



CHAPTER 1

COMMUNISM TODAY

We are on the verge of a realignment in American political life today, one that will produce libertarian and anti-libertarian factions. The anti-libertarian faction can also be called communitarian, as long as that term is defined with some precision. These communitarians will not be opposed, in general, to the free market. The Evil Empire has fallen, after all, and almost nobody really believes any more that we are slouching toward socialism. Alexis de Tocqueville's fear that democracy tends to evolve toward a benevolent despotism of meddling schoolmasters to whom we surrender thought and concern about our futures no longer seems so prescient. And neither does Tocqueville's hope that the Americans would continue to resist individualism through vibrant, participatory local political institutions. The truth is that American individuals are more obsessed with their futures than ever, while the communal attachments that help take people's minds off themselves and provide the safety nets that keep them from falling too hard are weaker than ever.

The new anti-libertarian faction will have the modest aim of moderating the self-destructive excesses of our self-obsession. It is true that more Americans than ever are now forming, and will con-



tinue to form, countercultural, “whole-life” small communities, and most of these communities will have a religious foundation. But that sort of thoroughgoing communitarianism will remain an “alternative lifestyle” that will not be embraced by most of us. The socialist hope that America as a whole could eventually become a “Great Community” founded on the activist, egalitarian pursuit of justice remains nowhere except in the world of professors. Most of our new communitarians will be happy if they can moderate the excesses of the libertarian view of liberty, if they can direct the future of human freedom well enough to encourage or at least not discourage those human experiences connected with love, family, friendship, faith, citizenship, responsibility, and even death—experiences that make life worth living. In other words, the new communitarians will be united more by their opposition to libertarian extremism than any shared, comprehensive view of human community.

The new anti-libertarian faction will oppose the comprehensive and indiscriminate claims for personal liberty made by libertarian ideologues. That view of the world—which until recently was shared only by a few intellectuals—is now emerging as the modern American consensus, cutting across the mainstream of our two political parties. A libertarian, for my purposes here, is pro-choice on everything, or almost everything—a free-marketer economically and an anti-prohibitionist, even an antimoralist, when it comes to social and cultural issues. The libertarian wants the principles of calculation and consent to inform every facet of each of our “designer” personal lives. And today, the ideology of libertarianism is being reinforced and reinvigorated by the promise of unfettered biotechnological development: we will soon be able to design our lives ever more completely in opposition to the various tyrannies and indignities nature imposes upon us.

To be clear, this ideological libertarianism is not characteristic of all or perhaps even most Americans who call themselves libertarians. Nor do I wish to imply that our self-proclaimed libertarians were in any way soft on Marxist totalitarian tyranny. But the kind of libertarianism I am describing here is a creeping cultural phenomenon that is affecting us all.

As I will explain, what libertarian ideology promises today is strangely close to what Marx promised would come with communism—freedom from alienation and oppression, a life constrained by nothing but personal choice, the withering away of religion, and the withering away of the state. The “old” communism of the Soviet empire was, in a certain sense, a strangely conservative ideology rooted in tyranny and historical quackery. It eventually collapsed because it futilely opposed itself to what libertarians call the “dynamism” of human initiative or free human action. Insofar as the hopes of communism present themselves now in a more clearly libertarian and technology-friendly form, they are in some ways more seductive.

Thus, while the title of this chapter will no doubt alarm some readers and irritate others, taking that risk seems necessary in order to help us think more clearly about the peculiar ideological threat that confronts us today. The new anti-libertarian coalition will obviously contain diverse elements. It should include all lovers of human liberty who see that libertarian ideology—like all ideological extremism—may generate rampant statism. I write, largely in the tradition of Hayek, Acton, and Tocqueville, against big government and for the enduring responsibility of fallible mortals.

IDEOLOGIES

We are all still living in the modern world, a world that has not changed in fundamental orientation for hundreds of years. The world, in fact, continues to become progressively more modern. One of the great founders of the modern world—Niccolo Machiavelli—thought that the great obstacle to human beings seeing the truth was their propensity to be suckered by tyrants, especially those employing the seductive charms of Christianity. For Machiavelli, people get so caught up in the illusions of an otherworldly imagination that they do not notice how much they are being taken advantage of in this world.

But despite the great success of Machiavelli and others in freeing human beings from that otherworldly imagination and directing them toward the pursuit of wealth and freedom in this world, it is not true that the main effect of his thought has been to liberate us from lies and direct us toward the truth. Even Machiavelli would have to admit that the unprecedented lies of our so-called enlightened era are the most tyrannical ever told. The twentieth century was—and the twenty-first century probably will be—a mixture of unprecedented freedom and unprecedented tyranny.

The name rightly given to a specifically modern lie is an *ideology*. An ideology is a form of popular science, and so not a form of real science. It is a comprehensive and easy-to-understand account of all that exists. Ideologies are the dogmas that fill the vacuum created by the discrediting of religious dogma. They are, in fact, usually meant to be replacements for Christianity's central tenets. But they never really free themselves from Christianity altogether: The future paradise promised by the personal God of the Bible, we are told, can be achieved in a more human—but still more impersonal—way.

Ideologies are offered as replacements for all personal claims

of authority—the claims of particular poets, priests, philosophers, princes, and God. The Machiavellian view—which is the democratic view—is that to defer to someone else’s wisdom is to be suckered into being ruled by that person. The claims of ideology, on the other hand, are never personal; ideologies teach that we are not controlled by persons but by forces, such as history or matter or the economy or technology. That is why ideologies are always promulgated by experts who never say “I think” or “I believe” but “history shows” or (nowadays) “studies show.” Ideologists always call upon the impersonal authority of science. But is it really more degrading to accept the personal authority of God or a philosopher like Aristotle than to defer to, or be controlled by, no one in particular?

It is true that to be controlled by forces is more democratic than to be controlled by people, since in the former case everyone is at least equally unfree. But that does not change the fact that ideologies such as Marxism and evolutionism make us all seem less truly free than we really are. The libertarian ideologues are at least right to say that we are not determined completely by the division of labor or nature, although they too ideologically imagine a future in which we will be deprived of much that genuinely characterizes our liberty. They, with the Marxists, imagine an unalienated, “designer” or choice-filled future, a kind of techno-paradise on earth. The libertarians, in their own way, imagine that we are less free than we really are.

All ideologies, in fact, oppose the foundational Christian claim, although one that does not necessarily depend on religious faith, that human beings are alienated by their natures. We experience ourselves as to some extent “displaced persons,” as somewhat homeless, as aliens or pilgrims in this world. The very existence of human beings—the very existence of myself as a self-conscious be-

ing—is a mystery that eludes systematic explanation. My self-consciousness—and so my openness to the truth about all things—cannot be explained by any ideology: Even Marx could not account for his own love of the truth or his own love of freedom—both of which were quite real—through his materialistic, systematic account of history.

COMMUNISM

Modern ideologies all deny that human alienation is natural, that it is part of the human condition and therefore something we cannot completely overcome on our own. So, all ideologies also oppose the Christian and classical view that false hopes about the effectiveness of human effort always end up intensifying the human alienation that they mean to remedy. Ideological programs to eliminate alienation end up undermining those ways we really do have to ameliorate and live well with our homelessness without providing any real replacement for them.

The claim of communism, for example, is that human alienation is not natural but historical. Human beings alienated themselves through their historical or economic activity—through their development of the division of labor. From the communist standpoint, the bad news is that we unwittingly messed ourselves up. The good news is that we can free ourselves through revolution by bringing the division of labor, and so history, to an end.

Surely, we might object, communism is dead: no one but North Koreans, Cubans, and a few out-of-touch professors buys that ideology anymore. Yet, in my view, while the hard side of communism is dead, the soft side is very much alive. True, nobody really still thinks that the communist revolution is coming, and almost everyone now knows that the totalitarian terror designed to pro-

voke or complete such a revolution was, at the very least, a monstrous mistake. But the seductive lie of communism lives on, in that many people still think that it is too bad that communism could not work, that Marx's beautiful dream could not become real, that we cannot free ourselves through economic or political action from our miserable human alienation.

We can begin deconstructing this lie by looking at Marx's description, provided in *The German Ideology*, of the unalienated life promised by communism: "in communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd, or critic." Here Marx predicts that under communism you will be able to do whatever you want whenever you want, with no reason at all to take one activity more seriously than another, no reason at all to take any of them seriously at all. The sign that alienation has been overcome is that no one is consumed or obsessed with any activity at the expense of others. Life has become a series of easygoing hobbies—what we now call playing golf badly, philosophizing or shooting the bull badly, and so forth. If you start to take golf and philosophizing seriously, then alienation has returned. Under communism, Tiger Woods's obsession with perfecting his short game would be unthinkable, as would Socrates's relentless obsession with questions that have no answers. Under communism, surely Tiger would relax, and Socrates would chill out and realize that he is just shooting the bull.

Now, we busy and very alienated Americans sometimes do yearn for weekends much like the communist life described by

Marx—weekends of casually terrible fishing and golf followed by shooting the bull after dinner. But if Marx's communism really described all of human life, it would not be heaven on earth but an inescapable hell. It would be worse than the hell experienced by Bill Murray's character in *Groundhog Day*. We would be stuck with lives even more hellish than living the same day over and over again; there would be *nothing* impelling us to choose in one direction rather than another.

Here is one way of explaining why life under communism would actually be hellish. Marx says that human alienation in some ways becomes magnified under capitalism. In capitalist societies, human beings have become more self-obsessed and individualistic than ever. Our devotions to God, family, friends, country, and so forth define less of our lives than ever before, and it seems that the only human distinctions left that bear any weight concern money. And obsession with money—a most selfish obsession—isolates us and pits us against one another. But the pursuit of money—which is required not just to live well but to live at all under capitalism—at least gives us something difficult and interesting to do, something that can moderate the neurotic self-obsession that can otherwise overwhelm us when we have nothing at all worthwhile to do. The money-based productivity of us capitalists, after all, really has made all our lives more comfortable, secure, and free. Our productivity is surely worthy of pride, but pride—a social virtue that connects one with others—would disappear if hard work, like everything else, became a pointless option.

Marx says that under communism our self-obsession will disappear. But why should that be? It is not that Marx believes that our old devotions to God, country, friends, and family would reappear: these alienating illusions, he thought, would never return. Our need

for and devotion to money would of course also be gone. So there would be nothing to orient or direct our lives; all of life would become a personal whim. It is not even clear why Marx calls communism communism, because under it we would not be guided or limited in our choices by any community at all. There would be no sense of duty or love to limit our “designer” lives; the attachments presupposed, and created, by duty and love limit our options and make us obsessive. Under communism, the good and bad news is that each human being would be both more free and more alone than ever.

There would be nothing to limit our self-obsession, to get our minds off of ourselves, under communism. And in that case, human beings would very likely be more death-obsessed than ever. Marx, a good materialist, never says that the coming of communism will bring human mortality to an end, and he never says that human beings will stop being self-consciously mortal. But no being aware of his or her own death can help but be moved by that fact. Under communism, if Marx is right, we would simply be deprived of the means—religion, love, virtue, political life, and so forth—with which human beings have always availed themselves in order to live well enough in the face of death. More than ever, we will be stuck with dying pointless deaths alone. The communist lie also would make it impossible to find the words to explain to ourselves our experiences of alienation in the midst of the paradise we had created for ourselves, and being deprived of such explanations would make us yet more alienated. Communism is not the remedy for, but merely an intensification of, characteristically capitalistic or individualistic alienation. What is psychologically tough about capitalism—and who can deny that Marx explained pretty well at times why we capitalists are anxious and restless in the midst of prosperity—would be worse under communism.

We might explain Marx's unrealistic imagining of life under communism as a possible *human* reality by referring to the intensity of his own distinctively human longings. He deeply desired to become wise, and so he imagined a world in which all mystery would disappear. He imagined away the mystery of death (not to mention birth), and he imagined away the mystery of love—or being dependent on another human being whom we find good despite (or because of) the fact that he or she eludes our complete comprehension and control.

Marx also longed to be completely free. He longed for a world without any trace of servility. That world too would have to be without love, death, or any form of human neediness or contingency, because it would have to be without anything that makes one human being dependent on another. Marx's characteristically modern longings for perfect wisdom and freedom were so strong that he did not see that a world without mystery and dependence would be hellishly inhuman. That world is both impossible and undesirable, at least as a human creation. More deeply still, Marx mistakenly imagined that he himself could be satisfied or even happy in a world of his own construction in which his longings for wisdom and freedom would be completely satisfied. It is part of the mystery of Marx's own being that we cannot really imagine him—that amazingly intense thinker and activist—as anything but miserable in the society full of slackers he worked so hard to bring into being.

IS COMMUNISM ALREADY HERE?

Communism as Marx describes it could never, as far as we can tell, become real, because neither he nor we could ever imagine a world full of unalienated human beings. But we *can* imagine a society

where something like communist ideology—the hope for a society in which everyone would live unalienated in the present without the oppression of religion and morality—exerted a great deal of intellectual appeal. Such a society would be not so different from our own—at least its more sophisticated sectors. And it would tend to have the following qualities:

The morality taught by its experts and repeated by its well-educated members would be marked by an easygoing tolerance or nonjudgmentalism. Those in the know would say that they are very indifferent when it comes to issues that used to be connected with the soul. Even choices that used to be regarded as fundamental or life-forming—like who to have sex with and why—would be regarded as mere preferences. Anything “consenting adults” do would be beyond reproach; nonconsensual sex would be less criminal than insane. That sort and all sorts of obsessive sex are evidence of wounded souls or at least chemical imbalances, and they would need to be eradicated through therapy in the interest of safety. More generally, anyone who deviates very far from moral indifference would be labeled as dangerously outside the “mainstream,” and perhaps also in need of therapy to get in touch with the truth of the times. If such deviants could not be talked into seeing the truth, drugs might be prescribed. If the medication did not work very well, they would just be ignored. There would, in fact, be no need to be so obsessive as the Soviets and put those moral fanatics—such as Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn—into psychiatric prisons, which would only call attention to their crazy whining. (American novelist Walker Percy once wrote that he had Solzhenitsyn envy: the Russian dissident was at least taken seriously enough to be thrown into the Gulag.)

Education increasingly would become merely technical and

careerist, and Percy's and Solzhenitsyn's books would be ignored. But our indifference to the soul would often make it not even particularly good technical education. Teachers would become increasingly nonjudgmental about their students' academic performance, and grades would continue to inflate. People would occasionally grouse but not really worry about what unearned self-esteem would do to students' souls. But there would also be a growing consensus that the report card should also include genuinely stern news about the student's body mass. Grade inflation does the student no physical harm. The real problem would be students inflating physically, too, and the obesity epidemic would become the number one educational concern. In the BMI category, there would be no masking the student's true performance. And the school would have every right to demand that parents discipline their kids toward a more physically risk-free life. The tough goal would be no child left with a big behind.

Education would become technical in order that students acquire the means to live however they please. Their mastery of technology would be in the service of diversity, of expanding the menu of individual choice. But how can they design lives according to mere preferences or whims? How can I choose to be a Christian or a Spartan or a philosopher when I know so clearly that there is no foundation to Christianity, being a warrior, or the way of life of the philosopher? Education would be largely technological because people's true view would be that the only real or weighty choices would be for health and safety, for maximizing one's own security and minimizing risk, for maximizing one's own independence and minimizing one's dependence on others and on nature. That choice for individual independence, of course, would also be to maximize dependence on technology. So for all the talk of edu-

cation for diversity, the tendency would be to empty the moral contents out of all non-technological ways of life. And so technology—the mastery of nature with individual control and security in mind—would move from being a means to an end. The real conclusion would be that all the diverse ways of life that resist the domination of technology are equally weightless. Nothing would arouse people enough to direct technological means effectively toward non-technological ends.

The seeming inability to be aroused over issues as fundamental as love, death, and God that would pervade a society such as the one we are imagining would lead some writers to believe that we really had become as passion-free as Marx hoped we would. Whiny or out-of-touch moralists would write books about people having become flat-souled or virtue having come to an end. These moralists would be dismayed that people seemed to be able to live well without reference to what used to be regarded as distinctively human obsessions. The world, to hear people talk, would seem to be composed of nothing more than soulless hobbyists or chatty tourists. More generally, theorists would be divided into those who like the communism Marx described and those who hate it, but they would all agree that such an apathetic world had come about.

There really would be some evidence, even if it were not entirely compelling, that people, by becoming unobsessive, had also become pretty unerotic: In the times of the Victorians or the Puritans, the sight of an ankle filled a man with desire; now we would see beautiful, virtually unclothed young women on MTV and yawn. It is not surprising that Viagra would have to be invented. People would actually believe that, as liberated individuals, they are no longer defined by “gender,” by being men and women. So they would also believe that marriage need not be between a man and a woman.

Redefined as a contract for caregiving between any two individuals, marriage would be detached from any necessary connection to sex and babies at all.

Sex would continue to exist, of course, but more as a form of mildly diverting recreation disconnected from the “necessity” of procreation or the alienating constraints of marriage. Instead of “same-sex” marriage elevating gay relationships by leading them to conform to the traditional standards of heterosexual monogamy, promiscuous and relatively casual gay sexual behavior would increasingly become the model for all human sexual activity. Married couples would be increasingly reluctant to admit to obsessing over one another’s fidelity. Love would continue to exist, but it would be perceived as more and more unreliable as a guide to human behavior. Disconnected from common human responsibilities and intimations of eternity or at least relative permanence, people would count on love less and less. The withering away of love, Marx sort of predicted, would accompany the withering away of the state and religion. The less erotic people become, the less dangerous, unpredictable, and discontented they become.

OBSESSIVE COMMUNIST PROHIBITIONISM?

Despite the logic of the argument against the future of love, those theorists who would believe that they see human beings becoming unobsessive and apathetic would be almost as wrong as Marx. They would confuse what people have been taught to say by ideological experts with what they really experience. People would not really be unerotic, just confused, and that confusion would make them more angry and litigious when it comes to matters of the heart than ever. No matter what the law and the experts might say, nobody really would believe there is such a thing as a “no fault” divorce.

And gay men would have as great a capacity for jealousy as heterosexual women. Even though thinking about death would disappear from polite conversation, all sorts of human activity would still reveal our personal obsession with our mortality. People would be more death haunted than ever before, and so traumatized by the fact of their inevitable extinction that they would often be unable to bear being with people who are obviously near death.

Sophisticated people would have very few children, not only because babies are clearly an alienating constraint on one's freedom, but because they refuse to endorse the idea that they would eventually need to be replaced. Rather than producing replacements, they would sometimes focus their attention completely and most scientifically on their own indefinite perpetuation. But out of love or fear of loneliness they would often still have one or two children, and they would become obsessive about their children's safe, healthy, and productive futures too. They would be so worried about their children that they would barely know that they loved them and would find it especially tough to be in love with them in the present. They would be deprived of the words to know that children—like all of us—are lovable, in part, because they will die, because they are aliens or pilgrims in this world. Childhood would be hell under communism, which may be why Marx never described it. Either parents would utterly ignore their children in the interest of remaining unalienated, or they would define their whole lives around the only beings left in the world stuck with loving them. Children would either be left completely alone or not let alone at all.

Children would be taught in school the ideology of evolutionism or sociobiology. They would learn that they are no different in any fundamental way from the other animals, that people are nothing more than really clever chimps. They would also learn

that those who in the past (such as Christians and Aristotelians) had had vain ideas about human distinctiveness also harbored gross superstitions and oppressive ideas about religion, morality, and politics. Science's "great demotion" of human beings to one species among many is the foundation of nonjudgmental human freedom, these students would be told, which is why they would now smile in disbelief when they heard someone say that one species is better than another. Only those even wiser than the natural scientists would understand the deeper truth missed by Marx, which is that as historical beings, humans used to be different from the other species, but are not anymore. Sociobiology, the deep thought would be, becomes true to the extent that communism does. Only when humans had become as at home in this world as the chimps, who surely are unrevolutionary and unalienated animals, would they also be communists.

The trouble would be that what people learn in school from the experts about the sociobiological view that we humans are clever animals and nothing more would not correspond with their personal experiences. They would remain strongly moved by anxiety, fear, love, and death, and they would know—more or less—that they are strange because they are open to the truth and chimps are not. Hearing that their strange experiences have no foundation, no reality, would just make them more alienated and obsessive—more anti-natural and unchimplike—than ever.

People would be mightily dissatisfied with the official evolutionary view that all members of all species share the same purposes: nature intends nothing more than for them all—including humans—to be born, spread their genes, raise their young, and then quickly step aside for their natural replacements. Individuals would be stuck with rebelling against blind and pitiless nature,

against the seemingly cruel and random process that is so indifferent to the fate of particular individuals. They would even go so far as to ignore the good advice sociobiologists would give us about the connection between human happiness and our instincts to have children and do our natural duties to them and others close to us. If evolutionism really expressed the whole truth about nature, then the human judgment would have to be that nature is no good. And so people would regret that nature could not really be changed through history, and they would look for new ways to give ourselves a better deal. The ideology of sociobiology—like the ideology of communism—would have the unintended and perverse effect of intensifying obsessive individualism.

COMMUNISM AND BIOTECHNOLOGY

Alienated human beings living under the domination of the ideology of communism would lose hope in Marx's idea of historical transformation, and they would see no hope in evolutionism or sociobiology. Although they would also be deprived of the hope of revealed religion, they would still conclude that human beings are by nature alienated, and they would begin to long for the power to change that nature. Hope for that possibility would lie in biotechnology. Thus far, humans had been slaves to the natural evolution that determines our genetic makeup, but biotechnology would promise the power to give orders to their genes. Blind and pitiless natural evolution would be replaced with conscious and volitional evolution, which would be used to secure and perfect the human individual. This new evolutionary process would rightly be called "utopian eugenics," because it would allow humans finally to have the unprecedented power to make flawed, alienated human nature good.

Genetic therapy and regenerative medicine would promise to eradicate disease and extend individual life indefinitely. Death would no longer be viewed as an invincible necessity that gives definition to human life but as a disease to be cured. The promise of the ideology of biotechnology would be that human beings would be less death-haunted than ever before and so more ready than ever to live the free, “designer” life promised by Marx.

Biotechnology would certainly make each human life objectively more secure. But experience suggests that there is little connection between the fact of relative security and the human *perception* of security. Even under the regime of utopian eugenics, death—having come to seem less necessary and more accidental—would arouse more anxiety than ever. And people would be more impelled to plan incessantly to avoid that accident. The teaching of Pascal that people are, by nature, miserable accidents, which had always seemed to be unrealistically extreme, we would actually work to make more true. And we would provide more evidence for his claims that our true home must be somewhere else and that our greatness is intertwined with our misery.

Longer human lives would increase self-obsession in other ways. Individual lives would be less defined by children, and sex might have to be altogether detached from reproduction. We would be left with neither babies nor reliable sexual “partners” to help us get our minds off ourselves. Libertarians would assure people that the new eugenic regime would be the very opposite of tyranny, because individuals would be perfectly free to make biotechnological choices for themselves and their children. But the limit to freedom would be, as it is now, health and safety; personal choice would not be allowed to burden others with unnecessary risks. The old-fashioned way of having babies—two married people having unpro-

tected sex and hoping and praying for the best—would surely be unnecessarily risky, so government would end up telling people how to have children and perhaps even how many to have. The state, in pursuit of risk management or eradication, would therefore intrude more and more into the most intimate details of people's lives. The more we would become obsessed with health and safety at the expense of love and virtue, the more we would be willing to surrender our freedom for security.

Biotechnology could not, then, any more than communism, ever really free us from death. But maybe it could free us from being strongly moved by that fact, and in that way make something like Marx's description of communism come true. Drugs like Prozac have already freed some individuals from anxiety while allowing them to remain thoughtful and productive. Maybe they are a prelude to a genuinely reliable psychopharmacology that can effect a change in our very natures. Rousseau said that the only genuinely good death would be an unconscious one, and it would not be hard to use biotechnology to abolish self-consciousness altogether—in some people, at least. But, as the example of Marx shows, we do not want to surrender our humanity altogether; we really want to *manage* our self-consciousness. We want to remain aware of and moved, but not too much, by love and death. The problem is that we do not understand self-consciousness at all, and how can we manage what we cannot understand? Our desire for designer moods is even less likely to be satisfied than our desire for designer babies. We are far more likely to unwittingly make ourselves more miserably disappointed in the intractability of our alienation.

The failure of the ideology of biotechnology to free us from being haunted by death while at the same time reducing the compensations we get for our mortality through our love of others and

God would eventually teach us that Marx was really wrong. No modern ideology can free us from religion—which will be around as long as human beings, unlike the other animals, are alienated by their natures. Nor can ideology free us from the state, because human beings will always remain free, proud, and perverse enough to require and demand to be governed. The resources human beings have been given to live well as self-conscious mortals are love, virtue, and spiritual life, and the main effect of modern ideology has been to deprive human beings of the words and self-understanding required to see this truth. Ideologies have kept us from seeing the truth about both our greatness and our misery, which is the truth about our dignity.

THE DANGER OF COMMUNISM'S UNTRUTH

We have never been in danger of Marx's communist dream becoming real. The danger, rather, has always been that modern human beings will remain unnecessarily miserable—in one way too free, and in another too subject to tyranny—because they refuse to face up to the truth that they cannot really free themselves from their alienation through their own efforts. The next step—the genuinely postmodern step—is to realize that our alienation is good both because it is a clue to the truth about our being and because it is the precondition for the goods, the loves that we enjoy in this world. Much of our dignity comes from the fact that we are stuck with living morally demanding lives.

I know that in suggesting that contemporary American culture is like the communism Marx describes I have exaggerated a good deal. Many Americans, for example, remain authentically religious, and we have in this country a genuinely Christian counterculture. Many Americans also live fairly well in the present by

loving their family and friends and not obsessing too much about the future. Many have a prudently minimal interest in diet and exercise only when it is fun. Studies even show that more Americans (although very few who think themselves sophisticated or in the know) are more obese than ever. (Not that overeating is less compulsive than overdieting.) We also should not forget that a good deal of our obsessiveness stems from the fact that we middle-class Americans are and will remain free beings who must work. As Tocqueville explained, those compelled to make money cannot help but love it, and the universal love of money is part of the equality and the prosperity that are genuinely American goods. And nothing I have said can explain why America was able to defeat the hard-communist ideology of Soviet totalitarianism or react so resolutely and so calmly to the crisis we call 9/11.

Even so, the attraction of soft-communist ideology is very much present among us, and it can be seen in the form of libertarianism—the promiscuous pro-choice ideology—that is infusing our intellectual life and both of our political parties. Because the miserable and perverse effects of our biotechnological pursuit of something like Marx’s communism will not be as obvious for a while as the benefits that such technology will achieve for health, safety, and prosperity, we can expect that organized opposition to the ideological combination of libertarianism with biotechnology will grow slowly. And it will grow ambivalently, because being an “alienated individual” will always be part of our self-understanding—and a point of pride—in a high-tech time.