Equality & Morality

by

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prepared for

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American society is being piloted in a nose-dive by the very ideal upon which the country was founded... equality.¹

Tocqueville once wrote that if men pounce upon equality... and they cling to it as some precious treasure which they fear to lose... tell them not that by this blind surrender of themselves to an exclusive passion they risk their dearest interests; they are deaf.²

Americans have pounced upon and cling to equality. Resultantly, we suffer.

This paper is designed to show exactly how the "myth of equality," emerged, invaded, and now deteriorates the quality of American lives. It is at least partially to blame for our greatest problems. It winds an intricate path to a spiritual wasteland which in turn invites societal abuse, self abuse, ecological abuse, and political apathy.

Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn's speech, "A World Split Apart" inspires these ideas. Solzhenitsyn states that Americans are not fulfilling their spiritual needs and their society is suffering.

The prevailing Western view of the world... was born in the Renaissance... The turn introduced by the Renaissance was probably inevitable historically: the Middle Ages had come to a natural end by exhaustion, having become an intolerable despotic repression of man's physical nature in favor of the spiritual one. But then, we recoiled from the Spirit and embraced all that is material, excessively and incommensurately.³

Solzhenitsyn's argument that we live in a spiritual wasteland is provocative but not new. William Blake (1757-1827) noticed human life taking its course outside of our spiritual centers and churches. "The Little Vagabond" exemplifies his observation.

Dear Mother, dear Mother, the Church is cold.
But the Ale-house is healthy & pleasant & warm;
Besides I can tell where I am use'd well,
Such usage in heaven will never do well.

But if at the Church they would give us some Ale.
And a pleasant fire, our souls to regale;
We'd sing and we'd pray, all the live-long day'
Nor ever once wish from the Church to stray,

Then the Parson might preach & drink & sing,
And we'd be as happy as birds in the spring:
And modest dame Lurch, who is always at Church,
Wou'd not have bandy children nor fasting nor birch.

And God like a father rejoicing to see,
His children as pleasant and happy as he:
Would have no More quarrel with the Devil or the Barrel
But kiss him & give him both drink and apparel.4

T.S. Eliot's (1888-1965) "The Wasteland" begins to portray the idea that not only are our bodies not in church, but neither does church have anything to offer us.

What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,
You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,
And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,
And the dry stone no sound of water.5

Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980), more recently, "shaped and reflected the spirit of his age. ... For many of his contemporaries... [his]
existentialism was the only persuasive faith in a frightening age notably lacking in faith."\(^6\) Unfortunately, existentialism gives little consolation for man. Contrarily, it tells him his life is absurd, and man is still left empty.

Personally, I strongly agree with Solzhenitysn's observation. I feel the spiritual wasteland. Solzhenitsyn helped me realize the emptiness is resultant of societal beliefs. He instilled in me the idea that the emptiness could be manifesting itself in lives all across the country... perhaps in all the Western world.

The center of your democracy and of your culture is left without electric power for a few hours only, and all of a sudden crowds of American citizens start looting and creating havoc. The smooth surface film must be very thin, then, the social system quite unstable and unhealthy.\(^7\)

Coupled with another symptom of spiritual decline, decline in church attendance, also supports his argument. Church attendance in nineteen years (as of 1989) declined by four and one-half percent.\(^8\) This sounds minimal, but continuous decline at this rate would mean a decline of over 43 percent just since our revolution. Solzhenitsyn captured my attention.

Decline in church attendance is not completely due to a decreased integrity of religious doctrines. Religions are still based largely on reasonable and believable explanations of the unknown. I wondered, then, what outside of the churches could be...

\(^6\) Wilkie 2022.
\(^7\) Solzhenitsyn 682.
turning people away from spiritual teachings.

I began to uncover the answer in the second volume of Democracy in America by Alexis de Tocqueville. Today there are so many religions readily available from which to choose.

Equality makes men want to form their own opinions; but, on the other hand, it imbues them with the taste and idea of unity, simplicity, and impartiality in the power that governs society. Men living in democratic times are therefore very prone to shake off all religious authority; but if they consent to subject themselves to any authority of this kind, they choose at least that it should be single and uniform. Religious powers not radiating from a common center are naturally repugnant to their minds; and they almost as readily conceive that there should be no religion as that there should be several.9

It is important to realize that American equalities are attributable to the belief in equality, not to equality itself. For example, laws are set up to treat people as equals, so all are equal before the law. Inherently and in many aspects of life, however, we are unequal. Our belief in equality, however, makes these inequalities potentially devastating. I will discuss inequalities more later. Let us first examine an underlying condition of society, the belief in equality, that is at least partially to blame for our society's greatest problems.

EMERGENCE OF EQUALITY

Equality is, perhaps, the "noble lie"10 that makes Americans endure their problems without desiring to solve them. Though we

9Tocqueville 29.
are not intentionally misdirected by a leader with the noble lie, as might have been the case in Plato's utopia, Americans are raised to believe an untrue concept. We are socialized with the knowledge that our founding fathers believed in equality. The founding fathers' interpretation of equality is different, however, from the more modern interpretation.

John Locke, who influenced our founding fathers, was the first to popularize the idea of equality. He states in his Second Treatise of Government that in the state of nature every man is created equal because all men are "the workmanship of one omnipotent and infinitely wise Maker"\textsuperscript{11} and, more importantly, because no man can be indefinitely controlled by another unless he consents to it.\textsuperscript{12} Whether or not all men are indeed "the workmanship of one... Maker" is impossible to argue; the second part of the argument, however, is reasonable. A person who is being controlled without his consent may not be able to single-handedly overthrow his tyrant, but after time he would surely be able to escape or rally support to overthrow or kill the oppressor. A summary for the argument is often stated as "We are all equal because we are all equally deadly to one another."\textsuperscript{13}

The concept of equality has changed. Now people accept the idea and then they try to explain it. One of Locke's reasons for

\textsuperscript{12} Joseph A. Losco, personal interview, 31 January 1991.
\textsuperscript{13} Daniel J. Reagan, "Problems in Public Policy" (course), fall 1990.
equality is that all are equal in God's eyes. This justification now seems strange in a spiritually unfulfilled society, but it is accepted as a reason for the idea's conception. Although americans do not necessarily subscribe to this justification religiously, they do subscribe politically. With religion being on shaky ground, Americans put blind faith in their forefathers knowing that the concept was embraced and defended by them. Thus we do not support the concept with reason, rather with the reputation of our forefathers. We then generalize and apply the idea to all characteristics of people because of our "explain[ing] a mass of facts by a single cause becomes an ardent and sometimes undiscerning passion in [our] mind."14 Thus, "as men grow more like each other, the doctrine of the equality of the intellect gradually infuses itself into their opinions."15 The American becomes less and less willing to turn to his "equals" for answers. The belief in equality resultanty "separates his contemporaries from him; it throws him back forever upon himself and threatens in the end to confine him entirely within the solitude of his own heart."16 Our concept of equality is, partially for this very reason, an unfortunate belief.

It should be obvious to us that all men are not equal. Everywhere we turn we see people who are extremely talented, creative, intelligent, handicapped, or retarded. These people

14Tocqueville 15.
15Tocqueville 259.
16Tocqueville 99.
stick out because they are exceptional. It is assumed, however, that everyone who is not exceptional is average and the same. "When the conditions of society are becoming more equal... a habit grows up of... overlooking the individuals to think only of their kind."  

General ideas[, however,] are no proof of the strength, but rather the insufficiency of the human intellect. The notions the convey are never other than incomplete, and they always cause the mind to lose as much in accuracy as it gains in comprehensiveness.

People do not fit into the simple groups of the extraordinary and the common man. It is an oversimplification because people's abilities span a wide range and we cannot expect to believe that all people who do not stick out extraordinarily can be lumped together.

So, why do we continue to believe that all people, minus the extraordinary, are equal? "Indeed, a major source of irrationality in our reasoning is our tendency, called the belief perseverance phenomenon, to cling to our beliefs even in the face of contrary evidence." Another "major obstacle... is our tendency to search for information that confirms our ideas, a phenomenon known as confirmation bias." Our minds process information in such a way that contrary evidence is ignored and we try to reinforce our

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17 Tocqueville 31.
18 Tocqueville 13.
20 Myers 287.
misconception of equality. Our minds simply refuse to believe in inequalities!

INEQUALITIES

We live, then, in a country wherein the prevailing mythos is equality. We base our concepts of politics, society and economics on this belief. Politically, we believe that one man is as good as another to govern, so we support a republic. Socially, we are relatively without classes because each individual sees himself as good as another. Economically, laissez-faire has prevailed because we believe success is based more on hard work than ability. Our welfare programs (born only of the catastrophic, though quickly forgotten, lessons of the Great Depression) are intensely ridiculed today for their "free hand-outs" to "lazy good-for-nothings." We are truly a nation believing that all people are equal to one another. This belief in equality, however, comes into conflict with reality and causes great problems. As stated before, the present-day belief in equality is too far reaching. When it comes into contact with the hierarchies that do exist, disillusionment occurs; we lose our innocence. For example, our political system is hierarchically structured from the common man through local governments, state governments, and the federal government. The federal government itself is hierarchically structured, though less discernably so because no one branch has complete power over another. Federally speaking, the hierarchy is situationally dependent. Whether a bill gets made law depends more on the
connections of the congressman sponsoring the bill than on the content of the bill itself.\textsuperscript{21} If the U.S. President wants to enact a policy, he has to first win the hearts of the career civil service elites.\textsuperscript{22} Even the mighty federal court system often inevitably decides cases based more on the quality of the lawyers than on the reality of the situations brought before them. This inevitably tilts the hierarchy in favor of the sharpest lawyers or those who can afford them.\textsuperscript{23} Though we all like to perceive ourselves as middle class and "as good as the next guy," we have all seen social divisions, especially in schools as we grew up and observed the disparity between the elite and poor. We have felt the social climber's grasp or been a social climber ourselves as popularity motivates us. Economically speaking, a hierarchy also definitely exists. Some people just have more economic power than others based on connections or money. As an example, getting a job can often rely as much on who we know as what we know.

When we are not closely involved in one of these hierarchies and we must interact with the political or economic systems, we find obstacle after obstacle. The citizen finds it nearly impossible to get a license for a business or to get a job at a state park where the patronage system still prevails. The college graduate finds herself flipping burgers at the local McDonald's


\textsuperscript{22}Roger G. Hollands, "Public Administration" (course), fall 1990.

instead of researching in a corporation's bio-technology lab or working in personnel management. Socially, the newcomer in a small town finds himself shunned and remains an outcast for months to come.

When we encounter such difficulties, we may first ask how we can make the system easier to deal with. After all, we argue, those who have succeeded within the system are our equals, and they should not find success based on such things as "connections," personality, intellect, appearance, sex, religion... We believe we are being treated unfairly... as if we are unequal!

Politically, we try to vote someone new into office to change things but finds our vote didn't ensure our candidate's victory. Even if we ran for office ourselves and won, we would find it nearly impossible to enact the changes we want for at least three reasons. First, Americans "are not naturally disposed to take one of themselves for a guide and to follow him implicitly." Second, "when once an opinion has spread over the country and struck root there, it would seem that no power on earth is strong enough to eradicate it." Third, people prefer not to make far reaching changes because they won't know the new "game plan." As both Machiavelli and Tocqueville would agree, Americans prefer stability in their rules, even if the rules are unjust. 24 We become frustrated as we learn we cannot change the system and we become apathetic toward it. Our only solution is to not play by the rules of the established game. We turn our efforts to "beating the

24 Tocqueville 256-258.
system" and undermining it. We return to Locke's "state of nature" where laws do not exist and life is Darwinistic.25

DETERIORATION OF SOCIETY

spiritual wasteland

"Almost all human action... originate[s] in some very general idea men have conceived of the Deity, of his relation to mankind, of the nature of their own souls, and of their duties to their fellow creatures."26 For this reason, the study of spiritual beliefs is of the utmost importance in the study of human behavior. If a man believes in nothing, he will have very little context in which to develop responsibility toward himself, his fellow man, or nature.

Unfortunately, American society is characterized by two concepts that are very hostile to religious belief systems... especially the prevailing religion of Christianity. The first concept is that of equality; the second is that of scientific proof owning dominance over religious belief. A spiritual wasteland has resulted from the impact of these two concepts on the American mind.

Because the American believes himself to be in the presence of equals, acquiring and maintaining faith may be incredibly difficult.

25Locke 4-10.
26Tocqueville 20.
Public opinion presses with enormous weight upon [his mind]; it surrounds, directs, and oppresses him... each man feels himself weaker in regard to all the rest; as he discerns nothing by which he is considerably raised above them or distinguished from them, he... doubts... his [correctness]; and he is very near acknowledging that he is wrong, when the great number of his countrymen assert that he is so.  

Equality also, as stated before, makes men want to believe in the existence of one religion or none at all. In American society there are several visible religions, largely due to improved communication systems. As previously stated, this often makes us denounce all religious faiths because we cannot believe that there could be more than one true religion. Unfortunately, because spiritual beliefs are most difficult to ascertain, denouncing a religion is also most difficult. Generalizing laws, and discovering that all religions conflict to some degree, we either denounce all religions or only accept the "common ground" of different belief systems. We tend to become theistic and profess belief in God. Simultaneously, lacking an encompassing doctrine, we find it difficult to hypothesize about the purpose of life, or relationships between God, man and nature.

Religious faith has also become harder to maintain because of religious and scientific conflict. Centuries ago Catholicism's geocentric construct suffered a laming blow from Galileo, and now it is feeling the old words of Malthus haunt it as regards to its stand on contraception. The last hundred years have seen all

27 Tocqueville 261.
28 Tocqueville 20-21.
29 Tocqueville 14.
religions reel from Darwin's theory of evolution, and today doctors are accused of "playing God" as artificial intrusion into the cycle of life (eg. genetic engineering, euthanasia, life support systems, abortion...) becomes more common. Our age is one in which the territories of science and religion overlap, and provable science prevails over faith supported doctrine.

Our literature, a written portrait of our culture, records the decline in spiritual faith. Popular thoughts are recorded in famous works. For this reason our literature provides a good historical record of our changing religious views. In the "ancient world" and the Middle Ages people wrote works with religious themes. Examples are the Holy Bible, the Illiad and the Odyssey and Dante Alighieri's Divine Comedy. In the Renaissance, people began to focus more on man's temporal life with such works as The Prince by Niccolo Machiavelli, and Hamlet by William Shakespeare. Realism and naturalism went on to personify this in works like Henrik Ibsen's A Doll House and Kate Chopin's The Awakening. Today, the "Moderns and Contemporaries" seem to all but forget ancient philosophy and exemplify a more modern or scientific view of social relations. Sigmund Freud's writings on the Oedipus complex, T.S. Eliot's "The Wasteland," Jean-Paul Sartre's writings on existentialism and Adrienne Rich's "Diving into the Wreck" all exemplify a lack of spiritual belief.

30 Wilkie vol. 1.
31 Wilkie vol. 2.
societal abuse

When clashes of ideology and reality couple with their offspring, the spiritual wasteland, a destructive combination is wrought. The combination strains our relationship with and breeds feelings of hostility toward society. It undermines religious beliefs which are a basis of morals and a powerful behavior modification force. As previously stated, the belief in equality forces man's attention upon himself and away from society. He believes himself to be equal to his peers and when he finds himself being treated unequally, or in unequal circumstances, he can become frustrated, angry and desirous of obtaining what is "denied" but "rightfully" his. When spiritual beliefs do not explain these feelings or reactions, criminal behavior may result.

Theft is a blatant example because it is literally one person taking from another. The thief's motive is usually either to obtain something he/she cannot afford or to get money. Either way, it is often an attempt to balance the socio-economic scale. Other types of crimes, however, may also result. Feelings of anger or a need to be in control can lead to rape, battery, child abuse, murder... Feelings of needing to be accepted, rewarded or respected can lead to similar aggressions.

self abuse

Just as hard feelings can be turned on society, so can they be turned inward. The use of drugs to escape the iniquities of
life isn't uncommon. Unfortunately, these iniquities are particularly painful to Americans because we believe in a just world and equality. We grow up being taught "that good is rewarded and evil punished. From this it is a short leap to assume that those who are rewarded must be good and those who suffer must likewise deserve their fate." We don't believe iniquities naturally exist.\(^{32}\)

When we believe in equality and the "just-world phenomenon,"\(^{33}\) inferiority complexes may ensue. When we grow up we expect, and are expected, to leave home, be self-supporting through work and make our own religious decisions. Most are expected to be self-reliant... no matter what their abilities.\(^{34}\) This causes great problems because, as previously stated, we are all different and variably able to attain certain levels of self-reliance. If for some reason we are unable to become or remain self-reliant, society labels us "inferior." We blame the victim.\(^{35}\) Not only does society ostracize people unable to aspire to a level of independence, but we punish ourselves psychologically and develop low self-esteem. This can then lead to drug abuse, eating disorders, suicide and other forms of self abuse.

Unfortunately, self-abuse does not help to alleviate low self-esteem, rather the abuse compounds it. For example, bulimia

\(^{32}\) Myers 594.
\(^{33}\) Ibid.
\(^{35}\) Myers 595.
nervosa is a type of self-abuse in which the victim continually punishes herself with stringent dieting or exercising because she has not been able to meet the expectations of society or family. Because she is not accepted for who she is, she tries to make herself more of what she "ought" to be, while simultaneously she punishes herself for being imperfect or "bad." Her expectations of herself, however, are just as unreasonable as those her family or society places upon her. Consequently, she fails; only to try again even harder to attain what she will never be able to achieve. As the cycle of failure continues, feelings of inferiority multiply. A power struggle is on that, if left to fester, may result in death. The only way to end this cycle is for the bulimic to realize that she does not have to be perfect and measure up to societal or family expectations. She has to realize that she is an individual and that not everyone can obtain the "perfect body."

Sometimes eating disorders are a cry for help like attempted suicide may be. The victim's hope is that someone will notice the affliction or depression in time and force them to get help. This shows the victim that somebody cares and loves them just as they are. Unfortunately, someone just telling the victim that she is a good person is usually insufficient. The belief, that all are equally able to attain a certain level of achievement, has been too ingrained. The same is often true of other self abuses like alcohol and drug abuse.
ecological abuse

"Equality... lays open the soul to an inordinate love of material gratification."36

Indeed, the crisis of ecological scarcity can be viewed as... a moral crisis in which the ugliness and destruction outside us in our environment simply mirror the spiritual wasteland within: the sickness of the earth reflects the sickness in the soul of modern industrial man, whose whole life is given over to gain, to the disease of endless getting and spending that can never satisfy his deeper aspirations and must eventually end in cultural, spiritual, and physical death.37

Our aquifers are polluted with chemicals; our rain is acidic; our air is smoggy; our ozone is depleted, our food contains pesticides and nitrates and our aquatic food supply is greatly diminishing. All this is due to our desires to have refrigerators, cars, aerosol cans... and industries that produce contraptions to fill our houses.

Our materialism seems to have become an integral part of our culture. We constantly try to buy a nicer car, a bigger house, prettier plates, more cassette tapes, more shoes... There's always something more that we want and, what's more, this doesn't bother us. Although we are a post-industrial society, we seem to have an industrial mind-set and believe in unlimited growth. We believe that we can continue mass-production without consequences. This makes the problem of materialism great because its fuel is a mind-set and difficult to eradicate.

36Tocqueville 22.
We have tried to materialistically fill our spiritual emptiness and, resultantly, we are destroying the environment. According to many ecologists, we have less than 20 years until our earth is irreversibly damaged from pollution and our own extinction becomes inevitable. Some ecologists say it is already too late.\(^{38}\)

Health-wise, naturopathic doctors see a correlation between our increased use of chemicals in food and drink (e.g. preservatives, fertilizers, insecticides...) and the high rate of cancer and other afflictions in this country.\(^{39}\) We are not just figuritively digging our own graves, we may literally be doing so.

**political apathy**

One manner in which people can address the inequalities that they see around them is through the political system. Why, then, does our country suffer from such great political apathy? Three predominant reasons are: the sluggishness of the system, incomplete knowledge about candidates and issues, and feelings of impotence.

Our political system was designed by men who believed in equality and feared instituted inequality. Our forefathers, therefore, designed a system of checks and balances that would make it extremely difficult for one branch of government to tyrannically rule. This, however, also makes it difficult for any one to rule well. The same type of catch-22 can be found in the legislature,

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\(^{38}\)Gene E. Frankland, "Environmental Politics" (course), fall 1990.

\(^{39}\)Betty Bow-Stiver, personal interview, 5 April 1991.
as obstacles that were designed to inhibit the bad legislation also inhibit the good. The political system and political activity are also firmly entrenched in tradition. Each year, for example, hundreds of unnecessary bills slow the legislature. Many of their sponsors do not expect, or even desire, them to pass. Their annual introduction has, however, become an informal tradition, and it has been said that congress just wouldn't be congress without them.\textsuperscript{40}

Complex lines of power characterize the system. For example, whether a bill passes in the senate often has more to do with who sponsors the bill than the bill's contents. To get power, seniority is usually necessary and favors have to be granted. Resultant of the "favor-trade," personal debts create a line of power and determine the success of bills. All of these characteristics make the system sluggish and a difficult one with which to deal and relate. As a result, frustration with the structure of the system can easily develop.

While dealing with the political system directly is frustrating, dealing with it indirectly is equally difficult. The way most of us become involved with political decision making is through voting. Voting for a set of issues, however, is next to impossible. Most people in this country vote moderate with left and right tendencies. Few agree with all the things one party organization represents; nonetheless, voting choices are usually between two platforms.

Not only do we have to choose a partially disagreeable set of

\textsuperscript{40}Reid.
ideas, but we do not know what portion of that set of ideas will be needed for decision making in the next term. For example, we may choose our candidate based on abortion principles. That legislator, however, may never be in the position to shape or decide abortion issues in the next term. His decisions may concern issues with which the voter disagreed. Unfortunately, there is often no way to predict the issues that will come up during the next session.

Because of the amount and diversity of material that could face an elected official, a candidate's character becomes the basis upon which many people vote. For this reason candidates often turn attention away from the issues and attack the character of their opponent instead. Mudslinging, however, often causes voters to boycott elections because the attack of someone's character for political purposes destroys the attacker's integrity almost as much as his victim's. The voter has no reputable choice in such an election.

Another reason for political inaction is our feeling of impotence. It has been said that the larger an empire, the more difficult for its citizens to relate to that empire. The reason for that is feelings of insignificance. When the sheer numbers of votes in a Presidential election are counted and posted, it is obvious to see that a single vote made no difference in the outcome of the election. Strangely enough, Presidential elections, where single votes are least influential, are the ones in which most people vote because they believe the decision to be important.
Still, only about half of the eligible voters show up for the Presidential elections.

**Voting For President**

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<th>Candidates</th>
<th>Voter Participation (% of voting-age population)</th>
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<tr>
<td>1972 McGovern--Nixon</td>
<td>55.2</td>
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<td>1976 Carter--Ford</td>
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<td>1980 Carter--Reagan</td>
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<td>1984 Mondale--Reagan</td>
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<td>1988 Dukakis--Bush</td>
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The place where a person's vote can have the most impact is at the local level. Often local elections can be won by as few as three to a dozen votes. Publicity at this level, however, is minimal and consequently most people see these elections as unimportant. They don't bother to listen to the candidates and often do not even know their names.

Another reason for political inaction is that most of us don't see our lives as changing very much as elections come and go. Thus, to many, politics seems unimportant. As stated earlier, our flawed concept of equality is what causes this self-centered outlook on life. Unfortunately, seemingly distant issues can impact us. For example, before 1978 all federal taxpayers paid for the upkeep of barge-used waterways... even if those taxpayers had no use of those waterways in their states (e.g. Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, Idaho...). The railroads had to pay for their own rail upkeep, and the trucking industry was charged extra for the use of the roads, but the American taxpayer was, in effect,

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41Hoffman 426.
subsidizing a competitive industry. Such drainages on our personal money supply can add up, but they will never be realized as long as we look merely to our immediate surroundings.

CONCLUSION

Locke's original concept of equality has been lost to the masses. Today we seem to have changed Locke's philosophy from "all men are equal" to "all men are the same." This concept isolates us within ourselves, pushing individualism to the extreme, and helps create a spiritual wasteland in which we singularly live. It is hostile to spiritual beliefs and to positive attitudes concerning both society and the individual. We try to soothe ourselves with materialism but, resultantly, we simultaneously kill the environment.

The arena in which some of the inequalities of our society could be addressed, the political system, receives little public attention. The reasons for political apathy are multitudinous. Few people have the time and energy to work with a system that is so sluggish and complex. A lack of knowledge and feelings of impotence are also at least partially to blame for low voter turnout.

Though some may argue that many afflictions in American society are unattributable to the myth of equality, the concept does facilitate the development of our societal problems. Nonetheless, equality is also a positive force in society. While

42 Reid.
the spiritual basis for morals disintegrates, equality supports a moral doctrine... inadequate as it may be. For example, we believe ourselves in the presence of equals, so we usually respect and tolerate other individuals and their differences. Equality also, through the long-lasting reverence it has received, is a steadying force in society. Its institutional and moral manifestations characterize the United States and link Americans in a certain degree of equality of condition.

Unfortunately, as earlier explained, the condition is not necessarily a positive one. Equality fosters spiritual, societal, personal, and ecological abuses. Because we do not understand society, we are slaves to it; we are reactionaries. We withdraw into ourselves and, as previously stated, compound the problem. Because we do not see the predicament and try to eradicate it, we are, in a sense, "call[ing for] equality in slavery."\(^4^3\)

The myth of equality is very much a part of the American identity. It is the basis of our individualism and its destruction could have devastating effects. For our "psychology, as Robert Coles has written, the self is 'the only or main form of reality.'\(^4^4\) "Abandon[ing our] individualism... would mean abandon[ing] our deepest identity."\(^4^5\) Perhaps, however, there is a way to eradicate the myth without devastating ourselves.

One possible way out of our predicament is to create a new

\(^{4^3}\)Tocqueville 97.
\(^{4^4}\)Bellah 43.
\(^{4^5}\)Bellah 142.
morality. We need to feel connected to society, ourselves, the environment, and politics so that we may respect them or use them more wisely. To do so, we need a concept that will grab ahold of our hearts and define these relationships. Though "democratic nations have neither time nor taste to go in search of novel opinions,"46 "there is a growing realization that technology can no longer save mankind and the problem is beyond the power of government or even world agencies to solve."47 Some say that "'given open communication and the ability to think problems out, most problems can be solved.' Solving conflicts becomes a matter of technical problem solving, not moral decision."48 Decisions, however, often must be decided morally. An example of such a conflict is the abortion issue. Science has not told us when a soul begins its existence. Resultantly many views pervade and disruption (e.g. violent protest, bombings...) occurs. Our governments are unable to decide what is "right" and try to compromise by legislating when and why abortions can take place. The views, however, are diametrically opposed; neither side accepts compromise, and the conflict continues. We are now asking ourselves, "If great and well-meaning institutions cannot save us, where are we to turn?"49

Are we to turn to ourselves or to society? We do not know.

46Tocqueville 260.
48Bellah 7.
497:267
All we do know is that we should be responsible. Unfortunately, "we cannot be responsible unless we know for what we are responsible,"\(^{50}\) and we usually have "a much better idea of what [we are] against than of what [we are] for." Many are "confused about how to define for themselves such things as the nature of success, the meaning of freedom, and the requirements of justice." For example, some would say that

> the goal of a good life is intimate involvement with the community and family into which [one] happens to have been born. But how do you know that in this complicated world, the inherited conventions of your community and your family are better and more important, and, therefore, more worthy of your allegiance, than those of other communities and families?\(^{51}\)

Our problem is that "we do not even know what kind of life on this earth is right for mankind."\(^{52}\) Is it right to use scientific study and technology as our main impetus? Would it be better to structure our society so as to attain spiritual aspirations? Should the maintenance of tradition be our intention? These directions are all beneficial to a degree. Unfortunately, they also conflict with one another. As previously discussed, science has already lamed our spiritual concepts. It also fights tradition by shaping our lives around new technologies. Our spiritual beliefs are often so strongly linked to tradition that we cannot develop new beliefs, to acquire faith, unless we at least partially abandon tradition. We must decide which impetus is most beneficial

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\(^{50}\) Bennett 260.

\(^{51}\) Bellah 19-21.

\(^{52}\) 7:260
because we must choose one to prevail. It is a circular problem. We need strong moral convictions to determine what kind of moral convictions we should have.

A second possibility is self-education. If we understood the error of our belief in equality and truly understood Locke's reasoning, perhaps we could put ourselves straight. We would understand inequalities, and our perception of "iniquities" would resultantly change. For example, if we could not achieve a certain level of performance we might realize the reason is inequalities, not personal flaws or injustices. As previously argued, we are all different. We have different levels of potential in different areas of life. We need to let ourselves off the hook. We cannot aspire to society's, or our own, unreasonable expectations. We need to stop criticizing ourselves for being unable to change the unchangeable.

The sooner we learn the true meaning of equality, the better off we will be. Unfortunately, the belief perseverance phenomenon, the confirmation bias, and our extreme individualism make it very difficult for us to "see the light of the day" and eradicate our misconceptions. Nonetheless, we must try. Our happiness and, perhaps, our lives depend on it.
APPENDIX 1: Analysis of T.S. Eliot's "The Wasteland"

What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man, 20
You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,
And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,
And the dry stone no sound of water. Only
There is shadow under this red rock, 25
(Come in under the shadow of this red rock),
And I will show you something different from either
Your shadow at morning striding behind you
Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you;
I will show you fear in a handful of dust. 30

[Fresh blows the wind
to the homeland;
my Irish child,
where are you waiting?]
"You gave me hyacinths first a year ago;"
"They called me the hyacinth girl."
--Yet when we came back, late, from the Hyacinth garden,
Your arms full, and your hair wet, I could not
Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither
Living nor dead, and I knew nothing, 40
Looking into the heart of light, the silence.

[Waste and empty is the sea.]

(lines 19-42)

The first six lines ask how people can gain a true religious philosophy out of a world that gives nothing upon which to build that philosophy. The world truly viewed in non-sensical, "a heap of broken images" (line 22). Even the most experienced in the world, the "aged" (Wilkie 1874, footnote 9), are given "no relief" (line 23) or explanations.

Eliot seems to say that though current religions are not necessarily supported, one can obtain some spiritual relief or be shaded from the sun by a rock or understanding (line 25). The relief is more steady than that conventionally offered by man as man's shadow is constantly moving (lines 27-29). We next learn, however, that the spiritual relief, is really no relief at all but
"fear in a handful of dust" (line 30). Therefore, his point thus far has been that there is something consistent we can hang onto in a storm, but the protection it offers is little.

What is consistent, though? Eliot exemplifies twice. In lines 31-41 Eliot describes two situations in which nature or desire offer him a desirable end but with life's restraints he cannot take those paths. First, though there is a wind that would fill the sails of a homeward bound ship, the sailor cannot set sail because he cannot find his love. Second, a desirable woman is before a man but his feelings don't permit him to obtain the love that could be his. It's a paradox. Things don't go right and fit into a law. Life cannot be explained.

The last line of the passage perhaps best exemplifies the paradox. "Waste and empty" would perfectly describe a dessert; a place without life-giving water. Yet, the place Eliot refers to is the sea. Conflicts. In other words "a heap of broken images" is all life is, but it is "a heap of broken images" and should be acknowledged as so.
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