

Part 1. Carl Trueman, **The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self**, 2020

How did a statement such as “I am a woman trapped in a man’s body” come to be regarded as coherent and meaningful?

the framework

social imaginary

- the way people think about the world, how they imagine it to be, how they intuitively act in relation to the world
- not grounded in a self-conscious belief in a particular theory of the world to which we have committed ourselves

mimesis and poiesis

- **mimetic view** of the world → the world has a given order and a given meaning to which humans must conform themselves
- **poietic view** of the world → the world is raw material out of which humans create meaning and purposes for themselves

psychological man

- psychological categories and an inward focus are the hallmarks of being a modern person
- commitment is to self vs. society

expressive individualism:

- “The understanding of life which emerges ... [in] the late eighteenth century, that each of us has his/her own way of realizing our humanity, and that it is important to find and live out one’s own, as against surrendering to conformity with a model imposed on us from outside, by society, or the previous generation, or religious or political authority.”

triumph of the therapeutic

- the expressive individual is the normative type of human being
- meaning and truth are matters of personal taste

emotivism

- the language of morality as now used is really nothing more than the language of personal preference based on nothing more rational or objective than sentiments or feelings

anticultures

- the intellectual class is devoted to the subversion, destabilization, and destruction of cultural traditions

deathworks

- the act of using the sacred symbols of a previous era in order to subvert, and then destroy, their original significance and purpose
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Quotes for discussion

“The intuitive moral structure of our modern social imaginary prioritizes victimhood, sees selfhood in psychological terms, regards traditional sexual codes as oppressive and life denying, and places a premium on the individual’s right to define his or her own existence.”

“If I am to be recognized and if I am to belong, then there needs to be conformity between ... social reality and my personal reality. And sometimes that conformity needs to be realized through conflict, whereby the ethics of one group or era are consciously defeated by those of another.”

“... once the basis for [ethical discourse] lacks any agreed-upon metaphysical or metanarrative framework, it is doomed to degenerate into nothing more than the assertion of incommensurable opinions and preferences.”

“When it comes to moral arguments, the tendency of the present age is to assert our moral convictions as normative and correct by rejecting those with which we disagree as irrational prejudices rooted in personal, emotional preference.”

the origins

Jean-Jacques Rousseau

- men and women are born good and then corrupted by society
- a person is most authentic when acting out in public those desires or feelings that characterize his inner psychological life

Friedrich Nietzsche

- rejected any claims to absolute moral truth
- rejected religion as distasteful
- live life as if each moment has eternal significance
- see Friedrich Nietzsche excerpt

Karl Marx

- human nature changes as the economic dynamics of a society change
- ethics and moral codes serve the interests of maintaining the current social hierarchies

Charles Darwin

- removed teleology (that natural entities have intrinsic purposes) from nature, and thus from human beings
- especially influential because his ideas are easy to grasp

Sigmund Freud

- sex, in terms of sexual desire and sexual fulfillment, is the real key to human existence, to what it means to be human

New Left → Critical theory

- world is divided between those who have power and those who do not
- Western narrative of truth is an ideological construct designed to preserve the current structures of power
- dominant narratives must be destabilized

New Left → Wilhelm Reich

- *The Sexual Revolution*, 1936
- family represents political oppression, so it must be abolished
- to outlaw or simply tolerate a person's sexual preferences is an act of oppression

New Left → Herbert Marcuse

- "good" words and ideas should be promoted and if need be enforced to ensure they monopolize public discourse
- "bad" words and ideas inflict psychological damage and cause oppression
- see Herbert Marcuse excerpt

Feminism

- see Simone de Beauvoir excerpt
- see Shulamith Firestone excerpt

triumph of the erotic

- Playboy magazine removed the social stigma attached to pornography → combined titillating photographs with serious interviews with people of cultural significance (e.g., Bob Dylan, Fidel Castro, Jean-Paul Sartre, Truman Capote)
- popular culture → sex became the dominant idiom for expressive individualism
- see Mona Charen excerpt

triumph of the therapeutic

- Obergefell v. Hodges (2015) → see excerpt from SCOTUS decision
- Peter Singer → see excerpts from FAQ
- Campus anticulture
 - see Mission Statement of Beyond the Green, a Middlebury College publication excerpt

LGBTQ+, the “Triumph of the T”

- anticulture, deathwork, and rejection of nature
- politically constructed → no intrinsic affinities between L - G, LG - B, LGB - T, etc. (but a shared sense of victimhood, common interest in destabilizing society's heterosexual norms, ethical debate rooted in emotional preferences, not commonly accepted premises)

Quotes for discussion

“... the world in itself has no meaning; meaning and significance can thus be given to it only by the actions of human beings, ...”

“The self must first be psychologized [Rousseau], psychology must then be sexualized [Freud], and sex must be politicized [New Left].”

“... to be free is to be sexually liberated; to be happy is to be affirmed in that liberation.”

Selected excerpts

Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 1882 (madman passage)

THE MADMAN---Have you not heard of that madman who lit a lantern in the bright morning hours, ran to the market place, and cried incessantly: "I seek God! I seek God!"---As many of those who did not believe in God were standing around just then, he provoked much laughter. Has he got lost? asked one. Did he lose his way like a child? asked another. Or is he hiding? Is he afraid of us? Has he gone on a voyage? emigrated?---Thus they yelled and laughed

The madman jumped into their midst and pierced them with his eyes. "Whither is God?" he cried; "I will tell you. *We have killed him*---you and I. All of us are his murderers. But how did we do this? How could we drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there still any up or down? Are we not straying, as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is not night continually closing in on us? Do we not need to light lanterns in the morning? Do we hear nothing as yet of the noise of the gravediggers who are burying God? Do we smell nothing as yet of the divine decomposition? Gods, too, decompose. God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him.

"How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers? What was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives: who will wipe this blood off us? What water is there for us to clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it? There has never been a greater deed; and whoever is born after us---for the sake of this deed he will belong to a higher history than all history hitherto."

Here the madman fell silent and looked again at his listeners; and they, too, were silent and stared at him in astonishment. At last he threw his lantern on the ground, and it broke into pieces and went out. "I have come too early," he said then; "my time is not yet. This tremendous event is still on its way, still wandering; it has not yet reached the ears of men. Lightning and thunder require time; the light of the stars requires time; deeds, though done, still require time to be seen and heard. This deed is still more

distant from them than most distant stars---and yet they have done it themselves.

It has been related further that on the same day the madman forced his way into several churches and there struck up his *requiem aeternam deo*. Led out and called to account, he is said always to have replied nothing but: "What after all are these churches now if they are not the tombs and sepulchers of God?"

Herbert Marcuse, *Repressive Tolerance*, 1965

"Surely, no government can be expected to foster its own subversion, but in a democracy such a right is vested in the people (i.e., in the majority of the people). This means that the ways should not be blocked on which a subversive majority could develop, and if they are blocked by organized repression and indoctrination, their reopening may require apparently undemocratic means. They would include the withdrawal of toleration of speech and assembly from groups and movements which promote aggressive policies, armament, chauvinism, discrimination on the grounds of race and religion, or which oppose the extension of public services, social security, medical care, etc. Moreover, the restoration of freedom of thought may necessitate new and rigid restrictions on teaching and practices in the educational institutions which, by their very methods and concepts, serve to enclose the mind within the established universe of discourse and behavior - thereby precluding a prior rational evaluation of the alternatives."

Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 1949

"One is not born, but rather becomes, woman, No biological, psychic, or economic destiny defines the figure that the human female takes on in society; it is civilization as a whole that elaborates this intermediary product between the male and the eunuch that is called feminine."

Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex*, 1970

"And just as the end goal of socialist revolution was not only the elimination of the economic class *privilege* but of the economic class *distinction* itself, so the end goal of feminist revolution must be, unlike that of the first feminist movement, not just the elimination of male privilege but of the sex *distinction* itself: genital differences between human beings would no longer matter culturally. (A reversion to an unobstructed *pansexuality* Freud's 'polymorphous perversity' - would probably supersede hetero/homo/bi-sexuality.) The reproduction of the species by one sex for the benefit of both would be replaced by (at least the option of) artificial reproduction: children would be born to both sexes equally, or independently of either, however one chooses to look at it; the dependence of the child on

the mother (and vice versa) would give way to a greatly shortened dependence on a small group of others in general, and any remaining inferiority to adults in physical strength would be compensated for culturally. The division of labour would be ended by the elimination of labour altogether (through cybernetics). The tyranny of the biological family would be broken."

Mona Charen, *Sex Matters: How Modern Feminism Lost Touch with Science, Love, and Common Sense*, 2018

"Feminism saw porn – accurately, in my judgment – as a degradation of women. Yet they always interpret life through the narrow lens of women's oppression by men, which prevents them from seeing that its harm is to human dignity and not just to women as a class. Porn encourages immorality because it treats people as means, not ends – which is exactly what casual sex does. Porn is, in a sense, the logical end point of the sexual revolution because it completes the separation of sex from love and relationships. Sexual release is commodified, packaged, and sold. The right to pleasure may be assured, 24/7, but it carries with it the debasement of human beings."

Obergefell v. Hodges, 2015

"A first premise of the Court's relevant precedents is that the right to personal choice regarding marriage is inherent in the concept of individual autonomy. . . . A second principle in this Court's jurisprudence is that the right to marry is fundamental because it supports a two-person union unlike any other in its importance to the committed individuals. . . . A third basis for protecting the right to marry is that it safeguards children and families and thus draws meaning from related rights of childrearing, procreation, and education. . . . Fourth and finally, this Court's cases and the Nation's traditions make clear that marriage is a keystone of our social order."

Peter Singer, select FAQ retrieved April 24, 2023

I've read that you think humans and animals are equal. Do you really believe that a human being is no more valuable than an animal?

I argued in the opening chapter of *Animal Liberation* that humans and animals are equal in the sense that the fact that a being is human does not mean that we should give the interests of that being preference over the similar interests of other beings. That would be speciesism, and wrong for the same reasons that racism and sexism are wrong. Pain is equally bad, if it is felt by a human being or a mouse. We should treat beings as individuals, rather than as members of a species. But that doesn't mean

that all individuals are equally valuable – see my answer to the next question for more details.

If you had to save either a human being or a mouse from a fire, with no time to save them both, wouldn't you save the human being?

Yes, in almost all cases I would save the human being. But not because the human being is human, that is, a member of the species *Homo sapiens*. Species membership alone isn't morally significant, but equal consideration for similar interests allows different consideration for different interests. The qualities that are ethically significant are, firstly, a capacity to experience something — that is, a capacity to feel pain, or to have any kind of feelings. That's really basic, and it's something that a mouse shares with us. But when it comes to a question of taking life, or allowing life to end, it matters whether a being is the kind of being who can see that he or she actually has a life — that is, can see that he or she is the same being who exists now, who existed in the past, and who will exist in the future. Such a being has more to lose than a being incapable of understanding this. Any normal human being past infancy will have such a sense of existing over time. I'm not sure that mice do, and if they do, their time frame is probably much more limited. So normally, the death of a human being is a far greater loss to the human than the death of a mouse is to the mouse — for the human, it thwarts plans for the distant future, and it does not do that for the mouse. And we can add to that the greater extent of grief and distress that, in most cases, the family of the human being will experience, as compared with the family of the mouse (although we should not forget that animals, especially mammals and birds, can have close ties to their offspring and mates). That's why, in general, it would be right to save the human, and not the mouse, from the burning building, if one could not save both. But this depends on the qualities and characteristics that the human being has. If, for example, the human being had suffered brain damage so severe as to be in an irreversible state of unconsciousness, then it might not be better to save the human.

You have been quoted as saying: "Killing a defective infant is not morally equivalent to killing a person. Sometimes it is not wrong at all." Is that quote accurate?

I did write that, in the 1979 edition of *Practical Ethics*. Today the term "defective infant" is considered offensive, and I no longer use it, but it was standard usage then. The quote is misleading if read without an understanding of what I mean by the term "person" (which is discussed in *Practical Ethics*). I use the term "person" to refer to a being who is capable of anticipating the future, of having wants and desires for the future. As I

have said in answer to the previous question, I think that it is generally a greater wrong to kill such a being than it is to kill a being that has no sense of existing over time. Newborn human babies have no sense of their own existence over time. So killing a newborn baby is never equivalent to killing a person, that is, a being who wants to go on living. That doesn't mean that it is not almost always a terrible thing to do. It is, but that is because most infants are loved and cherished by their parents, and to kill an infant is usually to do a great wrong to her or his parents.

Sometimes, perhaps because the baby has a serious disability, parents think it better that their newborn infant should die. Many doctors will accept their wishes, to the extent of not giving the baby life-supporting medical treatment. That will often ensure that the baby dies. My view is different from this, but only to the extent that if a decision is taken, by the parents and doctors, that it is better that a baby should die, I believe it should be possible to carry out that decision, not only by withholding or withdrawing life-support — which can lead to the baby dying slowly from dehydration or from an infection — but also by taking active steps to end the baby's life swiftly and humanely.

What about a baby without any disability? Doesn't your theory of personhood imply that parents can kill any baby they do not want, because it has no sense of the future?

Most parents, fortunately, love their children and would be horrified by the idea of killing it. And that's a good thing, of course. We want to encourage parents to care for their children, and help them to do so. Moreover, although no newborn baby has a sense of the future, and therefore no newborn baby is a person, that does not mean that it is all right to kill any newborn baby. It only means that the wrong done to the infant is not as great as the wrong that would be done to a person who was killed. But in our society there are many couples who would be very happy to love and care for an infant without serious disabilities. Hence even if the parents do not want their own child, it would be wrong to kill it. Although there are also sometimes couples willing to adopt, love and care for infants with serious disabilities, that is not always the case.

Elderly people with dementia, or people who have been injured in accidents, may also have no sense of the future. Can they also be killed?

When a human being once had a sense of the future, but has now lost it, we should be guided by what he or she would have wanted to happen in these circumstances. So if someone would not have wanted to be kept alive

after losing their awareness of their future, we may be justified in ending their life; but if they would not have wanted to be killed under these circumstances, that is an important reason why we should not do so.

What about voluntary euthanasia and physician-assisted dying?

I support law reform to allow people to decide to end their lives, if they are terminally or incurably ill. This is permitted in the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, and Colombia, and in the form of physician-assisted dying, in Canada, too, as well as in several states of the US, including Oregon, Washington, California, Montana, Colorado and Vermont. I was very pleased when, in 2017, after extensive debate in the community and in parliament, physician assistance in dying was legalized in Victoria, where I am from. Why should we not be able to decide for ourselves, in consultation with doctors, when our quality of life has fallen to the point where we would prefer not to go on living?

Beyond the Green: Collective of Middlebury Voices (Mission Statement).
retrieved April 24, 2023

We are an alternative voice on Middlebury's campus, a group of students who feel marginalized and silenced by the mainstream platforms available, including the student newspaper, *The Middlebury Campus*, and the online alternative paper, *Middbeat*. We want to be proactive, not reactive, and use writing as a way to support and ultimately achieve structural and institutional change. We feel as though individually, our voices are often ignored in the face of the hegemonic Middlebury discourse, but collectively we will be able to engage with the Middlebury community more effectively. We are a radical, anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-classist, anti-ableist, and anti-homophobic (as well as strongly opposed to all forms of oppression) group that rejects the structurally conservative "liberal" paradigm that exists at Middlebury. The reasons behind our formation are many, but the predominate [*sic*] one is a feeling of alienation within the campus dialogue—the so-called "free market of ideas" on campus is an illusion, one which exists only to support one strong ideology. We may not always agree, and we want to allow space to challenge each other. However, ultimately we share the same principles and intentions, and are committed to moving forward with solidarity and purpose. Moreover, we acknowledge the potential and probability that the articles we publish may be messy and emotional because the things we write about will be so close to our lived experiences. Rather than espousing the idea that all written work in the public eye must be dispassionate, we welcome the fact that our articles will be written with passion, with love, with anger, and overall, with purpose. We are tired of having to engage with those who repeatedly devalue our

experiences and values- by creating our own platform, we are unifying in the face of this intentional disregard, and rejecting the idea that we must conform to the dominant Middlebury narrative.