Christopher Lasch

author of *The Culture of Narcissism*

# The Minimal Self

## Psychic Survival in Troubled Times

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# The Minimal Self

W·W·Norton & Company
New York · London

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Christopher Lasch

Published simultaneously in Canada by Stoddart,
a subsidiary of General Publishing Co. Ltd, Don Mills, Ontario.
Printed in the United States of America.

The text of this book is composed in Janson Alternate, with
display type set in Modern #20
manufacturing by the Haddon Craftsmen Inc
Book design by Bernard Klein

First Edition

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Lasch, Christopher.
The minimal self.

Bibliography: p.
Includes index.
1. Self. 2. Human ecology. I. Title.
BF697.L26 19 155.2 84–4103

ISBN 0-393-01922-5

W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 500
W.W. Norton & Company Ltd., 37
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0

*To Chris*

He is as full of valor as of kindness,
Princely in both.

*Henry V, IV. iii*

The entire modern deification of survival *per se,* survival returning to itself, survival naked and abstract, with the denial of any substantive excellence in *what* survives, except the capacity for more survival still, is surely the strangest intellectual stopping-place ever proposed by one man to another.

*William James*

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# VI

# The Politics of the Psyche

*Contemporary Cultural Debate: An Ideal Typology*

Since the argument I have advanced in the foregoing pages cuts across conventional political boundaries, it will seem confusing to readers who rely on familiar ideological landmarks to keep their intellectual bearings. But it is not my argument alone that resists easy political classification. Long-established distinctions between left and right, liberalism and conservatism, revolutionary politics and reformist politics, progressives and reactionaries are breaking down in the face of new questions about technology, consumption, women's rights, environmental decay, and nuclear armaments, questions to which no one has any ready-made answers. New issues give rise to new political configurations. So does the growing importance of cultural issues. The new left, the women's movement, and the environmental movement defy conventional categorization, in part, because they

insist that the "personal is political," whereas earlier political movements paid little attention to the political implications of family life, gender arrangements, and sexuality.

For many purposes, psychoanalytic terminology now provides a more reliable guide to the political landscape than outmoded distinctions between left and right, not because controversies about contemporary culture are necessarily conducted in psychoanalytic language—though they often are—but because they address issues best illuminated by Freud and his followers. In order to provide ourselves with an accurate map of the geography of cultural politics, we can distinguish three positions, each with its own diagnosis of the cultural malaise, its own set of remedies, and its own affiliation with one or another among the psychic agencies distinguished by Freud in his structural theory of the mind. A broad sketch of these positions can hope only to suggest their general outlines, not to capture every nuance of cultural debate. No one has formulated arguments that conform perfectly to any of the following descriptions. These guidelines provide an ideal typology of debates about contemporary culture rather than an exhaustive historical transcript of everything people are saying. They represent the terrain in bold relief, missing many of the finer details. They represent it more faithfully, however, than obsolete labels derived from nineteenth-century political alignments.

Those who take the first of these positions see the crisis of contemporary culture, in effect, as a crisis of the superego. They regard a restoration of the social superego and of strong parental authority as the best hope of social stability and cultural renewal. According to partisans of the second position, on the other hand, it is the ego, the rational faculty, that needs to be strengthened. Our society needs moral enlightenment, they argue, not a forbidding structure of moral prohibitions and commandments. It needs people

with the inner strength to make discriminatory judgments among a plurality of moral options, not people who slavishly follow orders or conform unthinkingly to received moral dogmas.

The first position obviously has an affinity with the conservative tradition and the second with liberalism, but neither coincides exactly with those categories. The party of the superego, as we might call it, does not by any means include everyone who calls himself a conservative today; nor, on the other hand, does it include political conservatives alone. On the spectrum of current political opinion, it comes closest to describing the position of those labeled neoconservatives, many of them former liberals dismayed by the moral anarchy of the sixties and seventies and newly respectful of the values of order and discipline. The second position represents what I take to be the essence of the liberal, humanist tradition, with its respect for human intelligence and the capacity for moral self-regulation. It is a position that appeals not only to liberals, however—to those liberals, that is, who still keep the old faith—but also to democratic socialists and even to many revolutionary socialists. It is the position of the old left as opposed to the new; and it is precisely their deep disagreement about culture and morality, as we shall see, and not some disagreement about abstruse points of Marxist doctrine, that most clearly distinguishes these two movements.

The third position, the one that corresponds, more or less, to the thinking of the new left or at least to those who advocate a "cultural revolution" not merely against capitalism but against industrialism in general, is the most difficult to describe and the easiest to caricature. For this reason, I shall devote most of my attention to it, but only after sketching in the other two, since it is their inadequacies that have given rise to the critique and rebuttal mounted by the new left.

*The Party of the Superego* Those who adhere to the first of these positions attribute the disorder and confusion of contemporary culture to the collapse of moral inhibitions, the climate of permissiveness, and the decline of authority. They deplore hedonism, the "me-first mentality," and the widespread sense of "entitlement"—the belief that we ought to enjoy happiness, personal success, admiration, and respect without earning these things, as if they were part of our birthright. An "adversary culture," according to this assessment, has popularized attitudes formerly held only by alienated intellectuals: disrespect for institutions, authority, and tradition; rejection of society's claims on the individual; hatred of the bourgeoisie; demands for unlimited sexual freedom, unlimited freedom of expression, unlimited access to experience. A kind of principled negativism; a transvaluation of all values; an unmasking of the base motives underlying claims of moral rectitude: these habits of thought, hallmarks of the modernist sensibility, have allegedly filtered down to students, Hollywood scriptwriters, commercial artists, and writers of advertising copy, with the result that our entire culture now reverberates with the rhetoric and imagery of Dionysian revolt. The combination of "modernism in the streets" (as Lionel Trilling referred to the youth movement of the sixties), an "antinomian" cult of the self, and a therapeutic, remissive morality threatens to dissipate the last shreds of social obligation. Only a revival of the "transgressive sense," as Philip Rieff calls it—a "renascence of guilt"—will stem the rising tide of impulse.

In order to understand this position, we must be careful not to accept the characterization offered by its opponents. Those who see a strong social superego as the only reliable defense against moral anarchy—Rieff, Daniel Bell, and Lionel Trilling, to name only three of the most prominent exponents of this position—stress the importance of moral consensus and the internalization of moral constraints. They do

not advocate a repressive apparatus of laws and moral dogmas designed to enforce moral conformity. They have little confidence in external controls, laws against pornography and abortion, or the restoration of the death penalty, except as symbolic expressions of shared beliefs strong enough to influence conduct without the constant threat of punitive sanctions. They advocate positions usually identified with conservatism, but they do not stand mindlessly for law and order. They stand for the superego: that is, for a morality so deeply internalized, based on respect for the commanding moral presence of parents, teachers, preachers, and magistrates, that it no longer depends on the fear of punishments or the hope of rewards. It is for this reason that the party of the superego does not coincide with the contemporary political right, though it includes people on the right. Many right-wingers have no faith in the superego at all. Either they seek simply to enforce moral and political conformity through outright coercion or, in the case of many free-market conservatives, they take the same libertarian view of culture that they take toward economics, asking only that everyone enjoy the freedom to follow his self-interest. The first approach relies not on conscience but on pure compulsion. The second cannot properly be called conservative at all, since it traces its intellectual roots back to nineteenth-century liberalism. A truly conservative position on culture rejects both enforced conformity and laissez-faire. It attempts to hold society together by means of moral and religious instruction, collective rituals, and a deeply implanted though not uncritical respect for tradition. It stresses the value of loyalty—to one's parents, one's childhood home, one's country. When it speaks of discipline, it refers to an inner moral and spiritual discipline more than to chains, bars, and the electric chair. It respects power but recognizes that power can never take the place of authority. It defends minority rights and civil liberties. In this respect, cultural conservatism is compatible with political

liberalism, even with democratic socialism. Thus Bell describes himself as a cultural conservative, a political liberal, and a socialist in economics.

When I say that the conservative critique of modern culture rests on respect for the superego, I do not mean to imply that it draws on psychoanalysis or even that it accepts the validity of psychoanalytic methods and concepts. On the contrary, many conservatives regard psychoanalysis as one of the cultural influences that have undermined respect for authority, contributed to a therapeutic morality, and exposed "all justifications as ideologies," in Rieff's words. Nevertheless it is possible to state the conservative position in psychoanalytic terms without doing violence to it, as a number of theorists have already demonstrated when they criticize American culture as a culture in which the id has triumphed over the superego. In his psychoanalytic exploration of contemporary society, *The Dying of the Light*, Arnold Rogow includes a chapter called "The Decline of the Superego" in which he deplores the "flight from the superego" and the "breakdown of social controls" and insists that "those who value a civilized way of life must ultimately choose between the superego and the superstate." A few years ago, Henry and Yela Lowenfeld presented a similar argument in a paper entitled "Our Permissive Society and the Superego." "The youth of today are being deserted by their parents in regard to the superego development," they write. "The social superego is also ineffectual and its representatives give no support." The "decline of the superego," together with the growing "hostility against the culture which forces the individual to restrict his libidinal and aggressive drives," threatens the foundations of social order, according to the Lowenfelds.

These explicitly psychoanalytical formulations of the conservative position alert us to its principal shortcoming: its overestimation of the superego. According to the con-

servative indictment of modern culture, society's failure to uphold authoritative moral commandments or "interdictions," to use one of Rieff's favorite terms, opens the gates to a riotous horde of impulses demanding immediate gratification. In fact, the superego never serves as a reliable agency of social discipline. It bears too close a kinship to the very impulses it seeks to repress. It relies too heavily on fear. Its relentless condemnation of the ego breeds a spirit of sullen resentment and insubordination. Its endlessly reiterated "thou shalt not" surrounds sin with the glamor and excitement of the forbidden. In our culture, the fascination with violence reflects the severity with which violent impulses are proscribed. It also reflects the violence of the superego itself, which redirects murderous resentment of authorities against the ego. The superego, at least in its more primitive form, exemplifies a type of authority that knows only how to forbid. Careful study of its operations confirms the political truism that authority betrays its weakness when it seeks to rule by means of intimidation and threats of retaliation. It is never enough for authorities to uphold ethical norms and to insist on the obligation to obey them. Unless those norms are rooted in an emotional identification with the authorities who uphold them, they will inspire no more than the perfunctory obedience that fears punishment. Political theory and moral philosophy have always recognized that conscience rests not on fear but on the more solid emotional foundation of loyalty and gratitude. If the "transgressive sense" is breaking down in our society, the reasons for this lie not only in authorities' failure to insist on firm moral guidelines but in their failure to provide the security and protection that inspire confidence, respect, and admiration. A government that maintains a deadly arsenal of nuclear weapons and talks casually about "winnable" nuclear wars in which millions would be incinerated can no longer claim very plausibly to protect its citizens against foreign invasion.

A government that preaches law and order but fails to guarantee public safety, to reduce the crime rate, or to address the underlying causes of crime can no longer expect citizens to internalize respect for the law. From top to bottom of our society, those who uphold law and morality find themselves unable to maintain order or to hold out the rewards formerly associated with observance of social rules. Even middle-class parents find it increasingly difficult to provide a secure environment for their offspring or to pass on the social and economic advantages of middle-class status. Teachers can no longer claim that education promises upward social mobility. In many schools, they find themselves hard pressed even to keep order in the classroom. Authorities can promise neither the security of inherited customs and social roles, the kind of security that used to prevail in preindustrial societies, nor the opportunity to improve one's social position, which has served as the secular religion of egalitarian societies. The fiction of equal opportunity—the basis of what used to be called the American dream—no longer has enough foundation in fact to support a social consensus. In a rapidly changing and unpredictable world, a world of downward mobility, social upheaval, and chronic economic, political, and military crisis, authorities no longer serve very effectively as models and guardians. Their commandments no longer carry conviction. The nurturant, protective, benevolent side of social and parental authority no longer tempers its punitive side. Under these conditions, nothing will be gained by preaching against hedonism and self-indulgence. Instead of attempting to transmit and exemplify a clear ideal of moral conduct, those who hold positions of moral leadership would probably do better to teach survival skills, in the hope that resourcefulness, emotional toughness, and inner ego strength—as opposed to the security of an inherited morality—will enable the younger generation to weather the storms ahead.

*The Liberal Ego: Nineteenth-Century Origins of the Therapeutic Ethic* Liberal educators and social scientists have advocated ego-strengthening education, without calling it a program of personal survival, for some time. They have argued that a dynamic, pluralistic, and democratic society cannot live by the inherited moral wisdom of the past. According to the liberal theory of socialization, parents and other authorities recognize the futility of instilling in children practical skills and moral dogmas that will be outmoded by the time they become adults. Instead of merely transmitting the ethical and technical information accumulated in the past, they seek to train the inner resources that will enable the young to fend for themselves. According to liberal sociology, cultural alarmists mistake this educational realism for an abdication of parental and pedagogical authority, a breakdown of the family, a collapse of social order. As Talcott Parsons once put it, the modern family specializes in the "production of personality"—that is, the capacity for adaptation to unforeseen contingencies, for experimentation and innovation. John Dewey and his followers described the task facing the school system in much the same way. When they were accused of undermining respect for authority, they replied that democratic authority, like science, achieves its greatest success precisely in assuring its own supersession. It provides each new generation with the intellectual tools and emotional resources needed to challenge existing authority and to work out new ways of living better suited than the old ways to the changing conditions of a society constantly in motion.

The liberal tradition sides with the rational, reality-testing faculty, the ego, against both impulse and inherited morality. Even in the nineteenth century, when liberal education still drew on the cultural capital of the past, more heavily than it realized, liberal social theory envisioned a new type of autonomous personality emancipated from custom, preju-

dice, and patriarchal constraints. In its crudest form, liberalism identified itself with the utilitarian morality of enlightened self-interest, according to which the individual seeks to maximize pleasure and to avoid pain not, of course, by giving in to impulse but by putting off immediate gratification in the anticipation of future rewards. Today the morality of enlightened self-interest lives on in behavioral psychology, which conceives of moral education as moral conditioning accomplished largely through positive reinforcements. A behaviorist like B. F. Skinner stands squarely in the utilitarian tradition when he insists that punishment, an ineffective form of social control, has to give way to "nonaversive" controls. Skinner's belief that science can become the basis of a "better moral order," in which "there is no need for moral struggle," restates another tenet of utilitarianism, modified, as we shall see, by an overlay of twentieth-century progressivism.

The long-standing liberal critique of the superego found expression not only in utilitarianism and behaviorism but in nineteenth-century liberal religion, updated and secularized in the twentieth century by ego psychology, humanistic psychology, and other "reality-oriented" therapies. The nineteenth-century attack on Calvinism, denounced by liberal preachers as a religion of terror that bred either craven submission or revolt, illustrated very clearly the difference between two conceptions of social order, one founded on submission to omnipotent divine authority and the other on a system of rational "correction." Jacob Abbott, a Congregational clergyman, educator, and author still close enough to Calvinism to grasp its central doctrines, went to the heart of the issue when he distinguished between two conceptions of punishment, "vindictive retribution for sin" and "remedial" punishments administered with an eye to their "salutary effects" on character. Retribution, Abbott explained, takes little or no account of "future acts"; it rests instead on a sense

that justice demands punishment "as the natural and proper sequel and complement of the past act of transgression." Correction, on the other hand, employs punishment, along with rewards, in the interest of behavior modification, as it would be called today. A transitional figure, Abbott could still see value in retribution, which educates and satisfies our sense of justice. He found himself unable to decide whether God's punishment should be seen as vindictive or remedial, and the same uncertainty, he thought, extended to the machinery of penal justice administered by the state. But no one could have any doubts, he believed, about the undesirability of vindictive punishments in the school and family. "The punishment of a child by a parent, or of a pupil by a teacher, ought certainly, one would think, to exclude the element of vindictive retribution altogether, and to be employed solely with reference to the salutary influences that may be expected from it in time to come."

By the middle of the nineteenth century, most liberals had come to regard all forms of authority in the same light, even divine justice itself. They had come to believe that God punished sinners for their own good, not because punishment provides a fitting sequel to sin. Liberal preachers applied utilitarian conceptions of justice to theological problems and reinterpreted salvation and damnation as a rational apportionment of rewards and punishments designed to encourage good behavior and discourage bad. Just as penal reformers objected to corporal punishments and public torture on the grounds not only of their cruelty but of their ineffectiveness in preventing crime, so liberal theologians objected to the Calvinist doctrines of original sin and infant damnation on the grounds that they inadvertently encouraged moral irresponsibility and social disorder. Such was the burden of William Ellery Channing's celebrated "moral argument against Calvinism." "By shocking, as it does, the fundamental principles of morality, and by exhibiting a se-

vere and partial Deity, [Calvinism] tends strongly to pervert the moral faculty, to form a gloomy, forbidding, and servile religion, and to lead men to substitute censoriousness, bitterness, and persecution, for a tender and impartial charity." The new ethic of personal accountability and "moral agency" insisted on punishments (human or divine) accorded strictly on the basis of individual merit and aimed at the moral enlightenment of the offender, along with the correction of the bad habits behind his offense.

*Psychoanalysis and the Liberal Tradition of Moral Optimism* Nineteenth-century liberal theology, with its insistence that health and happiness are a reward for clean living and high thinking, already contained the seeds of the remissive, therapeutic moralities that have flowered in such profusion in our own time. It is a commonplace that twentieth-century psychiatry serves as a substitute for religion, promising the traditional consolations of personal mastery, spiritual peace, and emotional security. Many of the founders of modern psychiatry, including the early popularizers of Freud—Ernest Rutherford Groves, Wilfred Lay, Edwin Bissell Holt—were brought up as liberal Christians and carried into their psychiatric work the ethical meliorism so characteristic of nineteenth-century Protestantism. Those who turned to psychoanalysis welcomed it as another form of mind-cure, another system of self-improvement and personal growth. From the beginning, the American version of psychoanalysis minimized the power of instinctual drives and stressed the possibility of subjecting them to rational control. In the "moral struggle" between infantile desires and the "spirit of social evolution," as Lay called it, the unconscious proved itself "willing to follow directions and gain the reward held out to it."

According to Freud, psychoanalytic therapy could hope only to substitute "everyday unhappiness" for debilitating

neurosis. By training intelligent self-awareness, it might reconcile men and women to the sacrifices exacted by civilized life, or at least make those sacrifices easier to bear. It might even help to encourage more enlightened public attitudes toward sex. But psychoanalysis held out no cure for injustice or unhappiness; nor could it satisfy the growing demand, in a world without religion, for meaning, faith, and emotional security. It was exactly belief and personal power, however, that Americans hoped to find in psychoanalysis. They turned to Freud's work in the hope that it would provide a new ethic grounded in study of human nature, an "ethic from below," in Holt's words, or in the expectation that it held the key to personal effectiveness and contentment. Popularizations of psychoanalysis, in the early years of its American acceptance, depicted it as a competitor of Christian Science. One journalist, Lucian Cary, compared a repressed memory to an abscess. "Lance an abscess and relief is instantaneous. Tell your painful memory and you will begin to forget it." "We have but to name these nervous diseases with their true name," wrote Max Eastman, ". . . and they dissolve like the charms in a fairy story."

The transformation of psychoanalysis into a cult of personal health and fulfillment, which occurred more rapidly and went further in America than anywhere else, had already been foreshadowed in Europe, in the early rebellions led by Alfred Adler and Carl Jung. Adler divested Freud's theories of their sexual content, reinterpreting libido as the "will-to-power." The "inferiority complex," not the Oedipus complex, underlay all human actions. The struggle to overcome feelings of inferiority, to attain the "masculine ideal" of "security and conquest," was the "fundamental fact of human development." Adler's stress on interpersonal relations and competition, his social democratic sympathy with the downtrodden, and his identification of the will-to-power with the striving for moral perfection appealed to

many Americans. Large numbers of "Freudians" in the United States were actually closer to Adler and to Harry Stack Sullivan, who developed an indigenous psychology of interpersonal relationships that emphasized the need for power and security. This type of therapy, which assigned to willpower and self-mastery the healing role that Freud assigned to self-knowledge, blended more easily than stricter forms of psychoanalysis into a culture with its roots in nineteenth-century religious liberalism.

Even Jungian mysticism, in some of its manifestations at least, had a certain affinity with liberal traditions of moral striving and spiritual self-help. Jung saw the unconscious mind not as a tangled mass of desires—the Freudian view—but as a reservoir of collective experience, of saving myths. The task of therapy, as he saw it, was to bring to consciousness the buried imagery, the "archetypes," the eternal wisdom deeper than mere rationality, that slumbered in the soul. As Philip Rieff has shown, Jung addressed himself to a disease no less pervasive in modern society than the sense of personal inadequacy—the impoverishment of the spiritual imagination. He sought to restore the illusion of faith, if not its reality, by enabling the patient to construct a private religion made up of the decomposing remnants of former religions, all of them equally valid in Jung's eyes and therefore equally serviceable in the modern crisis of unbelief. Jung's spiritual eclecticism and Adler's self-improvement, radically different in so much of their tone and content, shared a central feature. Both replaced self-insight with ethical teaching, thereby transforming psychoanalysis into a "new religio-ethical system," as Freud put it. Jung's insistence on the individual's need to complete his "life-task"—to struggle against "psychic laziness" and to find his own destiny—resembled the Adlerian exhortation to master one's circumstances. For all his despair of science and rationality, Jung shared Adler's confidence that psychotherapy

could serve as the basis of a new morality, based not on the old prohibitions but on a scientific understanding of human needs.

Even this sanitized reading of Freud proved unacceptable to most American psychiatrists, of course, and they proceeded to work out ever more affirmative and uplifting therapies that promised not only personal regeneration but, in many cases, social regeneration as well, a secular version of the Christianized social order envisioned by liberal Protestants. In the process, they jettisoned what remained of psychoanalysis. Carl Rogers, exposed as a young man to the idealism of the YMCA and to the bracing atmosphere of religious fellowship, found Freud's pessimism as revolting and incomprehensible as his spiritual forebears had once found Calvinism. "When a Freudian such as Karl Menninger tells me . . . that he perceives man as . . . 'innately destructive,' I can only shake my head in wonderment." Rogers's own approach to therapy, as a follower put it, was "as American as apple pie." It emphasized free will, in opposition to the determinism of both Freud and Skinner. It aimed to promote "total sensitivity to the client," "empathy," "unconditional positive regard," "congruence," and the importance of being "real." In the tradition of earlier doctrines of human perfectibility, it held that every organism has an innate "drive toward growth, health, and adjustment." Above all, it stressed the possibility of achieving rational control over the self and its environment.

*The Quarrel between Behaviorism and Humanistic Psychiatry* Modern psychiatric movements, which have carried on the tradition of liberal religion and self-improvement and shored it up with scientific pretensions, can be divided very generally into game therapies and growth therapies, both of which present themselves as "humanistic" solutions to the problems not just of unhappy individuals but of

industrial society in general. In the first, one can recognize the ghost of Adler; in the second, the still more shadowy presence of Jung. Game therapies include the many schools of psychiatric thought that emphasize the importance of interpersonal relations, group dynamics, learning, communication, roles and role-playing, games and game theory. Eric Berne's transactional analysis, Albert Ellis's "rational therapy," William Glasser's "reality therapy," George Alexander Kelly's role-playing therapy, and Thomas Szasz's theory of "personal conduct," among others, belong to this category. Unlike psychoanalysis, which sees the human mind as the product of an unrelenting struggle between instinct and culture, these programs see mind as exclusively social. They concern themselves with the individual's relations to others rather than with inner conflicts. They subordinate the pursuit of self-knowledge to the pursuit of "meaningful goals." One of their principal objectives is to get the patient to set more "realistic" goals for himself and to renounce "perfectionist" illusions. Albert Ellis attempts to promote marital and sexual adjustment by attacking the unrealistic ideology of romantic love, the "myth" of the vaginal orgasm, and the "myth" of the simultaneous orgasm. George R. Bach and Peter Wyden condemn the "myth that sex and love must always go together," the "myth that simultaneous orgasm is a major requirement for good sexual adjustment," and other beliefs that allegedly encourage unrealistic expectations. Since the failure to live up to these expectations leads to self-denigration and feelings of inferiority, the most effective cure for inferiority, it appears, lies in persuading the patient to abandon illusory objectives.

Practitioners of the various humanistic or existential psychologies—Rogers, Abraham Maslow, Rollo May, Anthony J. Sutich, Ernest L. Rossi—have criticized game therapies on the grounds that games are repetitive and discourage growth, whereas psychotherapy should seek to transform

the client's "inner reality," in Rossi's words, into "creative products." They have criticized psychoanalysis itself on similar grounds, accusing Freud of ignoring the capacity for emotional and intellectual development. Thus Charlotte Bühler insists that psychoanalysis aims only to bring about "homeostatic satisfaction" and ignores the human need for growth. She herself "conceives of man," she says ". . . as living with purpose. The purpose is to give meaning to life. . . . The individual . . . wants to create values." Here again, self-understanding gives way to self-improvement and moral education as the object of psychotherapy.*

Vigorously opposed not only to psychoanalysis but to behaviorism, game therapies and growth therapies advance their own version of behavior modification, as Rogers has admitted, in the hope of making the client self-directing. Since many behaviorists make the same claim, the controversy between "post-Freudian" psychotherapy and behaviorism collapses into differences of style and emphasis. In public debates with B. F. Skinner, Rogers has accused his adversary of using science "to enslave people in ways never dreamed of before, depersonalizing them, controlling them by means so carefully selected that they will perhaps never be aware of their loss of personhood." But he rejects Skinner's vision of a totally planned and administered society only to put in its place the survival artist's regimen of living

*Psychoanalysis not only discourages moral optimism but gives little support to the growing tendency to see human beings as victims of external circumstances: another reason for its increasing unpopularity. Psychoanalysis came into being when Freud began to understand that his patients could not have been sexually assaulted by their parents with the frequency they reported; that is, when he began to understand these reports as a recurring fantasy. Recent critics of psychoanalysis have attempted to revive the seduction theory in its original form. They insist that Freud's thought took a wrong turn when he gave it up. The seduction theory conforms to the prevailing definition of man as victim, the prevailing belief, as Janet Malcolm puts it, that "we are ruled by external reality rather than by our inner demons." It is this belief that unites many opponents of psychoanalysis, even those who seem at first, like the humanists and the behaviorists, to be deeply opposed.

"on a day-by-day basis," without reference to any goals beyond self-actualization. He warns of the political dangers of a psychiatric priesthood, but his own commitment to democracy rests on the unsupported belief that although the "behavior of the human organism may be determined by the influences to which it has been exposed," it may also reflect the "creative and integrative insight of the organism itself." Characteristically, he thinks the question can be decided only by further research. If "sound research" supports Skinner's view of human dependence, "then a social philosophy of expert control is clearly implied." If it indicates that men and women have at least a "latent capacity" for understanding and self-reliance, "then a psychological basis for democracy [will] have been demonstrated." After criticizing Skinner for advocating rule by a scientific elite, Rogers himself leaves it to science to decide whether democracy has a future. He too proposes, in effect, that the fate of democratic institutions be decided in the laboratory and the clinic—decided, moreover, by the very scientists whose work has already, by his own reckoning, laid an "effective technological basis for eventual control by the state." Instead of arguing that the capacity for understanding and self-mastery can flourish under democratic conditions alone, Rogers hopes that "objective study" will vindicate his faith in humanity. Such a humanism, which reduces to wishful thinking, poses no challenge to behaviorism.

The quarrel between behaviorism and liberal humanism, as exemplified by nineteenth-century liberal religion and by the twentieth-century psychotherapies that have tried to replace it, seems to support Arnold Rogow's contention that the only alternative to the superego is the superstate. From the beginning, liberals have argued that the capacity for rational self-direction makes it possible to dispense with external social controls and authoritative moral codes, or at least to reduce them to a minimum. Yet the destruction of

the old creeds, the old commandments and constraints, seems to have released enormous capacities for aggression, which can be held in check, it appears, only by a return to some sort of collective superego or by a new system of scientific controls ostensibly administered in the interest of humanity as a whole—in the interest of its very survival, indeed—but vested in an enlightened managerial and technical elite. Since liberals refuse on principle to countenance a revival of moral "authoritarianism," as they see it, they find it increasingly difficult to resist the logic of a new social order "beyond freedom and dignity." The debate between Skinner and Rogers suggests that behaviorism cannot be refuted from a position based on an environmentalist, therapeutic ethic. Once you accept Skinner's premises—that "traditional" knowledge must give way to "scientific analysis"; that failure is the worst teacher; that the goal of social policy is to "avoid unhappiness"—it is not easy to resist his conception of utopia as a "world in which there is no need for moral struggle."

Skinner scandalizes liberals by carrying their own assumptions and prejudices to unpalatable conclusions. He makes explicit what liberal humanists prefer to ignore: that the therapeutic morality associated with twentieth-century liberalism destroys the idea of moral responsibility, in which it originates, and that it culminates, moreover, in the monopolization of knowledge and power by experts. Skinner is by no means a conservative, however. He shares the liberal faith that problems of modern social organization are administrative and psychological, not economic and political. He believes that social engineering holds the promise of a better world, once the techniques of social control are taken over by a disinterested managerial elite so that they can no longer be "used for personal aggrandizement in a competitive world." Like many socialists and progressives, he dismisses the danger of a scientific and technocratic tyranny

with the offhand remark that "usurpation of power is a threat only in a competitive culture." His idea of the good society, as outlined in *Walden Two* and later in *Beyond Freedom and Dignity*, consists of clichés of twentieth-century liberalism. He wants to replace competition with cooperation, politics with administration, punishment with "treatment," rivalry with "general tolerance and affection," romantic love with "simple friendship," hero-worship with an egalitarian interchangeability of social parts, in which "there's no reason to feel that anyone is necessary to anyone else." Like the early progressive educators, he wants to teach not subjects but "scientific method." In *Walden Two*, he abolishes the study of history, on the grounds that it encourages hero-worship. He abolishes the family, which discriminates against women and perpetuates selfish individualism. He abolishes adolescence, replacing it with a "brief and painless" transition to adulthood. He gets rid of the "secrecy and shame" surrounding sex. He decrees the end of frustration, suffering, and failure. He dispenses with "simple democracy," relieving the masses of the "responsibility of planning" and freeing them for spiritual self-enrichment.

The difference between Skinner and his humanist critics is that he acknowledges the undemocratic implications of all this without a qualm. "You won't find very much 'simple democracy' here," he writes of his model community. The inhabitants of *Walden Two* vote as the "Planners" tell them to vote. It is not hard to see why liberals object to Skinner's ideas or why those ideas sometimes appeal, on the other hand, to a younger generation in revolt against the "hypocrisy" of its elders. As the charge of hypocrisy implies, many young people accept the prevailing values but demand a stricter observance of them. This kind of rebellion finds an ideal spokesman in Skinner, who draws on liberalism in order to convict liberals of sentimentality and evasion. His ideas appeal to many young readers in their insistence that

utopian "change won't come about through power politics at all," but "at another level altogether." His frequent attacks on "consuming and polluting" echo important themes of the counterculture, as does his defense of "smallness" and his insistence on the social limits of growth. His egalitarianism reinforces the "anti-elitism" that has become almost the common denominator of contemporary politics. His pleas for the "complete equality of men and women," his attack on competitive sports and other forms of "personal triumph," and his dream of a "world without heroes" all participate in the current revulsion against invidious distinctions—a perversion of the democratic impulse that turns out to be perfectly compatible with acceptance of an oligarchy of experts, who claim no special powers or privileges beyond the impersonal authority of science.

Skinner's ideas may offend liberals, but they rest on a solid footing of liberal dogma: environmentalism, egalitarianism, social engineering. Behaviorism, moreover, confronts the weight of recent historical experience, which seems to indicate that liberals have exaggerated the power of rational intelligence to hold destructive impulses in check. Like psychoanalysis, to which it is otherwise unalterably opposed, behaviorism acknowledges the power of biological drives, ignored by "post-Freudian" psychotherapies or explained away as the product of "cultural conditioning." It denies that these drives can be overcome by means of moral education or by therapies designed to put people "in touch with their feelings." It prescribes stronger medicine: the skillful manipulation of social rewards by a scientific elite, supplemented, if necessary, by drugs, brain surgery, and genetic engineering.*

*Skinner himself, it should be noted, emphatically rejects drugs, brain surgery, and genetic engineering. Other behaviorists, however, do not share his scruples about such methods.

*Hartmann's Ego Psychology: Psychoanalysis as Behavioral Engineering* Before concluding that liberal psychiatry has no answer at all to those who proclaim the death of freedom and dignity, we need to consider the tradition of ego psychology in psychoanalysis itself, which has tried to put the case for the ego on intellectual foundations more secure than those provided by therapies stressing interpersonal relations or personal growth. Ego psychology, like "neo-Freudian" and "post-Freudian" psychology, rejects the picture of man as a creature of instincts, restrained only by the fear of punishment or the hope of rewards; but it still tries to adhere to the moral realism provided by psychoanalytic concepts. It does not deny the existence of psychic conflict or suffering; nor does it confuse psychic health with personal salvation. It resists the temptation to set up psychotherapy as a panacea both for the individual and for the ills of society. It rejects the therapeutic morality according to which "there are not moral or immoral people," in Heinz Hartmann's paraphrase, but "only healthy and sick people." It refuses to endorse pure self-interest as the basis of a new morality of health and happiness. In his book *Psychoanalysis and Moral Values*, Hartmann attacks the misconception that psychoanalysis exposes moral imperatives and ideals as illusory or defines mental health as complete freedom from moral codes and guilt feelings. "The widely held expectation that a maximal consideration of self-interest would provide solutions most satisfactory from all points of view," Hartmann wryly notes, ". . . is not borne out by psychoanalytic experience."

While it resists the assimilation of morality to psychic health and personal well-being, ego psychology also rejects moral "absolutes" and extreme positions in general. It attempts to steer a middle course between moral dogmatism and moral debunking, between an ethics based on superego constraints and an ethics based on enlightened self-interest.

Its characteristic posture is the claim of scientific impartiality, which often serves as an excuse to avoid difficult questions. Its guiding ambition, to which everything else is secondary, is to remodel psychoanalysis as a "general developmental psychology," in Hartmann's words. It is this aspiration that distinguishes ego psychology, strictly speaking, from the work of those who seek merely to extend Freud's work by studying the defensive mechanisms adopted by the ego in the face of anxiety, the importance of "transitional objects" in the ego's attempt to master the external world, or the genesis and development of the ego ideal. Those most closely identified with this particular school of psychoanalytic thought—Hartmann, Ernest Kris, R. M. Lowenstein, David Rapaport, René Spitz, Roy Schafer—have taken the position that psychoanalysis needs to concern itself not only with psychopathology but with normal psychological development. The pursuit of this program leads not merely to intensified study of the ego but to a certain idealization of the ego. As Fred Weinstein and Gerald Platt note approvingly, psychoanalytic theory has "moved away from the notion of the helpless and beleaguered ego, caught on three sides by id, superego, and unrelenting reality, waging therefore a constant defensive struggle." Far more than Freud, ego psychologists emphasize the ego's capacity for masterful, creative action, even while they reproach others for exaggerating the power of human reason and ignoring the inevitability of psychic conflict.

In order to become a general psychology, Hartmann argues in his *Ego Psychology and the Problem of Adaptation*, psychoanalysis has to deal with aspects of "adaptive development" that are allegedly free of conflict—that is, with those "functions" of the ego that cannot be reduced to defensive mechanisms against the conflicting demands of the id and the superego. These include a remarkably broad range of activities: perception, thought, language, motor develop-

ment, and even memory. To those who might argue that such matters lie outside the scope of psychoanalysis, Hartmann replies that "if we take seriously the claim of psychoanalysis to be a general theory of mental development, we must study this area of psychology too." But he never confronts the far more weighty objection that the assignment of all these important activities to the "conflict-free ego sphere," as Hartmann calls it, results precisely in their exemption from psychoanalytic scrutiny. The boldness of Freud's original challenge to academic psychology lay in his claim to have uncovered the unconscious dynamics underlying such ordinary mental phenomena as memory—memory above all—and thus to have made it impossible to regard them simply as mechanisms of "adaptation." His later work, interpreted by ego psychologists as a warrant for the abandonment of a narrow "id psychology," made it more difficult than ever to regard any "sphere" of the mind as free from unconscious conflicts, since it led to the conclusion that "not only what is lowest but also what is highest in the ego can be unconscious." Ego psychology, by explaining the higher activities of the mind as conflict-free, adaptive, and largely conscious techniques of personal and social evolution, has regressed to the position taken by pre-Freudian academic psychology.

Freud compared the ego to a "man on horseback, who has to hold in check the superior strength of the horse." For Hartmann and his followers, this image conveys an impression of man's power over nature, whereas Freud clearly intended it as a reminder of man's dependence on nature and of the precariousness of his mastery over natural forces—including his own capacity for destruction, which haunted everything Freud wrote after World War I. The beast within threatens to unseat the "rider," according to Freud; but for those who take ego psychology as their point of departure, reason steadily expands its control over the envi-

ronment. A "better mastery of the environment" and a "better control of one's own person," as Hartmann puts it, reveal themselves both in the development of the individual and in human history as a whole. Freud's motto, "Where id was, there shall ego be"—although it "does not mean that there ever has been, or could be, a man who is purely rational"—expresses not only a therapeutic ideal but a "cultural-historical tendency," according to Hartmann. According to Weinstein and Platt, "We can identify historically a growing capacity among individuals for making conscious, ego-oriented choices." The "effects of the modernization process on personality," in their view, gradually free the ego both "from the compulsions of conscience and from impulsions of irrationality."

Ostensibly "value-free," ego psychology shares with other sciences and would-be sciences a commitment to the ideology of science itself. It assumes that scientific enlightenment means historical progress. It equates reason with technology—that is, with the problem-solving activities of the mind, the rational adjustment of means to ends—and then proceeds to remove technology, in effect, from psychoanalytic investigation by arguing that the problem-solving capacity leads an independent and "autonomous" existence, free from inner conflicts or ideological compulsions.* Psychoanalytic therapy itself, according to Hartmann,

*Hartmann takes his definition of rationality straight from Max Weber. An individual acts in a "purposively rational way," he says, when he "rationally balances the ends against the means, the means against the subsidiary consequences, and finally the various possible ends against each other," in Weber's words. This technical conception of reason ignores the long tradition of "practical reason" originating with Aristotle, according to which knowledge is to be used not to accomplish a given objective but to train the virtues specific to a given profession or calling or practice and, more generally, to encourage the development of character and the pursuit of moral perfection. Since psychoanalysis is a practice precisely in this sense, stressing moral insight as opposed to what are now called "practical" results, one might expect its practitioners to be among the last to accept a technical conception of rationality.

amounts to a "kind of technology," even though the "way from science to technology is on the whole much slower and more complex in the psychological and social than in the physical sciences." For this reason, control over the irrational elements in human nature often lags behind human control over the physical environment. "Historical development has brought now one and now the other of these to the fore as goals," Hartmann writes; at the present juncture, man's growing mastery of the external world needs to be balanced by a growing mastery of the inner world. The technology of the self, in other words, needs to catch up with industrial technology.

We see now why ego psychology answers the threat of behavioral engineering no more effectively than "humanistic" psychiatry. Once the problem is defined in this way—the rationalization of mental life as a counterpart to the rationalization of the natural environment and a corrective to the "irrationality implicit in mass psychology," as Hartmann puts it—the demand for a new form of behavior control far more rigorous than psychoanalysis becomes irresistible.

It is the underlying premises of this discussion—the premises of ego psychology and of the entire liberal celebration of the rational ego—that need to be called into question. What if technological progress is an illusion? What if it leads not to greater control over the physical environment but to an increasingly unpredictable environment, a return of the repressed capacity for destruction in nature herself? What if the impulse behind technological development (though not necessarily behind the spirit of scientific inquiry) is itself pathological? What if the drive to make ourselves entirely independent of nature, which never succeeds in reaching its goal, originates in the unconscious attempt to restore the illusion of infantile omnipotence?

In order to complete our consideration of the politics of the psyche, we turn now to the work of those who have not hesitated to raise these disturbing questions, normally banished from "scientific" discourse, and in doing so have challenged both liberal and conservative traditions of thought.