependency theory caught on among Southern intellectuals and activists in the 1960s, first in Latin America then elsewhere.[53] This new revolutionary discourse held that the developed core—mainly Europe and North America—was not an end state, a goal to which other countries should aspire. Rather, it was the cause of Southern backwardness, as it kept the world's poor down by extracting surpluses through unequal trade. Likewise, local elites, the technocratic rulers of the many newly independent states, were not agents of progress but branch offices of repression.

Dependency theorists demanded changes that would upend the postwar international order. One was a shift to national economic self-reliance, through state-led industrialization, and an unlinking of popular solidarity in each country from the liberal world system. Even more dangerous to the core was a cross-South alliance that would have used a "New International Economic Order" to redistribute wealth globally. Countries that had been leaders in a world of linear progress would have become the led. Dependency theory dealt mainly with economic interests, but its appeal mapped on to deeper tensions in how atomists and demots related to one another. It struck at vanguard atomists' claim that their local authority rested on mastery of a global vision of enlightened modernization. And it fatally weakened certain assumptions about progress and hierarchy that served only so long as people could take them for granted.

The third type of reaction played out more on the level of national political culture in specific countries. It involved a demotic backlash against the terms of the atomist-demotic pacts. Tanzanian president Julius Nyerere illustrated the thinking involved. Much like Gandhi and Mariátegui during the popular upsurge, Nyerere felt the fragmentation and greed of modern life were deeply misguided. Instead of wanting to copy the developed West, Nyerere idealized precolonial Africa as "socialist," and called for "building on the foundation of our past." Modern individualism was an import, imposed artificially over African cultures that held people in esteem according to their community spirit. The usual demotic themes of equality and solidarity figured in his vision of *ujamaa*, or "familyhood."[54] Though more complex, Mao's Cultural Revolution in the late 1960s and early 1970s fitted into this cluster of reactions too. Atomists within the Communist Party came under attack by a radical demotic current, which claimed to carry on the spirit of the revolution against a new technocracy of "capitalist-roaders." Across all these cases, the national identities and national revolutions that had served as atomists' bridge to demots, and as their weapon against older high cultures, began to be turned against them.

Finally, many atomists themselves harbored doubts about the pacts. Civic conformity offended atomists' wont to indulge their individual tastes without pressure from society. Think of the image of 1950s suburbia in the West, for example, and the misgivings about it even from within. National solidarity was also putting a damper on the placeless self-seeking that modern atomism had initially tried to set free. As the meritocracy's younger cohorts began shaping public debate in the late 1960s and 1970s, those deeper doubts came to the fore. Something had to give.

In the end, the need to refine the system from within, and the need to respond to challenges from without, suggested the same readjustment. The generation that followed vanguard atomists chose to break the atomist-de-motic alliance and go it alone. That alliance had had tensions built in from the start, and could last only so long as atomists found it useful. A reframing of the prevailing ideology would have to do five things: (1) allow a purer atomist dominance, (2) blunt the residual high-culture critiques, perhaps by absorbing some of them, (3) deprive a new demotic upsurge of the power that it might exercise through nation-states, (4) begin a more open assault on the demotic social base, and (5) offer new placeless ideas that would fit atomists' sense of cultural uprootedness, and stay one step "above" resistance.

History marched on. Bridgehead atomists had brought a global atomist identity into the open. Vanguard atomists had dug into local settings, eroded high-culture resistance, and created a firm social base worldwide. Now it remained for another generation to lock in a purer, more confident universalism. It is to them that we turn in the next chapter.

Chapter 4

Culture Wars and Character at History's End

As we have seen, atomists faced both a dilemma and an opportunity in the late 1960s. On the one hand, their ties to demots were fraying. A new popular upsurge threatened to turn their image of world order upside down. The concessions atomists had made for the sake of the pacts—civic conformity, nationalism, and so on—were also starting to grate on their own sensibilities. On the other hand, atomists everywhere found themselves stronger than ever before. Over the last few decades, they had wiped out the world's perfectionist and virtuocratic high cultures as a source of opposition. They had made inroads among demots, diluting their folkways and drawing off their most talented leaders into the new meritocracy.

The adjustments to respond to these challenges and opportunities started around the late 1960s. Symptoms of the crisis included the youth protests that peaked in May 1968, the Prague Spring, the Indian Emergency, the Chinese Cultural Revolution, guerrilla movements in Latin America, and the unraveling of pan-Arabism after 1967. Some of these symptoms were challenges to atomist rule, some refinements from within, and some mixed. The effervescence petered out in the late 1970s. By the early 1980s a new ideological climate was crystallizing worldwide, and what lingered of atomist restraint vanished after 1989. Everything we now associate with "globalization" came out of this last reframing of global atomist culture. Atomists evaded their challengers and seized the new opportunities of a common *global* identity. Their ideological project congealed around its social base in the global meritocracy, with new conquests in sight and a new if weaker set of opponents. Just as vanguard atomism had evolved out of bridgehead atomism, so now did vanguard atomism turn into what I shall call *universal atomism*.

Speaking of universal atomism as a single global force does not rule out plenty of diversity within it. Globalization unfolds differently across world regions. Many economists and political scientists note, for example, that there are still national "models" of capitalism, such as the American, German, and Japanese.[1] In cultural matters, other kinds of diversity endure. Universal atomists need not think alike, or even be always in harmony on the details, for us to see that they have a common self-understanding and agenda. They adapt that agenda to different settings, depending on the opposition they face locally and the strategy that seems most useful. Thus they highlight themes of tolerance and diversity in the West, economic reform in Latin America, human rights and gender in the Middle East, modernization in China, secularism in India, globalization everywhere, and so on.

To challenge the dominant mentality, we must know it well: its strengths and weaknesses, its deepest worries, how it is remaking itself, the strategies it deploys. This chapter will examine universal atomists' self-understanding, and explain what it means to say they are fighting a culture war against their opponents. I aim to trace the contours of their agenda as a cultural and political force, on the same global scale where any future challenge will have to meet it.

It may seem odd at first to treat the last two decades of globalization as a phase in a culture war. In one line of thinking, most of what has happened of late has been nobody's doing. Technology such as the Internet has supposedly sped up global capitalism. Certain breathlessly

intoned code-words go with this image: “new imperatives,” “global webs,” “the power of flows.” Intent gives way to impersonal processes that are “in the nature of things and history.” The same view often extends well beyond globalization as such. Cultural patterns such as “the homeless mind,” “late modernity,” “postmaterialist values,” or “McDonaldization,” all come from forces beyond our control. Technology and the built-in logic of modern social systems work together to remake experience and outlook. No one guides trends or can stand in their way.[2]

I think it sorely misguided to say the changes swirling around universal atomism are nobody's doing. To be sure, technology does open up options with which we have to deal whatever our worldview. And experiences in modern society do shape the people who go through them. But neither the uses to which technology is put, nor the shifts of collective experience, happen in a vacuum. Both are shaped by policies and cultural pressures, which respond to the priorities of influential social groups. No yuppie cabinet minister or advertiser is truly indifferent to how many devout fundamentalists lurk in the population at large. Even if they do not think systematically in those terms, such people naturally try to remake global culture and mold the public in their own image.

In the recent rhetoric about globalization, trends are cast as beyond anyone's control mostly when their beneficiaries are talking. The beneficiaries still prefer to see history as momentum without intent, however. This oddity is perhaps not obvious to those whom it afflicts. No other ruling class in history has proclaimed its own neutrality so loudly, while inflicting its vision under the guise of impersonal trends. Older elites at least forthrightly took responsibility for moving things in one direction or another, for promoting certain hierarchies or orthodoxies. Only atomists tell a story in which history does the dirty work for them.

But what exactly is their work? Often critics say that the latest phase of globalization is “the second bourgeois revolution.” The global economy lets business escape the constraints of regulation and welfare-state taxes. Information and high-technology goods have replaced the stolid assembly-line manufacturing of decades past. New cultural patterns, such as the obsession with speed and ephemerality, just serve the capitalist logic of “flexible accumulation.”[3]

Real though the economic interests behind globalization are, I think it wrong to explain cultural trends entirely this way. Economics and culture are easily conflated, because the people who most benefit from globalized capitalism—often counted as the top twenty percent or so in each country[4]—also tend to have certain cultural and ideological leanings. What seems driven by interests may be just as much a question of culture. Indeed, the dominant social groups may care *more* about their cultural vision than about money-making. Some, like the newly enriched in some developing countries, often had the same cultural and ideological outlook long before capitalist globalization did them much good in the 1980s and 1990s. Plenty were salivating for what amounts to globalization before it actually happened. The cart cannot go before the horse. Moreover, many people of atomist outlook—say, left-liberals and social democrats—harbor misgivings about the inequalities capitalism has caused, while still supporting much of globalization's cultural package. Even if it seems like giving too much credit to imagine those in power are moved by a vision rather than self-interest, it may help us understand their agenda better if we give them the benefit of the doubt to start.

Today's culture war is fought, on one side, by a social group defined mainly by its mentality. Putting things this way harks back, in some respects, to earlier writing on the so-called "new class." The term was coined in the 1950s by some eastern European intellectuals who feared socialism was giving way to rule by experts. Some sociologists elsewhere in the world later applied this approach to capitalist societies too. The "new class" referred to the educated upper-middle strata hostile both to traditional popular values and to the older business elites. In more recent decades, according to some social scientists, the new class has reconciled with business interests to form one elite, anti-traditional and pro-market in orientation.[5]

On one level, this and the next two chapters could be read as an update on how the new class works *globally* at the turn of the millennium. But I shall not use the term, because the "new class" lens distorts what is really at stake in the global culture war. When the theory describes the values of the new class, it mostly treats them as arising from a desire for power and prestige. Technocrats supposedly attack the values of unenlightened plain folk because they need to justify their own role as re-educators or bureaucrats, for example. Or if the theory probes deeper, it sees the new class mindset as just an extreme case of a modern self-understanding, acquired through living in an impersonal modern society. We come back full circle. Either interests and power "really" drive everything, or cultural values matter because they permeate modern society at large rather than specific groups.

What is missing is an appreciation that ethical agendas attach to specific social groups, which clash because of those agendas. Universal atomism is the project of an atomist minority that is spread widely but thinly. It evaded its most recent crisis and now seeks to lock in history's end. The global ideological landscape bears this out. Global culture is changing in roughly the direction that empowered atomist groups want. We have more consumerism, more relativism, more self-absorption, less solidarity, and less high culture. And the ruling strata stand at the forefront of these trends. The vision spreads not as did Christianity in the Roman empire, quietly bubbling up from the pariahs to remake culture from below, but as did Catholicism in sixteenth century Latin America, or Communism in Soviet central Asia: from the powerful to the weak. If universal atomists are just spectators of an impersonal historical trend, then the trend coincides with their sentiments in a remarkable way.

We come to a crucial point. Much of this book will discuss universal atomism and global liberalism together. Let me digress briefly to highlight the difference between them, and why it matters. Atomism is one of the four timeless and placeless ethoses. Universal atomism, like bridgehead and vanguard atomism earlier, is a specific version of this ethos, triumphant in our time. Liberalism, in political thought, refers to a cluster of ideas about freedom and rights, which grew out of seventeenth century Europe and is now associated with the political systems in Westernized liberal democracies. In cultural and social history, liberalism can also refer to a broader way of life: capitalism, moral relativism, and so on. When I speak of global liberalism in this book, I have in mind mainly the latter, cultural layer of liberalism as a common pattern worldwide. Global liberalism is certainly the mainstream of universal atomism. Only the odd authoritarian or self-proclaimed socialist, such as the typical Chinese "Communist" today, has a universal atomist self-understanding without having, strictly speaking, a liberal framework for thinking about political questions.

This is not just a trivial abstraction about terminology. How universal atomism and global liberalism relate to one another is quite important, for understanding present trends as the deliberate project of a minority, and for understanding why this reality is so often obscured in most accounts of the world today.

We already saw that one account holds that there is no cultural project at all, that atomism is spreading only because of impersonal historical forces. No one does the dirty work, in other words. Another, more complicated view focuses on a supposed distinction between an unsavory atomist culture, on the one hand, and a global liberal project that promotes freedom, rights, and tolerance, on the other. Such principles, these voices insist, have nothing to do with cultural trends. This liberal argument then goes on to protest against the sort of critique I shall offer here. It says that the only liberal agenda centers on these unobjectionable, universal principles, and serves the well-being of all human beings as such. To tie those principles to powerful groups and a cultural malaise is unfair, because it misplaces blame. In other words, atomism and liberalism are two very different things.

Let us pause to reflect on what that argument really says. Liberal theorists are now prepared, by and large, to concede that liberalism first arose with the European bourgeoisie and served its interests.[6] That is to say, liberalism a couple of centuries ago did have a specific social base. But liberals now concede as much only in the past tense. They see self-interested sordidness in the bourgeois liberalism of an earlier era, but such sordidness is safely beside the point now. Candor about one's predecessors is much safer than candor about oneself. Saying nineteenth-century bankers had a self-referential ideology that later brought unintended benefits is one thing. Admitting the new meritocratic overclass has a self-referential ideology today is quite another. Thus liberal intellectuals have to insist that liberalism has escaped its original moorings in particular interests, and has become a freely evolving ideology for all human beings. To attack liberalism is to attack universal human principles to which no reasonable person should object.

Just because some people claim liberalism is a set of ethereal principles, exempt from critiques of atomist culture, does not make it so. Understandably, proponents of any doctrine tend to treat its ideals as freestanding, and distance the doctrine from any unpleasant ways in which it has been lived out. Today's global liberalism is no exception. Its defenders seem to hold a certain view of how ideas and practices relate. They think that if the lived liberalism of late modern culture is unsavory, it is because the ethereal liberalism of abstract principles has been misapplied. Or perhaps unsavory people have taken advantage of the space that liberal tolerance affords them.

Liberals who split ethereal and lived liberalism this way apparently want to force critics such as myself to choose one of two approaches. Either we can discuss only the abstract principles of ethereal liberalism, in a social and cultural vacuum; or we can take modern culture to task for its pathologies, but must leave ethereal liberalism untainted by those pathologies.

To be sure, it is possible to attack liberalism on an abstract plane. Some antiliberals have taken that tack, tracing the whole modern malaise back to some sort of philosophical error in western Europe two or three centuries ago.[7] Liberalism can accept critiques from this angle quite readily. They ignore the dark side of lived liberal culture, or treat it on so rarefied a level that most non-theorists would have no idea what concrete habits they imply. Moreover, abstract critiques can

be met with abstract defenses, in a never-ending harmless spiral. To win, critics would have to jump through the hoop of refuting liberalism philosophically on its own terms, which is impossible by definition.

Focusing so much on ethereal liberalism is also simply out of touch with how culture works and how ideas spread. Liberal political philosophy does reveal habits of mind, because it emerges from thinkers of this milieu and sometimes contributes political language to frame the atomist agenda. Many examples in this book will show as much. But to be blunt, global liberalism does not hold sway because of any eloquence on the part of liberal theorists in their journals or at their lecture podia. It holds sway because it resonates with atomist strata that dominate public life. Those strata—as politicians, advertisers, entrepreneurs, therapists, and educators—shape ordinary peoples experience in such a way as to ease atomism's further spread. Indeed, atomists' success over the last few decades makes it harder than ever for them to try divorcing philosophy from cultural forces. The atomist meritocracy has risen to prominence, and most intellectuals around the world are now socialized within it. Liberal philosophy echoes down the corridors of power. The full weight of publicity, policy, and therapeutic orthodoxy stand behind principles masked as universal and ethereal.

Moreover, the claim that liberalism is above social reality also founders because even leading liberal theorists do not make it consistently. The more implausible one's story, the straighter one should try to keep it. Yet they often write that practices flesh out the meaning of liberalism; or that liberal principles work in "reflective equilibrium" with "democratic political culture" or that modern life has allowed "democratic individuality" to flourish.[8] Of course, these thinkers welcome such features of lived liberalism. But they cannot have it both ways. Thinkers should not recognize the outcast cousin of liberal practice only when he presents himself sober and well clad.

The atomist ethos is perhaps easier to understand today than earlier, because it now stands alone in all its purity. As we saw, vanguard atomists forged an alliance with demots in the 1940s, both as a way of converting them and as a counterweight to an earlier generation of high-culture critics. Between the late 1960s and early 1980s, universal atomists everywhere broke that alliance. The new self-understanding no longer makes concessions toward embed-dedness—civic conformity, for example—that vanguard atomists had used as a bridge to demots. Any effort to make sense of the dominant character ideal must bear in mind this purifying shift, this breaking of an alliance that had grated on atomists' sensibilities.

One sign of this reframing is a new sentimentality. This reaction against the dry and mechanical tone of the pacts was foreshadowed much earlier, in the misgivings of some vanguard atomists of a literary bent. The likes of the Beatniks and Hu Feng had taken issue with the flatness of postwar culture, with the suppression of inner spirit, and with socialist realism's crude lack of imagination.[9] In the early years of the reframing, the 1960s youth counterculture made restoring an aesthetic spontaneity one of its first goals.[10] Universal atomists today are heirs to this reaction, when they give more space to the aesthetic, the intuitive, and the spiritual.

Examples of this new outlook abound. Some currents in Anglo-American liberal thought have revived the romantic idea of freedom as spontaneous self-expression.[11] The reaction against the mechanistic tone of the pacts emerged mainly from what used to be technocratic socialist

countries, however. Václav Havel—Czech playwright and dissident, and later president and hero in the pantheon of global liberalism—took issue, for instance, with anonymous bureaucratic power and a spirit-crushing rationality. He saw socialist Eastern Europe as suffering an extreme version of postwar developmentalism. In contrast, he affirmed a "practical morality" that valued human dignity and left room for a sense of wonder.[12] We find much the same impulse among Chinese literary intellectuals, melodramatic filmmakers, and "aesthetic Marxists" since the 1980s. They paralleled Havel in their image of inner spiritual crisis and a self that needed liberating from the burdens of mass politics.[13]

Everywhere, this new sentimentality makes much of individual experience and intuition. Often the individual is seen as more real than any group. Universal atomists reject abstractions of class and country, in the name of which vanguard atomists often treated people as means rather than ends. Sometimes they mix in mystical language too. The Chinese literary liberal Gan Yang blends postmodern thought with Daoism, for example, arguing that the human essence is deeper than logic. In a similar vein, the American political philosopher George Kateb writes of the "inner ocean," and of a "loss of self" that occurs in fleeting moments of "impersonal individuality." The same logic lies behind the appeal to this milieu of the Indian thinker Jiddu Krishnamurti. Along the same lines as Gan and Kateb, Krishnamurti said that within every individual lies "the story of mankind."[14]

Of course, we should not read too much into these flirtations with mystical language. The concern of these thinkers, and the audience to which they appeal, has no real overlap with mystical perfectionism. They may look inward, but they do not seek or find anything so robust as the likes of Laozi and ibn al-Arabī did centuries ago. A young professional with a literary bent and a dab of the counterculture has little in common with the ancients who meditated hours a day on stone floors to pierce through the illusions of the world. Atomists today borrow mystical and sentimental themes mainly as a way to undo the conformity that the pacts era imposed. They have more interest in releasing individuals from society's claims than in any higher truth that intuition might reveal.

Atomism's sentimental turn fits into the global culture war in still other ways not obvious at first. Some onlookers interpret the aesthetic or intuitive impulse as just an escape from society's pressures. Post-Maoist Chinese literature and aesthetic Marxism, for example, supposedly open up a realm free from the excesses of political fervor. And to be sure, we can read some writers' praise of eccentricity and escape into an "ivory tower" that way.[15] Yet neither the authors who write of sentimentality, nor the atomist audiences who read them, are perfectionists who resist society as such and want solitude for the sake of self-cultivation. Rather, they resist specific *types* of claims that the societies of the pacts era made on their members: conformity, collectivism, mechanical flatness, and the like. Sentimentality and aestheticism are useful means to that end.

That the apolitical tone really serves a political goal is apparent, if only because this phase of the culture war does sometimes demand political action. The Peruvian novelist Mario Vargas Llosa shows much the same distaste for ideologies and social pressure. In 1990, however, he campaigned for the Peruvian presidency on a market-reform ticket. The same global liberal audience to whom his novels appeal saw no tension between talk of inner subjectivity, on the one hand, and a foray into politics for the sake of liberalism, on the other.[16] Much the same could be

said about Havel's worldwide popularity and his role in post-Communist Czech politics in the 1990s.

Universal atomists elevate a kind of intuitive selfhood over ideologies. Vanguard atomists had used ideologies like nationalism and progress and class struggle as weapons against the past. Now atomists drop those weapons as more burdensome than helpful. When novelists like Vargas Llosa and Salman Rushdie write about their own craft, they say the literary temper is at odds with political ideologies and religion. They see literature as a realm of "inconstancy," of the "fragmentation of truth," of the heart rather than of duty. The aesthetic sets itself apart from the "antilife" in faith and ideology. Krishnamurti likewise wrote that "intelligence is beyond thought." Intuitive knowledge lies deeper than mere accumulated memories and philosophical traditions.[17]

Having inner selfhood trump society's claims reflects the experience of today's atomist social groups. Unlike premodern elites, they do not owe their position to having mastered a body of thought or standards of virtue. And unlike most vanguard atomists, they do not work in a world of regulated expertise. The global meritocracy today prides itself on its fluid analytical ability instead. For the lawyers and corporate consultants and policy advisers, agility of mind outweighs accumulated knowledge. These assumptions naturally spill over into philosophy and literature.

The content of this inwardness that universal atomists exalt is quite underdefined. Despite their language, they have little in common with any true perfectionist. Mostly, they want only a realm of choice and human concreteness. Take the writings of Wang Ruoshui, one of China's leading humanistic Marxists and deputy editor-in-chief of the party newspaper in the 1980s. He held that Chinese socialism suppressed human individuality by treating people as means rather than ends. Its orthodoxies were too distant from what people really wanted. Humanistic Marxism would cure that alienation by counting human desires in individual rather than national or class terms.[18] Note the difference from vanguard atomists, who had stressed collective and functional concerns, often treating people as interchangeable cogs in a machine.

Even among the more poetic and mystical of these thinkers, we find little deeper than this undemanding invocation of individualism. Kateb writes of "individual infinitude" as "everybody's inexhaustible internal turbulent richness."[19] This can be read as giving due weight to everyone's inner emotional experience, putting as much value on it as they do themselves. Krishnamurti further fleshed out the idea that the true self flourishes in solitude, with experience and meanings stripped away. It frees itself from the struggle to become one thing or another. Krishnamurti rejected traditional efforts to transcend the self for the sake of larger goals. He called for focusing instead on "what one is and let [ting] that complexity, that beauty, that ugliness, that corruption, act without attempting to become something else."[20]

In the end, the sentimental turn serves to dissolve the collective identities and outward discipline that atomists used earlier but now no longer want. That rigidity once held together the postwar world order, and eased the assault on non-atomist high cultures. Now it just dampens spontaneity and indulgence. Universal atomists defend inner subjectivity so ardently because it creates a space free of burdens. That inner life harbors no absolutes, no projects of becoming, and no demands on those who take refuge there. This mentality holds true regardless of whether the thinkers voicing it use humanistic, literary, or mystical language.

This new character ideal has further uses, beyond clearing away debris from the vanguard atomist generation. Universal atomists' suspicion of society's claims means they must deny too much purchase to any ideology—including their own. While they want a broadly atomist society, they happily show irreverence toward any particular *version* of it. In that spirit, many of their thinkers celebrate irony and write of the "self-purging dimension of liberal thought experiments." Proper "liberal ironists" will question the very ideologies that atomism itself generates, and imagine ways to shake their foundations from time to time. Even mass civic education should aim for an "externalized perspective" on prevailing public values.[21]

To anyone but an atomist, this ironic mentality seems odd. It contains an impulse to debunk, which eventually even turns in on itself. Vargas Llosa sees himself among the "professionals of dissatisfaction," those who wish "to arouse, to disturb, to alarm." And the Indian dramatist and public intellectual Rustom Bharucha calls for being "playful and wayward," "ridiculing and even subverting" all traditions.[22] This feature of universal atomism has three causes. First, atomists learned during the pacts era that while rigid ideologies add momentum against enemies, they can become burdensome later. Being "playful and wayward" toward the atomist ideology of the moment might make such self-burdening less likely down the road. Second, the strength of atomists today means they no longer need the momentum, the flattening of dissent, that helped them during their rise. Waywardness now scatters agency, by creating a culture whose members lack any sense of direction or sustained fervor. Such a culture will be less susceptible to movements against atomist dominance itself. Third, atomism purified itself when it broke the pacts. Conformity and civic piety were concessions that vanguard atomists made as a bridge to demots. Irreverence and detachment from one's values match up better with the atomist ethos now it stands alone. At history's supposed end, fittingly, we come back full circle to the nihilism of the Cärväka school and the Sophists.

This debunking extends to the self as well. Universal atomism raises psychological discontinuity and living in the instant to the status of a cultural ideal. This image of a "protean self" recurs across many spheres of contemporary life. Take the Bulgarian-French psychoanalyst and cultural critic Julia Kristeva, for example. She writes of the self as a "subject-in-process." Just as modernity has brought a crisis in collective meanings, so must one contain within oneself "an unending dynamic of transgression." Challenges to one's identity annul and replace it. In the literary realm, Octavio Paz, Mexican poet and diplomat, celebrated "the instant," not only as an aesthetic style but also as "the unifying thread amid our extraordinary diversity." Negating both past and future would shore up peoples sense of relativism and plurality. Krishnamurti similarly rejected the inner continuity of "psychological time," with all its memories and goals, in favor of letting one's "attention" wander freely.[23] Since they express a cultural ideal, all three writers have won a following among the atomist upper-middle classes.

An objection might arise here. Even if this image has a wide audience, should we infer that many people live it out in practice? Do ruptured psyches really abound in our time? Some evidence suggests so. In China, novelists' obsession with fragmented selfhood over the last twenty years has overlapped, chronologically, with the rise of a turbulent entrepreneurial stratum.[24] There is even some mutual sympathy between the two, so we might suspect navelgazing and glorified hucksterism go hand in hand. Politically, the current generation of leaders worldwide also lives out a salable and adaptable persona. When the likes of Bill Clinton,

Tony Blair, and Carlos Menem hold up wet fingers to the wind of public opinion, they reflect these self-understandings.[25] Surely it is more than coincidence that these patterns and the rise of theories of psychic discontinuity have happened at the same time. Perhaps neither really "caused" the other, but both reflect the same ethos.

A more compelling example of this cultural ideal comes out of therapeutic psychology. Admittedly, some liberal thinkers do look askance at the therapeutic impulse, even if it prevails in a culture they mostly admire. Kateb notes a widespread "lust for therapy," for example, and remarks that even though liberalism rightly emphasizes the individual, "unphilosophical self-absorption is not a pretty picture."[26] Given the hollowness we have seen at the heart of atomist selfhood, however, the therapeutic impulse seems to be just the "inner ocean" as practiced by those of more extraverted and less cerebral temper. Therapeutic psychology bears an alarming likeness to the cultural image in question, since it prods patients toward what more traditional souls would consider self-absorption. The atomist character ideal percolates through modern society in many ways.

One example is antidepressants like Prozac. Leaving aside the medical goals and effects, we can say that the mindset implicit in how such treatments are pitched fits neatly into universal atomism. Among other things, they supposedly free the self to crystallize anew by distancing patients from their prior values. Obligations and preoccupations that have proved burdensome are loosened to bring about a mellowed and well-adjusted self. Continuity of the self is chemically disrupted, so to speak.[27] The antidepressant fad of the last decade should not be read as a plot; to do so would be to give too much credit. But the upper-middle class experts responsible for such treatments—the researchers and marketers and psychiatrists—do work within a universal atomist milieu. Naturally their self-image is imprinted on their practices, and urged upon the public.

In all these ways, universal atomists have an identity obsessed with ruptures and self-distancing. They tend to plead subjectivity against any ends others might impose. Moreover, the ends one gives oneself are neither inherent nor lasting. This thinking goes even deeper, however, in a twist that can only bewilder non-atomists. For universal atomists, sympathy for other human beings means one must celebrate the repulsive within oneself. As Kristeva puts it, "we recognize one another as foreigners, strangers. That is to say, as weak, that is to say as potentially sick. And it is by being able to see the other as tracked by some pathology, by some anomaly, as I myself am, that I refuse to see in the other an enemy. And this would be the basis for a form of morality."

Kateb echoes the sentiment. Even in repulsive others, "I am encountering only external actualizations of some of the countless number of potentialities in me … I could become or could have become something like what others are."[28] Universal atomism sees the repulsive in others as intertwined with one's own, truncated, self. While Kateb likens this "radical equality made aesthetic" to early Christian sympathy,[29] it clearly has little to do with the notion that a God-given soul makes even the humblest beggar a jewel in the rough. Other ethoses have often used the idea of hidden human potential as a way to downplay differences on the surface. But only universal atomists use the language of a shared repulsiveness, in a bid to turn ideals upside down.

An outsider cannot help but see this cultural climate as built on an unhealthy solidarity of negation, on the company of misery. Since it leaves more room for choices that by other yardsticks are unredeemable, is it any surprise that in our time the global public sphere is increasingly given over to the depravity of Jerry Springer, Laura Bozzo, and other like-minded souls? Although defenders of what I earlier called "ethereal" liberalism protest their neutrality, the broader cultural impulses swirling around them are hardly neutral. In the real world, liberalism often seems concerned less with protecting choice per se than with pushing the boundaries of choice as low as possible. It subverts even private views on a hierarchy of virtues. Traditional religion, for example, is criticized for elevating mystical insight above bodily pleasure. In this spirit, one Indian journalist and social critic insisted, "there is nothing higher or lower in the natural disposition of men."[30]

This impulse to confound standards also appears in how atomists today imagine sexuality. Among the likes of Rushdie and Vargas Llosa, literary critics have noted a wont to cast sexuality as more earthy and thus more universally human than religion or ideology. Prophets and revolutionary heroes are cut down when they are placed in brothels. It has been said quite aptly that Rushdie "goes to the highest domain and tries to pull it down" via "a negative satire on life."[31] To degrade is to humanize, whether others or oneself. This cultural pattern goes well beyond any one writer, for it spills out of the reigning ethos in all spheres.

Objections will come from liberals who want to distance their highest principles from these facts on the ground. Liberals will insist that respecting people means distinguishing between them as choosers and the choices they make. Even someone who makes repulsive choices, for such pursuits as drugs, pornography, or profiteering, must still be respected as a free chooser. In technical language, this turns on a contrast between "recognition" respect and "appraisal" respect. Recognition respect means respecting people on equal terms, simply as human beings. Appraisal respect means respecting worthy traits that people show in varying degrees, as icing on the cake.[32] Or liberals might argue that, if what I describe really is a cultural project that goes beyond respecting people's choices, then it is just a way to solidify tolerance. In other words, liberalism practices cultural demolition as a means to an end. To create a culture that respects choice as such, one must push the limits of what people are accustomed to tolerating, by raising the profile of unsavory and indulgent ways of life. In this vein, some postmodernists also talk of "fostering difference" and a relativistic "mood of delight."[33]

If we buy their account of what they are up to, we must believe that liberals grit their teeth as they align themselves with all the impulses that make up universal atomism. This is hard to do, because none of these thinkers really take respecting individuals as a goal and then grudgingly sacrifice absolute values along the way. Frankly, most take the lack of absolute values as a given before they even start. Kateb writes that "I do not associate human dignity with any teleology or reason for being," Kristeva that her philosophy focuses on "the absurdity of everyday life," Krishnamurti that there is "no captain to direct one in this ocean of life," and others of "exuberance" as a gauntlet thrust in the face of a meaningless world. Existence trumps what one does with it. As the American political philosopher and policy adviser William Galston phrases it, "most accounts of liberalism embrace, tacitly or explicitly, the premise that life is too valuable to jeopardize in conflicts over how to lead it."[34]

We come to a difficult question. Many non-atomists in history have agreed that most conflict over beliefs is shortsighted and senseless. One can note liberals' vapid obsession with their own survival, without also waxing poetic about slaughter on the barricades. A more important point is that one can have healthy and unhealthy reasons for wanting people to be temperate in their methods and not to sacrifice life rashly over the details of a belief system. Universal atomists do not want tolerance out of a belief that a substrate of truth lies beneath different ways of pursuing that truth. Theirs is hardly the realm of the Quran's "no compulsion in religion." Nowadays, their *priority* is to push back the boundary of tolerance for its own sake, to confound norms of virtue and vice, to indulge the slack extreme of autonomy. Living outweighs how one lives. When we probe the atomist mentality ad absurdum, we find Krishnamurti saying that "more and more, as one observes, faith has no place any more; nobody believes in anything any more—thank God."[35]

To be sure, not all universal atomists profess an ideology of mere self-indulgence. Fukuyama, author of *The End of History and the Last Man*, wrote that there is "something deeply contemptible about a man who cannot raise his sights higher than his own narrow self-interests and physical needs." As he sees it, liberalism is more about recognizing human dignity than about indulgence, even if liberalism has spread partly because it does allow indulgence.[36] So does this idea of human dignity offer a counterweight to the ills I have described? For choice and respect to have an upshot other than "anything goes," then the liberal self would have to have some aesthetically pleasing *content*. It would have to impose uplifting *demands* on people, for the sake of a goal that one can reach in varying degrees.

Nothing like this appears. Liberal respect goes to everyone, however unsavory, with no questions asked. The very refusal to ask the kind of questions that would lead to *degrees* of respect rules out any real content to this character ideal. If a style of painting is such that every example is beautiful, but none more or less beautiful, then the beauty of that style is probably meaningless in the first place. The only real claim to a beauty of character in liberalism comes from Kateb and those of a like persuasion. Oddly, however, the beauty he sees is one not of content, but of adaptability, of self-renewal and an openness even to debasement as an option within oneself. The meaning of character stretches beyond anything that might appeal to a non-atomist.

To the extent that universal atomism includes any counterweight to self-indulgence, we have to find it elsewhere. It helps here to distinguish between what we might call *indulgent* atomism and *disciplinary* atomism. These two are not *types* of atomism, so much as different dimensions within it, different pressures that sustain an atomist's sense of self. On the one hand, indulgent atomism gives the widest leeway in style of life. It sets individuals free by dismissing, as a matter of taste, the virtues that their communities might demand of them. It also dissolves inner standards of self-cultivation. Loosely speaking, it adds up to the "anything goes" slackness that I have traced so far. Disciplinary atomism, on the other hand, means a submission to impersonal standards of performance. Competition among individuals, whether in the marketplace or in the examination hall, tends to erode solidarity among them. And if performance counts for all, then any sense of intrinsic inner virtue weakens.

The counterweight to atomist indulgence is atomist discipline. We must remember, of course, that standards of atomist discipline have little in common with the *ethical* responsibility that other ethoses demand to one's inner character, to one's fellows, or to history. Atomist discipline

is more impersonal, morally thinner, and narrows the horizons of agency. It offers a responsibility *of prudence*, of performing to gain rewards. The discipline of the undergraduate who makes the grade, or the executive who gets the new account, is not the same as the discipline of the mandarin who risked his neck to admonish a tyrant, or the imam who goes without sleep to minister to the sick.

In any atomist culture, both the disciplinary and the indulgent aspects appear. Premodern, bridgehead, and vanguard atomism had examples of both. In the great cultural transition from vanguard to universal atomism, though, the focus has changed. The disciplinary parts of vanguard atomism—the civic conformity, the pious nationalist ideologies, the early meritocratic striving, and so on—gave momentum to the assault on high cultures. Once the new order had solidified by the 1960s, disciplinary pressures could be slackened. This shift was exemplified in the 1960s and 1970s counterculture, and in the more long-term trend that social scientists have identified from harder "materialist" to softer "postmaterialist" values.[37] Vanguard atomists had cast modernity's main advantage as equal opportunity, for instance. They damned earlier societies for arbitrary privilege and aristocratic pretension. Universal atomists instead give personal freedom pride of place in their image of modernity. In liberal rhetoric now, preliberal cultures stifled the individual, as their remnants still do.[38]

While indulgent atomism may be more open today, more publicly sanctioned, some disciplinary themes persist. Science, for example, is often invoked because its acidic objectivity supposedly cuts non-atomist beliefs down to size. Chinese liberals like Yan Jiaqi and Fang Lizhi have used science as an anti-Marxist touchstone in this way, just as their counterparts in the Middle East think the scientific worldview, pushed relentlessly enough, will undermine orthodox Islam.[39] We might say that discipline here presses more directly on the individual, instead of being mediated through civic values or stereotypical bourgeois piety.

A change in such details on the surface does not mean a break of continuity from vanguard to universal atomism. From an outsider's standpoint, the clash between different generations of atomists in the late twentieth century caused more sound and fury than it should have. For example, liberal writers today mock the old left's use of the word "social" to sanctify any movement or policy: social justice, social movements, social security, social democracy, and the like.[40] The idea of a public good greater than the sum of its parts now strikes universal atomists as quite alien. Similarly, they see the postwar era as repressive, and the cultural loosening since the 1960s as a humane reaction against it. On the other side of the divide, surviving vanguard atomists of an earlier generation frown on unapologetic hedonism. "Restraint has gone slack," one of them complained in 1976. The new youth culture, lacking in self-discipline, would undermine prosperity and destroy common political values.[41]

Oddly, both sides of the vanguard-universal transition have seen the other phase as an aberration, a distortion of the true model. Viewed as phases in a global culture war against other ethoses, however, the two flow naturally into one another. Levittown had to lead to Woodstock; they are on the same side of history. Universal atomism is the unfolding of vanguard atomism, and could come only after the latter had served its purpose. Only vanguard atomism could have smashed perfectionism and virtuocracy and made inroads into demotic life. Strategically, universal atomists owe their strength to exactly what they now find repugnant and cast aside.

This pattern holds true across world regions, and across the many ideologies that vanguard atomists espoused.

Today's elites and upper-middle classes blend the disciplinary and indulgent sides of atomism in creative new ways. Sociologists have observed that such people everywhere live a double life. On one side, they practice the hard-headed rationality of a tightly organized technocratic economy. On the other, they seek "risk-free" outlets for creativity.[42] More impressionistically, cultural commentators in recent years have noted the merging of "bourgeois" and "bohemian" currents into a "Bobo" identity, or of "yuppie" and "hippie" themes into the "Californian ideology."[43] While those writers rarely bother to talk about the longer-term historical backdrop of these trends, such idiosyncrasies do shed light on a new global mentality. Even in developing countries like China, the same blend of disciplined moneymaking and cultural laxity has gained ground since the 1990s among the young upper-middle classes, making them ever more like their "Bobo-Californian" kindred spirits across the Pacific.

Two more specific themes will further flesh out our image of universal atomist character. First is markets. It is an understatement to say that global liberals look fondly on the word "market," just as an earlier generation made a fetish of "progress." The market economy today is treated with hushed, almost theological reverence.[44] The disappointing world recession that started in the late 1990s dampened this enthusiasm, but did not really change it. What exactly is the market, as a cultural symbol? Obviously it aligns with liberals' enthusiasm for choice, but a character ideal lurks beneath too. The market produces certain kinds of people who fit well into the atomist project. Sympathetic studies of markets have described them as enhancing cognitive skills and a sense of self-reliance.[45]

It is in the image of the market as something to be *realized*, however, that the peculiar mentality of universal atomists comes through clearly. In post-1989 Czechoslovakia, the market was praised as tapping into human nature, unlike socialist planning that had tried to deform human nature. Wang Ruoshui implied much the same when he wrote that state socialism, in defying economic self-interest, created a kind of alienation. Other liberal intellectuals in China in the late 1980s valued the market because it objectively rewarded performance. At the time, the transition to capitalism had brought ill-gotten gains to entrepreneurs who wheeled and dealed on the margins between public and private enterprise. Some intellectuals resented their lagging white-collar salaries, which were still tied to the state. A full market economy would offer "a competitive mechanism for ensuring equality of opportunity," and reward the talents of the educated more predictably.[46] Subsequent history proved them right, undoubtedly to their satisfaction. This fetish of the market thus mixes indulgence and discipline. On the one hand, markets supposedly release the human impulse to truck and barter. To condemn that impulse is to consign humanity to backwardness. On the other hand, markets offer an impersonal standard of performance, by letting individuals find their own level without regard to their other qualities.

Inequality is a second revealing theme. What, for universal atomists, are legitimate sources of inequality? Of course they debate such matters in their own ranks, but some patterns stand out. Unearned privilege has no place in global liberal culture. Advantage rests instead on expertise, shrewdness, or both. Since the meritocracy has taken power, we might also expect raw intelligence to be one of global liberalism's legitimizing myths. Yet here a wrinkle appears. According to some strands in liberalism, raw ability is just as arbitrary, morally speaking, as

ethnicity or inherited wealth. People do not "deserve" their genes or upbringing. Such schools of thought go on to argue that the unevenness of natural talents should be compensated by a generous safety net and a more equal income distribution. Liberals who say this leave only "legitimate expectations" intact as a basis for advantage. A person who performs according to the impersonal standards society lays down is entitled to the promised benefits.[47]

Whether or not one agrees with such principles, this reasoning certainly fits into the disciplinary part of universal atomism. Even where liberalism tries to correct for arbitrary inequalities, it still buys into the atomist ideal of people who strive for predictable rewards that, all else being equal, they then enjoy without owing much to anyone else. Schooling has evolved in recent decades to reinforce this mentality. Unlike how education under the pacts gave a lot of weight to civic socialization, education is now seen mainly as a machine to allocate rewards. Valedictorians live in McMansions.

Still, we must ask why so much unease lingers about meritocracy itself. Why does a ruling class created largely by meritocratic screening not claim, quite baldly, that it owes its authority to its talents? The reason has to do with the character structure I have described. If universal atomists said as much outright, it would mean basing power on inherent traits. Hard questions would then arise. As soon as a culture openly sets an elite apart from most people, attention naturally shifts away from *who* is entitled to be in the elite. Instead, people ask what *qualities* members of that elite should have.

Since universal atomist character has no content or mission built in, any talk about qualities of leadership would be dangerous ground for atomists to tread. Such a debate in the broader culture would fuel critiques of atomist dominance. After all, the atomist elite has few of the qualities historically considered admirable in those who rule. It thus finds it safer to obscure the link between traits and power. Meritocracy must seem an ideal far from realization, as in the rhetoric of the 1940s. This way, the debate can focus "in the meantime" on how to get still more capable people to the top, rather than on what to demand of those who have already got there.

Some vivid images of universal atomist character come from reports on elite student culture. Surveys of Chinese university students a few years ago showed an outlook of pragmatism, calculation, and little ethical vigor. The pattern is even more pronounced at top universities in developed countries. One ethnography of Tokyo University students showed them as given over to ennui and hedonism in everything except exam-taking and employment-seeking. The same image crops up in the United States, according to recent reports on the so-called "organization kids." Notably, the portraits come mostly from liberal journalists and public intellectuals who are quite sympathetic to the subculture in question. After visiting the Princeton campus, such writers recounted a few quirks but mostly praised the narrow pre-professional energy of the students. They welcomed that they were less "ostentatiously moral" than the tweed-clad gentlemen of a century ago. As an American social critic put it a few years earlier, character in such a milieu is reduced to "self-ironical niceness."[48]

Universal atomism has also produced a peculiar understanding of agency. We saw earlier that vanguard atomists did much to erode what they saw as the menacing agency of virtuocrats. They sang the praises of resignation to "progress," and cut agency down to a pedestrian level. The agency that universal atomists celebrate today also matches up with their own self-

understanding, in turn. Agency in atomist liberalism is, as Kateb puts it, "the will to transform action into contentious play."[49] Those who act politically should do so with ironic distance. In this spirit, one foreign admirer of Havel's leadership in Czechoslovakia praised "the boundlessness of his self-irony," his "anti-heroic and comical" effect on public life.[50]

For universal atomists, leaders who take themselves too seriously commit a supreme sin. Irony inoculates against fanaticism. Among self-declared Muslim leaders, for example, those who in liberal eyes are safest and most endearing are those "fervent hypocrites" among the Saudi elite who, because of their adventures of the bedroom and the bottle, have "a good deal of humanity." Societies in which a temper of "practical reason" deflates fervor are those in which global liberals feel most at home.[51] Beliefs should enter politics with a spirit of self-negation. Among cultures in history, this view is unique.

In general, agency among universal atomists is crowded out by an overriding concern with institutions. Interestingly, this is one point on which the current Chinese regime and its liberal opponents agree, a sign of the atomist outlook that they share. Official histories now downplay revolutionary energy as a motor of change, in favor of institutional development and modernization. And when dissidents like Yan Jiaqi speak of political reform, they focus on setting up institutions so mediocre figures can function well enough in them, and rules can do most of the work of governing. Except in the very short term, leaders do not affect history.[52] Universal atomists set their sights low when it comes to agency and the character to sustain it. Singapore's senior minister Lee Kuan Yew, when he tried in an interview to dress technocracy in Confucian garb, gave an interesting twist to the Confucian phrase *xiūshēn píng tiānxià* (rectifying oneself and pacifying what lies under Heaven). He translated it as "look after yourself, cultivate yourself, do everything to make yourself useful … [so] all is peaceful under Heaven."[53] Note the contrast with true Confucianism. Lee took a pedestrian view of personal qualities, and emptied action from the pacifying of the world. Mencius and meditation give way to market timing and marginal cost-cutting.

When universal atomists do any moralizing at all, it has a whiff of banality about it. When the *Economist* reports on the rise of corporate ethics programs, for example, it mentions trends driven by legality and image, such as a new interest in rooting out corruption and improving labor conditions. Sweatshops and bribes are bad for business, at least in the long run.[54] In a way unique to universal atomist culture, banality and a lack of scope for agency are enshrined. To be sure, there is the old saying that one curses someone by wishing that they live in interesting times. Fervor is not always better than peace. But the present elite stands alone in believing, as Fareed Zakaria, the sometime editor of *Foreign Affairs* and *Newsweek International*, recently suggested, that banality is cause for rejoicing.[55]

Anyone would be hard pressed to find much basis for ethical vigor in the atomist character ideal. Dissolving inner standards of virtue, and weakening the claims of society, leaves only a few issues on the table. Take the global public-interest advocacy networks like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, which are staffed mainly by atomists. As one sympathetic study recently found, their greatest energy and success comes when they focus on issues involving either legal inequalities of opportunity, or direct physical harm. Apartheid, gender discrimination, slavery, and torture are typical examples. Likewise, the "moral entrepreneurs" of new-class activism play on issues that will expand individual "autonomy."[56]

Of course, such efforts have alleviated some human suffering. I do not deny that modern liberalism has expanded many peoples moral universe. They often pay more attention than before to abuses in distant parts of the world, or against people with whom they have little in common. Many a prosperous suburbanite sent donations to the Indian Ocean tsunami victims. Any non-atomist should welcome these advances. But perhaps we should not give too much credit for them to atomist liberalism. Some of the willingness to reduce suffering comes more from economic abundance than from liberal culture as such. Technological development inevitably expands horizons and the sense that more can be done for more people. The verdict must remain out on whether a non-atomist modernity would have witnessed just as much humanitarianism, as I suspect it would have.

More important to my argument here, however, is that expanding one's moral universe says nothing about the content that fills it. When universal atomists donate to famine relief or publicly shame torturers, they do get the global scale right, so to speak. But by historical standards, their vision remains quite undemanding. It tackles some of the worst abuses, hopes that vulnerable people not be left to starve—though in fact millions still do—and so on. Clearly, however, liberal activist networks lack the psychic wherewithal to touch on deeper ethical concerns. Their sort of agency is thin, and oriented outward toward alleviating symptoms of problems. They find alien, if they think about it at all, the older idea that virtuous action is part of a properly ordered self. Alone among cultures in history, they act with banality as an end. Once everywhere has the entrepreneurial energy of Singapore and the moral flexibility of Amsterdam, agency ceases. This ethical anemia appears even among the global intelligentsia, where we might otherwise expect to find a reserve of critical energy. The world over, the intelligentsia sinks ever deeper into the mire of careerist conformity and subservience to power.[57]

Usually all the global trends I have described in this chapter are treated in isolation, as if they were oddities of the moment. Only in examining them together can we see them as layers of the same pathology. Universal atomism is a deep psychic structure, a character ideal lived out by dominant groups and slowly seeping through humanity. The emerging global culture marries technocracy to hedonism. Loosely, the present order rests on a grand bargain. The meritocracy buys its entitlement to self-indulgence, its lax standard of self-cultivation, by performing efficiently and by giving up any ethical pretensions. This self-image, which has reigned for a generation and a half, turns older understandings of power and virtue on their head. With all this in mind, we can now move outward, to explore how universal atomists see the balance of forces for and against them.

Chapter 5

Populace as Peril

In each phase of their world-transforming project, atomists have faced a challenge and either absorbed it or outmaneuvered it. In the 1940s reframing, vanguard atomists chose to ally with and absorb the popular upsurge. Doing so also let them outmaneuver civilizational virtuocrats and erode the latter's social base. The reframing of the 1960s and 1970s, in turn, could happen only because the pacts phase had enjoyed overall success. For decades now, virtuocrats and perfectionists have mounted no real challenge. Plain folk are the main reservoir of resistance. As universal atomists broke the atomist-demotic pact, they must now focus on meeting any threats that might bubble up from a demotic direction.

Under the guises of postcolonial nationalism, socialism, mass society, and so on, vanguard atomists had seen fervor among the populace—properly managed—as adding to the momentum against the old high cultures. Now their successors have doubts about democracy The best example comes from universal atomists in China. Both liberal reformers and the party leadership see liberalism—or ordered capitalism—as something that only a strong hand can create. Both accept property rights and the rule of law, but want to keep benighted popular impulses out of politics. Even dissidents who raise the banner of democracy worry that the peasantry might derail liberalization. In this vein, Chinese atomists have looked quite kindly on technocracy. Fang Lizhi, for instance, has argued that science gives people a modern, enlightened perspective. One scholar has noted that Fang and others like him claim power for the educated in much the same way as the old mandarinate did. The key difference is that that claim rests on scientific expertise rather than ethical culture. Others have noted that since the 1980s, the clash between dissidents and the ruling party has hinged less on "democracy" than on the details of who wields technocratic authority and how.[1]

This preference for expertise over mass participation cuts across regions. Among the Mexican elite of the 1980s and 1990s, for example, foreign-trained economists or "technopols" saw liberal economic reforms as above politics, and their opponents as representing only partial interests. Democracy no longer meant designing policy after a debate among the populace. It meant persuading one's opponents that resistance to liberal economics was just intellectual error or shortsightedness. Much the same "rhetoric of development," with its stress on entrepreneurship over participation, has been observed in international institutions like the World Bank.[2]

It bears noting that this attitude has gained ground in the developed North too, even though political conditions make it harder to ram through unpopular changes. Take public choice theory in economics and political science, which has rightly been said to rest on a deep skepticism about democracy. It holds that legislative decisions about policy often lead to inefficient results, because they reflect bargaining among group interests. A few years ago, the American economic policy adviser Alan Blinder argued that just as monetary policy is left to experts, so should "more public policy decisions [be] removed from the political thicket and placed in the hands of unelected technocrats," with the legislature setting only broad policy goals.[3] The technocratic trend is a matter of degree, of course, and liberals themselves see some democracy as a way of ensuring ultimate accountability. Still, the shift over the last generation is clear. Compared to the

postwar era, the wisdom of ordinary people is less esteemed. Ever more issues are pushed off the table of participatory politics.

The most important examples of atomist technocracy have emerged on the transnational level. Since atomist strata entirely manage global integration, the frameworks they set up reflect the technocratic impulse, the wont to insulate policy from popular pressure. "Transgovernmentalism" takes specific functions of government, such as law enforcement and environmental regulation, and links them across borders in a wider professional community. The World Trade Organization has attracted much attention as well, because it can now give binding rulings about trade disputes between countries. One political scientist has pointed out that these insulated transnational institutions do two things. First, they serve as sites for the "development of strategic consciousness" among elites. Exposure to these arenas makes such people think alike. Second, the treaties involved often lock in policies suitable to global capitalism, making it harder for voters to undo those policies in future.[4] This interpretation, while narrowly focused on economic interests, does map on to the rest of universal atomists' thinking. Part of the reason to escape from national polities in the last reframing was that these transnational venues let them stay one step above the opposition.

The technocratic impulse, at least as *opposed* to democracy, has not gone so far within developed Northern countries. But the North has its own examples of atomist skepticism about the populace. Take a value as central to liberalism as tolerance. In frank moments, liberals let comments escape them like "the liberal principle of free discussion no longer necessarily favors the triumph of liberalism." They fear that benighted sorts of popular pressure will wreak havoc. The liberal project of protecting individual rights is "like making a garden in a jungle that is continually encroaching." In practice, certain views are pushed to—occasionally beyond—the bounds of tolerance, lest they lead people astray. Often they include unorthodox scientific opinions at odds with liberal images of human nature, and language that might undermine a no-questions-asked respect for all ways of life.[5]

Of course, in pointing out this light intolerance, I do not mean to cast liberalism as repressive. Right now, at least in the North, it enjoys enough default support that it hardly needs to be. In most ways, the bounds of liberal tolerance are also wider than the bounds of many fundamentalist and other antiliberal movements around the world. Nonetheless, these patterns do suggest universal atomists' contempt for the mass of ordinary people, and their fear that democracy will let benighted forces surge up from below. Two generations ago, demotic fervor added momentum to vanguard atomists' assault on high cultures. Today, atomists want to demobilize their former allies, and turn them into mere objects of future conversion. To the extent that people outside a moderately well-off milieu are still demots rather than just lower-class atomists, they must be kept in check.

Examples of this outlook abound, especially in the global South. The educated middle classes of India worry that democracy will imperil technocratic rationality and freedom, largely because of the Hindutva upsurge. When secularists faced a serious Islamist threat in Algeria in the early 1990s, they canceled elections halfway through. Then they started building a "civil society" that would impress liberal values on the populace and head off another such embarrassment. The Chinese systems theorist Jin Guantao has expressed fear that if democracy is not "reasonable," mass fanaticism as in the Cultural Revolution will encroach on personal rights. And the

cosmopolitan Indian-Trinidadian novelist V. S. Naipaul has remarked on the "million mutinies" of "group excess" welling up in southern Asia.[6] Even in the largely liberalized United States, where atomists face far less resistance, plain folk in the hinterland are still often scorned by the northeastern and west-coast intelligentsia as hicks, homophobes, and would-be lynchers.

One sign of this apprehensiveness is that over the last generation, liberals have come to weigh rights much more heavily than participation. In mainstream liberal political thought, majority rule and representative democracy now matter far less than constitutional protection of individual rights. As Kateb has put it, too much participation would shore up "the states characteristic domination and insolence." Direct democracy brings the "noxious" pressures of community life.[7] We find signs of the same mentality on the ground. Chinese liberal dissidents, so admired by their global counterparts, fear mass turmoil and have said democracy is "first and foremost the rights of individuals."[8] Small wonder that so many educated Chinese sank into depoliticized passivity in the 1990s, as soon as rule of law and personal freedoms expanded. The student protests of Tiananmen have given way to stock speculation, video games, and preparation for English proficiency tests.

Zakaria voiced this self-understanding when he suggested that anyone with good sense would much rather live in a "liberal semidemocracy" with personal and economic freedom but political repression, than in an "illiberal democracy."[9] While universal atomists still see electoral accountability as a useful check on arbitrary power, rights take priority as a buffer against the untutored energies of the populace. Justice-as-equality under the pacts has yielded to justice-as-personal-space under universal atomism. This outlook makes sense, since universal atomists find the inner ethical demands of pre-modern cultures quite alien. If one cannot expect benevolence and decency on the part of people in power, if only interests reign, then one naturally seeks refuge in systems of legal rights.

All these patterns evince universal atomists' desire to insulate themselves from demotic pressures where possible. But how do they *relate* to what lingers of demotic life? Here we find a split. On the one hand, they imagine their former allies less charitably now the alliance has ruptured. When the literary and social critic Liu Zaifu writes a commentary on twenty-five types of Chinese personality, almost all chapters paint an unflattering portrait of ordinary people as slavelike, gossipy, and conformist: the usual atomist image of demots. Or a political theorist remarks that "the longing for community is a chimera—romantic, naïve, and, in the end, illiberal and dangerous." Or an anthropologist depicts small-scale primitive societies as far from harmonious and pleasant. Instead, they are rife with "maladaptations" that bucolic portrayals of them willfully ignore.[10] Clearly, the last reframing shifted the front in the global culture war. Those who used to focus on eroding high cultures now focus on wearing down plain folk and converting them. As the main repository of non-atomist values, traditional demotic life has become the target. The new goal is a vertical dispersion of atomism, from the global upper-middle class downward.

Yet on the other hand, universal atomists still have to rest some of their claims to legitimacy on the populace. Unlike perfectionist and virtuocratic ruling strata, atomist ruling strata have an ethos that is universal, at least in principle. Anyone can be an atomist. Relentless rhetoric thus aims to convince us that all demots are on some level "really" atomists with false consciousness. The conversion process supposedly involves *releasing* an atomist human nature already present

in them. After breaking the alliance, atomists now cast demots not as demots-becoming-atomists-through-historical-momentum—the earlier story—but as demots-who-are-already-atomists-if-they-are-seen-and-see-themselves-properly.

Signs of this shift in rhetoric abound. In the social sciences, talk of "rational peasants" goes well beyond trying to explain peasant economic behavior accurately. It also aims to find a shrewd market mentality already present in traditional life, as part of human nature. The penetration of atom-ist modernity into peasant cultures would then make more sense. Likewise with some intellectuals' efforts to extend models of economic calculation to marriage and childraising, or to apply liberal notions of justice within the family.[11] Under vanguard atomism, such spheres had been sheltered from the cold rationality of the atomist public sphere. Demots got at least that much as a sop to their sentiments about kinship and decency. Now those spheres are thrown open to liberal economics and liberal culture, on the grounds that atomist human nature knows no boundaries. The atomist project now has two prongs. One rolls back demotic ways of life as benighted. The other pushes back false consciousness within them, supposedly "revealing" atomism in the end.

This strategy works on many levels. Liberal rhetoric about globalization and market reform, for example, often appeals past rival ideologies to the populace. We hear of "peoples real aspirations…to go to Disney World—not to the barricades." The poor are "discerning consumers" and the natural constituency of globalization, victims of leftists or nationalists who deceptively claim to protect them. Peruvian economist Hernando de Soto portrays the street peddlers of the informal sector as shrewd enthusiasts of the free market. What has been called "market populist" discourse fetishizes the market as more democratic and more authentic than politics. It professes great faith in people when they truck and barter, yet disdains them as shortsighted fools when they start talking of the public good.[12] Everyone is an atomist if we strip away the ideological blinders.

Ironically, this sort of atomist rhetoric, appealing*past* critics to ordinary people, in fact appeals past its own genealogy too. Those leftists and nationalists whom universal atomists now mock as misguided ideologues were key blocs within vanguard atomism. Atomists find illiberal folly in their own predecessors these days. Facets of popular identity that strengthened the pactscivic solidarity, an idea of enduring folk culture, and so on—have turned into obstacles for global liberalism.

As a claim of legitimacy, saying ordinary people are all would-be entrepreneurs and consumers does well enough. If true, it means no non-atomist really has a leg to stand on. But rhetoric aside, universal atomists recognize that especially in the global South, the lower classes are illiberal *in practice* and need reeducating. Despite the shantytown peddlers and cash-cropping farmers who are gleefully pointed out, atomists think most peasants suffer from a "sediment of feudalism," a "deficiency in the human makeup." The most sophisticated atomist writers talk of modernity more as a mentality than as an environment. Peasants and unionized labor have atomist potential, but they show a hidebound inflexibility, an aversion to risk, a likelihood of infection by illiberal ideology. Since the 1980s, banners like "civility" and "human capital" have flown over efforts to educate demots in liberal mores.[13] Flexibility, shrewd skepticism, incentive-chasing, labor-force discipline, consumer culture—all make up a package being systematically pushed on atomists' former allies.

With this cultural revolution underway, strong ideas about civic solidarity and folk culture have been expelled from the public realm. Vanguard atomists had let conformity and social norms do much of the work of sustaining their project. Today, transformative pressures operate more directly on the individual psyche. People are set free from group demands and given new responsibility for themselves, but prodded into an atomist self-understanding by everything from the banking system to psychiatry. A fair amount has been written about patterns called "disciplinary neoliberalism," or "techniques of the self." They include the new practices of credit rating, surveillance, and especially the therapeutic remaking of individual conduct. One study of the liberal project in Africa has suggested that it inflicts an "emancipatory purification," cutting individuals loose from tribal identities so they become more pliable before "governance" and "civil society."[14]

The same logic lay behind Mexican "social liberalism" in the 1980s and 1990s. That vision, first purveyed by President Carlos Salinas, was of a society in which the state bypassed mediating political groups—like parties and unions—to deal directly with individuals as producers and consumers. Government policy would focus mainly on facilitating entrepreneurship and providing a minimal safety net.[15] Again indulgence and discipline met. Social liberalism set free natural acquisitive impulses, but also narrowed horizons to a life of prudence and profit. The ideal atomist individual was not an active citizen, or a pillar of the community, but rather a hard-headed import broker or mini-investor.

So far I have mainly mentioned examples from economics and politics. Atomists say demots are—or must become—atomists in calculation, work, and political passivity. But the dispersion of atomism downward involves popular hedonism just as much. Atomists point to the spread of consumer culture as a sign that their vision taps into human nature. In other words, atomism lurks in the soul of every Congolese pygmy and Kazakh tribesman, waiting only to be awakened by freedom and bright lights. Rhetoric suggests the lifestyle of liberal media culture is winning, "internalized in the remotest places." Even backlashes like the "tradition-mongering" of fundamentalists are just a "thrashing about" by ideologues who know they have lost. Because youth in Iran have a fascination with the West, this reasoning goes, they must see the "absurdity" of the Islamic state.[16] Human nature, hearteningly atomist whenever it shows signs of sordidness, surges up in a million moments of individual resistance against a dying traditional order. In a similar vein, many Chinese liberal intellectuals enjoy the "hooligan literature" of novelist Wang Shuo. In an "aesthetics of debauchery," Wang's works celebrate the dark side of lower-class life among "happy-go-lucky cynics."[17] Across world regions, the shift of emphasis since the last reframing is unmistakable. Unlike vanguard atomists, who used equal opportunity and civic piety as their bridge to demots, universal atomists now purvey their vision as a mass release from constraint, as the crass libertinism that Hollywood so well embodies. Tradition no longer mainly keeps people down; rather, it dampens the hedonism built into human nature.

This cultural project unfolds in many ways, and it would be exaggeration to say all trends are *simply* a product of deliberate atomist pressure. Take the sphere of religion, for example. Over the last three decades, individualistic religious currents have gained ground in the global South: evangelism in Latin America, pietistic sects of Christianity in eastern Asia, some Islamic currents in Africa, and so on. Studies of these sects have found them quite compatible with liberal modernity. They weaken traditional bonds, and favor economic discipline and mobility.

In the countryside, many wealthier peasants have converted to escape the burdensome ritual duties of community life.[18]

Atomists will say that this kind of cultural transition to individualism is driven from below, not pushed from above. The point has a grain of truth. But conversions do happen as responses to experience. As one study of Latin American evangelism found, uprootedness and despair lead people to find in such sects "a revolution within the self….It 'fills' and 'fulfils' personalities deeply infected in their physical and psychic being with dis-ease and unease."[19] This pattern resembles how premodern atomists—like slaves and journeymen—took up individualistic salvation-seeking when buffeted by "unease." Moreover, today's dominant strata welcome such "unease" and even indirectly create it. Many think it progress to thrust swarms of peasants off their land and into sweatshops. According to universal atomists, the uprootedness of rural-urban migrants is a tonic. It liberates them from the constraints of a community, and imposes a salutary discipline by making them responsible for their own fates. Uprootedness is atomist maturity.

These religious trends reinforce atomism only very indirectly, if at all. Most of the time, universal atomists see popular religion as an obstacle to their agenda. They think faith hampers a liberal sort of critical thinking. Liberal regimes should get rid of public language "suffused with piety," and redirect peoples attention to "the material world of hardship and injustice."[20] A parallel strategy tries to transform popular religion itself. The dramatist Bharucha, advocating this "cultural praxis" in India, sees it as a way to "strengthen secularism as a philosophy and life-practice," to cure "contamination by political and religious bigotry." The strategy includes popular encounters across sect lines, in "a mélange of spiritual behaviours" resting on "fluidity," "hybridity," and "performativity." Indian intellectuals of this stripe agree that the goal is to go beyond denying religious traditions political influence. Liberals must roll back "pervasive orthodoxies" and "retrograde tendencies" within them.[21]

Of course, most atomist pressure on demots does not take place on the level of intellectual debate about the content of traditions. In practice, two main forces have been working their magic over the last twenty or thirty years. First is the global mass media, especially television and music. Images quite alien to the experience of most young people around the world supposedly tap into impulses believed to lurk within them. The head of Coca-Cola's international advertising division insisted in a published interview that the images he creates are just an "idealized reflection" of existing life, "airbrushed" to show people as they really want to be.[22] The media's direct impact leaves little room for critical reflection or the buffer of non-atomist cultural authorities. A mullah or a tribal elder cannot compete with the flashy vividness of *Baywatch* and the "Material Girl."

Liberals know they are winning on this front of the global culture war. When Islamists seemed likely to take power in Algeria in the early 1990s, one writer argued that it would not matter for long anyway, because French television would "continue to penetrate millions of Algerian homes, undermining Islamic rectitude in relentless color."[23] As a result of such massive pressure, people often have a distorted image of the world's realities too. Southerners especially get the misimpression that liberal modernity has already won: that their own ways of life are in the minority worldwide. Sitting in the twilit square of a Peruvian highland town some years ago, I watched the initially skeptical and then intrigued face of a student of peasant background, as he heard for the first time that most of the world is far more like what he knew than like Hollywood.

Even those who see history going the wrong way can resign themselves if they think the battle is over.

A second front in the atomist cultural offensive is so-called "lifestyle engineering" by new-class professionals. As studies in many countries have shown, psychotherapists and others have thrown their weight behind a hedonistic and narcissistic sense of self. This orientation is evident at both ends: the milieu and values of the professionals in question, and the perception of their agenda by lower-class patients.[24] Just like the global media, lifestyle professionals are helping to drive universal atomism into popular culture. To be sure, we can argue about the degree of conscious intent in both cases. But it is disingenuous to pretend these phenomena are just neutral technologies and services, with no content fed into them whatsoever. They fit into the larger project of rolling back the residues of demotic culture.

One objection will arise against much of what I have said in this and the previous chapter. Those I call "ethereal" liberals will try distancing themselves from these cultural trends, by insisting they stand only for "political liberalism." Political liberalism, formulated by the American political theorist John Rawls and others, professes not to be a cultural blueprint at all. Rather than one vision fighting for power and rolling back the beliefs of ordinary people, it is just a neutral framework, a way for different value systems to coexist. Political liberals claim that unlike so-called "comprehensive liberals," who do promote atomist individualism, they can live alongside many alternative "conceptions of the good."

Their alleged openmindedness involves a wall of separation. On one side of it lie the diverse private beliefs people hold. On the other side lie the common principles of liberal citizenship that everyone must respect: equality, freedom of choice, and so on. Political liberals ask only that each "conception of the good" reconcile itself to that "overlapping consensus" in public life. Even illiberal sorts of people such as orthodox religious believers should be left unmolested if they concede that minimum. The Amish need not frequent nightclubs, but they cannot bludgeon others who do. In public debate, political liberals want to screen out private values and rely instead on what they call "public reason": appeals to rights, science, and other principles that everyone can accept. Politics should deal only with equal, rights-bearing citizens, not with highly contentious values.[25]

Political liberalism is much more than an academic theory. The same logic imbues many layers of the global liberal project. We can map it on to debates within Indian secularism, or thinking about how to bridge the gaps among civilizations, or indeed any wish to "integrate with differences and not despite differences."[26] People who think this way will argue that I am wrong to indict their "minimalist" liberalism as atomist. It is only about coexistence, and entertains no grand cultural designs that should offend a non-atomist. I want to address this objection here, because it goes to the heart of how different layers of liberalism and atomism reinforce one another. Political liberalism, however neutral it may seem as a theory, fits into the global culture war and even illustrates the atomist mentality.

While I do not think political liberals are *necessarily* closet "comprehensive liberals," some critics have leveled the charge. Certainly political liberalism has come out of a particular milieu: Westernized academia, with its largely atomist assumptions about what moves people and how the world works. Not many non-atomists subscribe to it. Moreover, the timing of political

liberalisms emergence as a theory—the 1970s and 1980s—says a lot. Were it as neutral as it claims, surely something like it would have cropped up in premodern cultures, or at least during global atomism's rise to dominance in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. One cannot help but suspect that political liberalism's tolerance of non-atomist ways of life reflects the decline of those ways of life. Would the atomist intellectuals of Harvard and Oxford profess such an easygoing neutrality if cultural trends were not going their way anyway? While there are such things as coincidences in history, this is probably not one of them.

The most interesting part of political liberalism is its language and assumptions rather than its context, however. Take some examples from Rawls, in no particular order. Being a free citizen means being able to change one's ends in life. People can remain free and equal citizens while undergoing drastic ruptures in their identities. Any individual's "theory of the good" is "self-authenticating," in the sense that saying it is the best goal for oneself makes it so. When someone reasons about justice, he or she steps back from personal beliefs to "regard the human situation not only from all social but also from all temporal points of view… [a] perspective of eternity… within the world." "The members of a community participate in one another's nature: we appreciate what others do as things we might have done but which they do for us.… [T]he self is realized in the activities of many selves."[27] Recall the views of Kristeva, Rushdie, Kateb, Paz, Krishnamurti, and others. Even from Rawls, the founder of political liberalism with its supposedly unimpeachable neutrality, we hear many of the usual atomist themes: the relativizing of inner virtues, the psychic discontinuity, the fragmentation of meanings, the distance from one's own ends, the seeing of other people as alternative versions of oneself. Even if some of the conclusions about political life differ, the mental maps of political liberalism and universal atomism eerily overlap.

Still, mental maps are not everything. Political liberals could be using the language of the atomist culture in which they live, without really subscribing to the same *cultural project*. But let us take a closer look at Rawlsian "public reason." As explained, a public reason is one that can appeal to everyone regardless of his or her private beliefs. To develop this idea, Rawls used the thought experiment of imagining that one knew nothing of one's own traits, resources, or beliefs. In this scenario, one could reason about justice based only on the common interests of any human being as such. Public reasons would include scientific principles, personal rights, increasing the resources available for people to use as they see fit, and so on. Now Rawls did say that public reason need apply to only the weightiest political decisions: constitutional arrangements, reasoning by legislators and judges, and voting on matters that affect other peoples basic rights. He wrote that the strongest case for public reason lies there. Yet he also stated in passing that ideally *any* decisions on public matters, and *any* individual voting, should rest on public reason.[28] Thinking in terms of public reason is obviously a cultural ideal for political liberals.

In light of this, how does political liberalism align with universal atomism? For one thing, public reasons can appeal to only one aspect of human beings. Once we strip away our "comprehensive" beliefs, once we have to argue to any human being as such, our arguments end up thin and insipid. Political liberalism demands only that people refrain from cruelty and publicly respect one another as citizens, regardless of personal qualities or ways of life. Debate about public affairs can take into account only morally neutral goals. For example, a political

liberal can argue for policies that would raise incomes, or reduce accident rates, or clean up pollution.

Sound though those goals are, they miss whole dimensions of human flourishing. Neutrality begins to slip away. Political liberals rule out any talk about whether a public policy will promote certain worthy ways of life, or encourage people to cultivate virtue, or discourage greed and self-indulgence. Such talk unnerves them because it elevates some choices over others. By historical standards, their view of politics is quite bland, since it brackets substantive demands instead of letting them enrich public life. While political liberalism does not *directly* urge egoism and indulgence, the outcome is the same. It screens out any official pressure against such ills. Indeed, public debate will naturally sink to the level of self-interest and hedonism under political liberalism, for it can tap into little else. Political liberalism deals with only one dimension of human beings, and an unflattering one at that. That dimension overlaps with much of the universal atomist character ideal we have seen.

I grant that political liberals show more restraint than other universal atomists, and that they do not push atomism frankly and vigorously. The wall they erect between public and private should buffer non-atomist ways of life from the worst pressure. But how accommodating, really, is political liberalism? Where does it draw the line between what it can and cannot do to people who think differently? Political liberals say that since their theory takes individual rights as a political foundation, "repressive" ways of life must be changed. On that level, "assimilation is an inescapable and legitimate object of liberal policy." Tolerance extends only to "reasonable fundamentalists": those who withdraw from the public sphere quietly, do not impress their views on others, and let members of their communities leave. Political liberals also say that children must be educated for liberal citizenship. They concede the fear of many traditional parents that such education may "spill over" and erode the children's other beliefs.[29]

The bounds of restraint move back quite deeply into non-atomist cultures. Political liberals may not want to snatch scarves off the heads of devout Muslim women—as some universal atomists in Turkey and France do—but they will impress liberalism on Muslim teenagers for as long as they have them in classrooms as a captive audience. Indeed, political liberals themselves often concede that their restraint is backhanded. They know their view of how private and public life relate contains much that only like-minded souls can accept. The American political philosopher Thomas Nagel openly admitted, for example, that any liberal who talks of tolerance in this fashion "should at least be able to convince himself." The "aim is to achieve a certain peace of mind." He added that "the forms of fanaticism which [political liberalism] cannot accommodate will gradually die out."[30]

All this amounts to the usual liberal protestation that convenient trends are nobody's doing. Impersonal historical pressures do the dirty work of creating a modern individualistic culture. In the global culture war, atomists can afford some restraint. All else holding constant, an atomist self-understanding will gain ground anyway, without the mess of snatching scarves off heads. Tolerance in Cambridge presupposes tanks and television in Cairo. To put it bluntly, political liberalism's "restraint" means locking in atomist ownership of the public sphere, and confining other ethoses to private spaces where they will wither over time.

How liberals talk about tolerance and the encounter of different beliefs is also revealing. They often assert that "the free flow of information is inherently compatible with our political system and values." Or once "all religious traditions have been hybridized" with one another, illiberal sentiments will fall by the wayside.[31] Throwing cultures together, or exposing people to different "conceptions of the good" in the right atmosphere, is assumed to lead to atomist liberalism as a common denominator. This amounts to saying that diversity gravitates toward atomism, just like water finding its own level. In broader perspective, this is an odd way to think about one's values. Water finds its own level by flowing downhill, after all.

But this view of contact among diverse beliefs needs probing further. The very way political liberalism is framed as a theory maps on to the broader cultural strategy of modern atomism. Political liberals make much of "intractable" differences among beliefs. Rawls and others have argued that given the many "conceptions of the good" in modern life, we must subscribe to political liberalism to avoid "mortal conflict" among them.[32] Mutual respect must be pegged on liberal citizenship, while more demanding values are confined to private life. Beliefs cannot enter the public sphere, for there is no way of reconciling them *on the level of beliefs*. Here lies a key claim of global liberalism: beliefs are "intractably" opposed.

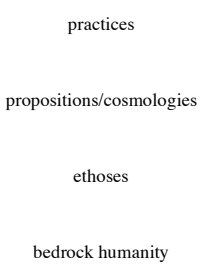
The idea reflects liberal political practice on the ground too. One critic has noted, for example, that liberals in India depict religious identities as sources of violence. The secular middle classes preside over a society wracked by communalism, as "the ultimate reservoir of sanity and the ultimate arbiter among different religions and communities."[33] Crudely put, Indians can meet harmoniously as Congress Party voters—or, more often, as Bollywood fans—but not as Hindus and Muslims. The image of "intractability" thus goes to the heart of how atomist liberals would have us bridge diversity.

What exactly is this "intractability"? Liberals think that when "distant others" meet without liberal citizenship as their common ground, they "cannot understand" and will often mistreat one another.[34] This scenario raises the question of what, exactly, they cannot "understand." Let us take a typical sequence of liberal thinking, which uses revealed religions as an example. The core of a religion is revelation. Religions aim at redemption. According to their original revelations, the different religions disagree on how to gain redemption. Thus one must see one's own religion as objectively true, and look askance at other religions. A similar argument says that a religion comes as a package of practices, rooted in revelation, among which one cannot pick and choose. Naipaul writes in this vein that Islamic identity rests on "rules and celebrations and proscriptions….Take away one practice, and everything was threatened; everything might start to unravel."[35] In other words, each way of life is a package of customs, rituals, and revealed truths. Taken as packages, ways of life have no points of contact among them. Hence their bearers cannot "understand" one another and will resort to brutality—unless, as good liberals, they distinguish between beliefs and the free and equal citizens who happen to hold those beliefs. Yet we see that by taking those stripped-down bearers as the ultimate unit, liberals fling the gate wide open to universal atomism as a cultural project.

Where does this leave us? Is political liberalism irrefutable, albeit dismaying in its implications? I think not. Recall that earlier in the book, I distinguished among different layers of commitments. Ethoses are the most basic layer, the self-understandings on which all other layers rest. They in turn sustain propositions and cosmologies, which recur in varying mixes across

different traditions. And at the most concrete level, we find practices that can be quite specific and placebound.

Global liberalism sees the differences among ways of life as "intractable" on two levels. One level, like the religious revelations mentioned above, is really that of propositions and cosmologies. The second level is practices. Often superficial differences of ritual or demeanor can inspire hostility. As a solution to this "intractability," liberals find common ground at a level *below* ethoses. Once one strips away practices, propositions, cosmologies, and the three robust ethoses—demoticism, perfectionism, and virtuocracy—as mere "possessions" of their bearers, what is left? The bedrock is more or less atomist: a flimsy selfhood of egoism, indulgence, choice, and survival. Instead of trying to *translate* across differences, *on the level of the differences themselves*, this approach focuses on the lowest and most insipid layer of human identity.



Liberals pretend "intractability" has been presented to them by history, and has *forced* them to look for a monochrome common ground, because sadly nothing else will work. In fact, they play up "intractability" because it lets them build their theory around atomism as the only way out. If they really wanted what they profess to want—peaceful coexistence, and a public sphere where values overlap—they could get it by translating ethical commitments as such. Surely Hindus, Muslims, and Christians have plenty of points on which they agree, for example. Yet liberals insist that any effort to "understand" other ways of life is "pretentious paternalism." The only way to coexist is by "living next to," not "living with."[36] The liberal public sphere has no true dialogue, only a collaboration based on the stomach and the purse, punctuated with shrugs of mutual indifference.

A decidedly non-neutral agenda lurks behind this anemic tolerance, whether it takes the guise of political liberalism or ideologies on the ground. For example, one defender of Indian secularism has argued that tolerance must involve "constructed and negotiated" identities. Unlike premodern Hindus' tolerance of other religious believers, as similarly devout people, a liberal tolerance must cut across *all* fault lines of "difference."[37] The recurring principle is that ideals and virtues cannot coexist *as* ideals and virtues, as facets of the same truth. Rather, setting free the atomist self demands a slackening and dissolving of truth. Translated truths are still truths, after all—perhaps even more so—and impose "unchosen" demands. They put a brake on hedonism and ethically vacant technocracy. Universal atomist rule has to make people take for granted that one should not even try to translate. Tolerance must occur via the lowest common denominator to ensure that it *includes* the lowest common denominator.

Chapter 6

The Escape from Place and Past

At the close of chapter three, I noted that the last reframing had to let atomists escape resistance that was welling up within postwar nation-states. The atomist project had to stay one step above its opponents. The logic of "globalization" over the last two decades can be seen as part of the global culture war. It has allowed universal atomists to forge a truly placeless identity across regions.

Supporters of globalization cast it as an encounter and "polylogue" among civilizations. Human rights principles and technocratic development now bridge diversity. This cosmopolitanism works from the top down. Beneath the enlightened uprootedness of the global upper-middle class, residues of religion and nationalism persist. From the standpoint of universal atomists, the traditions that resist globalization have built-in limits because each of them speaks to only one region. Openness and the atomist self go together. In an atomist world, beliefs become more flexible when they lose their territorial roots. People who escape any one identity find a smorgasbord of fragmented meanings in the world at large. As the German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk has put it, globalization fits into a gradual, liberating shift from "agrarian patriotism" to the "global self." Severed from their roots, people now wander as "nomads" through transit-zone "deserts."[1] In important ways, this image parallels how political liberals speak of "intractable" conflict. Just as liberal citizenship offers the lowest common denominator among "theories of the good," so does liberal globalization bridge the world's cultural diversity. For universal atomists, cosmopolitanism is a weapon in the global culture war.

To see how this cosmopolitanism works, let us revisit Fang Lizhi and Yan Jiaqi. Fang has claimed that liberal modernity cuts across all nations and ideologies. "Democracy" and "human rights" apply everywhere in the same way science does. "The spirit of science and reason and realism are bridging the gulf between faiths, dissolving the barriers between systems, tearing down the barbed-wire fences along borders. There is a tide in todays world, a rising tide of peace, democracy, reason, and tolerance." Fang condemned many of his compatriots for trying to insulate Chineseness from this encounter with the West.

Yan took a more vitriolic tack. In a 1988 interview, he called China an "unaspiring, boastful, stuck-in-the-mud country," suffocating under "the dregs of tradition" and "the intoxicating mist of dragon culture." He suggested that Confucian ideals of a morally perfect leader led to tyranny in practice. Modern science offered a counterweight to such folly. "Science can never intoxicate, because the truth is always clear and unmistakable." Authority should pass to "entrepreneurs, scientists, politicians, and social activists… [who] rely on their exceptional intelligence and arduous labors."[2] To Fang, Yan, and others of their milieu, universal standards give a reference point outside China. True for every culture, those standards can lend legitimacy to a new stratum of technocrats.

This cosmopolitanism has other examples too. One anthropologist has looked into the advantages that "transnationality" and "flexible citizenship" have for overseas Chinese, such as the multiple-passport holders of Hong Kong. Such people manipulate cultural capital from abroad and see mobility as an escape hatch. This mindset spills over beyond those who practice

such things themselves. Plenty of urban Chinese youth dream of going abroad to a promised land. And the Asian media serves up images as placeless as they are breathlessly commercialized. A Japanese journalist has noted that given the lack of a common Asian civilization before modernity, the areas integration is now happening on special terms: as a "hotbed of middle-class globalism."[3]

This mentality and its accompanying practices appear beyond eastern Asia too. In western Europe, migrant worker policy has reduced the weight of territorial citizenship. Rights attach to "postnational" identities and universal personhood. Millions of European Union citizens have burgundy passports that give them a free run of the continent from Dublin to Athens. The placeless logic permeates global mass media culture too. The head of Disney once said that "Disney characters strike a universal chord with children, all of whom share an innocence and openness before they become completely molded by their respective societies."[4] This history-ending mobile selfhood sets people free from the bonds of territory and social conditioning.

Explanations abound for what drives this globalizing mindset. One explanation focuses on underlying economic interests. The "metastate" of global capitalism favors cosmopolitanism as a way of making all cultural symbols and experiences convertible, "baptized in the acidic ocean of monetary liquidity."[5] Another explanation focuses on a different form of power, that of "cosmopolitans" over "locals." In that theory, "global" cultures serve mainly to bridge more parochial cultures, and to give people like the "organization men" of transnational corporations a sense of mastery and prestige. "Cosmopolitans" have leverage over "locals" because they claim broader horizons, and can enter and leave settings at will. "Conspicuously is surrender abroad a form of mastery at home."[6]

I think today's globalizing mentality does often serve wealth and power. But we can understand it more fully by looking at its *content*. How does "globalization" differ from, say, the way mystics or philosophers used to look beyond their own cultures before modernity? Now on one level, much of its content is thin and incoherent. As one historian has noted, unlike pre-modern "universal" empires such as Rome or China, global culture now is "a mélange of disparate components drawn from everywhere and nowhere." Global media may throw around images, but those images hardly stir people in the same way as national or civilizational myths.[7]

Still, looked at more deeply, globalization has its own logic, very different from the cosmopolitanism of perfectionists and virtuocrats before modernity. When such adventurers, as mystics or philosophers or principled unifiers, took an interest in other cultures, they did so constructively. They probed other ways of life, occasionally borrowing from them, for the sake of pursuing their own ends better. Ends were universal, so cosmopolitanism meant taking the variety of paths to them seriously.

Today's atomist cosmopolitanism has quite another aim. By exposing cultures to one another, it challenges "the unexamined feeling that one's own preferences and ways are neutral and natural." This is an openness of debunking. Universal atomists have a fetish for marginality. Migrants and others in a "liminal" space among identities help undercut national essences. As Bharucha puts it, "interculturalism" is all about "disrupting the primordialities." Kristeva agrees that a postmodern "polyvalent community" contrasts with the "weird primal paradise" of more bounded identities. In this vein, Liu Zaifu calls himself a "crevice figure." His marginality

among cultures is liberating, because it makes him skeptical of the peak ideals in any one of them. One who lives in a crevice cannot take himself seriously, and from that self-irony comes creativity. And as one Jamaican thinker puts it, the new cosmopolitan self "stands as an affront to the images codified and made sacred by the culture at large. I become in essence an offence at large."[8] Granted, these statements push the prevailing mentality to an extreme. But at that extreme we find an important clarity. This idea of marginality as offence, as disruption, as debunking, as a war on truth, sets universal atomism apart from older non-atomist universalisms that looked abroad to see truth better.

The appeal of the cosmopolitan atomist novelists, such as Naipaul, Vargas Llosa, Rushdie, Isabel Allende, and Gao Xingjian, reflects this outlook. Literary critics have noted that despite some political differences, these writers have much common ground. They all celebrate the hybridity of postcolonial migrants, turn everyone into an "other," and engage in a "perpetual flight from a fixed national and ideological identity." Naipaul has cultivated this image most carefully over the years. Living *in* the British metropole but not *of* it, he presents himself as "qualified to speak as a 'universal man' in whom all the vectors of geographical bias are perfectly canceled."[9] In a 1990 speech on "Our Universal Civilization," he praised the emerging global culture as one of doubt. It uproots people from tradition and turns their unease into personal responsibility. Crisis and marginality set people free. "Other more rigid systems in the end blow away."[10] Atomist cosmopolitanism is an openness of unease and uprootedness and discrediting.

All this cosmopolitan cant has an ironic ring, even beyond the intended irony of self-distancing. For one thing, universal atomists scorn exactly the bounded, national identities that served their vanguard atomist forerunners so well. They write of "claustrophobic" nationalism as "one of the human aberrations that has made the most blood flow," of "live volcanoes of fanaticism," and of the "docility" of those who "identify with a group too dumbly or too passionately."[11] Yet for vanguard atomists earlier, ironically, the nation-state was a pillar of their global project. Only by fragmenting identity and shrinking horizons, at the time, could atomists shatter the great civilizations that had kept them in check. Only by appealing to national identity could they dilute the more local bonds of demots, and harness the latter to their assault on high cultures. Only with national units and a continuity of folk culture, could the atomist project at the time keep its momentum and its image of linear progress.

Today's atomist thinkers have a convenient amnesia. They dismiss national identities, a residue of the atomist-demotic alliance, as mere cesspools of demotic solidarity. But demots do not naturally operate on a scale above kin and community. No peasant churns himself into a fury about his country's standing in the world; that is a pastime of different creatures altogether. Most nationalistic fanaticism rests less on genuine solidarity among people than on a notion of sameness with high walls around it. At midcentury, that walled-off sameness gave enough of a sense of continuity in each country to make vanguard atomists' agenda seem less abrupt. Atomists' view of nationalism has changed because while their strategy in the 1940s called for "going to the people," their strategy today calls for "going abroad."

The mental map has changed in another way too, having to do with how to explain the unevenness of modernity over the globe. Bridgehead atomists imagined themselves as islands of good sense in a sea of medieval oppression. They saw Europe's atomist breakthrough as just that:

universal truth had broken through there first, while other civilizations stayed frozen and now needed thawing. This was roughly the view of Hu Shi, Bilbao, and Ahmad Khān. Later, vanguard atomists saw their project more as a universal, linear process in which the West led the way. Loosely, the two phases map on to how strong and confident atomists were. Bridgehead atomists were fighting an uphill battle, in which they found strength by linking up for the first time across world regions. Vanguard atomists in the 1940s looked back on uneven gains, and needed to keep their momentum while resistance on all sides burned itself out. With the last reframing, universal atomists have now resumed some of the rhetoric of bridgehead atomists. Again they insist that atomism is a truth latent in all cultures. But while bridgehead atomists raised the universalist banner with a trembling hand, universal atomists raise it in the confidence that history's end draws near.

This is a kind of horizontal dispersion of the atomist project across all cultures. Atomists now see both their project and their enemy as place-less. These assumptions recur in journalism, in abstract theories of "human rights," and in the windy rhetoric of Western leaders about liberal democracy's appeals to all cultures. Universal atomists trace "battle lines between the forces of communitarian conformity and the growing network of free-thinking, autonomy-asserting individualists everywhere." Cultures no longer jockey for position along the path of progress. Everywhere, the real contest is between "different versions" of each culture, between liberal enlightenment and antimodern intolerance. Since the fault line cuts across cultures, the postwar boundary between core and periphery, between the European-American-Soviet models and their Southern imitators, no longer holds.[12] In this vein, many observers of globalization note that the core has been "decentered," and that cultural flows have taken on a "fractured and fragmented" color. Many intellectual fashions of our time now appear just as much in the Pacific Rim and the South as in the old north Atlantic core. And Southern academics have sought and won respectability in Northern academia since the 1980s, as voices of "postcolonialism" and the like.[13]

What purpose does this blurring of boundaries serve? Some writers of a vaguely Marxist persuasion argue that the new multicultural imagery is "one more device to conceal liberal self-deception." The structure of the global economic order has not changed just because the nation-state has lost ground to transnational corporations, or because many Asians, Africans, and Latin Americans have joined the ranks of the world's elites. At most, the new fluidity reflects "the deployment of culture in intraelite struggles within a context of shared economic interests." Capitalist elites in the South have more power now than a few decades ago, and can demand more space in the global imagination.[14]

Some evidence does suggest this blurring of boundaries aligns with economic interests. As far back as 1975, during the last reframing, an American diplomat wrote an article in *Foreign Affairs* proposing how to deal with the developing world s "collective cry of defiance" against the West. He argued for co-opting Southern elites by including them in the project of sustaining global capitalism.[15] And in 1990, the *Economist* attacked the idea, popular among some leftists, of a "North-South" divide in the world. It worried that thinking in such categories would encourage policies hostile to global capitalism.[16] While such examples do not say much on their own, it seems fair to conclude that this sort of cosmopolitanism does not harm global capital and probably helps it. One need not imagine, as some Marxists might, that bankers and CEOs sit

around polished conference tables plotting how to prod global cultural trends in useful directions. Most of the shift is unconscious, a cumulative product of the assumptions that atomist decision makers and intellectuals bring to their treatment of specific issues.

These assumptions unfold in many layers of the atomist project. Take the ideas floating around cultural diversity, for example. The "diversity" that has been played up over the last two decades is quite superficial, whether in the "world music" section of CD shops, the marketing of "traditional" folk crafts, or most kinds of tourism. Many studies have found that this cross-cultural curiosity traffics in "staged authenticity," stripping away real cultural contexts. Sparkles of difference punctuate a flat global commercial space.[17] While descriptions of these patterns normally treat the global market as the driving force, the deeper mentality is just as important. As the head of Coca-Cola's international advertising division once said, "the motivation is to have a common idiom, but not necessarily the same look." Fukuyama likewise said that alongside the history-ending uniformity of capitalism and liberal democracy, diversity would endure: a diversity in which "the French can continue to savor their wines and the Germans their sausages."[18]

This outlook, atomist to its core, treats culture as a possession of its bearer, just as political liberalism treats a "theory of the good" as a possession of the liberal citizen. The global capitalist economy fragments meanings and identities, then "markets" those fragments as mere tastes. When universal atomists talk of cultural heritage, they do not mean a comprehensive ethical universe that gives the self content and imposes demands on it. Heritage instead serves as an identity that colors the self, much like a fashion accessory.

Take how Chinese universal atomists see Chineseness. Li Zehou, a philosopher and leading aesthetic Marxist, says culture has a place in modern life. But he phrases the goal as *xītǐ zhōngyòn*, or "Western essence and Chinese application." This reverses the late nineteenth century traditionalist idea of *zhōngtǐ xīyòn*, which meant putting Western technology in the service of Chinese values. Li makes clear that the word "Western" is only shorthand, for modernity is universal. *Xītǐ zhōngyòn* means taking universal modernity and applying with an eye to local conditions. He thinks that strategy better than the extremes of either total Westernization or trying to preserve a Chinese essence, Unsurprisingly, Li links *xītǐ zhōngyòn* to "socialism with Chinese characteristics" the pro-market reformist slogan of the 1980s and 1990s. It is as local spicery that Chinese culture can continue, so long as it does not block the substance of global modernity.[19] Such is the logic of today's atomist globe: a kaleidoscope of color but no variety in what lies beneath.

Historian and dissident Bao Zunxin agrees with Li. Modernizers can draw on *parts* of Confucianism, but they must smash it as a coherent system. He takes issue most with what he calls the "ethical centralism" of traditional Chinese culture. As a package, its demands dampen the "creative" free subject-hood of modern life. This mentality appears outside China too. One Indian writer has said that he cares far less about the "survival" of any culture *itself*, than about individuals who happen to be "survivors" *from* that culture. Proper diversity is a diversity of "artifacts," not of "straitjacketed community grids" and "collective masochism." Likewise, a Latin American counterpart has insisted that globalization does not destroy tradition. It just turns tradition into a more fluid identity. As she put it, "what we are is what we are right now."[20] In

atomist thinking, people must refuse to treat traditions as comprehensive and timeless wholes, for such wholes impose too many demands.

The "globalization" of the atomist project lifts the burdens that go with more bounded cultures. In this thinking, diversity means fragmentation and a freeing of the self to pick and choose from "artifacts." But this cosmopolitanism has another, perhaps more important, motive behind it: it shores up a claim to legitimacy. Remember that part of the earlier backlash against vanguard atomism challenged the image of linear modernization. If developed Western countries embodied modernity better than the rest of the world, perhaps modernity was not so universal after all. The "globalizing" shift since the last reframing has let atomists answer this challenge. Images of "multiculturalism" and decentered "diversity" suggest that atomism is rooted everywhere and thus belongs everywhere. Atomist intellectuals outside the north Atlantic now say, for example, that the postmodern temper is not an import but rather "always" present in their own regions.[21]

Just because universal atomism belongs everywhere does not mean, of course, that it looks equally kindly on all parts of the world. Eastern Asia has enjoyed pride of place in the atomist imagination for the last two decades. Not long ago, atomists suspected Confucian culture blocked capitalist modernity, that it was hidebound and resistant to progress. Now, global liberals make much of the region's rapid economic growth. They search for reasons why China's periphery, the crescent of trading states from Taiwan to Singapore, has shown such dynamism.[22] Admiration for the so-called Tigers appears even in unlikely corners of the world. In his 1990 presidential campaign, Vargas Llosa said Peru should learn from across the Pacific.[23]

Eastern Asia occupies a crucial place in the psyche of today's atomists, quite beyond the vindication of free trade that some—questionably—find in it. Here they see a major non-Western civilization that modernizes but keeps some superficial differences from the north Atlantic. Conveniently, it shows that atomism resonates anywhere. The capitalist boom in eastern Asia has proved more useful, ideologically, than would have a capitalist boom in such semi-Western areas as Russia or South America. Western atomists make much of finding corresponding strands of thought in eastern Asia, despite its exoticism. Kristeva and Paz, for example, have admired the supposed pragmatic relativism in Chinese culture, the fluidity of Daoism, the focus on the moment.[24] And Asian religions like Buddhism have gained ground among the Western upper-middle classes since the 1970s, even though one critic has rightly noted that their version of Buddhism seems more like a license for self-absorption.[25]

If eastern Asia is universal atomists' dream region, then the Islamic world is their nightmare. This attitude goes well beyond the knee-jerk stereotypes of "Qur'ān-screaming" fundamentalists, or statements that "the Qur'ān is food for no-thought."[26] It also long predates the spectacular bloodletting by al-Qā'idah on 9/11. The underlying reason is that Islam's image contradicts the whole idea of a placeless atomist victory. Even Fukuyama acknowledged that "Islamo-fascism" is a gap in the consensus of history's end.[27] Universal atomists everywhere share this disdain for Islam. From his Mexican vantage point, Paz called it "the most obstinate form of monotheism," an exception to "the vast relativist civilization" gaining ground elsewhere.[28] What seems to offend universal atomists most is Islam's resilience as an ethical system, rather than an easily manipulable grab-bag of "artifacts." Its revealed scriptural basis makes it hard to reinterpret in a way that releases atomists from its demands. The survival of a largely uncontaminated Islamic

high culture among the clergy also gives a certain robustness and confidence. Atomists face stauncher resistance here than in other regions.

One last example of universal atomists' different images of different parts of the world also bears mentioning. They are remarkably fond of so-called “global tribes,” such as overseas Chinese and Indians, or outwardly mobile nations like Britain and Japan. Liu Zaifu celebrates the historic marginality of Jews in the West. Other writers see a new importance in “transmigrants,” people who keep one foot in a country of origin and the other in a country of settlement.[29] This fascination ties in with atomist cosmopolitanism, which exalts a certain kind of person: uprooted, mobile, with a sense of creative marginality and transgression. Sometimes the portrayal of diaspora cultures as transgressive is just atomist wishful thinking. Other times, when their experiences do favor this outlook, their networks can aid global atomist influence, wittingly or unwittingly.

Taken in all its aspects, the upsurge of cosmopolitan thinking over the last three decades helps the atomist project greatly. It fits into the requirements of universal atomisms social base: the world's new upper-middle strata. The global ramifying of atomism's supposed roots enhances their political leverage. They link up across borders, as a single cultural force aware of its placelessness. “Rimspeak” talk about the Asia-Pacific region is a case in point. The mental map of Pacific Rim integration links global capital in a “class-based archipelago” of coastal trading ports, from Melbourne to Singapore to Hong Kong, while the ties between those ports and their hinterlands weaken. Elites in the Asia-Pacific take more notice of one another than of their compatriots.[30] While most analyses of “Rimspeak” focus on economic interests and class conflict, the pattern roughly maps on to how universal atomism works as a cultural force.

Vanguard atomists saw themselves as leading their respective countries along a path of linear progress. Sometimes those countries jostled with one another, trying to “arrive” as soon as possible in the core end-state. Now, universal atomists have much weaker ties to any country. They staff branch offices of a global cultural project. We can draw a loose analogy to premodern ethnic identities. Historian Anthony D. Smith has distinguished between “vertical” and “lateral” “ethnies.” Vertical ethnies prefigured modern nationalism by uniting all classes in a given territory. Lateral ethnies were minorities, such as Norman knights or Jewish or Armenian diasporas, that cut across several territories.[31] While atomism is not an ethnic identity, we could say that vanguard atomists had a “vertical” image of progressive nationhood, and universal atomists have a “lateral” image of globalization.

This lateral self-understanding of universal atomists has a lot to do with how they dominate. Research on migration has explored the “politics of mobility,” the “socio-spatial hierarchies” that it generates. People with global networks have more leverage than people with parochial horizons.[32] Thus universal atomists sprinkle their writings with foreign phrases; or political leaders invoke “world opinion” as much as they do electorates at home; or globalization enthralls Southern intellectuals who seek validation from European and American academia; or Chinese liberals liken their compatriots to a frog in a well, who cannot imagine the breadth of the “blue ocean” of global modernity.[33] Atomists today have networks far wider than those of any resistance. Their last reframing succeeded. It let them escape the pressures welling up in the postwar nation-states, and stay one step above their opponents. The unconverted are not just backward and ill-intentioned; they are provincial too.

To see the panorama of riches that the whole world has to offer, people must surrender to a specifically *atomist* universalism. How many upwardly mobile youths in the developing world feel they have to adopt an entirely different persona, alien to their original values, if they are to reach out to other cultures? When Arab students, even devout Muslims, study abroad they often get rid of the *thaub* and don jeans for reasons that run deeper than avoiding the tiresome stares of passers-by. Another historical analogy offers itself. One historian used the term "cultural gradient" to describe how medieval Islam gained converts locally by keeping its cohesion across vast distances, through networks of rulers and merchants. Because of its "prestige on the widest horizons," more provincial identities gravitated toward it.[34] Much the same thing is happening now with global liberal culture, to ill effect.

Global liberals eagerly beat this drum of a monopoly on universalism. Fukuyama proclaimed that "liberal democracy remains the only coherent political aspiration that spans different regions and cultures around the globe." Illiberal leaders and movements can speak for one culture at a time, if anything.[35] This image of the world swiftly dismisses those who stand in the way of an atomist hereafter. Thus the American diplomat Anthony Lake called the exceptions to liberalism "backlash states… [that] seek to thwart or quarantine themselves from a global trend to which they seem incapable of adapting."[36] Modern atomisms greatest strength, and greatest vulnerability, lies here. As long as it keeps its monopoly on universalism, it will stay out of reach of any resistance that rises to challenge it.

Finally, we must make sense of how atomists today talk about history. Their ethos dominates now as never before, yet to ground itself properly it has to acquire an image of timelessness, by redefining the largely non-atomist past. Just as the atomist order cuts across cultural spaces, so must it be presented as above history—or, perhaps more fittingly, below history.

Now from one standpoint, we should not expect universal atomists to show much interest in such grand narratives. As the social theorist Mannheim observed decades ago, ruling classes that have already risen tend to see history as unrelated events. Only those whose time is yet to come see purposes unfolding in history. The tone of late modern culture also seems at odds with grand history. Analysts of today's market mentality have found "an eternal consumerist simultaneity," and an image of time as a flat continuum punctuated by sensation-driven experiences. Many atomist intellectuals today also profess what the French postmodernist Jean-François Lyotard called an "incredulity toward metanarratives." History dissolves into "little narratives" and "language games."[37]

One way universal atomists handle history is to revive how bridgehead atomists cursed the past as a tale of brutality and stupor. The present owes its legitimacy precisely to the fact that it breaks away from the past. This approach inspired the Chinese television documentary *Heshang (River Elegy)*, which has become an icon of Chinese liberalism. Broadcast twice in 1988, the six-part series was richly symbolic. On the one hand, the turbulent Yellow River and yellow earth of the Chinese mainland stood for insularity, repression, and a poverty of the imagination. On the other hand, the blue ocean represented global openness. *Heshang* suggested that these two forces had contended throughout Chinese history. Yellow benightedness had kept the creativity and cosmopolitanism of the blue ocean in check. Now, at last, "a great tidal wave" would sweep away the old values and bring "a brand-new civilization."

Interestingly, however, the writers of *Heshang* were talking about more than just China. They said in passing that its "ethical centralism" and "land-based civilization" had appeared elsewhere too, such as in ancient Egypt and among the Maya. But those civilizations had already yielded. "It is not that Chinese civilization is particularly unique. Its long existence is just the final struggle of the entire ancient world."[38] *Heshang* showed the same iconoclastic temper as bridgehead atomists, in depicting the past as a swamp of repression that needed flushing out. But unlike bridgehead atomists, the *Heshang* writers made a bit more of their enemy's placelessness, because of the avowedly cosmopolitan turn in the last couple of decades.

This disdain for the past is not especially creative. Other atomist narratives in recent years have done a better job of matching the atomist project's "globalized" dispersion across space with a historical dispersion across time. This historical dispersion tries to find an atomist spirit in all eras. A century ago, bridgehead atomists like Hu Shi had dug up a few ancient forerunners, to be sure, but those forerunners had been few and far between. They supposedly proved that what bridgehead atomists wanted was more than a fad from the West. Today, universal atomists need something different. Having won an apparent victory, they have to legitimize atomism as *the* latent truth in history. They need to escape the past by laying claim to another version of it, so to speak.

Some Southern postmodernists do this just by saying that things like "magical realism" have always been present in the everyday turbulence of their cultures.[39] Other writers claim only part of the past. A leading Egyptian literary critic, for example, drew a contrast between the supposed true Egypt of the Nile, with its tolerance and "urban haggling," and the "fanatic" fundamentalist Islam that surged out of the Arabian desert. Likewise, the Japanese finance official Sakakibara Eisuke claimed that the "global networking of Islamic, Indian, and Chinese merchants" in premodern Asia foreshadowed capitalist globalization. And the prominent Chinese liberal political theorist Li Shenzhi dug up "another China" obscured beneath all the stories of sages and stolid peasants. He suggested that the real motor of Chinese history had been the "vagrant" floating population, with its irreverent energy.[40] Universal atomists everywhere have a stake in claiming the past, or at least a good chunk of it. They are like nouveaux riches on the stage of history who must dig out a respectable genealogy after arriving.

Blurring boundaries and finding forerunners helps, but universal atomists need more. They have to show some instances of past atomist *assertion*. If atomism resonates everywhere, then every region of the world should have generated something along the lines of an indigenous atomist liberalism—not just some latent elements compatible with it in hindsight. Only by painting that picture can universal atomists undercut their opposition. Heaven forbid that antiliberal traditionalists still appeal to a cultural "essence" at odds with today's project. To secure their rule, universal atomists must "de-essentialize" those traditions, dissolving whatever was once thought to define them.

Some efforts to do this have involved looking for early sprouts of capitalism, independent of the West. Thus tales are told of the growing power and respectability of merchants in China during the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries. With respect to the Islamic world, we read of early "Islamic liberalism" and a supposed indigenous capitalism around the late 1700s. Or, on a broader scale, those who want to find the market everywhere claim the "spirit of capitalism" was "intrinsic to the culture" throughout premodern Eurasia.[41] Such historical alchemy amounts to

"finding" assertive atomism in history by seeing things for what they "really" were. Any claims by antiliberal traditionalists lose a firm reference point. Universal atomists want to blur the very *content* of the traditions that might stand in their way.

In the last chapter, we saw that the penetration of atomism into demotic popular culture has two prongs. One prong treats demots as *already* atomists, as hagglers and hedonists crushed by tradition. The other prong aims to *convert* demots into atomists, by bringing to bear the full weight of commerce, education, therapy, and the like. The strategic use of history to legitimize atomism also has two tracks. Apart from "finding" instances of atomism within each culture's past, it also tries actively to rewrite the major traditions. This rewriting has proved especially important in the culture war against Islam. Islam offers some of the strongest resistance to atomist globalization, because it rests on a coherent written tradition that will continue serving antiliberal aims unless reinterpreted from within. As an article in one liberal journal noted, "fundamentalism's greatest strength lies in the failure of secularized Muslims to create a strong, historically secure, and competitive identity."[42] When Western state-building efforts in the Middle East profess sympathy for "moderate Muslims," this strategic rewriting of tradition is usually implied.

Two spokesmen represent this effort to revise Islam from within: the Indian Muslim philosopher Akeel Bilgrami, and the Sudanese legal scholar 'Abdallāh Aḥmad al-Na'īm. Bilgrami argues that secular states need to stop ignoring religion, and instead use Islamic language against traditionalists. This effort will succeed by "unsettling [Muslims] into awareness of their own internal inconsistencies so as to eventually provide for a common secular outcome." Al-Na'īm applies the same strategy to human rights. For a liberal theory of rights to take root, that theory must penetrate cultures in "a process of retroactive legitimation." Liberals must counter most Muslims' sense that liberalism comes from outside their own tradition. Of course, al-Na'īm does not deign to think the substance of liberalism itself will change, just because some local color gets added. He seeks, rather, to "verify and substantiate the genuine universality of the existing standards."[43] Recall the quite similar thinking of Chinese liberals who call for *xītǐ zhōngyòng*, or "Western essence and Chinese application": a universal vision, with token adaptations so it can take root everywhere and seem less alien.

What does this rewriting of Islam mean, concretely? Let us take the proposals of al-Na'īm's mentor, the Sudanese thinker Maḥmūd Muhammad Tāhā. He argued that Islam has two messages. The "first message" is the orthodox Islam of rituals and proscriptions, based largely on the *aḥādith* and the Medina verses of the Qur'ān. According to Tāhā, this "first message" was meant for a specific, unenlightened Arab community of the seventh century. Tāhā said a quite different "second message" came from the original revelations in Mecca, some years before Medina. It transcended time and place, and focused on personal development, freedom, and tolerance. Tāhā thought that in modern times, people could revive the second message and cast off the constraints of seventh century custom.[44]

This appeal back to the "original" intent of Mecca—which al-Na'īm also uses—may be sincere, or it may be just a rhetorical inlet for an atomist agenda. On that one has to make one's own judgments. Still, the strategy is quite creative. Tāhā rewrote Islamic tradition by going back to a specific point in time: Mecca. Going earlier, say to the older prophets, would have made it impossible to present the "second message" as history's culmination—just as the Qur'ān was

presented at the time as the last great revelation. Going later would have left intact too much of the cleric-centered Islamic civilization that came after Muḥammad. Of course, for all its creativity, this kind of rewritten history does not involve a new vision. The vision is already there in universal atomism. What rewritten history offers is more local color, and above all a "de-essentialising" of traditions as a base of resistance to the atomist project.

Even if one buys all these kinds of historical dispersion—the blurred boundary between present and past, the premodern quasi-liberalisms, the rewritten traditions—one question still lingers. How did a human nature so inherently receptive to atomism generate repressive folly through most of history, at least as an official overlay? To answer this question, universal atomists have to distinguish between the *essence* of the past and the *traditions* that claim to embody the past. Visible history must conceal a truer history. Otherwise, timelessness would mean the persistence of age-old patterns.

One answer is Fukuyama's idea that liberalism marks the "end of history"—"end" being both the last stage and the built-in purpose. The twin goals of comfort and dignity are at last realizable now that social conditions have changed.[45] The timeless essence triumphs at last, with capitalist development and liberal democracy. Liberals who defend theories of human rights use a parallel approach. They have to account for the lack of a theory of human rights in traditional ethics, while still insisting that human rights correspond to inherent human needs. Here they tend to distinguish between the liberal *language* and *concepts* of human rights, on the one hand, and the human *facts* that make the concept appealing.[46] Thus the novelty of liberal ideology today is quite compatible with an atomist essence in history, barely appreciated at the time. This way, liberals can cast their vision *both* as vulnerable and in need of defense against people of ill will, *and* as timeless and standing above any alternatives. Fervor and legitimacy meet.

Three differences between universal atomists and their predecessors bear emphasizing. First, compared to bridgehead atomists, who just needed to gain a foothold in history by finding marginal and suppressed currents—the way Hu Shi talked about Mohism in ancient China, for instance—universal atomists must do more. They must deny non-atomists the foothold of one or another essentialism. Today s new grand narrative appeals, therefore, to impulses latent in the mainstream of a culture, such as the haggling merchants. Or it claims to revive truths obscured since a founding moment, such as the original Mecca revelations. It attacks its opponents where it hurts most: at the heart of their traditions.

Second, bridgehead atomists limited their search for forerunners to their own regions: Hu in China, Bilbao in Latin America and Catholicism, Aḥmad Khān in Islam, and so on. Universal atomists today, operating as branch offices of a worldwide movement, look everywhere. The arguments about liberalism in Islam, or China, or elsewhere, come from foreign commentators just as often as from local thinkers. Atomists the world over have a stake in proving that atomism cuts across space and time.

Third, compared to vanguard atomism, the story now deals less with progress than with permanent atomist self-understandings. History is no longer momentum; it is eternal atomist essence. This shift reflects the fulfillment of atomists' cultural vision among the dominant strata. Their project is now a dispersion, a spreading or consolidation of their ideal, not a becoming.

They need to secure legitimacy, to stop history rather than to push it onward. Dispersing meanings in history scatters the initiative that history might give to their opponents.

Most likely, global atomism is close to maturity. The details may change over time, to be sure. Unlikely though it seems now, atomists a few decades hence might temper global capitalism and strengthen safety nets for the poor. Or atomism might take a spiritual turn, with pietistic or New Age religions gaining ground. But atomism will not turn into something other than atomism. All else being equal, a church-going social democrat in 2050 could still be just as much of an atomist as any of today's stockbrokers or counterculture bohemians.

A true alternative must arise from outside atomism, from the other three ethoses. Such an alternative must be just as placeless, just as timeless, as global atomism. It must appeal to the better human aspirations in all their diversity. And, not least, it must prevent atomists from outmaneuvering their opponents yet again. In the next two chapters, I shall explain why the loudest resistance to atomism today fails on all these counts.

Chapter 7

Modernity's Malcontents

The last three chapters showed that in the global cultural shift of the late 1960s to early 1980s, atomists broke their earlier alliance with demots. Opting to go it alone, they have taken up a new creed of rootlessness and individualism. Demotic ideas have been cast out from the dominant vision of globalization. The plain folk whom atomists once counted as allies in a war against high cultures have now turned into mere historical leftovers, objects to be kept in check, occasionally scorned, and eventually converted.

Now we can look at the other side of the fault line. The "backward" groups that universal atomists now assault have not meekly resigned themselves to history's end. Indeed, the end of the postwar pacts has let populist and fundamentalist movements lash out with a clean conscience against the global order. This chapter will trace the contours of today's main social and intellectual reactions *against* global atomist culture. I cannot cover all the nuances of these movements and thinkers, of course. Rather, the point is to explore the parallel ways they make sense of the modern world. Despite important differences, they occupy roughly the same position in the global culture war.

It is admittedly unusual to lump together populists and fundamentalists from different parts of the world, let alone militants and intellectual spokespersons who operate on very different levels. Most academic "area experts" examine them in isolation, for example, throwing in at most the odd passing comparison. To treat them with sympathy is rarer still in such circles. Even when political scientists and sociologists do the rare comparative study of antiliberal reaction, such as studies of religious fundamentalism in several countries, they tend to look askance at what they examine. By and large, Western scholars and their fellow travelers have far more sympathy for atomist liberalism, for the comfort of history's end, than for its opponents. Turban-wearing malcontents get unflattering portrayals in the academic conference halls of Chicago and Melbourne. Such studies imply that resistance flourishes only because something went wrong on the march to Utopia. They try to understand backlashes so as better to avoid them.

Obviously I have a very different aim here. Just as I explored universal atomism with an eye to its pressure points, so does my account of the resistance tie into a political project. We shall see that that resistance has failed to offer a compelling alternative vision, and has unwittingly shored up global atomism by challenging it on the wrong level.

Lest I be misunderstood, I should say at the outset that while I think atomists are on the wrong side of history, I do not see their present opponents as entirely on the right side of history. Quite apart from failing strategically, they have more basic flaws of vision. Nonetheless, I do take their grievances against the present order seriously, and share many of them. Many of their goals could even fit into the alternative I shall outline later, though I suspect the reverse is rarely true. Readers already partial to any of these movements may feel that I am too harsh, too unforgiving of devout and tradition-minded people who are trying their best to navigate difficult times. Be that as it may, I hope at least to provoke reflection on what those discontented with today's arrangements really want, how they might get it, and where they might look for natural allies.

What are these clusters of resistance? First and most visible, of course, is *Islamism*.* Political movements under an Islamic banner proliferated after the late 1960s, especially as secular "Arab socialism" fell into crisis with the Six Day War. Today Islamists stake their claims from western Africa to central Asia, and from Turkey to Indonesia. As a force of resistance, Islamism centers on a cluster of popular movements and activist networks, and the intellectuals who give them voice. They are unapologetically at odds with the regimes that govern most Muslim-majority countries, and with the global order in which those regimes are anchored. Islamists call for establishing what they see as Islamically correct societies, based on guidelines in the Qur'ān and the example of the Prophet Muhammad. The often spectacular violence of groups like al-Qā'idah is an important, but by no means the only or most widely supported, tactic of resistance.

The second cluster of resistance, *Hindutva* (Hinduness), arose as a political label as far back as the 1920s, though its present importance in India really dates to the 1980s and 1990s. Here I shall use Hindutva to cover the cluster of movements, organizations, and parties that challenge the existing form of Indian secularism. They include cultural networks like the Viśva Hindu Parisad (VHP), militant orders like the Rastriya Swayangsevak Sangh (RSS), and parts of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Hindutvadis call for giving due weight to the Hindu culture of India's majority. They would correct the alien secularism that they blame on the Western-educated rulers of India since independence.

The third cluster has nothing to do with religion and, unlike the first two, never appears in comparative studies of fundamentalism. We saw earlier that atomism has gained ground in China faster than almost anywhere else over the last two decades. Two reactions have formed against it since the 1990s. One is an upsurge in *Chinese nationalism*, a backlash against China's cosmopolitan upper-middle classes and against a West-centered international order. The other is a *moralistic, egalitarian critique* of capitalism and the new technocracy. These two currents do not always overlap, though they align and often share the same lower-middle class supporters. Politically they remain inchoate, despite some feeble efforts at political organizing after 1999.

In Latin America, the main counterpart today is *Amerindian resurgence*. By global standards, these movements have a tiny base, resting on the forty million or so Amerindians† who are concentrated in the Andes and Me-soamerica. Political assertion by these movements—mainly under Maya, Quechua, and Aymara banners—started roughly in the early 1970s. They took center stage after Latin American Marxism faltered in the late 1980s. Their claims revolve around remaking liberal nation-states to enhance group cultural rights. Ideologically, the Amerindian movements are softer than their counterparts elsewhere in the global South. They have been least at ease with a violent seizure of power, and most likely to use liberal language to appeal to foreign sympathizers.

Despite the atomist face that the West presents to the rest of the world, it has plenty of discontent at home. The last of the five clusters of resistance comes out of the West. It includes obvious suspects like fervent nationalist movements in Europe or the so-called Christian Right in America. But it also encompasses what we might call *communitarian* and *populist* responses to global liberalism. Communitarians criticize liberalism from within political philosophy and social theory. They have not sought political power, but do challenge liberal principles directly. By populism, I mean the political and cultural forces, such as those in rural Europe and the American heartland, that react against the rootless indulgence of the atomist upper-middle

classes. Communitarianism and populism do not always overlap, and indeed deal with different aspects of the liberal atomist project. Yet some thinkers bridge the two, and they do have a common enemy.

A sweeping account of these five resistance clusters does raise problems, to be sure. They have plenty of diversity, both internally and across regions, that I cannot fully treat here. Moreover, their supporters rarely see themselves as kindred spirits. Some, like Islamists and Hindutvadis in southern Asia, have attacked one another regularly. But even after taking these caveats into consideration, it is still striking how much these five reactions—and others of a populist and traditional flavor elsewhere—align with one another. Once we dig beneath the language they use, and beneath the immediate political issues that shift from year to year, we find a common ethical core and a common mental map. Comparing them will give a useful point of departure for thinking about what is at stake and how well certain strategies are working. By knowing where the global fault lines lie, we can start thinking about how to redraw them more usefully.

In examining today's resistances *as a group*, I take an approach quite unlike that of mainstream liberal social scientists. When they look at fundamentalisms, or other kinds of reaction, they harbor certain assumptions that I do not share. They tend to see these movements as backlashes against the inexorable pressure of cultural modernization. Development and mobility have disrupted old meanings. Groups that fare worst in times of rapid change yearn for some moral reference point that makes sense of their plight. Religious identities harden as they turn into anchors for people tossed about by modernity. The ways of life that liberal modernity first has on the run come back with a vengeance as intolerant ideologies. Fundamentalisms, nationalisms, efforts for cultural renewal, and so on, are thus explained as "revitalization movements."[1]

Of course, I do not want to overstate what is wrong with the social-science explanation of these pressures. Much of what such researchers say fits well enough into the story I shall tell here. Still, an undertone of their approach may not be immediately obvious. Recall that atomists often displace responsibility for cultural change on to history itself. Impersonal forces do the dirty work. The mainstream social scientists' view of antiliberal movements fits into this pattern. In their focus on processes like secularization and globalization, they obscure important fault lines. Saying that religious or nationalistic ideas give people an anchor in a chaotic world hardly does justice to how those ideas really move them. Individuals do not just grope their way through chaos and seize on one ideology after another. Motives go much deeper. These antiliberal reactions, just like the opposite force pressing against them, involve self-understandings that are woven into the fabric of people's lives. A global culture war rages between what amount to different types of people. Just as universal atomism rests on specific ethos-bearers, so does the backlash against it reflect the mentality of equally specific ethos-bearers, who deserve to be taken seriously as more than just road-bumps on the way to Utopia.

A natural place to start our exploration, then, is the social base of these antiliberalisms. Who lives on this side of the global fault line? Who resists the universal atomist forces described in earlier chapters? Obviously, these movements draw in people who find themselves at the margins of massive economic and cultural change. The atomist order not only has not delivered for these people, but also steadily assaults their values. The rank and file of Islamism and

Hindutva are discontented youth, the urban unemployed, rural-urban migrants, or others from the lower-middle class. They find themselves caught between tradition and consumerism, with the good prospects of neither. In China, similarly, most discontent comes from laid-off urban workers, whom the Maoist regime once hailed as the kernel of the proletariat, but who did not fare well under capitalist reforms in the 1990s. The Amerindian movements also draw their strength from people under cultural pressure and between worlds. Support for the Maya resurgence, for example, comes mainly from urban areas where the cultural pressure has been greatest and livelihoods least stable. [2]

Whatever the details locally, all these reactions come out of a clash between two worlds. On the one hand, these people face pressure from above. The economic disruption, the assimilation, the threatened values, are all products of the atomist offensive that we saw from the other side earlier. On the other hand, they have left the most traditional sectors of their societies, and have picked up some modern aspirations without being able to satisfy them.

The latter point has the important implication that, while marginal and discontented, these people are not the poorest of the poor. They do not include many peasants or so-called lumpenproletarians, or members of traditional underclasses like the dalits of India. Today's resistance movements rest mainly on the lower-middle classes in cities and small towns, with some education and some experience of mobility up from the bottom.[3] Indeed, the middling position of these movements' supporters accounts for whatever ideological creativity they have. Their precarious distance from untouched tradition and poverty makes them sensitive to the shortcomings of those less modern than themselves. They are eager to refine and purify customs, and to distance themselves from the stupor of blind habit. This resistance is neither rustic nor reactionary. At the same time, their place in sight of yet outside universal atomism puts them on the front lines of the global culture war. They bear the brunt of atomist pressure against their way of life. Resentment against those on the other side makes them look for ways to enter modernity on their own terms.

This awkward middling position becomes even clearer when we look at the movement leaders and intellectuals. Their educational experiences weave together perspectives both from their traditional cultures of origin and from global modernity. Amerindian movement leaders, for example, keep ties to the Latin American countryside whence they came and where most of their people still live. At the same time, they are the first literate and educated generation of Amerindians. The term "Maya hackers" has aptly described these Guatemalan activists' ease with both modern technology and the Maya culture they want it to serve. Mastering the Spanish language and other arts of the liberal state lets them mediate between worlds.

Or take the Islamist leaders and Chinese nationalist intellectuals. The Islamists do not come from the '*ulamā*', the traditional clergy. Usually they have had some childhood exposure to Qurānic schools, but otherwise belong to the lay, lower-middle intelligentsia. Their religious knowledge is largely self-taught, and disconnected from the meanings that surround more orthodox Islamic higher education. Yet they do not fit into the Westernized secular intelligentsia either, given their familiarity with Islamic doctrine and their belief that their version of Islam is binding on everyone. This sort of marginal intelligentsia, neither fish nor fowl, predominates in the Chinese resistance too. Chinese nationalist intellectuals tend to come from the same middle classes as their Islamist counterparts. They have personal experience of urban Chinese atomism,

and often have traveled to the West as students or visiting scholars. Unlike their foes, however, they have shallow and unhappy ties to the West because of language barriers and the like. They react with a backlash against cosmopolitanism and its beneficiaries. Much of the nationalistic temper involves trumpeting the merits of Chinese culture and asserting its parity with the dominant English-speaking West.[4]

The leaders of these movements have a particular kind of relationship with their popular bases. By and large, they present themselves as mere mouthpieces for the grievances of broad categories of people. Islamist intellectuals refer to "the conscience of the dynamic *ummah* and its revolutionary depths," Chinese nationalists to an "awakening among the people," and so on. The Amerindian leaders try to paper over obvious gaps between themselves and the overwhelmingly rural mass of ordinary Maya. The Maya linguist and activist Demetrio Cojti Cuxil, for example, questions the centuries-old overlap between Maya ethnicity and rural poverty, and belabors the point that upwardly mobile intellectuals can be just as Maya as poor peasants. The American historian and populist social critic Christopher Lasch did much the same thing. He claimed that he shared the values of austere lower-middle class life, with its ethic of limits. Condemning liberals' contempt for such a way of life, he put himself and sympathetic readers on the same side of the cultural fault line.[5]

Such rhetoric raises obvious questions. No doubt all these leaders and intellectuals have their private demons and resentments, given their position at the margins of the dominant culture. Still, they are not now—and many of them never were, biographically speaking—*part* of the groups most buffeted by modernity. No matter how populist their sympathies, intellectuals and high-level activists do not really have the same personal experience as a peasant near Titicaca, a migrant worker in Guangzhou, or a miner in West Virginia.

The American populists and Chinese nationalists show one typical way of bridging this gap. Often they tell a story of rediscovery, which has some parallels to how vanguard atomists of the 1940s claimed to rediscover demots as allies. The new story of rediscovery has quite the opposite point, however. In essence, these critics say that the upper-middle classes, such as the yuppies of San Francisco and Shanghai, have abandoned the national communities of an earlier era. They wax poetic about American solidarity under Eisenhower, or how New China pulled together after Liberation, and so on. The critics then proclaim their own folksy authenticity, unlike universal atomists who make a fetish of uprootedness and transgression. They have rediscovered truths that atomists forgot. They can then preach those truths stridently, on behalf of ordinary people who continue living them out every day.

Overall, then, these clusters of resistance pull together a range of middling and lower classes around the world, as well as some marginal intellectuals and activists. People who *consciously* identify with them might add up to a third or so of the worlds population. Certainly that makes them, in combination, the largest ideological bloc in terms of raw numbers. They have some diversity in their ranks, surely more diversity than the far-ranging but shallow social base of universal atomism. Indeed, their diversity shows just how many people not only have not benefited enough from the modern atomist project, but also experience that project as an assault. Most know that if universal atomists continue winning, their own ways of life will fade into oblivion.

More specifically, how do these people describe their grievances against the present order? Growing economic inequalities everywhere make exploitation one obvious theme. While these critics do not subscribe to a Marxist view of class struggle, they are well aware of the economic interests that the present global order serves. The Amerindian movements give a quite loose diagnosis of this problem. Mostly they complain that Latin America's political and military elites are in bed with a range of shadowy interests, from landowners to oil-drilling companies. They see the ongoing cultural assault on Amerindian peoples as part of a strategy to dominate them for financial gain.[6] In this sense, they have a quite dated sense of the enemy, as little different from the old business interests of fifty or a hundred years ago. Only a few of the Amerindian critics focus on the ever more important role of development economists and other technocrats.[7]

Their Chinese counterparts are more likely to identify a self-interested technocracy on the other side of the fault line. The economist and dissident journalist He Qinglian offers a typical moralistic critique of the new elites. She writes of a new social structure that has congealed over the last two decades. It has concentrated wealth and power in a corrupt technocracy made up of roughly one percent of China's population. Economic, cultural, and political capital fold in on one another. The new elite has cast social responsibility to the winds and no longer represents the people.[8]

For Chinese moralists in particular, the atomist technocracy does not offend only because of its power and irresponsibility. It also takes corruption to an obscene level. These writers lament how Chinese cadres and entrepreneurs have taken up bribery and the “marketization of power” as their joint pastime. In line with the tone of popular resentment around the world, these critiques tap into plain folk's sense of decency and restraint. The economic suffering of people who have lost ground to shrewder and more corrupt souls in the last twenty years overlaps with their moral indignation. Chinese antiliber-als describe these inequalities as due to betrayal and raw greed on the part of the powerful.[9] Much of this account does come out of China's peculiar conditions, of course. The fast pace of change there has highlighted many ills that remain less obvious in other parts of the world. But the underlying sense that power has been concentrated and morality thrust aside would no doubt resonate with people elsewhere.

To flesh out what is at stake, let us put the matter another way. Both universal atomists and these critics condemn corruption. Both want officialdom to run smoothly and responsibly. The nature of what offends them in corruption does differ, however. For atomists, on the one hand, corruption wreaks havoc on impersonal performance standards and predictable rewards, the stuff of which obedient self-seeking is made. An enterprising go-getter should be able to get her import license without paying a bribe to a surly bureaucrat. Atomists call for institutional reforms and the like, to make systems run better and channel the self-interested behavior of those occupying them in a useful direction. For them, it is all about efficiency and smoothly rewarding the right kind of ambition.

On the other hand, the moralistic critics see the problem not as a politicized market, but as marketized power. They might agree on redesigning institutions to combat corruption. But officials’ moral decay and disregard for the common good get most of their attention. That a cadre would even think of reselling medicines so he can get the latest mobile phone troubles them far more than the lax accounting that makes it easy for him to get away with it. The critique

goes inward, to an infection of the soul. It shows more sensitivity to the changes in outlook that atomist gains have produced.

So far how these antiliberals view their enemies should not surprise us. Most of the account is just the realities of universal atomism, seen now through the lens of these peoples own concerns. Unlike universal atomism, however, this side of the fault line lacks a certain cross-cultural unity. These critics focus on how atomist culture manifests itself locally, and lose sight of its global coherence. Their vision resembles the old Indian folk tale in which seven blind men grope around different parts of an elephant and get no idea of the whole animal. Indeed, regional antiliberals seem to take issue less with an enemy global in scale, than with local enemies who add an offensive cosmopolitanism to their other misdeeds.

Examples abound. Hindutvadis target the "pseudo-secularist" foreign-educated elite, "effete imitators" who admire the West as much as they look down on India's majority. Chinese nationalists and moralists resent the tiny minority who celebrate their uprootedness and everything foreign. Western communitarians and populists attack "citizens of nowhere," the comfortable upper-middle class with its "tourist's view of the world." Islamists say the same thing but with a twist. Starting with the Egyptian Islamist Sayyid Quṭb a generation ago, they have distinguished between true Muslims, who actually live by the precepts of the faith, and those merely nominal Muslims who have embraced the easygoing hedonism of modern life. Adapting the age-old concepts *takfīr* (declaring a Muslim an apostate) *jāḥiliyah* (pre-Islamic ignorance), they draw lines of membership to reclassify nominal Muslims as outside the Islamic community. [10] Regardless of their exact language, all these antiliberals see the global ties and uprootedness of atomist social groups as complementing their mainly local sins.

This is not the only way regional antiliberals muddy the true relationship between the local and the global. When they *do* put the problem in global terms, most such critics slip into another unhealthy habit: defining good and bad along territorial lines. Within the West, many hostile to global liberal culture think the best way to resist it is by singing the praises of national sovereignty, against supranational institutions like the United Nations or the European Union. The latter, supposedly, are just another tool of uprooted and antitraditional technocrats. Seemingly they think if only national independence were restored, the cultural content would fall back into place. Outside the West, their counterparts often misunderstand *global* liberalism as just an updated Western imperialism. Globalization thus seems like another mask for American power after the Cold War, or geopolitical containment of rival civilizations, or perhaps a cultural infection that spreads from the depraved north Atlantic.[11] Here, instead of saying the problem is one of scale, they think the problem is that one part of the world is poisoning the rest: thuggery abroad and gluttony at home. And to be sure, both of these attitudes, Western and non-Western, reflect some truth. Any serious opponent of present arrangements does have to give due weight to how atomists control global institutions and use wider horizons as a weapon against more provincial enemies. At the same time, it is also undeniable that Western, and often specifically American, power does shore up the liberal world system.

Still, I think it wrong to overstate the implications of either fact. On the one hand, the chest-thumping patriotism of antiliberal Western nationalists, especially in the so-called "red states" of the American heartland, is misguided. They should remember that all Western governments, whether they act unilaterally or multilaterally, are a force for spreading worldwide the ills that

these same moral conservatives abhor at home. Consistency would demand that they oppose most Western self-assertion abroad, and take its foreign victims seriously, instead of cheering it on out of tribal enthusiasm. Ethically, the average Kansas wheat-farmer probably has more in common with the Islamist insurgents tortured in Iraq's prisons than with the Western-supported political elites who order torture to safeguard, in the long run, their nightclubs and oil-skimming opulence. And when Western troops ride roughshod over small developing countries and install new regimes, those regimes invariably empower exactly the kind of technocrats and mercenary souls that Western antiliberals resent in their own lands.

On the other hand, antiliberals outside the West are wrong to diagnose their problems as simply a Western infection. As we saw earlier, the modern West is quite unlike the older European heritage that had little to do with liberalism. The atomist West, the realm of superpower aggression and crass commercialism, sits atop the ruins of the real Europe—the Europe of Aquinas and Wagner, and of the cottagers and clansmen. The civilization of greater Europe is hardly the source of the plague. It has been its first and most pitiable victim. Even the pro-atomist foreign policy of Western states now cannot tar the West as a whole, because some resistance lingers at home.

The universal atomist project thus gets lost between two extremes. At one pole, when regional antiliberals talk of local fault lines, they treat the issues as local. The global ties of their enemy are merely insult added to injury. At the other pole, when they take a broader view, they get bogged down in notions of authentic-nation-versus-immoral-globe, or the West versus the Rest. Rarely do they look at the truly placeless middle ground. If they did, they would see their enemies as universal creatures, with a universal agenda, whose monopoly on universalism is a big part of their strength. Misdiagnosis does not help challenge even the branch offices of that project, let alone the project as a whole.

Given how regional antiliberals view their enemy, what strategies do they prefer? When they focus within their own countries, as is usually the case, many agree that their governments are beyond redemption, controlled by hostile elites deaf to people's grievances. Most of these movements have opted, therefore, to build momentum gradually in civil society: social movements, religious networks, militias, and the like. Islamists and Hindutvadis, for example, often recruit supporters through charitable and educational work. They offer social services and moral purpose to the marginal lower-middle classes, especially in the dense squalor of places like Gaza and Mumbai. The American Christian Right and populist militias have not operated amid such poverty, but similarly chose to build their own networks apart from the dominant liberal culture. Home-schooling cooperatives and talk-radio networks of that flavor have proliferated across the American heartland since the 1970s. The electoral victories of nominal moral conservatives like George W. Bush have not changed the perception—and the reality, for that matter—that the American government at most pays lip service to tradition and religiosity.[12]

Many currents within these movements are apolitical. They want sweeping social transformation, but not yet a direct confrontation with atomist-controlled states. In studies of fundamentalisms, these apolitical efforts have been called “world transforming” (if they try to build a new order slowly from civil society upwards), “world creating” (if they try to mark off their own separate institutions), and “world renouncing” (if they focus on private life and ritual). They are not “world conquering” in a revolutionary sense. These strategies flow from seeing

present elites as powerful yet irredeemably corrupt. Some Egyptian Islamists, for example, think that by creating their own, purified social spaces, they are "migrating" out of a pagan order just as Muhammad migrated from Mecca to Medina. Some Amerindian activists work on systematizing indigenous languages as a basis of ethnic pride, while others try culturally sensitive ventures in rural development. Even in China, where the authorities have crushed most organizing, resistance efforts in the late 1990s focused on independent labor unions and a "Workers' Party" that would advocate for marginal groups without directly seeking power.[13]

In the big picture, however, these reactions against universal atomism have a more complicated relationship with states than just ignoring them. Over the long run, they all want to overhaul society. Low-key activism is a stepping stone, not a destination. Indeed, most entertain the idea that eventually the boundary will blur between the organs they have built independently and the political systems in question. In the United States, the Moral Majority and Christian Coalition supported Republican candidates, even though it became clear that more often than not business buys off elected Bible-thumpers. Cojti holds that the Maya movement will use its growing cultural confidence as a springboard to political power in a multicultural Guatemala. Then it can erase all legacies of "internal colonialism." The umbrella organization for Ecuadorean Amerindians also has honed its confident negotiating style as if it will one day become part of the state. And Sudanese Islamists have penetrated the state by converting many army officers and bureaucrats.[14] In China, interestingly enough, things have moved in the opposite direction. An antiliberal "fifth column" within the state reflects not a slow strategic advance, but rather the legacy of an earlier defeat. There, only some older cadres and marginal groups within the ruling party hang on to non-atomist views today, nearly thirty years after the Dengist coup against the Maoists.[15]

With some minor and partial exceptions, these antiliberals have not seized the commanding heights of state power. Along with the civil society emphasis, this fact explains the theories they have developed of the state. Here tactics and ideology flow into one another. The thinkers of these movements tend to see the state as less important than society, as just one part of a comprehensive moral order. The polished Sudanese legal scholar and unofficial leader of Islamism in that country, Hassan Abdallah al-Turābī, has offered one such theory. In his view, an Islamic state is just the political arm of a proper Islamic society. It has no standing of its own. If Islam integrates all aspects of life, then a liberal boundary between the public and private spheres makes no sense. Hindutvadi thinkers hold much the same view. The colonial and Nehruvian states have been alien impositions. True Hindu political culture instead treats the state as a mere supervisory body. In place of liberal citizenship, Hindutva envisions a decentralized society held together less by the state than by *dharma* (ethical conduct).[16]

The moralistic tone of these movements reinforces the sense that change must start beneath the state: in the culture and in oneself. However much they draw battle lines and condemn universal atomist strata, they know corruption has spread beyond those strata. A moralistic light must shine on the whole society. The Chinese novelist and social critic Liang Xiaosheng has been one of the most scathing such voices. A self-described "country bumpkin from the northeast," and onetime worker-peasant-soldier student in the Cultural Revolution, he spares no vitriol in taking Chinas technocrats and "money mongers" to task. He draws from ordinary peoples austere sense of decency as he laments how money has infected Chinese culture. Swindling and hooliganism

have tainted ever-wider swaths of the populace. He wishes there were more people concerned with justice and energetically righting wrongs, and fewer "ruffians, hippies, yuppies, and eunuchs." [17]

Moralistic backlashes are nothing new in history, and can be of many types. For all the diversity of today's resistance, however, the resentful energy comes from a quite consistent direction. The moralism of all these movements reflects a lower-middle class piety and austerity. For instance, Liang Xiaosheng does not say atomism has lowered the tone of Chinese culture, or that the economic reforms brought philistine narrowness. He writes instead, among other things, of how educated people have lost touch with common sense by treating ethics as relative and overly complex. He also wishes his fellow Chinese would bring moral pressure to bear, and exhort hooligans to see the error of their ways. Likewise, American populists often have a folksy Midwestern sort of decency in mind, and make much of "popular common sense" and "plain, straightforward speech." When the social commentator William J. Bennett published his *Book of Virtues* to improve the upbringing of American children, those "virtues" included loyalty, perseverance, faith, a pedestrian sort of courage, and so on.[18]

All these antiliberal critics celebrate the values of plain folk in the communities they address. Their vision revolves around habits, rules, and the no-nonsense piety of demotic life. In noting the narrowness of that vision, I do not mean to deny its worth. It would be an improvement over much that ails us. Yet its proponents do seem oblivious to how much else a multidimensional, postliberal society would have to contain. There is little room for grander ideas of honor, or for the sense that people in high positions should place special demands on themselves.

Still, the nature of this moralism does fit into the story I have told so far. Regional antiliberals see their enemy as sophisticated, self-indulgent, amoral, and out of touch with common sense. While they miss important details, these critics do have a roughly correct mirror image of universal atomism. A generation ago, universal atomists smashed the postwar civic pacts and tore up their own roots. Todays backlash reflects the sensibilities of the people they cast off.

A peculiar kind of rhetoric goes with this effort to give voice to the sensibilities of plain folk. The leaders and thinkers of these movements claim to speak less for themselves, or for any grand ethical principles, than for their societies as a whole. They express mass conscience but do not form it. Liang Xiaosheng takes the same approach even in writing his novels. He favors a realism in touch with daily life, and finds "laughable" those authors who think they can transcend their setting.[19] Here we come back to the question of agency that has cropped up several times in this book. Across todays antiliberal reactions, agency is eviscerated because it rests on a kind of populist group thinking. Critical distance has little place here. This outlook comes through quite vividly in communitarian political thought. Michael Walzer writes that criticisms of a society are always "immanent," tied up with a person's social roles and the ideals already around him or her. In the same vein, Michael Sandel declares that "I move in a history I neither summon nor command….[Distance is always precarious and provisional, the point of reflection never finally secured outside the history itself."[20]

This mentality leaves little room for gaining leverage outside a society, to defy that society's consensus. Some Andean activists convince themselves that the humbling of agency is an inherent part of their culture, for example. "The Andean person neither lives in nor seeks an ideal

world, instead he or she lives life as it is." "The Andes is a world of affectionate conversationalists." "Nurturance knows nothing of confrontations."[21] When these popular antiliberals call for overturning the social order that afflicts them, they have little choice but to fall back on impersonal processes and shapeless actors. Thus He Qinglian wrote vaguely that China needs a broad social movement against corruption. And Liang Xiaosheng hinted that the people may lose patience and explode, but that the era of revolutionary heroism as such has long passed.[22] Of course, we must make allowances for the limits such writers have on speaking freely. Many live under regimes that supplement the mind-numbing passivity of consumer culture with threats of prison or exile. But even so, flattened demotic moralism seems inherently to make for flattened agency.

Indeed, the exceptions prove the rule. Whenever these clusters of resistance generate vigorous political action, it usually takes one of two forms. Sometimes they stress the power of organized movements. The longtime leader of Hindutva' khakiclad RSS militants, M. S. Golwalkar, exemplified this view. He suggested that such organizations serve as the conscience of society. They call ordinary people out of selfishness to "blossom in the bright rays of pure and sacred national devotion" The RSS has long been known for "self-restraint and self-sacrifice; "manliness and effort." and so on. Mass organization holds more promise than does individual heroism.[23]This kind ofdemotic agency is collective. Militants merge into an organized vanguard where discipline trumps conscience. Once they have seized public life and remade it, theirwill must presumably dissolve. Agency cannotpersist, because the self-understanding involved has little to sustain it.

The second form agency takes for these movements is acts of symbolic violence. This approach has appealed to Islamist militants, under an altered notion *ofjihād* (religious effort or struggle). A 1981 booklet on *jihād* called *Al-farīḍah al-ghā'ibah* (The Neglected Duty) stated this case. The author argued that true Muslims had to overthrow nominally Islamic states through violence. While granting that cultural propaganda and work in civil society had their place, he said the peaceful strategy of most activists would not suffice. An armed minority needed to risk everything and lead the way.[24] As an illustration, the group to which the author belonged carried out the spectacular assassination of Egyptian president Anwar al-Sādiāt. At first glance, militants who practice symbolic violence seem to have a strong sense of agency and heroism. But matters are more complicated. The booklet on *jihād*, for example, says that fighting will lead to victory. Yet fighting does not *cause* victory, so much as make those who are fighting worthy of divine intervention that ultimately defeats the enemy "at your hands."[25] This idea ofa *deus ex machina* ties in with many religious fundamentalists' sense that the end of the world draws nigh, and that a returned Imam or a Second Coming will right society' wrongss.[26] They think real change does not come from personal initiative.

We return to a point about demotic agency that I introduced earlier in the book. Demotic movements—as these regional resistances are, loosely speaking—have a weak spot when it comes to large-scale agency. The flatness of moral responsibility and the modest unease about acting on history hinder today's popular antiliberalisms, just as they hindered the likes ofTaki Onqoy and the Diggers centuries ago. Circumstances change; ethical patterns do not. *Anyone* can crash an airliner into a Manhattan skyscraper or place a bomb-laden backpack on a Madrid train, believing he is a foot soldier who serves the cause and thus gains paradise. He need not be a

prophet or a statesman or a learned cleric. That is precisely why symbolic violence has a place in some oftoday's popular antiliberalisms. To elicit a *deus ex machina* is not the stuffofperfectionists or virtuocrats. Nor does it usually work. Much like their predecessors, popular antiliberals rely on forces outside themselves for victory. Those forces might take the form of animist spirits, or divine intervention, or collective militancy, or symbolic violence that somehow makes the oppressors shudder and fall. This is the mentality of the village elder, the cadre, and the kamikaze.

By pointing this out, f do not deny the energy ofsuicidal militants, or the role that organizational discipline often plays, orthe link between action and a divine purpose in history. And not all change requires superheroism that stands outside society. But unease with agency as part ofone' own character hardly helps resistance to any order. Even if political action breaks down into mundane tasks and missions, all those tasks and missions need pulling together around a robust, transcendent self-understanding. The grandest historical changes have hinged on precisely that virtuocratic confidence, which differs starkly from what prevails even in the higher echelons of the RSS and al-Qā'idah.

Having sketched out what today's resistance clusters include and how they act, we can examine their agendas more fully. What do they want and how do they justify it?

Their overall vision of public life is distinctly illiberaL Fundamentalists, for example, usually hope to redefine the relationship between religion and state. In much of the South, the postindependence secular state has come under siege. Fundamentalists have to work in the global system of nationstates, but they want to give their own nation-states a more obvious religious coloriug[27] All these regional antiliberalisms—including those more vaguely moralistic than fundamentalist as such—aim at thickening the ethical content ofpublic life.

The nature and source ofthat ethical content vary from place to place. Western communitarians and populists barely define it. Usually they speak ofreviving a sense ofcommon nationhood, as they think existed in the 1940s and 1950s. Civic life should rest on shared experiences that cut across class lines. Lasch, for instance, lamented the professionalization of politics and called for more participation by ordinary people.[28] Presenting the project as a revival of postwar culture has obvious problems. Not least, postwar civic cultures were themselves a blend of denroticismn and atomism, and inevitably fell apart. Restoring anything like them seems more a matter ofrhetoric than a genuine hope. Often the West' populists and communitarians seem more taken with the *idea* ofrestoringa golden age than with any reality they can remember personally. After all, atomism disrupted Western cultures so early, and for so long, that its critics cannot point to any concrete image of an alternative. "Judeo-Christian values" or Victorianism or the harmonious 1950s go only so far.

In the global South, more non-atomist raw material remains intact. These movements can thus say more concretely what principles should inform a future polity For example, we saw that Hindutvadis' theory of the state treats *dharma* (ethical conduct) as the glue holding society together. The state should reflect *dharma* if it is to serve India' "self-born" society, rather than continue as a leftover from the British Raj. Ln Hindutva, *dharma* no longer means specific religious doctrines and rituals, which used to vary from sect to sect within Hinduism. Instead, it covers the whole array of cultural practices that make somebody a Hindu. This flattening and

unifyingverssion ofHindu identity dates as farback as the nationalist thinker V. D. Savarkar in the 1920s. It has become more relevant in the last few decades, however, as social changes have eroded the diftèrences of sect within Hinduism. Hinduism now seems just the shapeless way of life of most Indians. Amerindian movements have taken up a similarly comprehensive view ofwhat they represent. Culture for Maya activists means not Maya religion, however important it was historically, but rather a mass of practices and sentiments taken together. Finally, Islamists do take religion as their reference point, but it is a much-simplified code of living based on the Qur'ān and Sunnah.[29] A common dilemma appears when these movements try to impress ethical content on public life. Whatever the source of that content—a religion, a civilization, an ethnic identity—they still have to operate in the space of existing nation-states. Yet the content hardly ever overlaps perfectly with the space it would occupy. Usually there are important minorities that do not fit into their would-be community ofnmeaning. Regional antiliberals have a range ofanswers to this dilemma, depending mainly on the scale of their communities.

Hindutvadis take as their source of ethical content Hindu civilization, which roughly overlaps with modern India.They thus put forth what amounts to a vision of all-absorbing national citizenship. They tend to be the most assimilationist of these movements, at least in matters of visible public behavior. Since they have made religious rituals fairly peripheral to what they mean by *dharma*, they could leave the private faith and rites of minorities like Muslims and Christians undisturbed. But those minorities would still have to (re)integrate to Hindu culture as a comprehensive way oflife. This version of*dharma* as cultural unity would then anchor the new Hindu nation-state.[30]

Islamism takes as its community ofreference the whole *ummah*, which is far larger than any single Muslim country. As each such country returns to orthodoxy, Muslim majorities would impress ethical content on public space. Compared to the Hindutvadis, however, they would demand less assimilation. Al-Turābī and others would revive the *ẓimmah* system, granting non-Muslim minorities self-rule in their own affairs.[31] This tolerance partly reflects a centuries-old model oflegal arrangements to manage diversity. But it probably has to do also with the vastness of the *ummah*, which offers a psychological counterweight to any non-Muslim niches within each country. Unlike India, which would be the one Hindu polity, each Islamist state could affnrd more diversity on its territory.

Still more pluralistic is the Anerindian vision for Latin American countries that usually lack any clear ethnic majority. Ethical content here would emerge from and apply to specific peoples, such as the Maya, Quechua, or Aymara, alongside the Spanish-speaking *mestizos*. Amerindian activists want to take apart liberal states and turn them into "plurinational" federations. Loosely, each ethnicity would prevail in its own subnational territory. While these movements have more modest ambitions at the national level than their Hindutvadi or Islamist counterparts, the mental map is much the same. The size of their peoples and the territory they claim just means that the mental map must go into effect below the level of the nation-state.[32]

All regional antiliberalisms would infuse ethical content into public life, and would draw that ethical content from sources alien to liberal nation-states. Indeed, usually they *deliberately* describe those sources in such a way that they do not quite coincide with existing national spaces. Those national spaces were the psychological property of vanguard atornists and other fairly conventional nationalists, after all, and still bear their imprint. To be patriotic about what

was once the India of Nehru, the Egypt of Arab nationalists, or the Bolivia of the 1952 center-left revolution, would not quite ring true for these people. To fiind ethical substance thick enough and truly their own, these movements must now focus above or below or past thc nation-state—on a civilization, or a religion, or an ethnic group—even if they mast still control national political machinery in the end.

We have seen the sources of the ethical content that these movements would impose on public life. What about its flavor? How much would it differ from what now prevails? Let us take a couple of concrete issues: law and language.

Many of these movements demand alternative legal systems. Little exercises Islamists so much as the idea ofreplacing Westernized codes with "puré *sharī'ah* law: interest-free banking, flogging for drunkards, hand-chopping for thieves, and the like. Rather than appreciating the complexity of*sharī'ah* and the several schools within it, however, Islamists treat it as unified and clear-cut enough to answer all questions. Hindutvadis have likewise made a unified civil code part of their agenda. Doing away with the different marriage and inheritance laws of India' minorities would help reintegrate them into a common culture. Under different conditions but with the same mentality, Amerindian activists demand that states recognize the customary laws of their ethnic groups. Unsurprisingly, the customary laws they would apply usually reflect such principles as reciprocity, habit, consensus, and duty.[33] The importance of legal reform for all these resistance movements should not surprise us, given what we know of their demotic sensibilities. Their alternative legal systems would play to those sensibilities and favor a demotic self-understanding through collective moral pressure, regulation of habits, and so on. They would unsettle the atomist culture of sophisticated relativism and insulated private life.

Languages have also have become a burning issue. For the Amerindian resurgence, winni ng official parity for languages like Aymara, Quechua, and Kakchikel is part ofending the Spanish-speaking state' "permanent cultural aggression" But the issue goes far deeper than just markers ofidentity. Cojti and other Amerindian thinkers argue that each language is a"community of codes; a civilizational "matrix," the embodiment of a people' distinct and age-old outlook. They even suggest that being forced to speak an alien language causes a disharmony of the psyche. Amerindian thoughts cannot be fully translated out ofAmnerindian languages. Hindutvadis are also fixated on language, in their case Sanskrit and its modern descendant, Hindi. They, too, see language as a marker of boundaries and a sacred medium inseparable from their heritage.[34] And Islamists everywhere attach importance to learning standard Arabic.

All these languages overlap with the movements'ources of ethical content, distinct from the modern secular nation-state. Each language implies a scale different than that represented by Spanish in Latin America, or English in India, or the colloquial Arabic dialects or non-Arabic national languages in the Islamic world. Furthermore, language helps forge a communal iden-fity. Fixed linguistic meanings regulate individuals and link them together. Notably, these people' views on language have little in common with how premodern virtuocrats saw civilizational languages like Latin, Arabic, San skrit, or classical Chinese. Today' demots do not *see* language as a medium for timeless and placeless ideals, against which to measure local practice. They see it instead as the embodiment ofparticular ties and dense meanings that do not travel well.

Indeed, the way things like law and language work has much to do with why these resistance visions do *not* travel. Recall the several layers ofidentity that I have mentioned often: ethoses, propositions and cosmologies, and practices. Law and language are practices, hence on the most specific plane and hard to translate. These movements choose them for that reason, and also because they have what we might call intersubjective stability. In other words, they involve fixed meanings that regulate individual conduct and bind people together.

Choosing these practices as the symbols of resistance makes for an important contrast with universal atomists. The latter also flesh out their self-understandings with practices, but those are different sorts ofpractices. Given their love of flux and hybridity, atomists are more likely to express themselves through tastes in art, cuisine, clothing, and music. hnagine a young Hong Kong investment banker who spends a Saturday afternoon visiting a Picasso exhibit, eats sushi for dinner, then dons what he thinks is Left Bank garb to dance to Moroccan techno. Such practices can be taken apart and remade daily, according to the whim of each individual. They are what we earlier saw described as "artifacts": fragments that do not burden the self. The practices that regional antiliberals stress, however, are humbling because they have little room for such whims. Law and language are fixed, at least in a given place and time. One has to take such things for granted, as bigger than oneself.

Regional antiliberals all agree that people need anchoring in a community of shared meanings. Islamists contrast their vision with secular liberalism, saying it is comprehensive in touching on all aspects of life. Golwalkar said the same thing about the Hindutvadi version of *dharma*, an "integral humanism" that embeds each person in certain customs and duties, as "a living limb of the corporate social personality" Hindutvadis think liberalism tears the soul apart by elevating selfishness and rights over duties. And in Lasch' critique of post-1960s American society, he complained about a "culture of narcissism," tainted by the pathologies of an upper-middle class obsessed with novelty. In its place, he favored a populist "*ethic* oflimits." American culture should rediscover a lower-middle class sense ofreverence and honest work in a "calling".[35]

This roughly demotic character ideal also shows up, more abstractly, in communitarian theories ofhuman nature. These philosophers say liberalism has a deeply misguided view of the self. The liberal and postmodern stress on choice and revising onés goals ignores that the self cannot be separated from its goals, or from the community that shapes those goals. Even if a freestanding self could be found, it would be a morally barren self[36] When they stress the individual' membership in a community, communitarians align with regional antiliberals around the world.

All these thinkers and activists give a lot ofweight to fixed moral standards on which everyone agrees. The Scottish philosopher Alasdair Macintyre expresses this goal well. Among other things, he regrets that liberal societies do away with common reference points for debate. Political arguments have turned into fragmented "emotivisnr" idle rhetoric and knee-jerk reactions, now they lack a moral core to which people can appeal in more rational ways. Like his counterparts, Maclntyre holds that serious debate can happen only *within* a tradition. But he also touches on a more personal level, especially when he talks ofvirtue. He thinks virtue is something a person acquires by practicing habits that his or her culture sees as intrinsically good. To acquire those habits, one must start by humbly subordinating oneself to cultural standards and to elders who have already mastered those standards. The humility and subordination come as a

matter of faith before one can fully understand the goals they serve.[37] Regional antiliberals all share this idea that collective moral standards impress humility on people. Islamist thinkers like Quṭb have long emphasized rules and punishments derived from texts that are divinelyinspired and thus beyond debate. Morality would be "inconstant" if it did not come down from above.[38]

Regional antiliberals have a corresponding view of knowledge, as fixed and bound to a setting. Especially in the South, they distinguish between universal techniques and placebound values. One can learn some practical skills from anywhere, but each culture has its own moral standards. Thus they reject the idea of a universal path of development, along with the universal social theories that come mairnly from the liberal West of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Rescuing a culture from atomisn means drawing on its own heritage to build independent forms of knowledge. Only then can that culture face the West on an equal footing.[39] Only knowledge that is distinct counts for much. One thickens the ethical content of public life by building walls around the space it fills.

There is also a character-forming aspect to this view of knowledge. Here Western communitarians and populists join forces with their Southern counterparts. Maclntyre wants to revive a medieval-style unity ofknowledge, in which teachers would use a canon to instill the values ofa common tradition. Lasch lamented the affluent self-absorption and irrelevance of today's American universities, and scholars' loss ofa sense of public mission. And Chinese moralists show the same desire to put knowledge in a moral context when they attack liberal economists. Liang Xiaosheng tore apart economists' moral relativism and unwillingness to pass judgment on selfishness. He Qinglian blamed "conscienceless number-crunchers" for the brutalities of China' development path.[40]

The same logic flows into these people' economic views. Culture is usually a more pressing concern for them than is economics, as evidenced by all the American Midwesterners who voted for Republicans in 2004 based on "moral values." But when these antiliberals do talk about economics, they aim for ethical consistency. They dislike the prevailing style ofdevelopment, which takes increasing consumption as an end in itself. They agree that the global capitalist system is too narrowly materialistic to be in tune with "integral humanism" and "moral ecology" Ifnot properly handled, money disrupts the soul, just as technology and bureaucracy dehumanize. More broadly, they think globalization sacrifices community to profit. L.iang Xiaosheng wrote that "a country does not exist solely to cover the globe with money." The American populist Patrick J. Buchanan echoed that "the nation is of a higher order than any imaginary construct ofarr economist."[41] National pride meets with the wish to humanize a cutthroat economic system.

Regional antiliberals want more equality than the global liberal order now allows. Hindutvadis think "integral humanism" will flourish if largescale enterprises and the Indian state-owned sector give way to decentralized and more cooperative arrangements. Chinese moralists endorse some of the post-socialist economic reforms, such as letting peasants own their own plots. They take issue, however, with entrepreneurs who feel no obligation to their employees and are "*wèi fù bù rén*" (unbenevolent for the sake of wealth). Islamists also have a rather egalitarian vision, and would reconnect wealth to religious duties such as charity. Ainerindian activists ally tactically with leftist movements to help their largely poor rural base. And Western communitarians argue, more abstractly, that property rests on shared norms. Communities mold individuals and thus have a claim on their talents and wealth. Walzer especially shows a

suspicion of"market imperialism," in which economic success crosses into other spheres oflife and adds to the power of professional and moneyed strata.[42]

Since some of these thinkers flirted with Marxism back in the 1960s) their sympathy for economic egalitarianism should not come as a surprise. But we should bear in mind the reasons behind their position. They do not support egalitarianism simply out of a desire to spread wealth around, as social democrats do. Rather, they think economic equality is part of a cooperative order more in tune with human nature. Moreover, the egalitarian backlash makes sense given how history has unfolded lately. Even ifwidening inequality and moral breakdown are separate trends in the abstract, the reality is that both have happened at the hands of the same globalized upper-middle classes.

These resistance movements want an alternative development model that would let each society advance more independently, according to its own ethical standards. Amerindian movements throughout Latin America demand "ethnodevelopment" preserving age-old practices such as communal landholding. And Chinese nationalists want a more orderly path ofsocialist development, with more stress on China' uniqueness and independence. Theywould tame the "promiscuous opportunism" ofoverseas Chinese investors. These themes of self-reliance crop up in Hindutva and Islamism too. Technology needs to grow local roots. Modernity as such is not a problem, these thinkers say, as long as one has the confidence to screen techniques properly and fit them into one' culture.[43]

This idea of filtered modernization brings obvious challenges. Since these movements rest on people who are caught between worlds, they must find creative ways to reconcile tradition and modernity. Two strategies have appeared. The first is softer and more willing to compromise with global liberalism. The Maya intelligentsia, for instance, gladly imports many modern practices as long as enough ofa local imprint remains, even if Maya culture needs some twisting to make everything fit. Thus Cojtf enthusiasticallywrites that "the path of the Maya movement goes not only to Tikal (traditionalism), but also to New York and Tokyo (modernism).[44] The second strategy, typical of Islamists and other fundamentalists, is harder and more systematic. As a first step, it tries purifying and firming up the tradition. Only then will that tradition have the confidence to adapt modern techniques to its own needs. This effort to make tradition more systematic, more of an ideology, brings modernizing antiliberals into conflict with folk customs on the ground. In Africa and southeastern Asia, for example, Islamists try to superimpose "correct" pan-Islamic standards over local diversity. Hindutvadis also have little appeal to the most traditional and disadvantaged people in India, the dalits. One dalit intellectual, Kancha Ilaiah, voiced "untouchable" misgivings about Hindutvadis' relentlessness in a book entitled *Why I Am Not a Hindu*.[45]

The eclectic approach of these movements also shows in how they deal with gender issues. Contrary to what many liberals tell us, for example, most Islamists do not want to go back to the middle ages and force women out of public life. In much of the Islamic world, their standards ofIslamic dress and conduct appeal to upwardly mobile women who want to distance themselves from haphazard rustic customs. For many Muslins outside the Arab Middle East, uniform pan-Islamic guidelines stand for prosperity and cosmopolitanism. Many Muslim women who wear the *ḥijāb* (scarf) do so to gain entry to public space, including the professions, while keeping an Islamic respectability. And Hindutvadis have even carved out a role for female militants in their

movements.[46] All these shifts amount to streamlining tradition, so it can combine with modernity while keeping atomism at bay.

Their approach has its drawbacks, of course. Creativity on some issues like gender roles does not change the fact that regional antiliberals tend to oversimplify and slide into defensiveness. Liberal critics often say that rules about women' clothing and the like only affirm male supremacy. Misogyny supposedly onèrs an outlet for the frustration of lower-middle class males at their general powerlessness.[47] Even if liberal condemnation often stems mainly from visceral dismay at any culture that does not wink at relativism and promiscuity, it has a large grain of truth here. Yet the biggest problem has more to do with the overall approach than with any specific practice.

That problem revolves around howthese antiliberals'thinking focuses on *types* rather than *relationships*. Where a traditional peasant thought ofmen and women as concrete people, with face-to-face relationships and duties to one another, today's fundamentalists are obsessed with rigid rules. Men are men, women are women, and certain standards of image and behavior and authority apply everywhere without exception. Everything becomes a matter of uniformity and social control. A male zealot fronm Egypt should be able to contract an arranged marriage with a pious woman from Malaysia and have already laid out—preferably with a handy pamphlet to back it up—everything from the arrangement of her scarf in public to who makes what decisions over childrearing. Such crude and faintly farcical rules are the insular matter-of-factness of village life, pushed on to a grander scale with all the fixiry and none oFthe warmth. Then xenophobia gets added to the mix more often than not. Both Hindutvadis and Islamists depict outsiders as sexually decadent and preying on women, who turn into symbols of collective honor. And Chinese nationalists write of cosmopolitan Chinese women as if their foreign sympathies amounted to racial treason.[48]

Gender and family issues exercise these people so much that they often seem to be *the* supreme concern. More than one Chinese nationalist has claimed that certain ideas about the family are the core of Chinese culture. In writing about the depravity of the West, Quṭb picked promiscuity and family breakdown as almost the only ills worth mentioning specifically. American moral conservatives, too, often crowd out other issues in their talk of the family and sexual decadence.[49]To question the narrow focus on such themes does not mean denying that these critics have legitimate complaints about how their societies have changed. But the more important point is that this fixation has roots in their worldview and its strategic weaknesses. When movements like India' RSS condemn "sensualiry and effeminacy" and treat their struggles as an exercise irrvirility,[50] they again show the limits ofdemotic agenry.Their focus on gendered rules and virility and authority within the family only drives the point home. Uncomfortable with large-scale personal initiative, they seize on the things they *can* control. Agency starts and ends there, largely because it can go no higher and no farther afield. The global atomist order stays intact. The virile stridency on hot-button issues turns out, ironically, to be the stridency of the globally impotent.

It should now be clear how these movements' agendas and the motives behind them fit together. A final observation deals with how they use historical memory. As we have seen, each reaction fences off a community of meaning, claiming an essence for that community and hardening it for the fight. They also project their visions back into the past. Amerindian activists,

for example, have a quite sophisticated political memory. They adapt patterns of folk thinking that have evolved through five centuries of rule by Spanish settlers and their descendants. They say the Amerindian nations predate contact with Europe and have survived despite a loss of sovereignty. They reinterpret the Spanish conquest as an invasion, as a temporary "covering up" ofAmerindian cultures. Today' project promises to revive that cultural essence and its political claims. Some Andean writers borrow the vivid Quechua idea of a *pachakuti*, a cyclical turning of the world upside down every few centuries, to describe the future restoration of a proper order.[51] Other regional antiliberalisms use memoryfor political ends too. Through television epics, Hindutvadis present their version of Indian history to a mass audience. And Chinese nationalists relive grievances about Western imperialist incursions that started with the Opium War of the 1840s.[52]

The use of memory to support a political movement is unremarkable itself, of course. Historians and anthropologists take for granted that how people depict the past always suits one or another purpose.[53] Some features of today's antiliberal memory do stand out, however. First, these people all point to some ideal past that counterbalances their present afflictions. For the Peruvian agronomist Eduardo Grillo Fernández, the whole European presence in the Americas has been a"virulent plague." Because Andeans got careless about maintaining a moral order back around 1500, their harmonious civilization collapsed and fell prey to outsiders. Now they redeem themselves by finding their identity anew. Maya thinkers imagine the same sort of pristine preconquest civilization, which had its "philosophical specificity" and development path "deformed" by the Spanish invasion. In a similar vein, Hindutvadis look back before both the British Raj and the Muslim conquests, to a purity that Hindus lost through their own lack of martial vigor. Today' vision supposedly builds on "that race spirit which has survived all the shocks of centuries of aggression" Chinese moralists like Liang Xiaosheng and He Qinglian aim their nostalgia at a more recent time, the 1960s and 1970s Cultural Revolution that they experienced vividly themselves. Both writers admire the simple comradeship of that era, and contrast it with the self-seeking decay that followed. Finally, the starkest contrast between the present and an ideal past comes out ofIslamism. For Quth and other Islamists, the founding generation of Muhammad' Companions embodied purity because they had not yet embellished the austere truths of the Qur'ān and *aḥndith*.[54]

Some ofthris nostalgia is just an age-old demotic thinking. The folk sense ofrespectfor elders and continuity with the past is transferred, as it were, on to grand and meaningful history. As with much else, however, the nostalgia deals more with types than with relationships. Instead of village elders and fondlyrememberedgreat-grandparents,wenowheartalkofpeoplesanderas. This kind of demotic memory writ large loosely resembles how vanguard atomists once invoked the past. Vanguard atomists spoke ofenduring national essences and the like, so the transition to atomist modernity would seem less abrupt. Antiliberal critics today have an opposite logic. They all pick eras marked by contrast, not continuity, with what followed. After the breaking point when things started going wrong, only corruption reigns. Nostalgia means lamenting the chasm between ideal past and sordid present.

Perhaps the most striking feature of their nostalgia is how selective it is. These thinkers and movements have an oddly flattened view of their traditions. Television epics inspired by Hindutva, for instance, obscure the hierarchies of caste and class that shaped most ofhndian

history. The myth instead becomes one of Hindu domestic harmony and hardened boundaries against Muslims and Europeans. Maya historians have the same blind spots when they describe the civilization that preceded Spanish conquest. The whole culture comes across as some sort of glorified village. They ignore the preconquest Maya religious and political elites, reducing them to functional "specialists." Chinese antiliberals likewise downplay the layering of virtues in Confucianism. Their version of Confucian ethics deals mainly with horizontal, personal relationships: loyalty, kinship, and the like. The grander demands that the mandarin literati once put on themselves count for little. Whatever their setting, all these writers would very likely endorse Grillo' claim that "we here in the Andes, from time immemorial and for all times, are communitarianl[55] All these antiliberals have a selective memory, and pass offtheir own populist priorities as the essence of their heritage.

They also try to wipe out any residues of hierarchy that linger today. Perfectionist and virtuocratic high cultures have no place in these new versions ofold worlds. Hindutvadi movements like the RSS elide differences of doctrine and caste. Instead they play up a flat and vague nationalism, which can easily close ranks against outsiders. Golwalkar called "the common folk in the villages…the real backbone of our nation" In the West, MacIntyre is probably the communitarian thinker fondest ofAristotelianism, and praises it as the core of Europe' heritage. Yet his demotic leanings also make him point out Aristotle' "mistakes" in seeing selfcultivation as something only a few people could pursue. Al-Turābi and others do much the same refurnishing within Islam. His Islamic state would have no place for the esoteric knowledge of clerics and mystics. Indeed, he has wished aloud that clerical titles would disappear. The category of '*ulamā* would come to mean anyone with expertise, includingengineers and social scientists. Likewise, Amerindian activists see peasant villages as the repository of Amerindian culture. When they try to list authentieally "Amnerindian" values, they come up with reciprocity, solidarity, consensus, respect for elders, and unity between humans and nature.[56] As I have said before, we should take demotic values seriously. But the barest knowledge of any of these civilizations reveals that one outlook is being projected on to them, to the exclusion of all else.

People understandably stress those aspects of their cultures that appeal to them. One anthropologist has noted that Maya activists come mostly from modest peasant backgrounds, outside the ranks of Maya religious leaders. And in the Islamic world, mass higher education in recent decades has created a stratum oflay Islamists, who no longer need clerics to interpret texts.[57] In one sense, therefore, the tone of these movements just reflects their popular base. But we still have to wonder why today's resistances are more *uniformly* demotic than earlier ones. In the early twentieth century, the popular upsurge was only one type ofresistance to atomism. High-culture voices like Tagore and Ortega and Liang Shuming also shaped the debate. We need a broader perspective on why demotic reactions now prevail, and why the high-culture critics have mostly gone silent.

Sometimes civilizations get decapitated. One of the best historical examples was the Spanish conquest of the Inka empire, known as Tawantinsuyu.[58] When it flourished in isolation, Tawantinsuyu was much like other ancient civilizations. Perfectionist and virtuocratic elites reigned over demots, who ran most of their own affairs locally. After the conquest, Tawantinsuyu' elites were wiped out or absorbed. Onlythe peasantry lived on as keepers

ofAndean culture. Over time, memory came to reflect its bearers. Nost:algia about an Andean way oflife that predated the conquest gradually took on a demotic flavor. The continuity and public vigor of rival ethoses had been severed.

Much the same has happened now. Six decades ago, vanguard atomists allied with demots to wipe out the high-culture currents that had challenged atomism. That strategic response succeeded overall. By the time atomists were ready to break their alliance with demots and go it alone, only demotic strata had any life left. The residues ofvirtuocracy and perfectionism that did linger had been driven from public debate. What clergy or literati or gentry survived, politically uncowed, from the 1920s to the 1960s and beyond? Today' resistance is narrowly demotic because, apart from atomism, this is the ethos left most intact. I do not for a moment deny that it has fair grievances, a good deal of energy and courage, and an important role to play in any solution. But when resistance comes *only* from that quarter, it proves one-dimensional and ineffective.

* I prefer the term "Islamism" over other labels for the same movements, such as "Islamic fundamentalism" or "political Islam."

† This term is somewhat unusual. In their respective countries, these ethnic groups have usually been called "Indian" or "indigenous." Both terms would be misleading in a book about the world as a whole.

Chapter 8

Fortresses Become Prisons

So far we have scen how the major clusters of antiliberal resistance fit into the global culture war: their support bases, strategies, and goals. Their built-in problems with agency have also become clear. My main purpose has been to show why these movements have proved unable to mount a successful challenge. To the shortcomings already covered, I should now add their insularity. If global atomism is ever to face a challenge on its own scale, resistance must coalesce around a set of principles that can resonale worldwide. Why have these movements failed to fight on that level?

As a starting point, it bears noting that they are not wholly provincial. They have often forged wide-ranging alliances within their own communities of reference, even it those communities are spread over many countries. Amerindian movements, for example, have turned weakness into strength by linking up across Latin America's borders, appealing beyond their own governments to an international audience of human rights watchdogs, development foundations, and academics. Religious conservatives in the United States have been known to work together across Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish sectarian lines, on specific policy issues. Even more dramatically, Islamism also cuts across borders. Writings and taped sermons flow back and forth, militants train together, and leaders know one another. At the fringes of Islamism, al-Qā'idah has operatives everywhere from Argentina to Germany to Indonesia, and plots to blow up its enemies wherever they prove vulnerable.[1] None of thcsc movements are provincial in a strict sense of the word.

Rather, the problem is that they do not collaborate on a truly *global* scale. Whenever these reactions do look outward, either at universal atomism or at one another, they tend to stay on the defensive. Part of this is understandable. Atomists have what amounts to a monopoly on global debate. They staff almost all transnational institutions and information networks, whether human-rights foundations or professional associations or policymaking bodies. If regional antiliberals take their efforts farther afield, beyond their own countries or ethnic or religious bases, they find that these settings recolor their message.

Amerindian activists have suffered most from this pattern. One scholar has described them as "self-consciously phualistic," willing to draw on international language about human rights, identity, and the "global village.".[2] This Amerindian obeisance to global liberalism has several causes. First, the movements in question have chosen to appeal beyond their governments to certain *kinds* of transnational activist networks, which happen to have universal atomists staffing them. Second, Spanish-speaking countries are accessible to liberals and postmodernists from Europe and North America, in ways that, say, the Arab Middle East is not. The outlook of such activists and academics has shaped the language Amerindian activists use. They are pressed to be quaint, apologetic, and postmodern, as the price of visibility. Indeed, movements of this flavor—diluted, hybridized, and liberally networked—are for Northern onlookers by far the most palatable sort of "resistance." Resistance currents elsewhere face the same pressures but to a lesser degree. Chinese nationalists find the global dominance of English-speaking academia stacked against them. When they go to international conferences, they present on Mill, not Mozi.

And even a fervent Islamist like al-Turābī slips defensively into the liberal language of human rights when he speaks to non-Muslim audiences.[3]

This kind of global networking defeats its purpose more often than not. Mostly, regional antiliberals have little interest in worlds beyond their own. They build some of the highest walls of any ideology in history. Today's resistance is fragmented both strategically and ideologically. It draws lines around territory and turns good and evil into matters of space. In their focus on cultural essences, for example, Maya activists pose their principles in contrast to *kaxlan* (outsiders). And the 1996 Chinese nationalist diatribe *Zhongguo keyi shuo bu* (China Can Say No) bluntly proclaimed that "Asia is for the Asians".[4] Even *within* a country, atomism's contaminating spread often gets put in terms of regional contrasts. Thus Liang Xiaosheng writes disdainfully of southern coastal China as the source of an infectious obsession with money. Conversely, northern peasants turn into the guardians of Chinese morality. Throughout his writing he reproaches Chinese atomists with the word *tóngbāo* (compatriot). In their entrepreneurial self-seeking, they have cast off duties to their hard-up fellow citizens.[5] That the *tóngbāo* rhetoric omits four-fifths of humanity seemingly does not depress him.

Sometimes territory itself gets a sacred meaning, almost apart from the ethical landscape that it happens to contain nowadays. Amerindian movements claim their land as sacred space, an arena for identity that predates the colonial and liberal states. A few Maya writers even suggest that nature has favored their lush jungle-covered territory over the cradles of other world cultures. Some of their Andean counterparts revive old peasant cosmologies in which Pachamama (Mother Earth) and a kinship group intersect in the mountain villages where one's ancestors lived. Hindutvadis have a similar image of the Indian subcontinent as their spiritual homeland, as peculiarly suited to a divine presence. Wherever a person lives, loyalty to India serves as a litmus test of Hindu identity.[6] Only some of the regional antiliberalisms have this obsession with territory, of course. Boundary-drawing by Chinese nationalists is more likely to have racial undertones, for instance. And Western communitarians do not make much of geography, perhaps because many of them are Americans and their country is one of recent settlement. But those thinkers who do treat territory as sacred are just following their usual logic. Even if they grant that some things like modern technology are universal, they still see the particular, placebound aspects of life as richer and more compelling.

Chopping up our planet into sacred spaces does not help dialogue and collaboration, but it should not make them impossible. A greater obstacle is how regional antiliberals see the ethical content that they would put into each space. They assume that ethical content cannot overlap any more than two physical territories can overlap. This holds true even for movements that do not treat land as sacred. It ties in with what we saw earlier of how regional antiliberals view knowledge as context-bound. They think that no universal theories and ideologies call quite fit their own reality. In this spirit, Chinese nationalists have a knee-jerk disdain for the judgments of foreigners, on the grounds of China's unique guóqíng (national conditions). Amerindian writers like Cojtí and Grillo claim that universal theories distort, because "there is not only one world.… [T] here are as many worlds as there are cultures." Even placeless manners of speech off end. Lasch, for example, lamented the accentless "bureaucratization" of academic English, which has lost any earthy vividness and with it the ability to engage the public. And on a more abstract plane, communitarians like Walzer argue that apart from a duty to stop "the grossest and most of

fensive injustices" in any society, morality is thick and placebound. "The crucial commonality of the human race is particularism.".[7]

Dialogue and collaboration become quite hard if one takes these positions. Ethical content itself is context-bound. Still, we might bypass that barrier if we could translate ethical traditions into one another's terms, so they could make common cause against atomism. Unfortunately, however, most of these thinkers close off that avenue too. Not only do cultural spaces not resemble one another. We also cannot even look from one space into another and be sure of what we see. MacIntyre takes this line of thinking furthest. He makes much of what he calls "incommensurability" He argues that there is no neutral Archimedean point among traditions for making sense of them. For example, suppose that one translated a sacred text into a modern international language like English or French or Spanish. Rather than making the text accessible to outsiders, MacIntyre insists, translation would take away its real meaning by uprooting it from its cultural context. Each tradition has its own way of making sense of itself, so trying to make every tradition accessible to everyone defeats the purpose. "The wider the audience to whom we aspire to speak, the less we shall speak to anyone in particular" We end up not with universal truths but with a smorgasbord of "counterfeits." MacIntyre uses the Aristotelian and Confucian virtues as a case in point. He says even the same action, such as rushing to someone's aid, would be bound up with quite different meanings in the two traditions. Each has its own language for knowing what a virtue is, how one gains it, and how all the virtues fit together.[8]

Most of MacIntyre's fellows agree with him. The Canadian Catholic communitarian Charles Taylor is only slightly more optimistic when he writes of intercultural dialogue as a "fusion of horizons." Since anyone's worldview is self-contained, it is always a struggle to understand others. Those who want to understand can hope only to appreciate other worldviews on their own terms, after long effort. Even so, the boundedness of stubborn "horizons" does not go away. They just "fuse" and allow an uneasy mutual understanding. And no really universal truths emerge, for the whole process must start anew if other cultures enter the game.[9]

One regional antiliberalism, Hindutva, might seem to have a more flexible view of "incommensurability." Drawing on Savarkar's writings from the 1920s, Hindutvadis often say Muslims and other minorities should rejoin the Hindu fold because they can find counterparts of their own religious doctrines in Hinduism. They point out the plethora of sects and revelations in Indian history, and insist that Hindutva can bring any faith under its cultural umbrella. The all-encompassing tolerance of Hindutva will build goodwill with other religious communities in India, unlike Islam with its exclusiveness and proselytizing. The treason of India's minorities is that they—or their ancestors—converted and began looking to spiritual homelands outside the subcontinent, especially in the Middle East. According to Hindutvadis, they need not have done so. "Whatever could be found in the world is found here too. And if anything is not found here it could be found nowhere".[10]

On the surface, Hindutva seems to find common ground with non- Hindus, and to offer them something. But there is some ugliness in how it frames the matter. Celebrating its own spiritual tolerance mainly as something Islam lacks shows that Hindutva reeks of hostility. Even the idea of spiritual analogies, while more promising than the "incommensurability" of MacIntyre and Taylor, falls short of a true cosmopolitanism. Common ground does not necessarily imply a

motive to take advantage of it. Hindutvadis think they have nothing to learn from outsiders. Any universalism naturally centers on India as a sacred space.

Another way to think about the insularity of regional antiliberalisms is to ask if and how they allow their boundaries to move. Or, put differently, do they let individuals cross those boundaries and join their communities? Chinese nationalists think of Chineseness as a racial essence that outsiders cannot acquire. For all their hopes about China as a future economic powerhouse, they are conspicuously silent about eventually welcoming immigrants. Even foreigners very familiar with Chinese culture are allowed to forget their foreignness much less than in many other parts of the world. The old Confudan elite rarely had to deal with these issues, but its cultural universalism in principle let outsiders who had mastered the classics and rites enter even the upper layers of Chinese society.[11] Since that more broadminded high culture has been demolished, only raw physical traits remain for this generation of popular nationalists.

Amerindian identity is little more open. Even if assimilation to Spanish-speaking culture is a (perhaps reversible) way out, Maya and Quechua and Aymara cultures are normally understood as having no ways in.[12] And Hindutva, while not defined by race, is open only in a few scenarios. The treason of Indian Muslims and Christians can be expunged if they return to the fold, and reaffirm loyalty to India's sacred territory and cultural codes. Savarkar also suggested true foreigners could convert and enter too, but only if they took up the whole way of life and married into the Hindu nation to anchor themselves more fully.[13] None of these ways of handling outsiders—whether Chinese, Amerindian, or Hindutvadi—can be considered cosmopolitan by historical standards. They take for granted that their ideas and ways of life are not going to travel much if at all. Today's membership will stay more or less fixed.

Islamists will no doubt protest that none of what I have said in the last few pages applies to them. As the past spread of Islam suggests, the religion itself has no ethnic or territorial content. Islamists make much of the equality of Muslims from Africa to southeastern Asia, and want to iron out irregularities in the local practice of Islam. Even the nation-state has little hold on them. Leaders like al-Turābī work through existing countries, but envision building ties among Islamic states that could lead to unification. And al-Qā'idah operatives see their various citizenships at most as licenses to roam around unhindered, bombs in tow. Nor is the boundary with non-Muslims fixed. Qutb stressed that Islam is an "ideological civilization" that must spread to all humanity.[14] And in recent years, Islam—including zealous Islamist strands of the faith—has indeed welcomed many converts from all parts of the world. Unlike its counterparts, Islamism has no ethnic or even territorial boundaries as such.

But do not take all this at face value. Islamist insularity rests on doctrines and labels instead of geography. This is hardly the Islam of the early and middle periods, which found ample common ground with other revealed religions. Islamisnr today has much harder attitudes and plenty of disdain for other faiths. Its boundaries are permeable only through a total conversion of each individual. It accepts outsiders, but sees their entry as a proper defeat for the pagan spaces they have left. Moreover, when Islamist intellectuals talk of the *ummah*œ*s* eventual expansion across presently non-Muslim societies, they are mostly spinning abstractions. An Islam global in scope is at best a very long-terni vision, on the order of centuries. No Islamists today really imagine the majority of Paraguayans and Finns converting in their lifetime. Indeed, in the mind of the average Islamist militant who treads his way through shantytowns and strokes his beard while

fuming at apostasy, boundaries are far more fixed than the rhetoric of Islamist thinkers suggests. The remote prospect that the great-great-grandchildren of today's Paraguayans and Finns will pronounce the *shahādah* does not, in his mind, change the fact that Paraguayans and Finns are infidel peoples. Like other regional antiliberals, Islamists are, in fact, insular.

We have seen how all these resistances build high walls with few gates. But it is hard to overlook that they have similar goals and a common enemy nonetheless. To what extent, then, do they show any awareness of this common ground? They do make occasional noises to that effect. Some sayvaguely that their people should adopt useful practices from anywhere, so long as they fit into the local context. Some admire other regions that have stood up to the liberal West, as when an Egyptian Islamist praised the stridency of Maoist China. He Qinglian commented that China's social injustice has parallels elsewhere in the developing world, because of equally corrupt elites. The *Shuobu* authors tried linking Chinese nationalism to other countries' unease with American power. They suggested helping smaller regional powers uphold their independence, through a geopolitical alliance that "goes beyond ideologies" Even Buchanan wrote that a nonliberal American nationalism should not be domineering, because other countries have a right to their own dignity and distinctiveness too. And during the Bush administration's misadventure in Iraq, he dryly noted that true American moral conservatives could not logically support the secular libertinism that "American values" bring to mind for most Muslims.[15]

All the instances where these people say such things do not add up to much, however. They show at best a distant sympathy, or misgivings about how their own governments often foist liberal values on foreigners as well as on right-minded citizens at home. None of them match the branch-office mentality of universal atomists. Insisting that every country has a right to independence does not mean caring what those countries do with their independence. Nor does admiring other strident voices mean much stake in what they really say.

The shallowness of these people's interest in one another is even more obvious if we ask what they expect their own movements to offer the rest of the world. Regional antiliberals usually have quite modest ideas of how they would change the global political order. None support world government. Western populists typically object even to slight erosions of national sovereignty by such entities as the United Nations or the European Union. Even Walzer, one of the more internationally minded of communitarians, thinks any but the loosest form of future global governance would threaten cultural diversity.[16] Islamists have a similar view. They apparently want a decentered version of the present international system. They see the aggression of Western powers as the chief obstacle to coexistence of civilizations on an equal footing. Al-Turābī was typical in saying that he did not imagine Sudanese Islatnism spreading, and that it need not challenge the West if the latter minds its own business.[17] Even a group as seemingly radical as al-Qā'idah would most likely be content to eject Western influence from the Islamic world, set about building an austere Tālibān-style society across the *ummah*, and leave the infidels to wallow unmolested in Europe and North America. Its conditional offer of a truce to the European powers after the Madrid train bombings in March 2004 suggested as much.

Most Hindutvadis and Chinese nationalists would endorse the Islamist description of toda's world order, especially the ill effects of Western dontinance. The size of India and China—sowne one-fifth of huntanitv each—does add another dimension to their aspirations, though. Both Hindutvadis and Chinese nationalists have dreams of superpower status. Hindutvadi

hostility to India's minorities is often phrased as resentment of how their fussy demands hamper India's strength. The *Shuobu* authors also call for a Chinese confidence that can match their country's rising power. They extend the economic trend lines of the last few years, and proclaim that a "Chinese century" is inevitable after Anierica's decline. Tlws the inequities of Western hegemony in the world system contain their own remedy. With enough patience, the oppressed can use the same world system to turn things upside down.[18]

Of course, antiliberals in both India and China insist that the rise of their cou ntry would benefit the world, not just itself. Hindutvadis have long claimed that just as Hinduism deals with life as a whole, so does it have a unique attentiveness to unity amid diversity. In a future international system, Iudia could offer this "world-unifying thought" to nthers.[19] Some Chinese nationalist writers promise remarkably similar contributions from China. One predicted that the greater sense of harmony in Chinese culture, both among people and with nature, will one day redeem humanity from Western ewlogical folly. Another writer said that a powerful China will help overcome nationalism, just as the Warring States came together under Confucian universalism two millennia ago. China's rise as a world power paradoxically will serve wsmopolitanism.[20]

Both these would-be Indian and Chinese exports to the world involve the same idea: national stridency will soften the world as a whole in the long run, by giving a framework for a new universalism. Neither promises to go very far, however. These thinkers see little to learn from outside their own allegedly unique cultures. And, perhaps most importantly, they offer no real global *mechanism* for converting their national stridency into universal peace. One must first be a zealous nationalist, and only much later a magnanimous globalist. Whether they speak to Indians or Chinese, they imply aggressively throwing one's weight around in the meantime. Chinese "face nationalism" treats global status as a zero-sum game. Only saying no to influence from outside, as the *Shuobu* authors urge, can preserve China's honor against those who plot her humiliation. Hiudutvadis have also long felt India must harden her identity and reject themes of universal brotherhood. Global politics is survival of the fittest.[21]

One cannot help but wonder if the Darwinism outweighs the magnanimity. Though few would say it outright, many of these people undoubtedly long to see future Indian or Chinese marines finally giving a good drubbing to the West—or, more likely, to some small and poor country that offends the new bully. A nationalist in Beijing told me a few years ago, in an amusing play on words with a hint of sincerity in it nonetheless, that China's *gòngxiàn* (contribution) to the world might just be to gòngxiàn (conquer) other countries as it saw fit. Prophetic jests aside, these Hindutvadi and Chinese nationalist "contributions" presuppose the rise of a xenophobic power to global hegemony, before it deigns to think about what it offers everyone else.

Such people see one another less as allies than as future vassals. Whether we speak of Hindutvadis or Chinese nationalists—or of those Islamists who want a politically unified *ummah*—they aim less to smash the global hierarchy than to elevate their own civilization within it. Antiliberal movements outside the West either turn a deaf ear to one another or salivate over their own future supremacy. I suspect whoever caught up with or surpassed the West first would not show much charity. Dishearteningly typical is Chinese nationalists' view that the rest of the global South is racially inferior, and that only China can rival the West.[22] And if we pushed the

average Islamist to describe peoples outside the nominally Christian West, say in Africa or India, an image of pagan backwardness would probably come up.

If such Darwinism and insularity were confined to economic and political affairs, things would not be so bad. We might imagine ways for regional antiliberals to reason themselves into a more promising strategy But they see openness as threatening on an intellectual and cultural plane too. The behavior of missionaries is a case in point. For Islamists and Hindutvadis, Western missionaries are closet imperialists who pick off members of their societies one by one. Amerindian activists say that evangelization in places like Guatemala occurs on inherently unequal terrain, given a history of conquest and internal colonialism. Unless carefully managed, any flow of ideas between Amerindians and non-Amerindians will erode the former's cultural fabric.[23]

Perhaps the best philosophical statement of intellectual Darwinism comes from MacIntyre. We saw earlier his argument that "incommensurability" among traditions means no one can understand a tradition from a neutral point outside it. The Darwinian upshot emerges when Macintyre explains what happens when two or more traditions meet. Loosely, he says that only that tradition will survive which best explains the clash. In such an "epistemological crisis," traditions compete by telling rival stories and seeing which wins more adherents. The victor will be able to explain shortcomings within the loser's system better than vice versa. Thus "the multiplicity of traditions does not afford a multiplicity of perspectives among which we can move, but a multiplicity of antagonistic commitments, between which only conflict, rational or nonrational, is possible.".[24]

This outlook hardly favors making common cause across civilizations. If global encounters mean a weeding out of the weak, politically and culturally, then it should come as no surprise that regional antiliberals look outward with fear or smugness instead of goodwlll. This deficiency of global-mindedness has understandable psychological roots. The most powerful regions of the world—North America, Europe, and the Pacific Rim—have surrendered to atomism and become a force for its spread. Discontented people elsewhere naturally want to take them down a peg or two, for reasons of both ideology and cultural pride. And even the truly placeless machinery of global integration—business, academia, and the like— is staffed largely by people hostile to everything these critics hold dear.

Still, the insularity that might hinder enemies in the short run does regional antiliberals no lasting good. Despite huge inequities between North and South, for example, they have no language for demanding justice at the global level, beyond independence and parity of states. They close off contact with one another and lock in a defensive posture. Slowing down the pace of the atomist advance does not lead to an alternative that can roll back the advance itself. Rather than winning the global culture war, they seem sometimes ju t to want to lose it more slowly.

So far I have dealt only with regional antiliberalisms of a popular flavor. Those reactions have been the loudest and best organized movements against atomism in recent years. To be fair, however, we should round out the picture by looking briefly at a couple of other resistance currents, which atficstmayseem less vulnerable to the shortcomings I have highlighted. Do they

overcome the problems with agency and insularity that prevent regional antiliberalisms from upending atomist rule? Or do they suffer from other flaws?

One obvious force is the *global new left*. While I am wary of left/right terminology, this label refers well enough to a cluster of movements that are networked globally and hostile to upitalism. They include the "anti-globalization" activism that erupted at Seattle, Québec City, and Genoa; the grassroots networks of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that focus on their chosen poor; participatory "new social movements" and intellectual voices of "radical democracy." Compared to the traditionally-minded fundamentalists and populists and nationalists, the global new left has an amorphous social base and little political power. This ideological bloc has some strengths, of course. It is as globally minded as capitalism, and does not reek of insularity like the regional antiliberals. We shall see that its shortcomings center instead on agency and one-dimensionality. As with the regional antiliberalisms, I do not want wholly to dismiss the global new left just because I think it unpromising. I do share its concern for social justice, among other things, and part of its vision could probably fit into a more comprehensive movement against global atomism.

What does the global new left want? Loosely, these critics imagine a "countermovemen" against capitalist exploitation and the undemocratic arrangements that the global elite has set up. The American world-order critic Richard A. Felk has called this alternative "globalization from below" It would remake the global economic order in a way that is "people driven," and attuned to human relationships and ecological sustainability. The global new left's vision does not mean a frontal assault on capitalism as such. Rather, it involves spreading capitalism's benefits more fairly and restoring some of the social democratic safeguards that two decades of cutthroat competition have eroded.[25]

A strategic view that most of these critics would endorse appears in the 2000 book *Empire*. Since it pulls together many strands of the global new left and has been received warmly, *Empire* is probably the closest thing to a manifesto that this resistance has. The authors—Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri—blend Marxist and postmodern theories to argue that global capitalism is omnipresent and highly flexible. In contrast to how regional antiliberals diagnose the world, Hardt and Negri do not map morality on to territory. The "empire" has no inside and no outside. Since the system and resistance are intertwined, the future lies gestating within the present. A better world order will come not from nostalgia for premodern certainty, but from pushing through the present chaos to the other side. The project of "counter-Empire" will be carried out by diverse political actors in fluid alliance with one another: "a communication of singularities.".[26]

The transnational scale of both the problem and the solution means the global new left has little interest in nation-states. The project bypasses them. Ecology and taming global capitalism are matters for "world civic politics" instead. The *Empire* authors and their fellow travelers doubt that capturing states would help their movement. They even suggest that earlier revolutions show the state is often a tool of repression, whoever controls it. The social movements of the global new left focus on civil society, on fluid practices emerging at the grass roots. New participatory experiments and cultural codes, however haphazard, are "subversive in themselves" The *style* of action matters more in the long run, for it creates a culture of creative participation.

Favorite cases of this strategy are the thousands of direct-action protests organized by NGOs in India, and the participatory networks in Brazil that culminated in the Partido dos Trabalhadores (Workers Party). The latter tried to link national politics to social movements, as an experiment in "radical dernocracy".[27] The global new left has always had an uneasy engagement with politics. Its energy focuses both below and beyond the state. It mirrors the cultural strategy of regional antiliberals, but does not aim eventually to seize public space and impose orthodoxy upon it.

Ethically, the global new left is a mix of atomism and demoticism. Some of its supporters, at the margins of universal atomism, want atomism's rough edges softened. Others are loosely demotic but willing to make concessions to atomist openness and fluidity. On an intellectual level, we find this hybrid flavor in the writings of Chantal Mouffe and other theorists of "radical democracy." Mouffe presents "radical democracy" as a blend of liberalism on the one hand, and communitarian "civic republicanism" on the other. It keeps liberalism's ideas of fluid selfhood and moral relativism, but pleads for more social equality and participation. By stressing civic-mindedness, communitarianism supposedly balances liberalism's ills. Still, Mouffe has doubts about the rigidity and conformity of most traditional communities, and rejects them as "nostalgic relics which ought to be discarded" Concretely, "radical democracy" means making common cause among the movements of the global new left. Out of their praxis emerges a new political self, an "ensemble" of activism.[28]

Whether intellectually or practically, the global new left is neither fish nor fowl. The more it talks of postmodern flux and actors who are uncertain about all they do, the more it sounds like a branch of universal atomism. From that standpoint, we might call it a system-refining movement. It would temper capitalism with equality, but would bring no cultural rupture. Indeed, that end of the global newlefi spectrum works within the present order and does not really escape its assumptions. Many of its intellectuals are socially indistinguishable from the elites of universal atomism, even if they have a mild countercultural bent left over from the 1960s, and a stronger sense of justice. That most of its activists traffic in single issues—pollution, sweatshops, AIDS, and so on—only highlights their doubtful antisystemic credentials.

At the other end of the spectrum, where the global new left fades off into demoticism, its goals remain fragmentary and small-scale. For example, take E. F. Schumacher's "alternative economics," which has gained a following among some in the global new left since the 1970s. Schumacher drew from Buddhism and Gandhi, to craft a more humane economic vision around the idea that "man is small, and, therefore, small is beautiful." He would do away with impersonal bureaucracies and large-scale trade, and ground economics in local communities so far as possible. Materialism would give way to a renewed concern for creativity and relntionships.[29] Most of his vision is classically demotic, in the usual good and bad senses, with a heavy dose of "deep ecology" Given how it would most likely be applied—with little room for people who are not vilinge-minded—it would stifle anyone of more cosmopolitan temper.

It we look at the whole spectrum of sensibilities that color the global new left, therefore, it does not really amount to an exception to the arguments I have made. At one end, it stands indicted on all the charges leveled at universal atomism: self-absorption, paralyzing indefiniteness, and hostility to tradition. At the other end, it suffers the same nemotic flatness and problems of scale as the regional antiliberalisms. The latter point does not mean the global new

left and the regional antiliberalisms are the sanre. They are not. They have different language and different supporters, and because of the global new left's on-end-off alignment with atomism, they have clashed often. Put a pro-life protester and a Greenpeace activist together—sparks will fly.

In at least one respect, agency, the global new left suffers from *worse* problems than do the regional antiliberalisms. Blending universal atomists' indecisiveness with demots' humility and narrow horizons, it ends up with the worst of both worlds. The global new left has a weak and diffuse idea of agency, with little room for critical distance or seizing the world from above. The *Empire* authors show only scorn for metaphysics or purposed history. Since all meanings have dissolved, revolutionary militants have nothing on which to peg their energy. One Argentine historian and journalist echoed the sentiment: "We can no longer think of revolution as leading to some ideal goal." Agency becomes an exercise in "dailiness," a fluid blend of "discursive," "transversal," and "inaudible" actions that supposedly nibble away at authority. At best it works only through a long-term, unconscious adding-up of gesturet.[30] Blueprints give indigestion to those who see politics today as the art of self-apology. At an extreme, we thus read in one report on the Québec protests of "a theatrical catapult built by a surrealist group from Alberta and used to hurl teddy bears on police lines.".[31]

All these are pronounced examples, to be sure. But the global new left's unease with vigorous agency is unmistakable, even in milder cases like Falk's "rooted utopianisni" Despite misgivings about the "Disneyland postmodernism" of some on the left, he still sees earlier styles of revolutionary heroism as irrelevant if not wicked. He also finds fundamentalist ideologies too relentless to lead to anything but self-righteous excess. Blueprints constrain and dehumanize. Rather, the world willchange once the "latent energy" bubbling up in transnational civil society finally breaks through at an "opportune moment.".[32] Some healthy reservations about violence have their place, of course, but the global new left's timidness has prevented it from fully challenging the global order. Because of its compromises with postmodern softness, it does not even have the substitutes for agency that some fundamentalists find in organized militancy or symbolic acts.

The kinds of resistance I have discussed so far—the global new left here, and the regional antiliberalisms earlier—have one thing in common. They have been atomist, demotic, or some hybrid of the two. They occupy the homogeneous side of the four-ethos scheme, in other words. It seems unlikely victory in the global culture war will come just from tweaking the balance between demoticism and atomism, or the scale on which resistance operates. Instead, the fruitlessness stems in part from the lack of a highculture dimension. Atomists succeeded a generation agu in wiping out the social bases of perfectionism and virtuocracy, leaving nnly demoticism as an anti-atomist political force. Resistance mostly occupies the space that universal atomists have left it.

Despite this disheartening pattern overall, however, a few clusters of high-culture resistance still linger. To round out this survey of the landscape with which history has presented us, let us see why these reactions have not amounted to more. Knowing their peculiarities will help lay the groundwork for the last part of the book. Any multidimensional global challenge will have to draw on both demotic and high-culture forces, wherever we can find them.

Three clusters offer a sample of *high-culture antiliberalisnr* since the 1960s-1970s reframing. One is the so-called "New Confucian" revival. Unlike Chinese nationalism and populism, with their roots in the nrainland's lowermiddle class, this revival has centered on some intellectuals in Taiwan and the overseas diaspora. While the Confucian literati have vanished everywhere, remnants of their mentality survive more outside the mainland than within. The revival's leading figure is the philosopher and public intellectual Du Weiming. A second type of high-culture resistance has involved the Iranian clergy, led at first by the ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. The Sh‘ ite Islamic clergy was one of the world's few virtuocracies left intact after midcentury. It coordinated resistance to the Shah in the late 1970s and then, allying with a popular revolt, founded a revolutionary regime with some virtuocratic features. Our third high-culture bloc is in Western academia. Invoking the heritage of premodern Europe, it denounces late modernity on behalf of a more reflective and cultivated way of life. Many figures would do, but I have taken as an example here the late American cultural critic Allan Bloom.

It may seem odd to lump such different groups together. The people in question would probably find the idea alarming, or at least amusing. Still, beneath their divergent concerns, they share a similar core self-understanding, which sets them apart from the other resistance currents I have examined so far.

These high-culture critics have a temper quite unlike the flat moralism of the fundamentalists and populists. In most respects, their outlook matches that of the premodern thinkers they admire. The biggest contrast with regional antiliberals is that they have a strong sense of principled intellectual responsibility; of questioning blind custom and taking the broad view of world affairs. Du Weiming insists the Confucian classics are not merely of historical interest. Rather, they offer truths that a true intellectual must try to live out personally. Du affirms the inner richness of Confucian self-cultivation, against the "sophisticated relativism" of modern Western scholars. The true meaning of Confucianism lies behind the rules and rituals. Khomeini likewise saw inner meanings in Islam. Having explored mysticism in his youth, he had little patience for unimaginative clerics or plain folk who saw Islam as little more than a bunch of "ordinances.".[33] Unlike demotic antiliberals, these high-culture critics are sensitive to manylayers of ineanings, and know truth involves more than regulations.

Indeed, their transcendent outlook gives them the leverage to reinterpret tradition. Here they have much in common with thinkers like Muḥammad Iqbāl and Liang Shuming in the early twentieth century. Du speaks of reviving Confucianism not by restoring its past form, but by sparking another renaissance like the two that occurred in ancient and medieval times.[34] This attitude contrasts with the nationalists and fundamentalists, whose matter-of-fact nostalgia exempts them from originality. Du treats the great epochs of Chinese history not as something to admire passively, but as something for today's Confucians to relive under their own steam. Rather than seeing Confucian texts as a recipe for rigid gender roles, for example, he wants to express the underlying principles anew and affirm women's participation in public life. Family structure is a means to virtue, not an end in itself.

Khomeini and his fellow ayatollahs showed a similar idealism and critical leverage. The constitutional structure of the Islamic Republic of Iran had no precedent in Shi'ite legal rheory. Khomeini drastically reinterpreted the role of the clergy, arguing that given the pressures of modern times they had to step up and take responsibility for the state.[35] The Iranian application of

sharī'ah law has also been much more reflective than most Islamists elsewhere envision. And contmry to liberal indictments, women's role in Iranian public life has expanded since the revolution. Women now make up a large part of the university student population, and have been known to serve as judges.

To put the peculiarities of Iran's virtuocratic polity in perspective, contrast it with the rigidity of the Tālibān in late-1990s Afghanistan. The latter militants were mosdy tribal demots, who impressed the sensibilities of village life on a whole country—and ran into the same pathologies of excess that usually go with the shift in scale. Even the Ṭālibān clergy was much flatter, much more populist in its origins and temper, than the Sh'ite ayatollahs over the border in Iran. Again, we see that transcendence allows a kind of principled creativity, a confidence to screen and adapt new practices from outside one's own community. The Iranian clerics have been far less paranoid about the outside world than fundamentalists elsewhere. Their inner virtuocratic anchor does not allow unwitting compromises with atomism. They differ greatly, for example, from all the former Marxists who lack such inner confidence and thus get sucked into being "reasonable" about the global capitalist order.

That the Iranian clergy holds political power—for now at least, despite the designs of hawks in Washington—makes it an exception among highculture antiliberals. Most of its counterparts, including the Confucian revivalists and the Western classical humanists, have dealt with the present climate by withdrawing into a rarefied intellectual sphere. And to be fair, apolitical withdrawal is an obvious choice. Atomist victories during the twentieth century have denied them any institutional influence over public life. They also have no popular allies to take them to power as happened, partly by accident, in Iran. Du Weiming is now a Harvard professor and speaks mainly to an academic audience. A roughly like-minded current on the Chinese mainland—the so-called *guóxué* (national learning) fever—also focuses on "an intellectual realm of self-eealiratioti" quite unattuned to public affairs. Disheartened by todays climate of passivity and rampant consumerism, Chinese high-culture intellectuals have turned their backs on politics. Bloom, who taught for many years at the University of Chicago, also took intellectual self-containment as a good in itself. Lamenting today's "poverty of living examples of the possible high human types" he saw the canon of European classics as the best source of inspiration. The goals of Bloom and other Western classical humanists have long been modest: toning up elite education, and restoring the universities as enclaves of timeless truths.[36]

In the end, today's high-culture antiliberals have a mixed record on agency. They have the inner resources for a vigorous engagement with modern life. When political opportunity presented itself in Iran, they proved quite creative and resilient. Mostly, however, even those who admire virtuocratic traditions have withdrawn into their own ivory-tower fortresses. Apparently they see a lack of inechanisms for public influence, and a crass popular culture not worth the effort at redemption.

What of universalism? Compared to regional antiliberals, these critics are more open to other civilizations in principle, yet they fall short in practice. Bloom praised the older philosophic sort of openness to other cultures in a search for truth, unlike the liberal openness of blithe relativism.[37] None of his own writing dealt with the non-Western world, however. Perhaps the legacy of imperialism still makes Western classical humanists think they are above learning from

Asia. Certainly the "Great Books" curriculum that some of them defended a few years ago was painfully provincial, by global standards.

Du Weiming has more enthusiasm for dialogue. He has said, for example, that a new Confucianism must be "communicable" to people outside Chinese culture. He has also favored drawing knowledge from elsewhere that might shed light on Confucianism.[38] But his interest in dialogue never goes far enough. Du sees the Confucian revival as something occurring mainly in eastern Asia, lest it "weaken its roots" there. Contact with others is at best peripheral, an intellectual exchange to help Confucian revivalists flesh out their own thinking.

The Iranian clergy has also welcomed cosmopolitanism in principle. Khomeini played up the Indian forays of his ancestors as an illustration of Islamic universalism. He even opposed putting nationality requirements into Iran's constitution. In more recent years, Iranian leaders such as former president Muhammad Khatami have called for a "dialogue of civiltizations" Some have proposed that different religions make common cause against depravity. All faiths come from a common source and "one day, they will all again merge together in a global religionP".[39] In practice, however, the Islamic Republic's cosmopolitanism is nominal. During the 1980s, its so-called "Of fice of Global Revolution" extended no aid to movements outside the Islamic world. The statements about dialogue are also all aimed at the West, as the power center, and ignore the rest of the world. Even the call for a united front of religions against liberalism was hopelessly vague.

Across these high-culture antiliberalisms, then, we find some potential for dialogue but very little to drive it. Moreover, just as regional antiliberals often slide into liberal language once they enter global fora, so do highculture antiliberals face the same peril. Du Weiming is a case in point. As an international academic, he operates in networks that would co-opt any real dialogue. If he meets Muslim scholars, he meets them at Western-style philosophy seminars in Singapore, not at seminaries in Iran. He has also made frequent remarks about Confucian values being an asset in the rapid growth of the Asian Tigers.[40] No such words could escape anyone who gave due weight to how the Tigers' market-worshipping would appall Confucius. These slips into philosophical indiscipline tie in with the pattern of apolitical withdrawal. Since the Confucian revivalists are not fighting against atomism for public space, they easily make concessions to it.

This unwillingness to draw lines and speak bluntly shows through in Du's approach to dialogue too. Whenever he has called for dialogue, he has listed as potential partners of the Confucian revivalists a hotchpotch of world intellectual currents with little in common: everyone from Marxists to Buddhists to post-Freudians.[41] Sometimes dialogue seems little more than a call to openness for its own sake. Yet the fact is that constructive dialogue and resistance need *specific* points of contact and a common aim. One gets neither by trying to include everyone. Harsh though it may sound, mapping a dialogue across one universalism also means waging war on other universalisms.

In short, today's high-culture antiliberals do not suffer the problems with agency that hamper both regional antiliberals and the global new left. They tend to withdraw from public life, hut that pattern reflects discouraging conditions more than an anemic spirit. The usual vigor of virtuocracy does endure beneath their resignation to circumstance. Their greatest weakness comes from insularity, or at least a vagueness about what cross-cultural dialogue means. This

deficient cosmopolitanism has psychological roots too. Given their position, they often have compelling reasons not to seek new universalisms. Intellectuals whose authority comes from mastering one tradition—whether Confucianism or Shi rte Islam or the European classics—would tread on uncertain ground farther afield. It takes courage for someone respected at home to become a novice abroad. Without a larger political and cultural project worth the risk, they prefer the security of what they know best.

The Iranian clerics have had a further problem. By seizing political power in 1979, they slotted themselves into the nation-state system. The best example of agency thus ended in the most stubborn source of insularity: national defensiveness. While understandable in light of Westem eagerness to undo the revolution, such jealous national sovereignty was a dead end. Insularity and inadequate dialogue also have tied in with obvious domestic shortcomings of the Iranian regime. Many people have rightly criticized repressive legal and social practices that have persisted despite the clergy's creativity. I suspect more openness to intercivilizational dialogue would have helped here too. It would have helped not by allowing atomist contamination of the experiment—I surely do not mean dialogue with Hollywood—but by lending broader perspective on the universal principles beneath Islamic law and Iranian custom. Practices could have been refined in the fire of comparison with practices elsewhere that stem from the same roots.

Our picture of the resistance is now complete. Regional antiliberalisms fail because of their weak agency, ethical flatness, and narrow horizons. The global new left has broader horizons but suffers the same problems with agency, quite apart from its dubious antisystemic credentials. The high-culture antiliberalisms have the opposite problem. They have strong foundations for agency, even if most put little stock in politics. They are hampered mainly by insularity, and at best dabble in intercivilizational dialogue, with scant sense of what true dialogue would require or serve. In the next chapter, I address these problems and pull together the many strands of my argument. How can we build a postliberal universalism that bridges multiple ethoses, and has the agency and breadth to confront the present order on its own scale?

Chapter 9

The Triple Partnership and the World Commonwealth

Three purposes have driven this book. I have described four ethoses, as permanent features of the human cultural landscape and as building blocks of an ordered society. I have traced how those ethoses have clashed in modern times, leading to the lamentable outcome ofan atomist-dominated globe. And I have mapped out the deep pathologies of atomist culture and argued that it needs challenging on the broadest scale. This chapter and the conclusion will draw these three strand together and build on them. I start by reviewing what we have covered, and highlighting what modern world history shows us about atomism's strength, its points of vulnerability, and the lessons that earlier challengers can teach us today.then I plot out how we might think about a postliberal world order and the paths leading to it.

Chapter one introduced the four ethoses: demotic, perfectionist, virtuocratic, and atomist. Through examples from premodern history and thought, we saw that the same four self-undersrandings have cropped up again and again, despite the many ways societies have had people live them out. It may have seemed odd to go back hundreds or thousands of years to start a book aimed at the present and future, but it gave us a firmer and more distant vantage point. Ideals about human nature that cut back and forth across history have a robustness that talk of novelty cannot efface. Once the boundary between present and past fades, we can see atomists' dominance for what it is: history's aberration. The burden of proof no longer falls against the resistance as automatically as atomisns present-minded defenders and beneficiaries wish. We gain leverage against atomist modernity from outside it. Only by knowing several permanent universalisms can we imagine another world that takes them as building blocks.

Chapters two and three told the story of modern atomism's escape from what had kept it in check earlier. Starting in the late nineteenth century, bridgehead atomists linked up across world regions and put rival ethoses on the defensive. First, they turned premodern thinking about freedom upside down. Instead ofthe ethically rich spiritedness on which premodern atomists had frowned, freedom became mere anemic indulgence. Second, bridgehead atomists turned modernity's expanded scale to their own advantage. Undercutting the great civilizations, they put forth a universalism of the lowest common denominator. By the 1920s, challenges arose from both popular and high-culture directions, and in turn forced the global atomist project to readjust. Vanguard atomists allied with demots after World War II. They deflated popular resistance and eroded the ways of life that could sustain virtuocracy and perfectionism.

Today's atomist strength and non-atomist weakness reflect this history of challenge and response. Permanent forces interact as they always have. Modernity hasjust let atomists pursue a novel strategy that other ethos-bearers have not met properly. Modernity and globalization are not *inherently* atomist. They have seemed so only because non-atomists have failed to see that the old raw material remains as a resource, if only they use it properly.

Chapters four, five, and six probed globalatotnist culture today. Over the last three decades, universal atomists have broken their earlier alliance with demots and gone it alone. Their new

outlook blends rootlessness and calculating self-indulgence. The distinct pathologies ofatomism come through quite clearly now it reigns supreme. We have also seen the causes ofits resilience. As its proponents endlessly remind us, liberalism is now the only ideology that addresses all countries. An idea that started with bridgehead atomists persists: that cultures can meet only in the depths of interests and relativism. Institutions and structures also shore up universal atomism. Atomist professional and political networks have the greatest breadth and complexity. The meritocratic screening of recent decades has created a social base that entices talent into its own ranks.

Chapters seven and eight looked at the main clusters of resistance. Despite their differences, the fumdamentalist nationalist, and populist reactions have common problems that keep them on the defensive. Their narrow demotic base stops them getting beyond rigid pieties and insularity. They even build high walls against one another, so they offer one another nothing and cannot make common cause against global atomism. Much as civilizations turned inward and ossified when the Mongol horde laid Eurasia waste centuries ago, so now do they react poorly under pressure. Global atomism and its main challengers really reinforce one another. The latter occupy the unpromising spaces allotted to them. Our fate turns on a mutual bashing of the self-indulgent and the provincial.

Nor do the exceptions offer much promise. The global new left has a broader vision, but its awkward blend of atomism and demoticism leaves it with the worst problems of each. Agency is self-apology, and capturing political power mostly irrelevant. The few high-culture critics who survive do not show the same flatness and lack of creative energy, to be sure. But they have not opened nearly enough to one another across regions. Without a political project, most have withdrawn into self-cultivation and keeping the atomist plague from their own doors.

In light of all the disheartening realities facing us, what prospects do we still have? Who are "we" anyway? I should like to think that "we" are a range of people, from various civilizations, who take a similarly dim view of the ills of our time. I should also hope that many of my readers, even those who disagree with large chunks of what I have said, count themselves on this side of history. Whatever our differeuces of viewpoint for personal or cultural reasons, we can take our common concerns as a point of departure. Different ways of expressing our sentiments should not blind us to their overlap.

Concretely, this book reaches out to all those who oppose global atomism fervently enough to want it displaced. The question to ask now is how we might displace it, and what might come after it. The answers I shall offer are not "moderate" enough to endear me to liberals or other atomists. Rather, I want to pursue this line of thinking to its logical end. We have our backs to the wall, so to speak, at a point in world history when the cultural raw material for the best human aspirations fades by the day.

The questions of *breadth* and *depth* are crucial. Breadth means thinking about how to challenge atomism on its own global scale. Not only is a cosmopolitan antiliberalism possible, contrary to what many now take for granted. It is also the *only* way forward. Whatever cannot appeal to people in all civilizations will neither inspire nor win. Depth means grounding both the vision and the energy for realizing it in a real shift of self-understanding. Tinkering with how institutions are set up will not be enough. The world needs more than "globalization from

below," or other projects that would only soften edges and reduce inequality. Addressing deprivation is a worthy aim, and one I share. But our proper starting point should be within rather than without. Remaking the world is a question of character, not policy. We must imagine *anotherglohalization,* in touch with the permanent truths that earlier societies knew well and tried to live out.

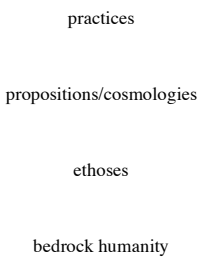
This chapter will revolve around three themes: (1) the need for a more cosmopolitan resistance, (2) the importance ofvirtuocracy in an alternative vision of publiclife, and (3) the political project of establishing a postliberal world state. I intend none of what follows as a detailed blueprint. I want only to suggest how we might think about a worldwide alternative, and sketch out the contours of a strategy to bring that alternative to fruition.

This task demands that we learn from any historical experience that foreshadows it. In chapter two I described civilizational virtuocrats, the high-culture critics of atomism in the early twentieth century. We saw that thinkers like Eliot, Rodó, Tagore, and lqbā lvoiced many sound and noble aspirations. We also saw why they failed to outmaneuver atomists in that cycle of re istan ce. While they had broader horizons than today's fundamentatists and nationalists, they still took civilizations as the building blocks of any global synthesis. Without a clear sense of contact points among world regions—and fault lines that cut across them—they could not focus their energy globally. They failed to see that their vision needed to crystallize in a common project, namely the seizure and remaking of global political order. Their creativity ended up scattered in small-scale experiments in culture and education. The emerging atomist order was not met on its own scale and rolled back.

Even if spirit of civilizational virtuocrats now moves us in turn, we must not repeat the strategy that failed them. We cannot now usefully talk of the "essences" of different civilizations, if indeed anyone ever could. An obsession with such units will only lead us astray from forging a postliberal universalism. To sink global atomism's ship, we must bore through the bulkheads that divide today's resistances from one another. Nor can a focus on civil society and virtuous action beneath politics suffice. Perhaps our predecessors a century ago thought they could afford to wait for historical trends to reach a crisis. Atomist advances had been wide but not deep, after all, and plenty of raw material for alternatives remained. Today, we no longer have that luxury. Atomism's fall is far from inevitable. The next two or three decades—at most—are the last chance to roll it back, because the resources for doing so fade by the day. History has not yet ended, nor should it end on their terms of tragedy. But history's end will come to afflict us unless we meet atomism on its own scale and with due vigor.

How, then, might we set about crafting a vision fitted to the task? As I explained earlier, there are many levels on which we can talk about truths that map across diversity. At the most basic level, we can speak of universal human traits. Usually these traits radiate out from biology and the like. This common denominator takes no account of ideals or rich self-understandings. It might talk of hunger, or greed, or sensitivity to pain, but little more inspiring. One level higher, we find recurring character structures like the four ethoses. Here human nature splits into a few patterns. Unlike the monochrome level of the human as such, the plane of ethoses does not show every person as identical. It does preserve universality, however, because the ethoses recur across space and time as permanent poles of the human experience.Ihe most robust ethoses, as we have seen, are demoticisnr, perfectionistn, and virtuocracy. Atomism is an ethos too, since it

has a character ideal beyond the basic layer of the human as such. But atomism has a uniquely close relationship with that most basic layer, since it makes much of homogeneity, raw impulses, and the lowest common denominator. At times, atomists' focus on this placeless bedrock means they claim special insight into humans as unpretentious animals. Finally, at the most specific levels, *we* find the variety of propositions, cosmologies, and practices. These layers lose any universality, for they involve beliefs and ways of life at one point in space and time. For example, they include sectarian religious identities that do not travel or translate well.



We can map common ground on any ofthese levels. The more specific and concrete the level, the narrower the common ground, and the fewer people who share the characteristics in question. Liberals talk most about the two extremes: the bedrock ofraw humanity—on which they think their ideology has unique purchase—and the most fragmented level of customs, tastes, and other concrete practices. They do so mainly because this view of the world sustains their dominance. They put the ultimate moral reference point beneath ideals, where raw interest and desires alone rule. Then they treat people's values and cultural practices as superficial choices. Because those choices vary from setting to setting, they supposedlyconre into conflict unless confined to private life. It is in the gulf between these two extremes—an unholy marriage ofanimalistic degradation and relativistic fragmentation—that modern atomists' hold on the imagination lies. Only atomism is universal, they say. All other ideals are context-bound and untranslatable, so they can coexist only as private tastes.

We must shatter this myth. We must pay attention to the middle ground between the flatness of raw humanity and the diversity of cultural details. Today's obsessions with either ego or ethnos must yield to serious thought about ethoses. Posing the question this way means probing deep enough to map character ideals across time and space, but not so deep that we end with atomists' universalism of the depths. The ethoses are well suited for this purpose. They let people see their own self-image in their counterparts. They can step back from practices to ask what character ideals those practices serve. By its very nature, that question can lubricate creative comparisons and mutual learning. At the same time, enough substance stays so we can discuss the *content* of ideals. Commitments of such depth are serious and binding, not just personal tastes like a favorite wine.

Thinking on the level of ethoses has important consequences. It concedes modern liberalism's claim that it rests on something cutting across time and space. That something is atomism, the same atomism as in the Sophists and Carvaka school and Legalists centuries ago. But this concession really takes more away from liberals than it gives them. For in the same breath, we can then bypass and deflate liberals' claim to speak for all humanity. The fourethos scheme presents three other universalisms that are equally timeless and placeless, and far more inspiring.

We can now start talking about the modern crisis as a threat to character ideals that represent the best parts of the human spirit. Identifying several rich universalisms, notjustthebedrock that universal atomists have in mind, gives us the leverage we need to reclaim the world as a whole.

Of course, the idea needs to be taken further. To saywe get critical leverage from this framework raises many questions. A skeptic could object that even if the descriptions make sense, they are still only descriptions—an "is," not an "ought" Why does the recurrence of these ethoses give them moral weight as a starting point for challenging what now holds sway?

Note that I have not said the four ethoses are metaphysical truths that anyone should accept on faith. To be sure, they do often correspond to what people in history have seen as metaphysical truth, natural law, or the like. When we read ibn al-Arabis writing on dimensions of prophethood, for example, we find much that aligns with a more worldly description of virtuocracy as a cultural type. Unlike today's secular atomists, I do believe many deeper truths lie beneath the world we see. A devout reader from any religious tradition might wonder why I do not refer more to such matters. But I can only urge such a reader not to make too much of my choice to avoid metaphysical language here. The building blocks ofthis argument recur across cultures and eras. To use metaphysical language, which is usually context-bound and takes some details for granted, would probably not help the accessibility of the argument to other readers.

The way I first introduced the four ethoses is also the best way to take the argument to the next stage, and answer the objection that they are an "is," not an "ought" Through the historical examples of chapter one, I showed that certain self-understandings have recurred. The four-ethos model emerges not out ofthin air, as an intellectual abstraction, but from the widest range of human experience. The ethoses are shorthand for a recurring set of choices built into that experience and thus into human nature. A society that satisfies those recurring demands resonates with human nature. Accommodating two ethoses instead ofone, or three instead oftwo, means that a society resonates with more aspects of human nature. Such a society is more compelling, to more people, than one framed more narrowly.

We should also rcmember that the four ethoses are not really four equal choices. The three robust ethoses—demoticism, perfectionism, and virtuocracy—have always placed more demands on their bearers than has atomism. They treat human aspirations as richly layered, beyond the atomist bedrock of self-interest, tastes, and efficiency. Indeed, atomists concede as much. Atomist rhetoric describes "real" human nature in the rawest and flattest of terms. Within the four-ethos scheme, therefore, we have a three-versus-one contrast that has recurred across history. Atomistn is the odd man out.

Atomists maygive two responses to what I have said so far.Ihe first focuses on how I get from these patterns to how the world should be ordered. The second deals with how the facts ofmodern history seem to work against me.

On the first count, an atomist might object that no matter how much the three non-atomist ethoses recur, and how much we might want to base an alternative world culture on them, they are still only descriptive. Blunter atomists might put it ditTerently. Even though these ideals recurred in history, and even though their bearers frowned on atomism, they were wrong. In other words, demots, perfectionists, and virtuocrats have deluded themselves with "truths" that are really fictions. Only atomists past and present, only the merchants and janissaries and

technocrats and yuppies, have seen human nature in its base reality. I agree that modern atotnists can state that case. On their own terms ofdebate, we probably cannot prove them wrong. Confucians and Platonists could not prove the Legalists and the Sophists wrong, after all. But neither, it turns out, can modern atomists prove themselves right. We end up back at square one, trying to make sense of patterns in history and a modern departure from those patterns.

Why should the past importance of the three robust ethoses and their contempt for atomism carry weight now? Our best answer is that a consensus across time and space, in different traditions independent of one another, suggests insight into underlying truths. Atomist liberals today claim tovalue deliberation and consensus. Can they object, then, when a far broader and richer historical consensus indicts them? If a consensus matters because it hints at truth, then the consensus from before atomist rule should outweigh any supposed consensus now. After all, it arose in many more contests, had many more supporters, and was not distorted by the pressure oftoday's global media and education systems. I do not pretend the historical consensus is, in itself, a refutation of what underlies atomist liberalism; one cannot "refute" a timeless impulse. But the historical consensus probably does outweigh liberals' usual claim that, lo and behold, the novelties ofthe modern age have made all past truth irrelevant.

Of course, liberals will remain unpersuaded here. I suspect the reason is that, by and large, they do not value consensus as a sign of truth because they doubt that truth exists. The value they attach to deliberation and consensus has little to do with the *content* of whatever agreement people might reach. It really serves to shore up a no-questions-asked respect for individuals who hold beliefs and debate one another *in the present.* The whole issue of how to weigh a historical consensus gets lost. Conveniently, this means that no matter how much premodern generations had grand ideals and frowned on the baseness of atomism, the moral weight of their views died along with them. Liberals need not prove the priests and peasants of 1200 wrong, because the priests and peasants of 1200 are gone.

The problem with this liberal response is that we have no reason to take it as a logical default position. Saying it does not make it so, a point liberals should remember since they skeptically remind others of it so often. One can hold this liberal view of past and present only if one already takes for granted, arbitrarily, that truth does not exist. *Only* then can the priests and peasants of 1200 be dismissed, rather than included in an ongoing human enterprise. *Only* then does the historical consensus have no insights to offer and no continuing claim on us. Without truth as a goal, the ways people have sought it do not matter. Iflibemis reject the claims of history on those grounds, then I can say little to them, and vice versa. The gap between us is ultimately too wide to bridge.

Still, atomists can fall back on a second objection, involving the facts of recent human experience. Here they might bracket the issue of whether the three non-atomist ethoses rest on truth or not, and focus instead on what modern history says about human aspirations. From their standpoint, that ever-larger numbers of people in modern times have embraced liberal ideology, as well as other signs of atomism, suggests human nature is quite susceptible to just what 1 have spilled so much ink attacking. To challenge global atomist culture would mean standing against the preferences of many people. Even ifthe other three ethoses have value in the abstract, they ignore what most people want. Usually this response will add that atomist liberalism gives people what they *most* want: expanded choices, comfort, personal security, and so on.

This objection can be leveled not only against my argument so far in this chapter, but also in retrospect against the story told in earlier parts of the book. Even if we find modern atomism's conquests appalling, surely some built-in human need must liebehind what has happened. If true—if modern atomism has appealed to human beings so widely—then all our ideals stand on shaky ground.

I could take the easy answer and start speaking ill of human nature. Perhaps most people really are self-indulgent and short-sighted. Perhaps, without a carefully crafted cultural climate that keeps atomism in check, society always goes to the dogs. In other words, atomism's advance does not cancel the merits of the other three ethoses. It just reminds us that we have an uphill battle to overcome most people's laxity. I do not want to make this argument, however, partly because I do not ultimately believe it, and partly because it would be a disheartening concession to atomists. We betray our ideals if we start qualifying their resonance with human nature in this way. It would also mean retreating to terrain that alomists would gladly let us occupy. Ancient and modern atomists alike have argued that only they see human nature in all its base reality, and that any higher ideals are affected or imaginery. To concede a blanket appeal of modern atomism to human nature would mean buying into atomist thinking.

Nonetheless, we do have lo make sense of tlte “demand” side ofatomism's spread over the last century. It will not do to focus only on how modern atomists have imagined and “supplied” each phase of their project, as was my goal in much of the book Neglecting the sad reality of atomisms attraction to many people would muddle our thinking about the pressure points for rolling it back.

Let us start by taking apart modern atomism's appeals to different types ofpeople. Many perfectionists, given their wnt to distance themselves from normal life, did not see much at stake early on. A ce ntury ago, they still had their refuges in contemplation, genteel private life, and so on. Atomism's advance struck them as just the latest episode of the herd's skepticism about all that was good and noble and transcendent. Atomist individualism at least seemed likely to leave perfectionists alone. The rest of the twentieth century shifted the earth under their feet. Cultural pressure gradually increased to see one's own standard ofself-cultivation relativistically, as one option among many. The kind oftemperamentat home with perfectionism has not vanished, so much as lost focus. Sometimes rarefied artistic postmodernism or New Age quasi-mysticism have filled the gap, hut on atomist terms. The cultural wherewithal for a robust perfectionism has gone.

Likewise, demots have seen a gradual erosion of the settings that make demotic values vivid and easy to practice. Villages give way to clusters of cash-cropping farms, then to suburbs and shopping centers. Experiences mold people. When those experiences change because of atomist pressure, the scope of demnotic life shrinks. Many ordinary folk no longer have enough personal experience ofdemoticism to know its demands and rewards fully. Compromises and concessions add up over a couple of generations. Atomism at least talks about equality, plain folk tell themselves, and nothing much can be done about its tearing apart of coummnities. One by one, demots become “reasonable” They accommodate their hopes to what they experience as vast forces unleashed around them. The small decencies of village life fade, as people retreat into their homes and adopt the cutthroat attitude toward the outside world that onesocial scientist has dubbed “amoral familism.”[1] For both denrots and perfectionists, the dimension each ethos shares

with atomism has eased this remaking of the self. Sometimes backlashes happen if change is too abrupt. More often, though, demots and perfectionists have been like the frog that sat in a slowly heating pot and was boiled without knowing it.

Virtuocratic groups have gone through some ofthe satne changes, though another pattern has usually prevailed. Since virtuocrats need a society on which to act, mechanisms for doing so, and institutions that give continuity to their thought, atomists have found them quite easy to undermine. Most virtuocratic strata around the world, such as the clergies and mandarinates, were pushed aside through social reforms that bridgehead and vanguard atomists carried out forjustthat reason. The global intelligentsia's absorption into a new meritocratic culture has also dissolved, individual by individual, many of the self-understandings crucial to virtuocracy. Virtuocrats could only have survived by fighting back. And of course some did, knowing that atomists shared none of their sensibilities and would give them no quarter. Usually the lack ofa clear vision meant those efforts failed before they started, with a whimper rather than a bang.

No doubt much of this sounds alien to atomists savoring their version ofprogress. With readers outside atomist culture or at its margins, however, I suspect it strikes a chord.Ihose who over the last century have watched with dismay as virtues were flattened into tastes, and those whose worlds of small decency have unraveled between ambition and shrewdness, and those who have seen the public sphere given over to bread and circuses—all can recognize, in their own ways, the shifting fault lines of the global culture war. The overall lesson is that modern atomism has not appealed to bearers of the other ethoses *as such.* Rather, it has created a world in which those ethoses can no longer flourish. We see a kind of openness to atomism by default. Atomism has boiled the frogs slowly. Memories of ways of life that sustained the three robust ethoses have faded all too easily, in the developed North and in ever more of the South too. In public and private life alike, talk of those older ideals now seems quaint at best.

This history hardly amounts to an atomist victory on a level playing field. Just because the conditions that sustain non-atomist ethoses have proved destructible, just because atomism gains once memories ofthose conditions have faded, does not mean atomism has really trumped other impulses in human nature. Moreover, atomists who suggest otherwise should remember that modern life has also abounded with reactions against atomism, driven by yearnings for community or transcendence.Ihe very idea of alienation arose as modern atomism took shape, and has gained purchase with each atomist victory. And suicide rates are correlated with the kind of rootless modern society atomists prefer, as a classic sociological study showed in Europe a century ago.[2]

The full record of modern life suggests neither atomism's “inherent” appeal to human beings, all else being equal—precisely because all else has *not* been equal—nor atomnism's unambiguous appeal even once it has made its conquests. Atomists rty to dismiss backlashes and alienation as juet so much immaturity, on the part of shortsighted people unwilling to face up to the world's meaninglessness. All their talk of modern atomism's resonance with human nature founders because people's sentiments have really been quite mixed. Atomists cannot appeal to only some human tastes and not others. The very way atonist rhetoric works, with nihilism at its base, rules out any higher standard for treating some human desires as inherent and others as shortsighted pathology. For every person who dreams of being told all is permitte d, there is

someone else who finds the soulless egoism of our times dispiriting. Which one does not represent “humanity”?

So far I have explained the ba kground ofhow the appeals of non-atomist ways of life have faded, and how the“demand”side of atomism's spread has an air of default about it. Some specific appeals ot modern atomism still need addressing, though. What does it mean to say that something resonates by default? Here we need to talk about not only the *who,* but also the *why*. To make things simpler, I shall focus on atomist *liberalism* specifically, though other streams of modern atomism, such as technocratic and countercultural socialism, often overlap. The argument for liberalism's resonance usually focuses on such things as expanded choices, comfort, and personal security. Now most people agree that liberalism has performed well on these counts. Addressing this fact means both making sense of what people perceive, and deciding what the upshot of those perceptions really is.

The perception of liberalism's advantages is understandable. Modern atomism in general, and atomist liberalism in particular, have presided over rapid technological development. The average person today has far more wealth and opportunity at his or her disposal than ever before. This does not hold true anywhere near so much outside the developed North, though that caveat does not change liberalism's appeals to the converted peoples in question—which is, after all, what needs explaining. Even though modernization *could* have happened undet another social order, perhaps one that kept atomism at bay, liberalism and economic development have overlapped enough in reality that people tend to credit the former with the latter.

Mass prosperity has also spilled over, softening edges in many spheres of life. Personal protections, choices, and dignity have abounded in ways they could not before modernity. People in developed liberal societies do not starve in hovels and face thrashings by local tyrants. That liberalism declares personal rights as its supreme value naturally leads many to think that any advance on that tont comes from liberal thought, and not from background social conditions. Finally, many people who dislike atomist culture still support something like “political liberalism” as a way for different beliefs to coexist. Since no other mode ofreconciliation seems on offer, non-atomists often resign themselves to atomist control of the public sphere—though political liberals use more slippery language to describe it.

It is wholly proper for people to want these goods they see in liberalism, and to demand that any society furnish them. We should not dismiss them by saying this support for liberalism is mere shortsightedness. Where nonliberal societies have failed—for more than historically contingent reasons—to deliver prosperity, personal dignity, the ability to live decently without coercion, and peace among worthy ways of life, such societies have lessons to learn. Any discerning representative of such a society would agree.

Nonetheless, we need not draw the lesson that liberals want us to draw. Recognizing goals like prosperity, physical safety, and peaceful diversity need not mean capitulating to an atomist liberal way oftlrinking about them. Making allowance for different language and priorities, they are goals that all sensible non-atomists in history shared. I have yet to hear of any premodern societythat trumpeted its unmatched accomplishments in starvation, enmity, and cruelty. Worthy goals must be disentangled from the cultural force that now distorts them and harnesses them to its agenda.

That liberalism can plausibly claim a monopoly on concern for prosperity, human dignity, and peaceful coexistence shows little more than modern atomists' series ofvictories in remaking people's assumptions. The maneuvers and shifting rhetoric that I traced in earlier parts of the book have not been for naught. Identifying them is only a starting point. We must aim in this century to reverse them. We must snap the supposed tight link between the atomist culture that underlies liberalism, and the good things on which liberal ideologues claim a monopoly. Then most of the default support for atomist liberalism in particular, and modern atomism in general, would evaporate. After all, bearers—or ex-bearers—of the non-atomist ethoses have not accepted modern atomism out of a newfound repugnance for their own ideals. They have felt that the conditions to fulfill those ideals cannot hold under modern pressure. Or their understanding of what those ways of life mean has faded. Or they have bought into the fiction that only a broadly atomist culture can assure personal dignity, comforts, and peace.

Remember also that despite atomism's conquests, it has managed onlyto neutralize the public impact ofits rivals. Today, as two thousand years ago, it cannot make them intrinsically unappealing. History and human experience have this salutary bias built in. Even if the number of people who sustain demoticism, perfectionism, or virtuocracy has shrunk—and this trend is a serious ill, of course—the bases ofthese three ethoses' ongoing appeal cannot be eradicated.

Let us return to the main thrust of the argument. My purpose here is persuading those who oppose the atonistorder that one approach, in particular, will let us ease it into history. If we agree that the three robust ethoses have ongoing relevance, what follows? For all three to flourish, a postliberal world commonwealth must be a kind of triple partnership among them.

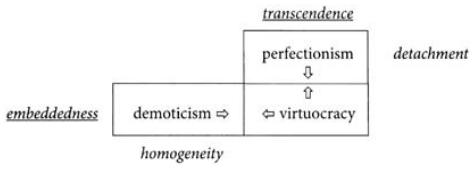
This approach contrasts with how global liberalism handles diversity. Liberals focus on cutting everything down to a lowest common denominator: usually raw self-interest or disembodied choice or content-free citizenship, or some blend thereof. They claim that focusing on this bedrock means liberalism can accommodate the widest range of ways of life. As a cultural force in practice, however, atomist liberals and their fellow travelers make war on most of past human experience and aspiration. Superficial diversity does not mean demoticism, perfectionism, and virtuocracy stay intact. Quite the contrary: they are at odds with the whole mindset of atomist liberalism and must be cut down to size. For liberals, coexistence means truncation. One suspects they would pack a box not by stacking the contents, but by hacking offany protuberances to make more room. Liberal “diversity” does much the same to the range of human ideals.

In contrast, a triple partnership of ethoses would leave substance intact. Rather than being flattened to an atomist common denominator, the three robust ethoses could interlock in a richer civilization.I do not pretend the interlocking itself is a simple task. It means refining what the three ethoses really demand, deciding what points of contact exist among them, and mapping out the spaces in which each would best flourish. But having this aim—a coexistence based on interlocking truths, not on relativism and negation—is already better than what ails us- It is not a new task as such. The great philosophers and prophets are with us in spirit. After all, most premodern thought dealt with different types of human nature and layers of truth, and how a civilization could fit them all together. Modern atomists forgot such things because of their aversion to truths or virtues of any sort. If nothing beyond the raw self counts, then no ideals are compelling enough to need interlocking on their own terms.

So how might we integrate demoticism, perfectionism, and virtuocracy? Classical social thought offers at least two schemes for reconciling multiple ways of life within a whole, even though the building blocks were not the three ethoses being discussed here. One scheme is biographical, the other hierarchical. The biographical scheme has its best example in Hinduism's multiple stages oflife: studying, householding, mystical withdrawal, and so on. Each stage lets a person concentrate on one type of truth, but at least in theory everyone experiences them all in turn. The hierarchical scheme, as in Plato's *Republic,* takes another tack. It reconciles different ways of life by ranking them from higher to lower. Lower callings are necessary, and have their place, since they provide resources for the higher callings of a minority.

Both these approaches fit diversity into a whole, but they have problems. The biographical route allows genuine respect for the ethical commitments ofeach phase. What it loses is depth. Intensity and resolve come from having each way of life mostly practiced by a different group of people, for all their days, rather than by everyone at different times. The hierarchical approach does allow this depth and continuity. Still, it falls short of really integrating multiple ways of life on their own terms. “Iower” callings such as streetsweeping may be “true” in some sense, but including them as means to other ends hardly makes people in them feel like partners in a civilization. The real human value and satisfaction ofa street-sweeper does not lie in sweeping the street so a priest can stroll past deep in thought. Only a peculiarly self-absorbed priest would think so. Rather, the street-sweeper's satisfaction lies in the intangible virtues of being a good husband, father, neighbor, and pillar of his own small community. The hierarchical scheme does not give due weight to these purposes on their own terms. Like the biographical scheme, it falls short.

We need to let bearers ofthe three ethoses see one another as indispensable, as parts of a joint civilizational project that calls forth humanity’s best impulses. Such a scheme also needs points ofcontact between different ethoses. In short, interlocking means both partnership and mutual recognition. Here I think the relationship of the three ethoses has our solution built in. When I first described the ethoses early in the book, I noted that demoticism and perfectionism are polar opposites. Ihe pillar principles of each do not overlap: embeddedness and homogeneity clash with transcendence and detachment. Clearly those two ethoses have no real points ofcontact. But I also pointed out that since virtuocracy takes one dimension from each—namely embeddedness and transcendence—it bridges them.



This means demoticism and perfectionism can interlockvia virtuocracy. For various reasons, this approach does not appear in any classical social thought. Virtuocratic thinkers did often describe the ideal character as a blend ofinner and outer dimensions: insight and social duty, sainthood and prophethood, self-cultivation and righting the world, etc. What they did not highlight was that *the two dimensions of virtuocracy map on to neighboring ethoses and are thus bridges to them.* In his or her own character, a virtuocrat can recognize partofwhat makes a

demot a demot, or a perfectionist a perfectionist. Like demots, they fulfill duties within the world. And like perfectionists, they meditate on higher truths and a proper ordering of the self. Since virtuocrats see their own ideals as applying only to a minority ofpeople, this recognition does not mean wanting to turn everyone into a virtuocrat. The bridges are for visits and creative borrowing, not resettlement.

Atomists might protest that they, too, bridge demoticism and perfectionism. There is a grain of truth here, however tiny. Atomism does have one dimension of each ethos: homogeneity and detachment. If we stretch the rhetoric of"political liberals" far enough, then the room liberalism ostensibly gives to various types ofcommunities and personal cultivation might seem to be atomism's outreach to demots and perfectionists respectively. Yet atomism, unlike virtuocracy, stresses the homogeneity ofhuman nature. Thus everyone can become—in some rhetoric, alreadyis—an atomist. Atomism assimilates in a wayvirtuocracy does not. While it has points ofcontact with demoticism and perfectionism, it is less a bridge than a whirlpool that sucks in whatever it recognizes. Modern cultural history bears out this point in practice. Demots and perfectionists get boiled slowly, like the frog in the pot.

Virtuocracy poses no such threat to what it bridges. It needs the living example of both demoticism and perfectionism to keep its own vitality, and lacks the will to assimilate. Furthermore, we saw that virtuocracy pulls together the higher principles of the two poles—transcendence and embeddedness—while atomism pulls together the lower ones that are really means to each end—detachment and homogeneity. Not only does virtuocracy bridge neighboring ethoses while preserving them, therefore. It also bridges what each ethos considers more important, whereas atomism bridges what each considers less important. A triple partnership in which demots and perfectionists both ally with virtuocrats has much to recommend it. It is a compelling alternative to how liberalism handles diversity, for it takes all three ethtoses seriously as permanent ways of life.

This triple partnership has other important features too. It encompasses all the self-understandings on which the most inspiring human goals have been pegged. This multidimensionality solves many ofthe problems of today's resistances. As we satw fundamentalisms and populisms and nationalisms have a narrow demotic base and engage only one dimension ofhuman nature. If they continue posing their claims alone, they will neither outmaneuver universal atomism nor offer any but the most suffocating of alternatives. Including the two high-culture ethoses alongside demoticism would mean being able to challenge atomists from several angles at once.

Of course, some demotic antiliberals might resent having to marry their popular social base to high-culture currents. Their sensibilities would not reign supreme if they won in an alliance with virtuocrats and perfectionists. But if they want to win anything, they have little choice. The triple partnership is the price to pay for defeating the atomist threat, and for any space in which to live out their principles. If the challenge succeeds, it will also appeal to many people who oppose atomist liberalism but find the various fundamentalisms and nationalisms unmoving. It will bring a true world culture built on more than rigid prescriptions, boundaries, and pieties.

But perhaps I am getting ahead of myself. I speak of a future challenge without defining its scope. In short, it must be both political and worldwide. Liberals are already building

mechanisms of global governance. Within decades, they may well found a world state to lock in their gains even more fully. *We must capture the world state project and turn it to our own ends, namely the triple partnership as a metapolitical vision.* This leads to far harder questions than any current resistance asks itself, but perhaps greater resolve too. Put bluntly, the task is to displace the present global atornist elite—and some ofthe groups radiating out from it—and to incapacitate it politically, economically, and culturally. In more technical terms, we must think of elite substitution and regime change.

As I said at the outset, I do not claim that this conclusion is moderate, just that it flows from our starting point. Two lines of reasoning suggest it. First, no middle ground lies between the present order and the alternative. Unlike regional antiliberalisms or high-culture critiques that only propose defending certain spheres for experiments, the triple partnership is hardly something to realize in the interstices ofglobal liberalism. To work, it must command the global public sphere. Second, time is short and the cultural onslaught continues apace. Universal atomists have made it a priority to wipe out ways of life incompatible with their vision. As long as present arrangements stay intact, the resources for a rich postliberalism will keep shrinking. Let there be no doubt: unchallenged, atomists will make sure the night of history closes around us.

Bearers of the three robust ethoses must seize and remake the global political order as a matter of self-defense. We have good reasons to avoid casting this project too timidly. No alliance hinged on virtuocracy, the polar opposite of atomism, can speak of common ground with those who sustain the present system. Compromises and gradualism are ideas to take up as necessary, not a proper starting point. Indeed, alternatives of this scope *inherently* mean posing demands that the current order cannot accommodate. Any challenge unlikely to crack that order fails the litmus test ofbeing a genuine alternative. Unlike the popular resistances, a triple partnership bridged by virtuocracy contrasts so starkly with global atotnism that it throws the world's fault lines into sharp relief.

A project that involves seizing and remaking world politics needs a healthy dose of agency built in. We saw that agency has been a weak point of thepopulists and fundamentalists. They have neglected the inner qualities and sense ofselfthat best sustain agency. Reviving classical traditions of virtuocracy offers us much here. The political project itself would tie into a distinct sense of agency and resolve, a will to grasp history by the scruff of the neck. Character and mission intersect. The contrast between virtuocratic resolve and the psyche of universal atomists would bode well too. The character of universal atornists would not help them resist a vigorous challenge. Recall the moral relativism, the hesitancy, the ruptures of identity, the loosening of constraint, and so on. Yuppies and technocrats lack the stamina for a global culture war in which the other side fights back unrelentingly.

Virtuocratic agency ties in with the worldwide political project in many ways. On the one hand, a world polity arranged around the triple partnership would give virtuocratic agency a lasting place. Unlike the diluted agency of atomists and demots, which vanishes in a pedestrian end-state, virtuocratic agency is an ongoing exercise in character. Virtuocrats do not venture into politics just so they can get back to their own private lives. In this sense, the political project would create long-term conditions for agency. On the other hand, the need to eject atomists from

power gives an immediate outlet for virtuocratic agency. The transition itself is an exercise in character.

Let us flesh out the process and the goal. What principles can guide the formation of a postliberal world state and give some idea of its contours? I can offer only a broad outline here Details should come from experience and adaptation, not from a blueprint. Given the same starting point of a triple partnership among ethoses, one might well think of principles and structures other than those I have in mind. lndeed, such potential flexibility is one strength of this starting point.

The rest of the book takes up three concerns in order. This chapter goes on to explore the intricacies of building a worldwide virtuocracy atop the raw material of several civilizations. I begin here because virtuocracy is the linchpin of the triple partnership. I also address how different ethoses might flavor different parts of the public sphere, and how those parts could relate politically. And I respond to some likely objections, especially from atomists and liberals. The conclusion will then touch on grand strategy and the pressure points for a transition.

Clearly, virtuocrats have a key role in this vision of a postliberal world state. But do not misunderstand me. This book is by no means an apology for power-seeking by people we might call virtuocrats. It hardly exalts virtuocracy over all else, or defends the interests of a virtuocratic elite. I have no desire to replace Armani-clad egoists with robe-clad hypocrites. As the historical examples showed, virtuocracy properly understood means placing demands on oneself, not extracting benefits. Anyone who reads virtuocracy as a guise for privilege, whether as a would-be practitioner or as a critic, misses the point.

Furthermore, every society has a minority of people who play a disproportionate role in shaping public affairs. Global liberalism has its inequalities and its control mechanisms. When it does away with its CEOs and its generals and its media moguls, it can cast the first stone. Its defenders are hardly in a position to attack the role of influential groups in a society. The real difference is that unlike liberals, I take seriously the question of what qualities people in those influential groups should have. If talking of virtuocracy as the keystone of a world state is read as designing an elite, so be it. But thinking about the best possible version of something found in all systems does not require apology.

Besides, most objections to this part of the project are premature. A worldwide virtuocratic stratum does not even exist now. Talking of it does not mean identifying a group with the characteristics in question and demanding power on its behalf. No existing group—no clergy, no intelligentsia, no party—has the socialization or all of the personal qualities that would go into a worldwide virtuocracy as such. To be sure, some social fragments around the world are closer to the image than others, and can be patched together as a force for atomism's displacement. But at best they are sources of insight and raw material.

Since the last few decades have eroded the social base of most virtuocracies around the world, we have some room for creativity in fashioning one anew without the cobwebs. That fashioning would span not decades but generations, however. Worldwide virtuocracy has two phases. In the first, we must patch together virtuocratic and quasi-virtuocratic groups from around the world, and empower them as the keystone of a postliberal polity. Still, that keystone stratum would be transitional, and must see itself as such to accomplish its mission. The second phase emerges

only when the first generation gives way to its successors, trained from youth in a unified political culture built on a synthesis of civilizations.

Virtuocracy and crafting that synthesis among civilizations are intertwined. For insights from several traditions to converge, they need common terrain. A virtuocracy that presides over a postliberal world state would offer such terrain in its own way of life. Nothing sheds light on multiple understandings ofvirtue—and where they overlap—better than a group that uses them to make sense of its own place in the world. A worldwide synthesis must rest on the marriage of reflection and practice. Originality of this sort does not come from arid comparisons oftexts. It comes from the experience of the harried headmaster who has to explain to a Muslim parent in the morning, and a Hindu parent in the afternoon, why each one's child has to learn about the other's religion; or from the experience of the young Kikuyu lawyer who takes a job in Shandong and visits Confucius's birthplace not as a curious foreigner, but because the *Analects* touched her own heart.

Naturally, this idea of synthesis clashes with two views we have already encountered. The first is that of Maclntyre and others who see intercultural translation as folly. As MacIntyre puts it, bringing fragments together across boundaries produces just a decontextualized smorgasbord, the kind of stuff liberals pick and choose without taking scriously[3] Obviously Maclntyre is right about how dialogue works in a liberal world. But I am not talking about a liberal world.Ihe motives of those who try to make sense of different civilizations do matter. A worldwide virtuocracy that drew on multiple "fragments" would do so more seriously and successfully, because the effort itself would be part of constructing a cmnmon identity and a common set of codes.

The second objection to this synthesis is implied by universal atomist thinkers, such as the American postmodernist Richard Rorty. One of Rorty's essays criticized "ascetic priests" and philosophers who try to pierce through cultural diversity and find universal truth. Such social theorists and revolutionaries are "not much fun to be around," Rorty opines. He calls instead for "the revenge of the vulgar upon the priests": embracing mundane comfort, accident, and the meaningless mess ofhistory, as novelists of a postmodern bent do.[4] We should not expect Rorty and those like him to find much pleasure in the company of globally minded virtuocrats. After all, a chasm does divide those of us who see global integration as a serious task from people who see it as a playground of irony, an excuse to mock traditions and escape their demands.

That said, let us explore this new global synthesis more fully. Bearers of the same ethos have a natural contact point across civilizations. The virtuocratic keystone stratum, specifically, would pull together virtuocratic elements from all cultures. The corresponding currents in classical social thought would serve as intellectual raw material. None of this would be just idle dialogue.fechnology's easing of contact among regions means civilizations can no longer just practice a salutary neglect of one another, or even a generous curiosity. A grand story, a grand experiment, must bridge them. In short, we should aim to *merge the remnants of the several defunct civilizations into one living one*. The political and intellectual agendas feed into one another. Each would facilitate the other and give it purpose. Imagining global integration as the building of a "supercivilization" takes us far afield from the logic of universal atomism. Where atomists talk of a *globe* dryly linked by markets and laws and consumerist fads, we must talk of a *world* as a realm of common meanings.

The civilization-building synthesis would not stop at sweeping away intellectual barriers to unity, or translating doctrines for entry to a global conversation. It would also *refine* content. Physics tells us that when masses collide, they give off heat. So, too, would a proper encounter among civilizations burn off the accretions that obscure truth in each setting. Some historians have spoken of the Axial Age, the time from roughly 500BC to AD500 when complex thought first flowered across Eurasia. The German philosopher Karl Jaspers once wrote that a second axial age might follow our scientific-technological age, though he offered no thoughts on what it would involve.[5] think such a breakthrough could come from the effort to forge a world civilization. Traditions that arose in the first Axial Age would meet in a fruitful context. Looking beneath diverse practices for common ground would refine the truths that those practices are supposed to embody: truths of religion, philosophy, or even just customs that shed light on the human condition.

This vision of dialogue involves a definite view of pluralism. One theorist has identified three types of pluralism. The first tolerates a variety of beliefs as mutually exclusive, on the principle of each-to-one's-own. The second respects diversity because it assumes the same truth lies beneath the many forms beliefs take. The third calls for mutual learning among belief systems, because none possesses the whole truth alone.[6] The building of a world civilization does not fit neatly into any of these three types. It lies somewhere between the second and the third. It allows mutual learning across regional civilizations where useful, but the encounter mainly refines what goes into it.

In any case, all these purposes clash with what drives atomist globalization. We are to push civilizations together for dialogue, in the confidence that certain universal insights will emerge and triumph. Mutual exposure *of this sort* refines truths. Atomist liberals, in contrast, see in cross-cultural exposure a way to advance relativism and an undemanding sort of individual choice. On one level, they set up global diversity as a smorgasbord where truth has no meaning. On another level, they make much of how different belief systems will clash in a torrent of cruelty, unless confined to private life. Intolerant religions serve as poster children for liberalism, ironically, for they have no universal implications. They practice their folly in cages as enlightened relativists stroll by and point, much like visitors to a zoo. Liberals will find my proposal of dialogue and synthesis bizarre, for it entertains the idea of truth, and takes as building blocks exactly the ways of life that liberalism has divided to conquer. Seeking parallels across civilizations imperils liberalism because most of those parallels are nonliberal. Indeed, the attempt is liberals' worst nightmare: a union of the benighted.

How is the *process* of synthesis to work? What *standards* might cosmopolitan virtuocrats apply, as they decide what to take up from different cultures? How would they screen insights so that some, but not others, would eventually sustain the world polity? For one thing, taking ethoses as contact points for translation does away with most problems that bedevil existing efforts to enrich the content of public life. The virtuocratic ethos, for example, has more universality than any one culture, any one religion, or any one philosophy. Because it touches on deep self-understandings, it goes beneath the kind of conflict-producing symbols that nationalists and fundamentalists hold dear. A virtuocratic synthesis does not, therefore, invite the objection that ethnic or religious minorities correctly raise today: that the source of would-be public

morality does not overlap with all of the cultural spaces it would color. Virtuocracy is at home everywhere. No one can attack it on grounds of alienness or cultural chauvinism.

But to realize that promise, the postliberal keystone stratum would need guidelines as to what can properly enter the world public sphere and how. Loosely, anything *translatable* can enter. For a principle to rise from one tradition into the currency of an emerging world civilization—let alone win assent from people debating it—it must be mappable on to understandings elsewhere. What does this mean concretely? Take a specific practice, such as part of a traditional legal code, or perhaps the expectation in some culture that every educated person would read a certain classic text. Now imagine that as the world polity begins assembling its own legal codes or educational curricula, it has to pick and choose what contributions to admit from the "laboratories" of different cultures. Things that seem useful here and there still have to be evaluated to determine how well they really fit with the purposes of the world commonwealth, and how vigorously to promote them outside their cradle cultures. Practices like legal codes or educational curricula would have to be traced back to the ends they serve, then compared with practices elsewhere that purport to serve the same ends.

Moving up a level from these examples, the same standard would apply to more abstract ideas and principles too. How would they enter the language of a new world civilization? They already translate more readily, because they are one level removed from diversity on the ground. But if they come from only one culture and have not emerged in multiple traditions independently, then they need screening and rephrasing to find points of contact.

This search for common ground is not some kind of global steamroller, crushing diversity and abolishing all local color that does not fit into the world state. The world public sphere to which these standards would apply has a limited scope. Just because something does not serve its purposes, does not mean it has to be wiped out where it already prevails, or banned from spreading voluntarily to people elsewhere who can use it. Nor am I saying an insight must be translated and torn out of its original framework before it can be talked about elsewhere. It need only be *capable* of translation, and accessible to people from other traditions the first time they hear it—perhaps with some translation in their own minds. For an idea or practice to be presumed worth debating everywhere, it need not already have exact parallels everywhere. The standard should be seen as a spectrum: a function of the number of recurrences, how independent they are of one another, how deeply they tie into a valuable self-understanding, and perhaps the weight already given them in each tradition.

These guidelines differ markedly from how liberals screen public symbols and debate. Usually liberals admit only what Rawls called "public reasons," or something along those lines. Claims must appeal to people regardless of their moral traditions or lack thereof. To do otherwise, they argue, would be to respect some beliefs and some ways of life more than others, and thus to deny freedom and equality. In practice, this means liberals can appeal in public only to science, raw interests, disembodied choice, and other undemanding things. A standard of ethical translatability, in contrast, would admit a wider range of claims. It would take more human ideals seriously as raw material for debate, and thus would allow a richer and thicker public sphere. It would not filter out as much substance as liberalism does. If anything, the screening it demands would only highlight substance by burning off what obscures it.

The pressure to recast principles as universal also bypasses many of the fears liberals have about morality entering public debate. The debate and emerging synthesis would stand on all traditions at once. No one civilization could ram its doctrines down others' throats. The synthesis would be eclectic, seriously thought out, and something to which anyone, anywhere, could claim ownership. A Zulu and a Nepali should be able to debate overlaps in Aquinas and Zhu Xi, for instance, and take for granted that whatever overlaps they detect are a placeless human insight. Some insights would win assent over others, no doubt. But the process would ensure that such would be the triumph of the more complete over the less complete, the more ennobling over the less ennobling, and so on without regard to place.

So far I have talked of dialogue and convergence mainly as a top-down process. The keystone stratum of a postliberal world commonwealth would draw virtuocratic raw material from all civilizations. Its universalistic starting point—the very idea of a world civilization—would gradually be enriched and filled out by the several traditions on which it rests. The synthesis means pulling together material from many sources. The people involved would look forward, so to speak, in an act of unifying creativity driven by the imperatives that face them. Here the motive does come from the top.

But creativity would go the other way too. Being thrown together this way would affect all the world s great traditions as such. They would have to engage one another, as well as the worldwide project that draws on and reinterprets them. Concretely, this means intellectuals loyal to those traditions—rather than mainly to the emerging world civilization—would be pushed toward a renaissance: a renaissance of Confucianism and Hinduism and Islam and the original Europe, and so on, separately as well as jointly. For one thing, they would open more to one another horizontally. We can hardly blame tradition-minded intellectuals for insularity in the present. Everything global is now tainted by an atomist liberalism they abhor. A safer political context would lubricate their mutual interest. If they became aware of gaps in their own heritages, they might borrow from elsewhere to fill those gaps.

A more complex aspect of the renaissance would come from having to respond vertically, so to speak, to the emerging world civilization. While the worldwide keystone stratum would pull together anything universal, intellectuals who continued working *within* each tradition would have a creative ambivalence. No doubt many would put some effort into refining their own traditions so they could be more universally accessible. They would want to hold up their heads as contributors of truth beyond their own space. This “push” would meet the “pull” of cosmopolitan virtuocrats seeking inspiration.

Another pressure would refine traditions in *contrast* to the new civilization-building effort. Regional intellectuals unpersuaded by translation and placelessness would have to argue for the uniqueness of whatever truths they claim to know. Perhaps one or another of the great traditions really did get it right, so to speak. The latter renaissances would be ones of reflection and reaffirmation. The intellectual descendants of today's regional antiliberals, if they insist that a distinct truth needs high walls around it, would have plenty of space to occupy here. They could turn inward and savor known truths, for centuries if they wished. Despite our best efforts, no doubt, many of them would still regard a world state as a misguided venture, something neither fish nor fowl. They should be free to do so. Most should much prefer it to the present liberal order, however. It would bear them no ill will, and would remove much of the present pressure

against them. It would welcome renaissances within traditions, even renaissances uninterested in dialogue, although it would have a broader constructive agenda of its own.

All this revivifying of the *separate* traditions—horizontally or vertically— would look backward rather than forward. I mean backward in a positive sense: taking stock and building on each tradition itself, rather than from a vantage point among and above them all. On any of these levels, however, the overthrow of the atomist order worldwide can be expected to catalyze renaissances within and across civilizations.

As the promise of these renaissances suggests, a world civilization need not mean uniformity. We could expect some pressure toward convergence, of course, as intellectuals within each tradition respond to the larger context. And the world polity would have some stake in eroding the worst xenophobia and insularity. If certain people want to make shrieking vitriol at other parts of the world the core of their belief system, then I have neither the capacity nor the desire to answer them. But those, I hope, are few. Above all, we must remember that the forging of a world civilization and the renaissances within the separate traditions would occur on two different tracks, even though they deal with the same raw material. Any universalizing pressure within a distinct tradition, as a distinct tradition, would come from its own agenda and resources. No civilization lacks this potential.

Moreover, the project of a world civilization has restraints built in. First, it would mainly add a universal layer above civilizations, not in place of them. The keystone stratum would do well to preserve continuity and intellectual independence within each tradition. It would need many laboratories on which to keep drawing. Second, this synthesis deals only with *virtuocratic* elements from the various traditions. Dialogue among demots and perfectionists everywhere would flourish too, no doubt, but in its own ways that have nothing to do with what I have proposed.

That last point brings us to a new focus. So far I have discussed the virtuocratic core of a postliberal world order in some detail. Now we can move on to think about how demots and perfectionists would fit into the world commonwealth. In using these labels, of course, I do not want to imply that the scheme means rigidly classifying people as virtuocrats, demots, or perfectionists, and then slotting them into the polity as such. Ethoses do fade into one another at the margins, as we have seen. The labels are more a useful shorthand, a way of talking about the many valuable ways of life that a postliberal order must encompass. Earlier I proposed the triple partnership as a metapolitical starting point, as a framework more fundamental even than any world constitution. Now we reach the stage of imagining what political structures would best embody that relationship among the three robust ethoses.

Loosely, I shall assume we want world political authority to answer to a sustained and coherent public consensus. That consensus would have to be duly expressed in translatable terms. It would also have to be sensitive to the idea of the world commonwealth as a partnership among permanently valuable ways of life. These assumptions are democratic, but democratic in a richer and more multidimensional sense than anything liberalism offers. I think these abstract guidelines will be fairly uncontroversial, if one accepts the starting point. Again, however, what follows is only one vision one might derive from them.

People who have the same ethos—virtuocrats or demots or perfectionists among their own kind—have no difficulty finding common ground for political debate. Each ethos is itself a contact point across cultural diversity. Whatever translatable claims can win assent within such fora, whether public or informal, would be quite well-grounded by definition. The virtuocratic synthesis-building I already proposed is an example. Here, we should be more concerned with how the three *different* ethoses might relate to one another in political life. I think one promising approach would be to mark off spheres within which each ethos can best operate. Its bearers could then impress their own sensibilities on the spheres in question, without interference. Alongside the virtuocracy that holds a world polity together, there must also be spheres for demots and perfectionists.

Political energy would shift away from present nation-states in two directions. One direction, as already implied, is upward to a world polity in which a peculiarly virtuocratic kind of universalism prevails. We must take back the broadest horizons from atomists, and empower people who will take truth seriously and elevate the tone of large-scale public life. The other direction is downward, to local spaces for the sort of solidarity and participation that demots have always wanted. Villages and neighborhoods and cooperatives must regain their rightful role. The two most important layers of political life would thus be global and local. Despite technological leaps, this vision corresponds to the two natural foci of public life before modernity: "universal" empires and little communities.

Devolving responsibilities to a local level has many benefits. It would roll back the power, ever greater in recent decades, of expert administrators who think efficiency trumps morality. It would also let demots participate more directly in the concerns that immediately affect them. The loss of local control to large, impersonal forces has been among demots' main grievances in modern times. Liberals have paid scant attention to it—they are so busy peddling the fiction that ordinary people have fared well under their rule.

Local decentralization would also mean a better match between political units and cultural identities on the ground. Folk cultures face constant pressure from global liberalism and large-scale fundamentalisms. They are caught between MTV on one side and zealots with a Procrustean view of tradition on the other. Folk cultures would do better in these revived spaces for participation, than under either of the alternatives. Many hot-button ethnic issues like language and sacred territorial rights would also be defused by the smaller scale. Hard communal boundaries—which flatten folk diversity within and shed blood without, as in mid-level revivals like Hindutva and Islamism—would unravel between the pulls of the global and the local.

Two principles should shape this level of political life. First, communities should have leeway to craft a local atmosphere in tune with their heritage and sensibilities, richer than what liberals now permit. Within reason, practices such as modesty in outdoor attire, public display of religious symbols, or bans on open sale of alcohol or pornography or "unclean" foods, might fall under this heading. Local atmosphere need not impinge much on how people live at home. The small scale also lowers the stakes because the next village might well have a different atmosphere. People who worry about tyranny of the majority are usually fearful of whole provinces or countries becoming inhospitable to them, not that each village might create a climate fitting for its residents. Second, communities should have direct participation. That

participation could take a range of forms. Direct democracy could mean anything from village councils that date back centuries, to communes designed by the radical new left.

Supervision of local communities by the world commonwealth need not be overbearing. It should ensure (1) that local political structures are indeed participatory, (2) that each community's borders are marked off in accord with local circumstances and identities, (3) that communities deal lawfully with one another and with other entities such as economic cooperatives and religious institutions, (4) that enough openness exists for intercommunity travel and intellectual and economic flows, and (5) that demots' sensibilities do not burden perfectionist and virtuocratic ways of life that cut across communities.

We need space and encouragement for demotic life, not suffocation of other ethoses or limits on horizontal mobility. People who move into a community and embrace its local flavor of demoticism, for example, should participate on equal terms. Of course, a reasonable time lag would ensure a genuine commitment to the place. A small minority of sectarian or experimental communities might be allowed more insularity. The North American Amish or some hunter-gatherer groups in the Amazon rain forest are obvious candidates. Perhaps they could restrict outsiders from moving in and swamping them, or be exempted from some uniform practices. Obviously we should strike a balance among all these considerations. Whatever the details, however, both local atmosphere and participation would be protected more fully than they are now under global liberalism. The metapolitical structure itself would lock them in.

Restoring many responsibilities to a local level overlaps somewhat with the theory of subsidiarity. Originally a Catholic doctrine, subsidiarity became one stream of broader European thought in the second half of the twentieth century. It holds that higher, larger-scale levels of government should not take over functions that can adequately be carried out at a lower level—by regional or local governments, or private entities. Often the idea of keeping functions as decentralized as possible has appeared elsewhere, too, among critics of statist overregulation. Subsidiarity supporters would no doubt welcome much of what I have laid out.

An important qualification bears adding, though. Strengthening local space and participation does not mean denying an equally important role to a vigorous universalistic layer of politics too. Some ways of life, in particular those of perfectionists and virtuocrats, require worldwide spaces cosmopolitan in spirit and with little if any regard for place. Bringing some tasks closer to the people also does not mean that each community must rely only on its own resources. Unlike many versions of decentralization and subsidiarity, what I describe would not exempt anyone from the duty to aid poor regions and communities. It leaves ample room for a world authority to redistribute resources, even though those resources would flow through participatory channels once allocated. In short, the burden of proof should not fall *against* large-scale functions and actors. This scheme just separates the logic of local decentralization from the logic of universalism, and then lets political attention gravitate toward both poles as appropriate.

As a practical matter, of course, a world commonwealth would need some layer of politics between the local and the global. Some efficiencies of scale should remain. Communities might pool functions, such as public safety or maintenance of infrastructure, in municipal federations. Beyond that delegation upward of authority that communities already held, the world commonwealth would also need some regular districts or administrative units. Some sort of

directly or indirectly elected assembly could govern in each one. Given the overall approach of marking off spheres best suited to each ethos, those mid-level units should deal only with functions that neither of the other two levels can handle. I see no reason to enshrine sovereign powers for them, as for the global and local layers separately. Above all, they must remain responsive to the communities beneath.

How big should these districts or provinces be? Surely, the imperatives of holding together a world commonwealth and eroding large-scale ethnic chauvinism rule out territories large enough to throw their weight around. I confess I have little patience with people who feel they have to belong to the largest possible political unit as a kind of psychological anchor. The mid-level units in question should be smaller than the vast majority of today's nation-states. Anywhere from several hundred thousand to a couple of million inhabitants seems a good rule of thumb. Where practical, first using existing subnational units of roughly that size—like Switzerland's cantons or Peru's departments—might make the institutional rupture and reordering less awkward.

Of course, all these points are abstract speculation unless real people find them compelling. So how persuasive are demots likely to find the overall scheme? The simplest argument I can put to them is strategic. Plainly said, this is their best bet. Neither demots nor the chauvinistic quasi-demots who back today's resistances can defeat global atomism alone. Nor can anyone imagine a worldwide political structure based only on demotic values. This scheme of separate layers, with a strong local element, offers demots the best way to protect their own priorities under modern conditions. If they want their communities back, and back to stay, this is how to do it.

Perfectionists invite a different argument. So far I have not mentioned them in this sketch of possible political structures, for good reason. Neither mystical nor aristocratic perfectionists have anything like virtuocrats' and demots' stake in public life. History suggests that perfectionists need only some spaces of their own, and a broader culture that acknowledges them. I do not, therefore, propose making much of an institutional role for them in a world polity. Rather, they should find the scheme compelling because the split character of virtuocracy—linking to demoticism and perfectionism—means they would have a permanent ally at the core of a new world civilization. Virtuocrats *need* perfectionists. The triple partnership itself enshrines perfectionism, and would preserve it as no version of atomism ever can. Perfectionists would also benefit from the renaissance within and across traditions, though in this respect virtuocrats should really leave them to their own devices.

In the end, I do not pretend that either demots or perfectionists would have no doubts about what I have outlined. Many would probably have objections I have not addressed. And that is all well and good. Any alliance among ethoses, any scheme that gives people some spaces but not all, will be far from utopia. Premodern cultural history shows that the tension among ethoses never ends. The real question for demots and perfectionists to ask themselves is whether they would fare better with what I propose than under continuing atomist rule. I am confident they would, though it is only fair that we first examine arguments on the other side.

By far the strongest objections to my proposal will come from liberals and their fellow travelers. We should expect as much. Atomism lies at the opposite pole from the center of the triple partnership, and in today's world liberals are the best spokespersons for atomism. I do not apologize for wanting to exclude atomism from the partnership itself. It could not be otherwise:

no culture can make equal room for all four ethoses at once. Nor should we forget that, before modernity, atomism was mainly a frictional category. Atomists rarely wanted to be in the circumstances that shaped them as atomists. From that standpoint, I might even say, not entirely tongue in cheek, that the triple partnership's greatest service to atomists would be reducing their numbers over the long term, by drawing them into the other three ethoses.

In any case, let us see what objections liberals might raise against what I previously outlined. I agree that liberals could raise fair concerns, that we should take those concerns seriously, and that some sensibilities present in liberalism have merit. Still, I reiterate a point from earlier: there is nothing valuable in liberalism that is not present elsewhere too.

So what charges will liberals level at me? First, they will say I am a foe of equality. Talking of different ethoses divides people into groups. Recognizing thick ways of life, some of which involve peculiar qualities and cultivation, might blind one to a common human nature and the equality of all people as individuals. Praising some of the ideals held by premodern clergies and aristocracies also smacks of hierarchy. Liberals will gravely conclude that this vision would roll back the progress of the last two centuries, in which the downtrodden common people finally won fair treatment. The horrors of the dark ages would return.

Were these charges true, they would alarm me too. But the triple partnership need not rank ways of life. There are no gold, silver, and bronze souls here. All three ethoses have a place in the polity. That it treats them on their own terms, and gives them spheres to occupy, is entirely compatible with a horizontal, democratic relationship among them. Ranking their bearers would mean comparing apples and oranges. Bearers of each ethos could be expected to have their own myths and *ésprit de corps*, as always. Demots might tell each other hilarious tales about the oddity of perfectionists, and vice versa. But those ideas either would not enter the public sphere among the ethoses, or they would balance out within it.

Moreover, the scheme leaves room for mobility. A demot's child who loves philosophy and desires to serve in public life should not be trapped all her days in a village cooperative. Nor, for that matter, should a virtuocrats child whose temperament better fits the hearty fellowship of the village cooperative be trapped in an elite academy to satisfy his father's idea of prestige. Individuals should practice the way of life for which they are best suited. For the charge of gross inequality to hold water, the society in question would have to have demots who look longingly at the lives of its virtuocrats or perfectionists. It should be set up so that would not be the case.

The only truth to these likely liberal objections about equality lies elsewhere. This scheme does take for granted that in the context of each ethos, standards about better and worse ways of living have some purchase. For instance, perfectionists should be able to say, frankly and with a clean conscience, there is something truly wrong with a self-declared “mystic” who spends every day on an acid trip, even if he does not hurt anyone. Just because the scheme separates human nature and human ideals into different currents, does not mean it urges people to suspend judgment. Unlike atomist liberalism, it affirms publicly that truth exists and that some choices are better than others. When liberals bemoan this sort of inequality, they say more about their own lax cultural milieu than about the alternative.

Second, liberals will object that I want to do away with democracy. Now it is true that the logic of the triple partnership, recurring universalisms, a world civilization, and so on, does clash

with how *they* see democracy. Liberal democracy is a counting of noses, a sum of individual interests and unjudgable opinions. This alternative, in contrast, treats public debate as reflecting and touching on character ideals. A consensus is a collective stab at truth. Putting debate and public accountability in these terms does not mean doing away with democracy. Indeed, the scheme has ample room for participation. We saw already that local civic life would flourish, giving demots especially control over the matters that most concern them. In many respects, indeed, it would be *more* democratic than the technocratic structures liberals have designed out of fear of a benighted populace. Demots are surely not getting much democracy out of liberalism nowadays. They get manipulation by campaign spin doctors, and the dubious satisfaction of entering a polling booth every few years. At the world level, virtuocracy would be a tonic for public life. Virtuocrats have vigorous agency wrapped up with their own self-image, in a way that liberalism's social base does not. I for one should rather dispatch a mandarin or a mullah, not an advertiser or a stockbroker, to challenge a tyrant.

But perhaps liberals will seize on another point. They might say that making local life demotic and the apex of the world state virtuocratic would deny demots a role in large-scale policymaking. This criticism would read into the proposal things that are not there. Everyone inclined to engage large-scale matters could do so. Just because a virtuocrat and a demot might not participate best through the same channels does not mean one would participate and one would not. Demots could have many kinds of input into a world polity: cultural and territorial representatives elected through communities, functional bodies speaking for occupational categories, advocacy networks based on public interest and ideology, and so on.

Virtuocrats would have a certain role as the glue of a world state, but let us not exaggerate that role. Policy areas handled locally or by some parts of civil society would fall quite outside their purview, for instance. No virtuocrat should tell villagers where to build a clinic or how to run a festival. Virtuocrats might even best leave local politics *entirely* to demots, who can handle it better and enjoy it more, and confine their own political activity to other fora where they belong. For demots, virtuocracy would be mainly a bridge among spheres, and a guarantor of the triple partnership against an unsalutary atomist resurgence.

Third, liberals will argue that I take freedom lightly. Here they would cite early liberal thinkers like John Locke and John Stuart Mill, who made compelling arguments for freedom. Locke called for religious tolerance, for example, on the grounds that true faith was a matter of the heart. Governments that tried to control belief would only promote hypocrisy. Mill likewise argued for protecting individual choice from the pressure of others. Free experimentation would benefit society more than harm it. And only a way of life freely chosen would be in tune with human dignity.[7]

Modern liberals will suggest that in my aversion to liberalism, I am casting aside these contributions. They will insist that I am at least insensitive to freedom as an independent value. But the vision has ample scope for freedom, even if it understands it differently from liberalism. For one thing, a person could choose among ethoses, since all parts of the triple partnership have equal standing. The more fluid the society, the better the alignment in each generation between ethos and personal temperament. One could also choose which way of life to follow within an ethos, and argue to one's heart's content about how best to live out the ideals in question.

As long as the cultural climate pushes people toward seriously considering such truths, it can allow ample freedom in how they pursue them. Freedom of this sort brings depth and creativity. The most pluralistic premodern cultures understood freedom along these lines: as a lubricant for truth. The Qur'ān's "no compulsion in religion" did not mean that religion is folly or that all choices are equal, as secularists today prefer to hear. For modern atomist liberals to cite the likes of Locke and Mill in their own defense is a bait-and-switch strategy on a grand scale. Those transitional thinkers were heavily imprinted by the older understanding of freedom in all its elegance and seriousness. As I noted earlier, valuable points in liberalism are not unique to it. Moreover, in assessing the scope of freedom in this alternative, we should not forget that freedom is built into the very scale. All civilizations would become building blocks of the postliberal order. People would find more than enough diversity and flexibility for a genuine sense of freedom. If anyone thinks the riches of all traditions together are still suffocating, that choices as far apart as being a Buddhist or an Aristotelian or a Khoisan are not enough, then he or she really sees freedom as a rejection of all definite ideas about human flourishing.

Fourth, liberals will say that the scheme undermines tolerance. Talk of character ideals and demands and seeking truths means people of heterodox views will not be fully respected. Any synthesis that emerged, in other words, would be at the expense of other diversity. If liberals mean by this criticism that all identities are not tolerated relativistically, as mere tastes held by individuals, then they are right. But that sort of tolerance inspires no one, and gives no points of contact with whatever is being tolerated. Instead, this alternative implies a *tolerance of translation*. If a belief or practice on which people disagree maps down on to an ethos, then bearers of the same ethos can tolerate it as a means to their own ends. This tolerance is far richer than suspending judgment. Mutual respect rests on a similarity of character. People would even have a contact point for learning from what they tolerate. Experience suggests that a tolerance of translation, of character parallels, is much more inspiring than the liberal version of tolerance as severing sometimes-respected choices from the always-respected chooser. A rough analogy is how, in earlier times, warriors would respect their foes and even honor their courage after they had fallen in battle.

Character-centered respect could spill over into many areas of public life. Public debate, for instance, could rest on a mutual regard much deeper than disembodied liberal ideas of citizenship and raw humanity. The content of debate would also be richer, because it would engage the character ideals of the participants. It has built-in checks on the flashy appeals to interest and emotion that prevail in today's liberal polities. To borrow language al-Fārābī used in a different context, it would favor "persuasion" through inner commitment, not just an "imaginative impression."[8]

Fifth and finally, liberals might argue that the scheme neglects protections against cruelty, because I do not talk of "rights." I do indeed avoid rights language, because it comes from a stream of thought at odds with the whole vision. But this liberal criticism is overstated. Protections for individuals are easily built into a system of any ideological flavor, including this one. Legal procedures to limit the abuse of power have emerged again and again in history. Just because it would not use rights language does not mean a world commonwealth would welcome torture, secret police, arbitrary detention, vigilantism, and the like. If liberals raise this criticism, they do so not because of any real reason why abuse would flourish, but because the checks on

abuse do not feed off liberal reasoning and a liberal view of human nature. Instead, the inspiration for something analogous to rights is built into the starting point of ethoses. The triple partnership serves the ideals and versions of human dignity that each ethos stresses: membership, cultivation, responsibility, and so on. Institutions would thus be obliged to prevent encroachments on dignity.

Personal immunities are in fact more, not less, secure, precisely because they do *not* float in the rank air of autonomy. They have a solid purpose instead. While the times did not always lend themselves to fulfilling the ideal, this reasoning lay behind most premodern understandings of decency and restraint. As al-Fārābī put it, one should lament the killing of a virtuous man not just as a man, but out of regard for the city that has lost him and for the virtuous condition he achieved.[9] A future torturer would have many reasons not to torture, quite apart from the great likelihood of later being locked up. The torturer would find in the idea of character translation a contact point with the victim's dignity.

Restraint would also tap into the virtues of those contemplating abuse. Torturers would harm their *own* character by acting cruelly. This was roughly the logic behind classical Confucian talk of benevolence; or behind the observation of the Stoic Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius that "to do an injustice is to do yourself an injustice—it degrades you."[9] According to such thinking, cruelty was beneath a gentleman and would only sully his character. The liberal route to restraint, via an abstract idea of human rights, lacks this vividness. It does not give a would-be abuser a personal, intimate stake in acting decently. Unsurprisingly, in modern times far more wickedness has come from technocrats than from gentlemen. The Adolf Eichmann who sent off cattle cars to Auschwitz was an atomist, not a virtuocrat. And gentlemen have not abounded at Guantánamo and Abū Gharayb.

The crux of this debate—whether the rhetoric centers on freedom, tolerance, or rights—is whether we should treat individual protections as freestanding. Liberals make them an ultimate value, which trumps and relativizes any other ethical goods. Nonliberals, such as myself, instead would anchor protections in how they advance ethical goods. Instead of saying people have rights for the sake of rights, we say people have something like rights because they allow specific kinds of human flourishing.

This is not just an abstract difference. To see what is at stake, think of the risks on both sides. The liberal, freestanding approach to rights holds that the worst acts are to suppress freedom, torture, or kill. Existence as such—human life and capacities—matters more than how anyone happens to use it. We know the drawbacks of that view. Treating rights as freestanding, no questions asked, runs the risk of a widespread deterioration in the tone of a culture and in what people expect of themselves. If existence trumps qualities, if choice trumps what one chooses, then people face little pressure to call forth the best in themselves and others. Just because we expect people not to disembowel one another does not mean they cannot legitimately be self-interested, shallowly hedonistic, spiritually obtuse, and rancorous toward those who do not sink to their own level.

Conversely, the risk of anchoring individual protections in other ethical goods is, as liberals hasten to point out, that the goods are the end and the protections the means. Means can always be sacrificed to ends, if other means seem more useful. The risk liberals often cite is that

horrifying abuses will occur against people who choose unsavory ways of life, or who question prevailing beliefs. Usually liberals choose this point in the argument to hold up ancient cruelties as examples. Unless we make personal choice and immunities sacrosanct, in other words, we have no sure brake against the worst things human beings can do to each other. Resist the triple partnership, for that way lie the thumbscrew and the stake.

Of course, I exaggerate both sides to show the thinking involved. No reality is ever as clear-cut as people often imply in the heat of argument. Modern atomist cultures contain many decent folk, who demand more of themselves than the public ideology requires. And wanton abuse in premodern, nonliberal societies usually happened only out of sight, or in what were seen as exceptional situations. Normal people felt uneasy with it because it went against their better instincts. Contrary to some images, medieval peasants did not regularly have red-hot pokers thrust into them by the local inquisitor.

But let us go a layer deeper in the debate. The real comparison turns on how each side describes the *process* of succumbing to the risks identified. For liberals, the risk is fiendish wanton cruelty; for antiliberals, it is greedy nihilistic hedonism. Nonetheless, both accounts hold that by giving one value trump status, we let all other values slide down a slippery slope of compromise. The path to fiendish wanton cruelty starts where we imagine that being too soft will allow unsavory impulses to flourish. Protecting all that is good and true demands a few hard blows against people of ill intent. Some years later, we end with stonings, witch-hunts, and the gulag. The path to greedy nihilistic hedonism starts where we think letting unsavory impulses alone in their own sphere poses no threat to anyone else. In any case, individual autonomy has its price and we can afford to pay it. Later on, we end with a culture where no language exists for saying anything is unsavory. Older ideals have become so many fictions, and any degraded choice is as good as any other.

Where does all this leave us? I think the best argument for an "anchored" rather than a "freestanding" approach to personal freedom lies in the nature of each slippery slope. We must monitor, vigilantly, the risk that anchored guarantees might be compromised. But we have a check built in, because we can always argue our way back to those same guarantees. Again and again in history, the idea has cropped up that protecting individuals is the best way to help their commitment to good ways of life. Should the threat arise, we can always revive that case, clarify it, and press it relentlessly against anyone too shortsighted to grasp it. After all, anyone trying to compromise individual protections would be appealing to ethical ends to justify doing so. The language for getting back from those ends to proper means would still be at our disposal.

Conversely, the slippery slope of freestanding liberal rights includes a spillover from legal practices into the mindset of a whole society. Liberals overlook that unsavory choices, unless tolerated only begrudgingly, are cumulative across a population and a culture. As modern experience shows, certain ideals can fade from mainstream life. Without countervailing public pressure, the idea of respecting choices slides all too easily into a widespread belief that choices really are just a matter of taste. It is disingenuous for liberals to imply that an "upward" pressure on people's choices will survive of its own accord, despite the tone of the emerging global culture. They have had plenty of time to show their type of freedom does *not* wreak cultural havoc, and have failed. A nonliberal society that employs torturers may well come to its senses and decide not to torture. It has the language for reasoning its way out of bad habits. Modern

atomist society is not suddenly going to see a proliferation of sincere Mencians and Platonists, however. Such truths now seem alien if not incomprehensible, as earlier atomists perhaps intended.

In the end, I know none of this is likely to persuade liberals. No bridge lies between what they take for granted and what people of my persuasion take for granted. But one final point of disagreement bears mentioning. Having heard my arguments about how the world commonwealth would secure human dignity, some liberals might adopt a more conciliatory tone, and say that my assurances make me sound quite liberal after all. If I think individuals need protections to flourish, surely I am agreeing with what I earlier called "ethereal" liberalism: the abstract liberal principles of rights and choice, quite apart from any cultural realities of the moment. They will then push one step further, as they come in for the kill. If liberalism has this acceptable layer of principles, separate from atomist culture, then I am wrong to attack liberalism as such. People with my priorities should give liberalism due credit for what it gets right. We should wage the battle against atomism to our hearts' content, but spare liberalism itself as a neutral or even healthy force.

This is quite dangerous reasoning, even if it seems harmless on the surface. It amounts to more of the usual slippery rhetoric: ethereal liberalism is the "true" liberalism, distinct from lived liberalism, and it eternally deserves another reprieve. I suppose if liberals say we agree that free choice uplifts the human spirit, or that people should be protected from abuse, or that authority should be accountable, they are not strictly wrong. Liberals do get some principles right, and when they do I can agree with them. But those principles do not redeem liberalism *as liberalism*, for they are not uniquely liberal. Many thinkers and cultures—past and present—have seen a way of life as worthwhile only if people embrace it sincerely and reflectively. No civilization has celebrated wanton cruelty. All have praised charity, common decency, benevolent restraint, and so on. The principles of fair legal procedure, consistent justice, and the duty of rulers to serve society have arisen in many settings independently, without any whiff of liberalism around.

Liberals have no monopoly on the wish to ensure human dignity. We can argue over how *well* different societies have served human dignity, and why, but the widespread presence of the ideal itself is beyond question. Just because those universal principles appear in liberalism too, does not mean they redeem the liberal package as a whole. Turning things around, how many liberals today would say Confucian China was redeemed because it had offices open to talent, or that early Islam was redeemed because it stopped infanticide? All these good things are just propositions and practices, which can fit into many different packages. If we want to talk about a liberal *package* or a liberal *ethos*, then we have to dig down to some version of atomism. As we saw, liberals phrase these good principles in a way quite unlike how nonliberals historically have phrased them. They say personal immunities are freestanding ultimate values, not means to something grander. This amounts to harnessing universal principles to an atomist self-understanding.

To realize the full potential of those universal principles, we must slice them off from the monopoly that liberals claim on them. The goal of human dignity is a common ideal. We should celebrate the various mechanisms, such as legal procedures or freedom of worship, that serve it. Instead of tarring those mechanisms by association with liberalism, a world commonwealth should restore the diversity of names and uses they once had. The three nonatomist ethoses can

give them a richer grounding, and remove the pathologies they have come to include. The alternative order I have described has ample room for all these good practices: choice among ways of life, personal immunities, public debate, and so on. A world polity ordered around the triple partnership would hardly slip into atrocity and cultural suffocation. It would have a vigorous public sphere and treat people civilly as individuals. It would grasp that imposing orthodoxy does no good either to individual human beings or to a civilization in the long run. Legal measures necessary to ensure all this would be built into the polity.

Even here, however, we must be careful not to slip into the line of thinking that liberals would urge us to adopt. They would probably have us say that we should "transfer" what they call "liberal" practices into the postliberal world commonwealth. I think that would be a grave mistake. Letting these practices in with any kind of "liberal" label still affixed leaves a door open for the rest of a noxious cultural package. From its position of strength today, liberalism can afford to be all things to all people, subtly transforming even its opponents. Whatever areas of agreement we have with liberals—as *with any human being*—on some concerns about personal protections, it would be misleading and irresponsible to treat them as matters for concession, moderation, and hotchpotch compromise.

To put it bluntly, there is such a thing as being unhealthily reasonable. Many critics of the present world order are already too apologetic for their own good. Just because people can arrive at some similar conclusions along different routes does not mean the routes themselves do not matter. Without stark contrasts, without a rupture in global political culture, a postliberal order would be compromised from the start. None of this alternative is a revision of liberalism, or even something that can be dressed up to sound palatable to those who oppose it. Just as it must strike atomist culture relentlessly, so is it outside and at odds with liberal thought.

All that said, however, we still come back to a recurring point. Liberals looking at a postliberal world commonwealth would find many things that would fall under their labels of freedom, rights, and so on. Strangely enough, this means that if we buy all they say about their own cultural neutrality, they would have no cause for complaint. Let us imagine for a moment that we do believe them: that a stripped-down "ethereal" liberalism is just a way for people to coexist in dignity, and conceals no sordid atomist agenda. Taking this line of argument far enough, we might hear that anyone from *any* of the four ethoses can be a liberal.

As I have argued throughout, all this is far-fetched. But if true, it has an ironic upshot. It means that *any society that respects people*—concretely, does not do things such as drag them to temples or inflict red-hot pokers on them—*should be acceptable to liberals, even if it devises massive cultural pressure against atomism*. In other words, we could have a "liberal" society that is also energetically anti-atomist. The idea does seem odd, as well it should. I suspect that with each concession we grant liberals along that line of argument, they will begin wondering whether they really want to occupy the terrain they have requested. After all, the more liberalism can enfold without offending, the more it loses shape. It cannot then erect barriers against anti-atomist pressures that most liberals fear.

The only people likely to be receptive here are those we might call liberals-by-default, or more awkwardly "non-atomist liberals." Such people are non-atomists insofar as they fit into one of the three robust ethoses, albeit perhaps in an unreflective or less than coherent way. Yet they are

liberals insofar as they value human dignity and choice. Such people are not part of the problem, even if my take on liberalism might unnerve them at first. They are wrong, however, in taking for granted that their deeply-held principles of tolerance and decency belong only under a "liberal" heading. The arguments I have made—as well as the worldwide political project implicit in them—might open up some options that, as non-atomist liberals-by-default, they think they now lack. With a suitable constellation of cultural and political forces, they might find it easier than they think to cast off the "liberal" label, along with its atomist entailments. Then they could realize the appeals of the triple partnership, which would bring all layers of their ethical commitments back into harmony. No longer would they need to grit their teeth at the ills that liberal societies accommodate.

Of course, *most* people who fly the "liberal" banner are more mainstream atomist liberals. Few of them would entertain shifting allegiances this way. They would cling to the view that antiliberalism must end in atrocity. The idea that personal dignity can flourish outside their framework would strike them as unrealistic if not deceptive. They would insist that non-atomists cannot respect freedom. In short, they would never agree to a rolling back of atomist culture, and would oppose any political movement by a triple partnership of demots, perfectionists, and virtuocrats, no matter the spirit of generosity and restraint that went with it. Even if we refute or bypass their fears on each specific issue, the overall vision still clashes with their sensibilities. For that, no apology is on offer. A struggle over the tone of global culture will never happen on the terrain of persuading atomists as atomists, or liberals as liberals. But I hope I have shown, at least, that non-atomists should find liberal objections unpersuasive.

Conclusion
Reclaiming History

We inevitably come to the final question of political strategy. What are the pressure points against global atomism? How might we patch together a movement to rupture the liberal order, displace present elites, and found a world commonwealth? As in the rest of the book, I shall not set forth a detailed roadmap here. Our effort must occur on many levels simultaneously, only some of which lend themselves to outlining in the abstract. I want to highlight two themes here as points of departure: global distributive justice and cross-regional networking.

By global distributive justice, I mean the huge economic chasm between North and South. All the glitter of global capitalism has not wiped out poverty. Most liberals and even social democrats have proved unwilling to give this issue much attention. If they say anything, they claim the solution lies in freer trade, which they already support for reasons that have nothing to do with relieving poverty. Most shudder at the thought of more drastic measures, which would involve sacrifice and put a damper on consumer society. Mud huts with cholera-infested water are lamentable, but if they are the price of keeping SUVs and Playstation 2, so be it. Beyond modest increases in aid from North to South, such people think redistribution is too much to expect of the well-off. This makes a more democratic global political system unthinkable, until inequalities have shrunk and all countries enjoy "a decent standard of living"—in other words, after a world state would no longer have to impose redistribution on the North.[1]

Clearly, universal atomism offers little promise of an assault on Southern poverty. It has enslaved the spirit to the stomach while satisfying neither. The success of atomist groups in winning power over the last few decades now works against them, in fact. Many a 1960s radical now drives a Mercedes and intones all the reasons to be "realistic" about social justice. Those who once preached equality, when battling older elites and taking over campuses for the counterculture, now have a stake in squashing serious challenges to capitalism. The half-hearted remedies liberals propose for global poverty would involve no sacrifices, either by atomist elites around the world or by the largely atomist populations of the North. The noises Tony Blair started making in late 2004 about development aid to complement the "war on terror" will amount to little, in all likelihood. Any real effort on this front will have to occur despite liberals, and in opposition to them, not through them.

If we challenge global atomism, we must take up this issue too. It offers a weapon and an illustration that civilizational virtuocrats lacked the last time around. *A struggle against the cultural ailments of atomist modernity can tie into a struggle against global economic injustice*. Now a prominent political philosopher—himself a moderate left-liberal, it bears noting—did once remark to me with a chuckle that mixing the two would be "an interesting combination, but a losing one." If we look only at the visible distribution of power in the world, and assume change must come from persuading the powers that be, he was probably right. But reordering the world on this scale, politically and culturally and economically, could never start at the top

anyway. If it happens, it will start from the reckless energy of people who thirst for justice and have little to lose. In this light, mixing what most of humanity needs culturally with what most of humanity needs materially is the only sort of vision we should entertain, whether or not fate blesses it in the end. People need their spirits ignited *and* their stomachs filled. For many in the shantytowns and forgotten hamlets, relieving grinding poverty would be among the most vivid promises of a postliberal world commonwealth.

Do not misunderstand my intent in linking the two. It would be wrong to take up the poverty issue just for strategic reasons, to win mass support for a cultural agenda. Rather, the philosophical and economic aims are two sides of the same coin. Both deal with human dignity, and both require that we eject atomists from power. Moreover, the worldwide triple partnership has a natural affinity for global justice. Neither liberalism nor the regional antiliberalisms are equipped to bring global economic justice, or even to speak of it coherently. Liberals make lucre-lust more respectable than in any previous culture, while fundamentalists and nationalists lack language for talking about justice beyond their own patches of land. The world commonwealth vision, in contrast, does away with boundaries and recasts economic life as a means to an end. Indeed, narrowing today's development chasm between North and South would let us expand one freedom that the liberal order, despite all its rhetoric, does not allow: geographic mobility for all people. No longer would Southerners be treated with contempt at Northern embassies and airports, their visas denied because they are seen as potential sweatshop immigrants.

Of course, liberals could craft a response to this line of attack. Many see that liberal performance has fallen short even of liberal ideals. They also know that inequities create the risk of a backlash against much they hold dear. At the margins of liberal thought, we find a vaguely social democratic idea that coming decades will require change: more sensitivity to international distributive justice, "freedom as development," a "global harmonization of capabilities," and so on.[2] This strategic response waits in the wings, though no threat has yet proved large enough to activate it. A future scenario of atomist response to the kind of challenge I propose would hark back to the 1940s reframing. Atomists reached out then to demots, as a way to counteract the rumblings of civilizational virtuocrats, the popular upsurge, fascism, and communism. In future, atomists would again aim at saving the system by absorbing discontent and splitting popular resentment off from any ideologically consistent leadership. They would recreate the postwar social pacts, but on a global instead of a national level. In tackling Southern poverty, they might even adopt some language from the global new left, without going so far as to threaten capitalism.

Last time, the strategic alliance worked, and became the backbone of mid-century welfare states and the like. This time, however, it would most likely fail. For one thing, it would demand more concessions than liberals can afford. Ignoring global inequities this long has let them grow so severe that those in power cannot buy Southern support on the cheap. Trying to go halfway, economically or culturally or politically, would mean playing with fire. History shows that even minor concessions have often ignited revolutions. A Bengali or Gambian who finally sees a chance for real global democracy and economic justice will not care that liberals think him unexpectedly loud. Liberals would risk cracking their system while trying to save it. In any case, they may not be in a position to attempt a response like this at all. We saw in chapter five that, over the last two decades, they have tried to lock in their global power by insulating institutions

from political pressure and turning much policymaking over to technocrats. By doing so, they have removed many of the outlets for discontent that let a system adapt and respond. Power today is hard but brittle. A broad-based challenge would be difficult to handle.

The second strategic theme to mention is cross-regional networking. This deals less with how to outmaneuver atomism's power base, than with how to build a world-transforming coalition in the first place. We must overcome the insularity that now plagues the regional antiliberal resistances and prevents them making common cause against atomism worldwide. As the core of the alternative I have outlined, virtuocracy has a cosmopolitan enough temper, but it still has to overcome fragmentation.

A sociologist of philosophies has argued, with much historical evidence, that schools of thought rise and fall largely on the strength of their networks. Intellectual energy comes from sustained interaction among thinkers.[3] Perhaps one pressure point is for virtuocratic currents—counterelites, we might say—to build ties worldwide. Every e-mail exchanged between an ayatollah in Qom and a neo-Confucian in Taibei is progress. We need non-atomist networks that run parallel to the atomist ones. They would bring a critical mass of intellectuals together as a self-consciously worldwide force.

This networking and dialogue are not easy tasks. They involve social groups that have been on the defensive for decades. Even if we can point to virtuocracy as an abstract point of contact, the intellectuals in question still need to muddle through making sense of one another in practice. If ayatollahs meet neo-Confucians, what should they say? In cobbling together such a vanguard, we should remember that intellectuals who now see themselves as speaking for a particular tradition will not be the most receptive. Most ayatollahs *as* ayatollahs just will not be that interested in most neo-Confucians *as* neo-Confucians. Any ad hoc alliance would break up under even mild stress.

Rather, the effort must start with more free-floating parts of the non-atomist intelligentsia. No doubt this includes people like many readers of this book. Often they admire older virtuocratic traditions, but are not self-consciously organized within them. Nor do they find the loudest resistance movements of our time inspiring. With the decline of Marxism, and the growing signs that todays fundamentalisms are going nowhere, the world has a reservoir of critically minded intellectuals who are ready to move on. Historically, new challenges have surged up from just that sort of reservoir. Adopting a cosmopolitan vision will not be easy for any who contemplate it. It means clearing within oneself the blight that modern atomism has wrought on us all. It means a meeting of the personal and the political, a putting in order of one's ideas about character, agency, and duty. Anyone with whom this mission does not resonate inwardly, who sees it as just a package ready for the taking, is missing the point. The vanguard of such an effort would become the precursor of the postliberal keystone stratum described earlier. These people must see themselves as a worldwide force, with roots everywhere and a vision for everywhere, from the start. Anything less will weaken all that follows and make it too easy for the project to unravel.

This approach has its tensions, of course. On the one hand, these intellectuals must build long-term bridges abroad for the sake of the most sweeping political project the world has ever seen. On the other hand, this cosmopolitanism will distance them from the more immediate settings on

which they would otherwise act politically. An Algerian who prays at the mosque but also reads the *Doctrine of the Mean* and corresponds about it with Ecuadoreans and Thais would be an unusual Algerian. This split between a placeless inner inspiration and having to engage one's own time and place is nothing new. Premodern virtuocrats took it seriously and dealt with it, often to good effect. Those older lessons just need reapplying, on the new terrain this century offers. The challenge is to turn such complexities into sources of creativity and resolve.

Perhaps all this comes across as too quixotic, as seeking out philosopherkings in the shantytowns and *madrasahs* in hope of building a movement on them. Be that as it may, people at the starting point—the core support base—should place these demands on themselves as an ideal, even if not an attainment. In striving to exemplify what virtuocracy can mean to the modern world, they would set the terms of debate. But the initial support base, with all its peculiarities, would be only one part of the full array of social forces that must coalesce against global atomism. The appeals become looser as we move outward through a series of concentric circles. Here, for example, we could draw in the ayatollahs, neo-Confucians, and others like them. Today they work within assumptions that are roughly virtuocratic but not very cosmopolitan. They are sufficiently fed-up with present arrangements to have a natural sympathy for this sort of challenge.

Arrangements would be looser still as we look out further, to alliances with demotic and perfectionist groups, and with leftists who support global economic justice. The narrow definition of the core support base, and stringent model of its mission, matter greatly for these alliances that radiate outward. *Only* a cosmopolitan vanguard forged among and above existing resistance currents—and thus beholden to none of them—would be in a position to ally with all the social blocs necessary. Purity at the center will allow diversity further out.

All these points come down to one caveat. We should not think of an alliance as a whole that is just the sum of its parts. The vision of a world commonwealth has much that can appeal to a range of people, who might not each support every aspect. Adding those radiating currents of support, as and when they see fit, does not mean compromising the overarching vision that holds everything together. Accretion of support should happen less through appealing to existing movements with existing agendas, than through tapping directly into the receptivity of their bases. Ultimately, building a world-transforming alliance does not mean converting hundreds of millions to the core vision as such. It means only ordering critique into a focal point, highlighting the contrast between the global order and the global alternative, pushing things to a breaking point, and getting people to choose. That is the model of success that history offers.

We have cause for optimism. Most people around the world are suspicious of the system atomists have created, albeit for different reasons and with different ideas about what follows. Even with reservations, they would do well to bet on an ethically multidimensional and geographically broad-based challenge. Only those who genuinely support the atomist order, or those who can offer a likelier way of ending it, should bet against this sort of challenge. The former are a precarious minority worldwide. The latter, if they do have a better approach in mind, should speak up and help advance the debate.

In the end, the real question to ask oneself is what a future world civilization should look like. History hangs on what happens in the next few decades. The vision that wins will very likely be

locked in for centuries to come, until humanity is spread across the stars. In response to all the breathless talk of "globalization," a historian once noted that there is still no such thing as a global culture, because the world has none of the common history and vivid turning points that shape national identities.[4] Despite the placeless cultural codes of universal atomism that we have seen, he is right insofar as today s cosmopolitanism has little inspiring content. The challenge I have proposed can be seen, in part, as the promise of a world political culture worthy of the name. The transition itself would create, globally, the kind of foundational memories that most nations have. That common identity could then percolate down from the first thousands of pioneers and glue together a postliberal world state.

World history has yet to start, not because unity has not come, but because the unity that has come is lifeless. The closest historical parallel is the Qin empire, which used Legalist methods and ideology to unify Chinas Warring States over two thousand years ago. Only after its brutal reign had brought a unity of degradation could Confucians overthrow it, turn destruction into synthesis and renewal, and impress upon ancient China the ideals for which they justly became famous. We have an analogous task today: turning an atomist globe into an ethically sound world.

The atomist order has not ended history. History can end the atomist order. Whether it does will turn on fortune and circumstance, just as much as on inspiration and will. I have only sketched very roughly how we might think about strategy. Two intertwined points should stand out: the need to take up the world-state project, and the need to push serious intellectual engagement across the several traditions. Details would emerge from the unfolding of the project itself, both as a thrust against atomist liberalism and, in the best scenario, as the founding of a postliberal polity.

Even to reach that breaking point, we should be thinking in terms of decades if not generations. But starting the effort has an air of urgency about it. The global atomist onslaught goes on, eroding raw material by the day. That history has not yet ended does not mean it will not end. Enough cycles of resistance have been outmaneuvered that only a narrow window of opportunity remains. We have our last chance to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat, and to craft a world order that befits the multifaceted human spirit.

Notes

Introduction

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Chapter 1: Ethoses Across Time and Space

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33. "Mundaka Upanisad," 1:2:1.

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65. Shang Yang, 1:1; Han Fei, ch. 14, pp. 124–25 (L-i), ch. 18, p. 94 (W), and ch. 50, p. 128 (W).

66. Speech in Plato, *Republic* 338cl -3 and 343al-344c8, reprinted in *The First Philosophers* as T7, pp. 274–76. The speech is a representation by an opponent, of course, but the views fit well enough with what is known about Thrasymachus from other sources.

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68. Shen Buhai, fragment 6, in Creel, *Shen Pu-hai*, p. 357; Shang Yang, 3:9 and 4:18; Han Fei, ch. 15, p. 138 (L-i). On Legalist expectations of the ruler, see Creel, *Shen Pu-hai*, p. 92; Chen Qitian, *Han Fei Zi jiaoshi* (Hong Kong: Congshu Weiyuanhui, 1958), p. 967, and Roger T. Ames, *The Art of Rulership: A Study of Ancient Chinese Political Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), p. 94.

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70. Han Fei, ch. 5, pp. 17–9 (W).

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72. Shang Yang, 1:1 and 1:3; Han Fei, ch. 14, p. 123 (L-i), ch. 18, pp. 93–94 (W), ch. 45, p. 235 (L-ii), ch. 46, p. 237 (L-ii), and ch. 49, pp. 97–99 (W).

73. Shang Yang, 2:5; Han Fei, ch. 46, p. 239 (L-ii); Vandermeersch, pp. 213–4.

74. Krçna Misra, *Prabodha Candrodaya*, and Madhava Acarya, *Sarvadarsanasamgraha*, excerpts reprinted in *A Source Book in Indian Philosophy*, pp. 228–29 and p. 248, respectively.

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19. Gu Hongming, quoted in Zhou, pp. 280–81. Zhou's overall sympathy for the liberals prevents him from more than passing attention to Gu's critique.

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Chapter 4: Culture Wars and Character at History's End

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Chapter 7: Modernity's Malcontents

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Chapter 8: Fortresses Become Prisons

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Conclusion: Reclaiming History

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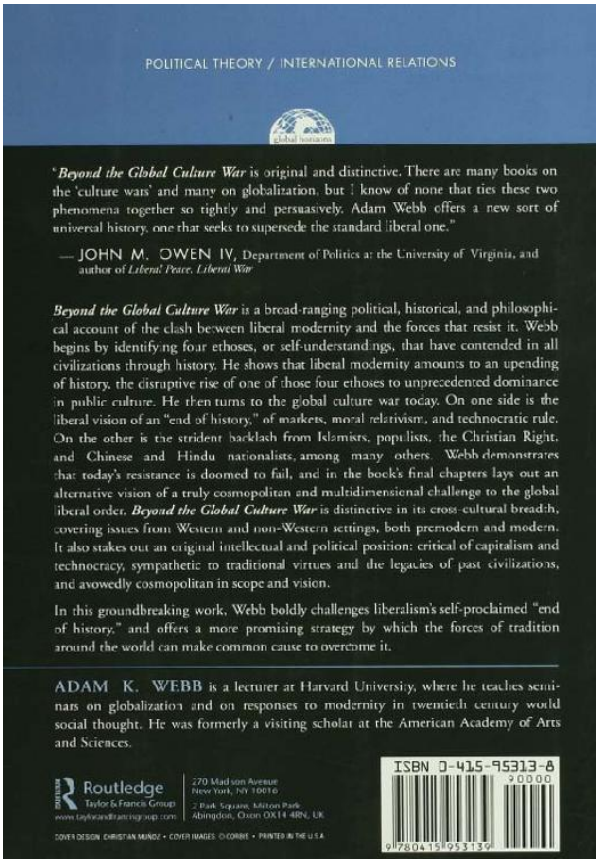

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"***Beyond the Global Culture War*** is original and distinctive. There are many books on the 'culture wars' and many on globalization, but I know of none that ties these two phenomena together so tightly and persuasively. Adam Webb offers a new sort of universal history, one that seeks to supersede the standard liberal one."

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Beyond the Global Culture War is a broad-ranging political, historical, and philosophical account of the clash between liberal modernity and the forces that resist it. Webb begins by identifying four ethoses, or self-understandings, that have contended in all civilizations through history. He shows that liberal modernity amounts to an upending of history, the disruptive rise of one of those four ethoses to unprecedented dominance in public culture. He then turns to the global culture war today. On one side is the liberal vision of an "end of history," of markets, moral relativism, and technocratic rule. On the other is the strident backlash from Islamists, populists, the Christian Right, and Chinese and Hindu nationalists, among many others. Webb demonstrates that today's resistance is doomed to fail, and in the book's final chapters lays out an alternative vision of a truly cosmopolitan and multidimensional challenge to the global liberal order. ***Beyond the Global Culture War*** is distinctive in its cross-cultural breadth, covering issues from Western and non-Western settings, both premodern and modern. It also stakes out an original intellectual and political position: critical of capitalism and technocracy, sympathetic to traditional virtues and the legacies of past civilizations, and avowedly cosmopolitan in scope and vision.

In this groundbreaking work, Webb boldly challenges liberalism's self-proclaimed "end of history," and offers a more promising strategy by which the forces of tradition around the world can make common cause to overcome it.

ADAM K. WEBB is a lecturer at Harvard University, where he teaches seminars on globalization and on responses to modernity in twentieth century world social thought. He was formerly a visiting scholar at the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

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