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Law, Culture and the Humanities 2009 5: 194

DOI: 10.1177/1743872109102488

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Liberalism in a Romantic State

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This article explores the connections between liberalism and romanticism, and argues that there is a split within liberal thought between a rationalist conception of liberalism, which relies on traditional moral psychology, and romanticist versions of liberalism, which adopt the romantic critique of reason and attach a positive value to the supposedly “irrational” faculties of the human psyche, such as passion, emotion, and love. Attending to this split within liberal theory provides us with a deeper understanding of what motivates religious fundamentalism and the more general movement of “return to traditional values” in religious and socially conservative quarters. Fundamentalists and other socially and religiously conservative critics of liberalism perceive that the embrace of a romantic picture of human psychology, and the implementation of doctrines of individual freedom and choice in the realm of marital and sexual relations (in the realm of love) undermines the premises of traditional moral psychology, which insists that “the passions” be subordinated to the faculty of human reason. Paradoxically, religion (a religious conservatism in particular) appears in this face-off between romantic and rationalist conceptions of human psychology and freedom on the side of reason. Religious conservatives attack (romantic) liberalism precisely because they perceive liberalism to constitute an assault on reason and morality. Liberalism has responded to this conservative attack by entering even further into a romantic state, in particular, the romantic state of war. War, love, and religion are the three domains of human experience in which the contrast between romantic and rationalist conceptions of human psychology and freedom is sharpest. Liberalism at war, liberalism in love, and liberalism on faith are the subjects of this Commentary.

Key words: liberalism; romanticism; psychology; fundamentalism; rationalism; war; love; religion.

What is the state of contemporary liberalism? At this particular historical juncture, post-9/11, it is hard to resist the urge to turn this into a psychological question. In a world defined by torture memos, surveillance authorizations and “wars,” both real and metaphorical, liberalism is clearly in a highly agitated state. The widespread perception that terrorism, religious fundamentalism, and anti-Westernism have combined to create an “existential” threat forces us to ask whether that threat is real or imaginary,

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which in turn is to ask whether the fears expressed represent sober and accurate assessments of the dangers facing liberal democracies today or, as critics have alleged, a sort of hysteria. Have we properly identified the threat confronting America and other putatively liberal, democratic countries, or have we succumbed to paranoia? Are we collectively in the grip of a phobia – “Islamophobia,” xenophobia, or another religious and racial phobia? Or do these phobias, which undeniably form a part of the contemporary zeitgeist, signal the presence of a threat that in fact is real, is “existential,” and calls into question the very ability of the liberal state to survive and maintain the integrity of its principles, even if the nature of that threat is misapprehended through the distorting lenses of fear and paranoia?

All of these questions regarding the real or delusional nature of the fears expressed in currently popular ideas like the “war of civilizations” and the “war against terror” are posed in a psychological register that practically begs for psychoanalysis – or perhaps for the insights of the new cognitive psychology which purports to reveal our inherent inability to assess risks and perceive reality “objectively.” Questioning both the cognitive states (the beliefs and perceptions) and the accompanying emotional states (the fears and anxieties) that drive contemporary liberalism, these questions ask us to make a diagnosis of a psychological kind, as if liberalism were the patient, and “we,” the diagnosticians, the psychologists. But while I like the idea of examining the collective psyche of the liberal state, I don’t want to push this anthropomorphic conceit very far. What really interests me is less the *psyche* of liberalism than the theories *about* the psyche on which liberalism implicitly relies. What I propose to analyze in this commentary is the psychological theory that contemporary liberalism makes use of in performing its characteristic regulatory and deregulatory tasks.

My basic suggestion is that liberalism’s picture of the human psyche is a romantic one and, further, that liberalism’s romanticist psychology is responsible for throwing liberalism into its current state (whose character remains to be described). Further still, there are holes in contemporary liberalism’s understanding of human psychology, ruptures and internal contradictions that exacerbate the situation, making liberalism vulnerable to attack, and weakening its ability to fend off its attackers. To be sure, liberalism’s implicit theory of psychology (and the holes in its theory) do not bear exclusive or even necessarily primary responsibility for the state that liberalism is in. But we have much to learn from understanding the psychological roots of the current conflict between liberalism and its critics, in particular, its conservative religious critics, fundamentalists and other religious traditionalists, for whom the contemporary liberal vision of freedom as freedom from psychological repression is anathema and a spur to increasingly aggressive forms of (re)action.

That liberalism is “in a state” is, I think, undeniable. That this state is a consequence of mostly unstated assumptions (and confusions) about how our inner psyches are, or should be, ordered, is also, I think, undeniable, if not equally obvious. The psychological assumptions that govern

contemporary liberal thought and policy reflect the increasing – though incomplete – influence of a romantic view of the psyche, which exalts the irrational side of human nature, disparages psychological repression, and elevates “the heart” over “the head.” This romantic view of the psyche vies with a more traditional rationalist picture of human psychology (and of morality and politics) which contrariwise elevates the head over the heart.

The traditional view of psychology, which governed earlier conceptions of liberalism as well as the Christian conceptions of government and morality from which liberalism derived, was a *moral psychology* – that is, a view of how the human psyche *should be* ordered, which equated moral virtue with a properly-ordered psyche in which the “lower” faculties, such as appetite and passion, are subordinated to the “higher” psychological faculty of human reason. Not only did the traditional rationalist psychology underlying Christian and classical liberal thought equate moral virtue and psychological health, it likewise equated both virtue and the well psyche with *freedom*. Freedom, on this view, like virtue, is only possible when reason reigns within the psyche. People within whose psyches reason does not reign are *slaves* to their passions, not free internally (i.e., psychologically) and hence not competent to exercise the rights of freedom and self-government externally vis-à-vis others (i.e., socially and politically).

Such a conception readily lent itself to the traditional Christian understanding of free will on which early theorists of liberalism, like John Locke, based their political philosophy. On this traditional understanding, it is a mistake to think of freedom of the will as consisting simply in the absence of restraints on choice. Put otherwise, it is a mistake to think of free will as a form of self-expression (as the romantics would have it).¹ On the contrary, free will, on Locke’s account (as on the traditional Christian understanding), is a form of “self-transcendence,” in which we transcend our bondage to physical needs and the corrupting temptations of the material world. To be possessed of free will is to be governed by reason, which itself is understood to be the expression of *God’s* will or (much the same thing) of God’s law, which we apprehend through reason. According to this rationalist moral psychology, free will is thus as much a matter of submitting (to God/Reason/Law) as it is a matter of self-mastery. Indeed, self-mastery, recognition of reason, and submission (to the divine will) are on this account precisely the same thing.

This was obviously, in addition to being a profoundly psychological conception, a deeply religious conception (of reason, of freedom, and of morality). But it was also part of the original liberal understanding of reason, freedom, and morality – a liberalism of the head, not the heart.² Such a rationalist version of liberalism informed the first formulations of liberal

1. See Gideon Yaffe, *Liberty Worth the Name: Locke on Free Agency* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

2. *Contra* the essays in J.G.A. Pocock’s *Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on Political Thought and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), which suggest that civic republicanism’s commitment to the traditional moral psychology is what distinguishes it from liberalism.

policy regarding which areas of human behavior to subject to regulation and which to leave free from regulation and open to individual choice. By depicting many human choices as the product of psychological *unfreedom*, of enslavement to the passions and the appetites, this rationalist version of liberalism created a justification for subjecting wide swaths of human behavior to highly coercive forms of legal regulation – regulations such as prohibitions on sex outside of marriage, restrictions on divorce and contraception, and explicitly religious injunctions and exhortations enforced by the State.

This was a framework of law that liberals today would be more likely to characterize as “puritanical” and “repressive” than as liberal. But in an earlier time (the time that traditionalists are always fighting to restore), it was possible to conceive of this legal framework as being grounded in the classical liberal values of individual freedom and equal dignity (before God). So long as one espoused the traditional view of the hierarchy of rational and irrational psychological faculties, as did most exponents of liberal political philosophy (be they Lockean, Kantian, or products of the Enlightenment), then one could hold the view that subjecting individuals to the authority of moral regulations enforced by the State was not only good and necessary, but also expressive of the liberal values of individual freedom and equality.

Nor was the traditional psychological justification for subjecting individual behavior to regulation, and for viewing such regulation as expressive of liberal values, dependent on continued adherence to the religious belief in God. Over time, and with gathering strength in the wake of the Enlightenment, the rationalist picture of a well-ordered psyche (and freedom and virtue) was secularized, dispensing with its explicitly religious foundations while retaining a belief in transcendent reason and law.³ The belief in transcendent reason – that is, the belief that freedom (and morality and psychological health) do not merely permit, but affirmatively require subordinating feelings, appetites, and “blind faith” to intellectual reason – continued to provide an explicitly liberal justification for enforcing moral values through law long after liberal discourse was secularized. It was only later, after an altogether different picture of the “irrational faculties” began to permeate liberal thought and policy, that the whole idea of “moral legislation” came to be seen as antithetical to the fundamental principles of liberalism.

This altogether different picture of psychology that changed the face of liberal law was, of course, the romantic one. A romantic view of the human psyche directly challenged the rationalist premises of classical liberal thought and, ultimately, took hold in legal thought and popular consciousness, dramatically reshaping legal policy. Many of the most significant

3. On the dispensability of a belief in God, see Nomi M. Stolzenberg and Gideon Yaffe, “Waldron’s Locke and Locke’s Waldron: A Review of Jeremy Waldron’s *God, Locke and Equality*,” *Inquiry*, Vol. 49 (April 2006), 180–216.

social transformations that have occurred over the last two centuries can be traced to the ascendance of a romanticist view of freedom and human psychology over the more traditionalist rationalist one. The most obvious examples would be the various radical and reformist movements that have aimed at redefining the terms of sex, gender, and family: the movements for women's liberation, sexual liberation, and reproductive freedom, the more recent movements for gay rights and gay marriage and still more radical visions of queer liberation, not to mention the seemingly more moderate but in fact no less revolutionary no-fault divorce movement of the 1970s – all of these adumbrated by earlier changes in marital and sexual practices, such as the shift away from the practice of arranged marriages and toward companionate marriage and marriage by choice. It is hard to conceive of any of these movements, of their aims and aspirations, let alone their successes, without the spread of romantic notions of self-expression, self-definition, and free love.

The freedom to choose whom and whether to marry, with whom and whether to have sex, or children, and whether to exit a marriage – these freedoms are all so firmly established and so thoroughly domesticated today, it may be hard to see them as expressions of a revolutionary romantic doctrine of free love. But the idea of personal freedom and choice in the domain of love, sex, and marriage (and divorce) is as deeply rooted in romantic conceptions of freedom and desire as any radical anarchist doctrine of free love. All of these notions entailed a dramatic extension of liberalism's doctrines of personal freedom and human equality beyond the realms of human behavior to which classical liberalism's doctrines of freedom and equality originally applied. At the same time, they involved a re-conceptualization of the nature of human freedom, and of the psyche of the human agent endowed with freedom – a change in conceptions that precisely tracks the distinctions between rationalist and romantic conceptions of the psyche and of freedom. The rationalist conception of freedom as a matter of self-mastery or self-transcendence was replaced by the romantic conception of freedom as a matter of self-expression. In short, the notions of freedom of choice in the domain of sex, love, and marriage that we now take for granted represent the triumph of a romantic conception over a rationalist one, a triumph that occurred, curiously enough, within the traditionally rationalist precincts of liberal thought.⁴

How romantic ideas entered into the edifice of rationalist liberal thought, or, to put it the other way around, how liberalism entered into a romantic state, is a complicated story which can only be gestured at here.⁵ But looking

4. This is not to deny that similar developments occurred in other precincts. For example, socialist countries exhibited a similar change in attitudes towards sex, marriage, and divorce, as romanticism penetrated the popular culture there as well.

5. The best treatment of this can be found in Nancy L. Rosenblum, *Another Liberalism: Romanticism and the Reconstruction of Liberal Thought* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987). See also Isaiah Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

back at the broad sweep of the evolution of liberal thought, we can see that the domain of social relations to which the liberal doctrines of personal freedom and human equality have come to apply has steadily expanded. What began as a narrowly political (and religious) doctrine about the scope of legitimate governmental authority has been adopted by ever-growing numbers of people around the world as a personal philosophy, as a code of personal morality – or, as some would have it, a position of principled opposition to codes of morality – that tells us how, and how not, to treat others and how to make decisions for one self. Liberal education, liberal approaches to child-rearing, and liberal sexual mores are all reflective of this general phenomenon of liberalism being adopted as a personal, and not just a political, philosophy.

From the freedom to choose one's occupation to the freedom to choose one's marital partner, or the freedom to divorce or not to marry at all; to the freedom to decide how and with whom one's children should be raised, whether to raise a child by oneself or not have children at all; to the freedom to reject the faith of one's parents and adopt a religion of one's own choosing or not believe or affiliate at all – there is virtually no area of life today, no matter how private or deep-seated within the recesses of our individual hearts and minds, to which the liberal doctrines of personal choice and autonomy haven't been applied. Our work lives, our family lives, and our spiritual lives, our love lives and our sex lives (one of the more radical innovations of latter-day liberalism being the proposition that these needn't be the same thing), even our most basic sense of personal identity – our religious, cultural, national, gender, and sexual identities – have all been brought under the aegis of the doctrines of liberalism and turned into matters of personal choice. The freedom to divorce epitomized by the no-fault divorce revolution is just one concrete manifestation of this very general phenomenon.

Underlying this trend has been a profound reshaping of the image of the human psyche, and of the difference between the disordered and the well-ordered psyche, on which liberal legal policy relies. The extension of the doctrines of individual autonomy and personal choice into the private domain of intimate relations and personal identity has gone hand-in-hand with a rejection of the traditional rationalist view of the psyche and freedom, which insists on the elevation of reason over the irrational faculties within the psyche. In its stead, legal doctrines and public policies have come to incorporate a romanticist view that emphasizes and valorizes feeling, emotion, and, in the wan formulation of market theorists, “personal preferences,” and calls for their free pursuit and free expression. It is customary to trace the origins of this “personalization” of liberalism and of politics more generally to the feminist movement of the 1970s which made “the personal is political” its motto. And indeed, feminism deserves much of the credit (or blame, if you adhere to the traditional view) for breaching the wall separating the private realm of domestic, familial and affective relationships from the public realm, where liberal doctrines of freedom and equality were long confined. But feminism itself can be seen as an

expression of romanticism, resting as it does on a rejection of the rationalist view of the properly-ordered psyche, and demanding a transvaluation of the traditionally denigrated (and feminized) psychological characteristics of emotion, attachment, desire, intuition, and concern with the satisfaction of the physical appetites and other material needs.⁶ The collapse of the public-private distinction is itself a hallmark of romanticism. Focusing on the domain of affective experiences and intimate relationships as a field of legal regulation in which freedom is to be claimed, feminism and romanticism alike affirm the value of romantic self-expression in both public and private domains.

The extension of the doctrines of freedom and equality into the domain of private relations thus entailed a very different way of conceiving of freedom from the conceptualization that governed classical liberalism's traditional moral psychology. After all, free will is one thing, "free love" (or the undisciplined pursuit of happiness) quite another. And while the majority of "liberal-minded" people today may fail to recognize the freedoms they claim in the domain of personal relations as expressions of a radical doctrine of free love, the point is not lost on religious conservatives. In the US, it is Darwin's theory of evolution that is usually taken to be the flashpoint and the emblem of the conservative cultural politics of religious fundamentalists and other like-minded moral traditionalists. But the evolution that excites the most antipathy towards liberalism, the evolution that unites fundamentalists and religious traditionalists of different faiths and different stripes around the world notwithstanding the profound theological and cultural differences that separate them, is the evolution away from a concept of freedom as a matter of freedom of the will (a concept to which Christianity, Judaism, Islam and many other religious faith traditions traditionally subscribed) and towards the prevailing concept of freedom as a matter of the free expression and pursuit of personal feelings and desire.

The threat posed to traditional notions of morality by this romantic idea of freedom of desire is not difficult to see. It threatens to undermine not only traditional sexual prohibitions and norms of marital obligation, but also traditional forms of child-rearing and education, as witnessed by the increased popularity of romantic conceptions of education and child-rearing, which demand an end to "stifling" the child's "natural" curiosity and call instead for educators to be sensitive to the child's need for self-expression and self-development. Underlying the competing educational philosophies and codes of sexual morality lies the basic opposition between the traditional rationalist conception of freedom as free will linked to the disciplinary power of reason and a romanticist conception of freedom as a matter of unleashing the psychological drives from reason. Freedom of the will implies an agent that can, and should, be governed by reason;

6. See, e.g. Robin West, "Jurisprudence and Gender," 55 *University of Chicago Law Review* (1988).

it presupposes a concept of reason that can, and should, subordinate and discipline feelings, appetites, preferences, desires, and lusts. By contrast, freedom of desire implies an agent (if that is even the right word) who is not entirely in control of herself, whose actions are impelled by a human psyche in which reason has at best a subordinate place, or no place at all.

The advent of new educational policies favoring self-exploration and “values-clarification” over self-discipline, authority and the instilling of objectively “correct” values is one manifestation of the growing influence of romanticist conceptions of freedom and psychology and the supplanting of the rationalist conception of free will by the romanticist conception of freedom of desire. The advent of legal policies granting sexual and reproductive freedoms, dissolving traditional prohibitions on divorce, adultery, sodomy, and fornication, and more generally supporting the right of “consenting adults” to make sexual and reproductive decisions for themselves is another. And the areas of sexual regulation, education and family law are by no means the only areas of law in which romanticism has displaced traditional rationalism as the reigning philosophical view. While some areas of legal regulation have continued to adhere to the rationalist presuppositions of traditional moral psychology,⁷ numerous other areas have adopted the romanticist view, reflecting an increasing receptivity in legal and popular culture to the romantic conception of freedom and psychology and a concomitant eclipse of the traditional rationalist view.

In general, the law has preferred to substitute a romanticist view of human psychology for the rationalist one in fields of law where the behavior subject to regulation (or deregulation) is regarded as a species of romantic experience. In our culture, sex and marriage are the most obviously “romantic” forms of experience, if not the only such forms of experience available, corresponding as they do to the narrowest sense of the term as it is used colloquially. But from a genuinely romanticist perspective, any conduct or human experience that is driven by romantic “passion,” i.e., irrational or non-rational impulses, such as love, feeling, instinct, or desire rather than reason, is a “romantic experience,” and therefore eligible for treatment according to romanticist rather than rationalist norms. The realm of romantic *experience*, as conceived by romanticism, was never limited to amorous or familial relations. Rather, it was understood to encompass a wide range of human experiences and intimate relations, including friendship, spiritual communion, artistic and scientific inspiration and, at the opposite pole of human relations, war. As the Romantic poets (and,

7. Most notably criminal law. Business law, where an economic perspective prevails, is a more complicated story. The “rational actor” model beloved of economists would seem to reflect a prevailing rationalism. However, the version of “rationalism” adhered to by contemporary economists adopts a purely instrumentalist vision of reason, which places it at odds with the traditional conception of rationalism. Whereas in the traditional conception, reason reigns over the appetites, the rational actor model sees reason as the instrument of the appetites. Thus from the traditional point of view, economic “rationalism” is really a form of irrationalism – or romanticism.

following in their wake, Freud and his followers) well understood, romantic experience is not confined to the marriage plot, nor is erotic love confined to sex – nor, for that matter, is eroticism the only irrational force driving human nature. On the contrary, romanticism apprehends eroticism as but one of the “irrational” forces that permeates life. Romantics were never blind to the dark side of un-reason; they saw full well the potential for violence in unbridling the psychological drives that impel human beings to act. But even when they didn’t go so far as to exalt violence (as some did), they always insisted upon both the impossibility of subduing the irrational side of the human psyche, and the undesirability of subjecting desire and “natural” feeling to psychological restraint. “The heart,” as romantics are always fond of saying, “has laws of its own.”⁸

One of the areas most widely recognized as subject to the law of the heart, other than sex and love, is religion. Like love, faith, in the common understanding, is “blind” – something that bypasses or, in the experience of its practitioners, *transcends* human reason. Even the most secular and atheistic eighteenth- and nineteenth-century romanticists could not fail to be impressed by the emotional and “spiritual” transports of religious enthusiasm. Both religious enthusiasm and the sometimes more sober but often ecstatic religious conversion experiences prized in Protestant culture provided prototypes for the quintessentially romantic experiences of self-reinvention, “spiritual” connection, and contact with a realm of experience beyond the “soulless material world.” Thanks to Transcendentalism and various other progressive movements for cultural and educational reform, these originally religious ideas would eventually percolate into the popular culture. In the same vein, the Christian conception of agapic love formed the prototype for romantic conceptions of erotic connection and loving attachment – whether to God or, in a more secularized idiom, to the cosmos, to a romantic partner, a particular kin group, community, or nation, or, as in the Christian conception, humanity at large. Both popular religious culture and popular secular culture in America exhibit the imprint of the originally religious conception of romanticism and its romantic conception of religion as an essentially inward, intimate, psychological experience, an affair of the heart.

Faith is thus conceived in terms very similar to desire, as an expression of the non- or irrational side of human nature, a matter of feeling and emotional transport in which reason plays little or no role. Like sexual and familial relations, religious experiences are depicted as inherently subjective, personal experiences, affairs of the heart and not the head. This romantic conception of religion is so ubiquitous in American popular culture (and in other cultures where the American model of religion has been successfully transplanted) that it is now quite difficult to conceive of religions otherwise. Protestantism,

8. On the romantic law of the heart, see Hilary M. Schor, “Show Trials: Characters, Conviction and the Law in Victorian Fiction,” *Cardozo Studies in Law and Literature*, Vol. 11, 179–195 (1999).

Catholicism, and Judaism have all been reshaped in this image of religion as a fundamentally psychological, emotional experience of self-definition, -reinvention, and -expression, as have newly imported immigrant religious traditions, and the many newly-invented religions that abound in the United States. In this regard, every religious faith in America has become a “New Age” religion – with the important exception of the religious movements that have appeared within virtually every faith tradition dedicated to resisting the “liberalization” of religion and the secularization of modern society.

Situating religious fundamentalism and the broader movement to restore traditional values and authority in the context of the longstanding and ongoing philosophical contest between rationalist and romanticist ideas helps us to see that, among the other impulses animating the various fundamentalist and traditionalist movements that have arisen across the globe, one of the most powerful and unifying mobilizing forces has been the felt need to resist the encroachments of romanticism. These encroachments may be more frequently described as the encroachments of “liberalism,” or of “secular humanism,” or secularism tout court, but we can see that most if not all of the provocations attributed to liberalism and secularism are in fact that product of a specifically romantic conception of freedom and desire, taking concrete form in progressive educational and child-rearing practices, sexual and reproductive freedom, liberation from traditional gender assignments, and the erosion of traditional marriage. Perhaps the greatest threat of all to the many religious groups that are dedicated to maintaining or restoring traditional forms of religious authority is the attempt to integrate these freedoms into the various religious faith traditions, to reform or “liberalize” religion from within. This too is a product of romanticism. Notwithstanding the cultural and theological differences that divide them and make fundamentalists of one faith tradition (e.g., Christian evangelicals) bitter foes of another (e.g., fundamentalist Islam), they share a common enemy, and although that common enemy commonly goes by the name of “liberalism,” our analysis shows that it is a fusion of liberalism and romanticism, in other words, the replacement of the traditional version of liberalism which rests on the premises of traditional rationalist moral psychology, with a romanticized version of liberalism, which rejects the traditional rationalist moral psychology, which has aroused the forces of reaction. Sexual libertinism, female independence, the corrosion of the traditional family and paternal authority – all of these explicit targets of fundamentalist polemics are so many manifestations of the romanticized version of liberalism, or liberalism “in a romantic state.”

It appears, then, that romanticism, or more precisely, a fear of romanticism and what it has wrought in the most intimate domains of human relations and experience, is what is driving the contemporary religious reaction that is sweeping across different faith traditions and becoming a major political factor across the globe. Religious reaction is at bottom a reaction formation against romanticism. But this deceptively simple formulation suggests that the relationships between religion and romanticism, and between religious

fundamentalism and liberalism, are actually far more complicated than the commonplace view of religion and the commonplace view of fundamentalism would suggest. The commonplace view, as we saw above, is that religion is the quintessence of romanticism, that is, irrationalism – a realm of experience impervious to reason and driven instead by the non-rational or irrational impulses. Religious fundamentalism, from this point of view, is simply the purest expression of the essential irrationalism of religion. It distinguishes itself from other forms of religious expression only in its refusal to pretend that religion is otherwise. It resists all the efforts to “rationalize” and “liberalize” that have been undertaken in order to make it palatable to modern liberal sensibilities, and is unapologetic about its embrace of “blind” faith over reason. Indeed it champions faith over reason.

There is more than a grain of truth in this description of religious fundamentalism. It accords both with many of the statements of fundamentalism’s chief expounders and with the descriptions put forth by its critics. But a simple equation of religion with irrationalism is highly misleading. It suggests that religion is unequivocally hostile to rationalism and captive to a romanticist view that denigrates reason, whereas secular liberalism is unequivocally on the side of reason. This in turn suggests that liberalism and religion are inherently at odds, and that the current standoff between liberalism and the upholders of religious tradition is at bottom a fight between the forces of reason (liberals and secularists) and the religious forces of un-reason. But we have already seen that it is both the case that contemporary liberalism is far less committed to rationalism and far more attracted to a romantic picture of un-reason than this formulation suggests, and, conversely, that religion is not so unequivocally beholden to a romanticist view of irrationalism.

We have already seen the alternative to the romantic conception of religion articulated in the traditional moral psychology that was dominant in both traditional Christian and classical liberal discourse. That traditional view of morality and psychology was, as we saw earlier, an emphatically rationalist as well as a religious view, which explicitly refuted the premises of the anti-rationalist, or romanticist view of morality and religion. It is true that a romantic vision (of religion, morality, psychology, knowledge, and freedom) has long been present in Christian thought. We tend to associate the articulation of the romanticist critique of reason with the eighteenth-century Romantic rebellion against the Enlightenment, in particular the Enlightenment’s exaltation of Reason. But there had always been voices in the Christian tradition championing the irrational side of human nature and criticizing the primacy assigned to reason as a conduit to (religious) truth. Indeed, long before the eighteenth-century Romantic movement arose, there were both religious critics of reason (e.g., Christian fideists, who argued for the primacy of faith over reason) and anti-religious critics (e.g., the early seventeenth- and eighteenth-century libertines, who argued for the primacy of desire and appetite over either religious faith or scientific reason). These early adumbrations of romanticism articulated the key concepts of the romantic critique of rationalism. The critique of reason

continually coexisted with the more dominant rationalist approach, contesting but never besting the rationalist premises of traditional moral psychology until the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries when at last romanticist ideas gradually began to take hold.

The current conflict between liberalism and conservative religious movements can indeed be traced to this ancient conflict between romanticism and rationalism – but not in a simple way. Over time, rationalism, romanticism, and religion have each evolved in different directions, forming shifting alliances and dis-alliances with one another that defy any simple generalizations. There is, however, a basic distinction to be drawn between two different versions of liberalism that have evolved, one based on a rationalist view of psychology, morality and freedom, the other based on the romanticist, anti-rationalist view. Once we recognize the existence of this basic division within liberalism between rationalist and romanticist versions⁹ – between liberalism in its rationalist conception and liberalism in its romantic state – it becomes possible to better understand the sources of contemporary religious and cultural-conservative reaction. At the same time, it becomes impossible to speak of a simple opposition between religion, or religious fundamentalism, and liberalism.

As we have seen, more often than not, what is taken to be a “liberal” target of conservative religious attacks is actually a form of romanticism, or rather a fusion of romantic and liberal conceptions – of marital, familial or sexual relations, of child-rearing and education, of religion, of freedom, and of liberalism itself. In its rationalist version, liberalism does not pose the same kind of threat to traditional morality as it does when it enters into a romantic state. Recognizing the tension that exists within liberal discourse between rationalist and romanticist conceptions helps us to clarify precisely what it is that the forces of religious reaction are reacting to, what they are so threatened by, and so desirous of combatting – not liberalism *per se*, but rather, that particular version of liberalism that results when romantic conceptions of psychology and freedom are integrated into liberal thought with the result that liberalism becomes fused with romanticism – or, to put it slightly differently, enters into a romantic state. Recognizing the distinction between the classical version of liberalism, rooted in the values of the Enlightenment, and liberalism in its romantic state also helps us to understand why liberalism has not been able to generate a more coherent or powerful response to conservative attacks. Instead of a coherent response, liberalism has exhibited ambivalence and vacillation in the face of fundamentalist attacks and conservative critiques of its romanticist premises. That vacillation reflects the fact that at the same time as liberalism has, more and more, entered into a romantic state, it has never definitively rejected the original rationalist premises of liberalism nor has it left them entirely behind. Instead, the tension between rationalist and romanticist

9. See Rosenblum, *supra*, note 5.

conceptions persists within liberal thought as an ongoing, unresolved, and rarely acknowledged tension.

The split between rationalism and romanticism is the ambivalent legacy bequeathed to liberalism by earlier traditions of Christian thought. From the rationalist strain of Christian theology and political discourse, liberalism inherited the concept of free will and related notions of traditional moral psychology that would provide the foundations of the modern contract law and other areas of law relating to the emerging free market, as well as much of the edifice of criminal law. From Christian romanticism, liberalism inherited a picture of human psychological capacities and potentials that directly contradicts the rationalist picture underlying criminal law and the conventional law of contracts. These two pictures of human psychology have continued to vie with one another, without either one ever completely vanquishing the other. Instead, both persist, resulting in ongoing tensions, unresolved contradictions and a profound ambivalence about what picture of human nature to adopt that weakens liberalism's ability to respond coherently to conservative attacks.

Again, the law of divorce, here situated in the liberal law of contracts, is exemplary. As described by the political philosopher Nancy Rosenblum in her invaluable study of the relationship between liberalism and romanticism, the conventional or classical version of liberalism, rooted in Enlightenment ideals, "values regularity, impersonality, and impartiality." It "inhibits spontaneity and self-expression" precisely in order to "secur[e] expectations" created by contract or by law. Romanticism, by contrast, flips this hierarchy of values, assigning greater weight to feelings and their fluctuations, privileging spontaneity over predictability, and the right to change one's mind over the value of enforcing contracts and established expectations.¹⁰

The very idea that one has a right to change one's mind – or to put it more romantically, the right to a change of heart – is a romantic notion that stands in direct tension with the principle of making people abide by their promises and contracts, as classical liberalism demands. Classical liberalism justifies the enforcement of contracts, and the refusal of changes of heart, on the rationalist grounds of the traditional moral psychology: contracting is conceived of as an exercise of the free will, where the will is understood in turn to be ruled internally by reason. Or at least it is supposed to be ruled by reason. For those unfortunates not ruled by reason internally (i.e., psychologically), the law traditionally reserved two responses: either treatment as a member of a category, like women, children, lunatics, or slaves, who were viewed as naturally intellectually inferior and therefore incompetent to exercise free will and the rights of choice and in need of protection, thus subject to the tutelage and authority of others; or, in the case of members of the class of recognized rights-holders (prototypically, white landholding

10. See Rosenblum, *supra*, note 5, 34.

men) as people whose desire to breach reflected their own failure to submit to reason, a failure which was not to be rewarded by judicial rescue from bad bargains. The doctrines of incapacity carved out as the traditional “exceptions” to contract law clearly tracked this traditional rationalist (psycho)logic, as did the comparable traditional rules regarding who was eligible to exercise political rights. The resulting treatment of commercial contracts was not so dissimilar from the traditional religious approach to marriage vows: the marriage contract and commercial contracts were ones that in theory “no man could tear asunder,” a stricture that was justified at least in part on the grounds that the parties had entered into these contracts of their own rational volition and free will.

Romanticism, of course, rejected this logic. The legal consequences of this rejection can be seen in the development of legal doctrines that enshrined the romantic notion of changes of heart. The clearest illustration of this tendency can be seen in the evolving law of divorce, where a slow, fitful process of liberalizing the grounds for divorce, culminating with the no-fault divorce revolution of the 1970s, reflects the eventual triumph of romantic notions of the legitimacy of changes of heart and the inappropriateness of subjecting “the heart” to legal coercion. (“The heart has laws of its own.”)

The fusion of romantic and liberal ideals that would eventually support the legal implementation of the romantic notion of a right to a change of heart can be seen in the very first argument in favor of divorce to be made in the English liberal legal tradition, John Milton’s seventeenth-century tract, “The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce.”¹¹ The arguments that Milton put forth, at a time when English law (following traditional canon law) recognized no legal grounds for ending a marriage at all, reflected a fusion of romantic and liberal ideals that would not become the prevailing perspective for several centuries. Milton made the case for a right to divorce not only in cases of spousal wrongdoing but also in cases of what we today would call “irreconcilable differences” or nothing more than the absence of love. As grounds for such a right, Milton freely combined biblical, liberal, and unmistakably romantic ideas, demonstrating that a romantic conception of freedom of the heart coexisted not only with a certain (romantic) religious outlook but also with the more conventional and rationalist “intellectual freedoms” that are more commonly associated with liberalism from the very beginnings of liberal political theory. The so-called intellectual freedoms are those, such as freedom of conscience and freedom of belief, that are understood to involve purely cognitive exercises of the mind – freedoms of the head. Milton himself is better known as the author of one of the first liberal tracts supporting such an “intellectual freedom” (freedom of the press from censorship) than as the author of romantic polemic against prohibitions on divorce. But it is surely no accident that,

11. “The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce,” in John Milton, *Complete Poems and Major Prose*, Merritt Y. Hughes, ed. (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 1957), 696–715.

in addition to his great poetic works, works which themselves were at once religious and romantic in character even as they explored the great liberal theme of freedom of the will, Milton authored both the first treatise on the right to freedom from censorship, widely recognized as one of the earliest and most important contributions to the liberal canon of free speech, and the first treatise on the right to divorce.

The fact is that Milton made his astonishingly modern case for divorce in much the same spirit in which he made the case for the classical liberal freedom from censorship and freedom of speech. Both the “intellectual freedoms” which Milton endorsed (freedom from censorship and freedom of the press) and the romantic freedom of marriage and divorce expressed a conception of personal freedom that was based on religious doctrines of Christian liberty and free will *and* on the liberal political doctrines that early liberal theorists like John Locke (and Milton himself) were beginning to derive from these Christian doctrines. At the same time, they also expressed a romantic spirit. Figuring marriage as a relationship of intimate companionship, based on romantic and sexual love, Milton movingly described the costs – specifically, the emotional costs – of living imprisoned in a loveless marriage. He thus gave voice to the romantic conception of companionate marriage that would not become prevalent until the nineteenth (or, in some communities, the twentieth) century, but which, once accepted, would radically change popular and legal culture, sweeping aside the traditional notions underlying such practices as arranged marriages and restrictions on divorce.

It was not until the 1970s that the courts, legislatures, and the wider culture finally adopted Milton’s romantic idea that a husband or wife should be able to leave a marriage unilaterally simply because he or she didn’t love her partner anymore. The rise of no-fault divorce reflects the widespread acceptance of romantic notions such as “the heart has its own laws” and the corollary belief in the right to a change of heart. The notion of a *right* to a change of heart, grafting romantic notions of emotional flux onto liberal notions of legally-recognized rights to exercise certain freedoms reflects the more general fusion of liberal and romantic ideas that took place in the wake of the ideological battle that was waged in many different arenas between Enlightenment ideals and romantic critics of the Enlightenment over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The movement for no-fault divorce was just one concrete manifestation of the fusion of romantic and liberal ideas that took place as romantic conceptions of love and freedom and the human psyche were incorporated into the edifice of liberal thought.

The considerable backlash produced by the no-fault divorce movement likewise demonstrates the ongoing resistance to romantic notions of marriage and divorce and a more general skepticism toward the romanticization of changes of heart and “the law of the heart.” To be sure, not all of that backlash stems from conservative or religious quarters. Feminist concerns about the feminization of poverty and the detrimental financial

consequences for women and children of no-fault divorce have also been at the forefront of the movement to curb no-fault divorce. But we cannot underestimate the extent to which the conservative resistance to no-fault divorce (and divorce more generally) is fueled by adherence to the traditional moral psychology. And of course it is not just modern attitudes towards divorce which threaten to undermine traditional morality and the view of psychology which supports it. Abortion, contraception, homosexuality, nontraditional gender roles, sexually permissive images and practices, permissive child-rearing practices, and progressive education have all been grouped together as posing the same threat to religious authority and traditional values, which fundamentalists and other religious conservatives purport to defend. Perhaps the greatest threat of all, from the standpoint of religious fundamentalism, is the liberalization – or romanticization – of religion itself, which glorifies “authentic” personal religious experience, and in so doing, substitutes personal freedom for established authority, and subjects established institutions and patterns of social life to the wildly disruptive, anarchic power of an individual’s change of heart. There is indeed no greater threat to established religious institutions and religious authorities than an unfettered right to individual freedom of religion, especially when it is conceived (in highly romantic terms) as the right to pursue “your own spiritual path,” which includes the right to change one’s conception of one’s spiritual path, regardless of the pre-existing commitments that stand to be shattered by such an individual pursuit.

Seen in this light, religious fundamentalists and other defenders of traditional religious faith appear as the defender of the values of regularity, predictability and the protection of established contracts and institutions as against the values of personal spontaneity and self-expression, and the right to change one’s mind – or heart. In other words, religion/fundamentalism appears here to stand on the side of the values upheld by classical liberalism, in opposition to the values associated with romanticism. It may seem strange to contemporary readers of Christopher Hitchens and Richard Dawkins to think of religious fundamentalists as the party of reason.¹² But from their own point of view – and from the point of view of the traditional moral psychology that was once the common property of liberalism and traditional religious thought – fundamentalists are defending reason. More particularly, they are defending a rationalist view of human psychology (and, with regard to children, a rationalist view of psychological development) that places reason at the apex of the hierarchy of psychological faculties, and defines freedom accordingly as an intellectual freedom that requires disciplining and “transcending” the self, that is, transcending the “base” elements of the self and subjecting them to the authority of reason

12. See Christopher Hitchens, *God is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (New York: Twelve Books, 2007), Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006). For an exquisite response, see Marilynne Robinson’s book review, “Hysterical Scientism: The Ecstasy of Richard Dawkins,” *Harper’s Magazine*, November 2006.

(which is to say, the authority of the moral law), rather than permitting them unbridled expression. Fundamentalism, in other words, is not the enemy of reason, but rather its truest defender. It is not beholden to irrationalism; it is rather opposed to irrationalism, and therefore, to romanticism, which celebrates the irrational at the expense of reason. By the same token, it is not antagonistic to liberalism; it is rather liberalism's truest defender. But it is only the defender of *true* liberalism, that is, liberalism that stays true to its original rationalist premises and the associated views of morality and psychology that follow such rationalism. The enemy of religious fundamentalism, on this construction, is not liberalism per se but the form – or the corruption – of liberalism that results when liberalism drops its traditional rationalist conception of human psychology and enters into a romantic state.

It is only when liberalism enters into the domains of romantic experience, and applies its doctrines of personal freedom and individual choice to those realms of experience, that it provokes the kind of conservative religious reaction that is associated with religious “fundamentalism” and that has come to play such a large role in politics today. As we have seen, when liberalism enters into the domain of intimate, affective – romantic – experience, it necessarily exchanges its conception of freedom from one based on the rationalist premises of traditional moral psychology for the subjectivist premises of a romantic conception of freedom of self-expression, freedom of belief, as freedom of desire. Belief, on this account, is no more rational than feeling or desire. Like the more anemic “preferences” beloved of liberal market discourse, faith, emotion, and desire are all conceived as inherently irrational psychological appetites or drives, which are granted license to roam where they will. It is this essentially romantic (or libertine) conception of freedom and choice, which demotes reason to the role of delivery boy, tasked with figuring out how to get what faith or feeling determines is wanted, that constitutes the chief provocation to conservative religious reaction.

Of course, romantic views about human relations and psychology are not the only source of provocation. There are no doubt other, perhaps deeper causes – political, economic, and other cultural factors that have played a role, and continue to play a role, in provoking conservative reaction. But the leaders of fundamentalist religious movements and other movements dedicated to preserving, or restoring the authority of traditional religious values and beliefs, could never have succeeded in spreading their ideas without making appeal to deep-rooted fears and anxieties provoked by the liberalization – or more precisely, the romanticization – of religious faith and intimate relations.

So long as liberalism stays out of our romantic, sexual, and religious lives, so long as it refrains from interfering with our child-rearing practices and modes of education, then it avoids colliding with religious codes of morality – or at least minimizes the occasions for collision inasmuch as religious codes of morality are more concerned with personal than with

public matters. It is only when liberalism enters these domains of social relations and affective experience – only, that is, when it enters a romantic state – that it is bound to collide with traditional codes of morality. It is no accident that the areas of most concern to religious critics of liberalism overlap to a great extent with the very same domains of human experience that romanticism valorizes, namely, the domains of affective experience and personal relationships – what classical (rationalist) liberalism would relegate to the domain of “private” experience. Religious battles are waged over our sexual lives, our family lives, and our spiritual lives.¹³ How we raise and educate our children, whether we conceive of child-rearing as a matter of bringing up children to be able to make rational choices for themselves or, rather, as a matter of transmitting and instilling the values and sense of loyalty of a particular group – these are the kinds of issues of most concern to religious fundamentalists (of different faiths) and other critics of liberalism yearning for a restoration of community and a return to tradition and traditional values. But these are also the issues that touch on the main concerns of romanticism. How we love and who we love, what our roles as men and women are, and whether we have the freedom to break out of these roles – these are the issues of perhaps the greatest concern to religious critics of liberalism. But they are also issues of central concern to romanticism. Of common concern to both romanticism and religious fundamentalism (and religion, more broadly) are all of the areas of human experience that are said to surpass (or bypass) the bounds of rationality: the experiences of love, of faith, and also of warfare and other forms of heroic conflict which call for displays of virtue and courage not readily assimilated to the norms of rationalist liberalism.

The rhetoric of warfare is itself a sign of liberalism’s romantic state. Contemporary political discourse abounds in bellicose imagery, declarations of war both real and metaphorical, in some cases completely imaginary, in other cases rooted in a bloody reality of actual violence, official warfare and unofficial terrorist acts. The perceived enemy is religious fundamentalism combined with terrorism – not homegrown fundamentalism of the Christian variety but rather the religious fundamentalism that inspires militant Islamic movements and other non-western, anti-western religiously-inspired terrorist groups. It would be puerile to draw a simple equation between the anti-western ideologies that motivate these religious groups to attack America and other liberal democracies and the anti-liberal polemics espoused by conservative religious groups internal to America and the western political and religious traditions. The latter see themselves as America’s biggest defenders in the face of anti-westernism and the threat of Islamic terrorism, whereas the former are obviously no friends of Christian

13. But not our work lives, interestingly enough.

fundamentalism (and even less of Jewish fundamentalism) and see the liberal West as the greatest enemy.

In this context, we once again see homegrown fundamentalism in alliance with American liberalism and the political philosophical traditions of “the West.” Fundamentalists in the United States present themselves as liberal democracy’s greatest defenders, joining other cultural and political conservatives who claim, contra the “liberals” (in the narrow political sense), that security measures, including the suspension of civil liberties, are required to defend liberal democracies from the terrorist threat. Indeed, in political circles where liberalism is still a dirty word, when progressives and intellectuals on the left turn against liberalism, while conservatives simultaneously excoriate liberalism and represent themselves as its biggest defenders, it is hard to know what liberalism is, or what counts as attacking or defending it, let alone what the grounds for attacking or defending it are. But no one in mainstream American politics is rejecting liberalism, or the need to come to liberalism’s defense. The only question is *who* provides the better defense: the conservatives, religious and secular, who insist that “the Constitution is not a suicide pact,” or the self-described liberals who argue that conservative policies violate the very values they are meant to defend?

The only thing that is clear in this confusion is that liberalism is in a state. I have argued above that liberalism is in a romantic state. But I have also argued that liberalism in its romantic state coexists with liberalism in non-romantic, rationalist state, a version of liberalism predicated on the rationalist presuppositions of traditional moral psychology. I have further suggested that the conservative religious reaction which informs fundamentalist movements both at home and abroad, and which leads fundamentalists of different religious stripes to finger “liberalism” as the enemy, is traceable to the romanticization of liberalism, that is, the formulation of liberal policies based on the romantic notions of freedom and human psychology in lieu of the traditional rationalist ones. This sense of enmity has led to a sense of embattlement, and, in some cases, to actual battles, not excluding the use of violence and force. Such aggressive actions are rare, they are not supported by most people who identify themselves with religious fundamentalism and cultural traditionalism, and they are more often espoused by groups outside America, groups that oppose America and western values and culture, more generally, than by religious groups indigenous to America and “the West”. That said, whereas most supporters of fundamentalist Islam do not actively support terrorism and in many instances actively oppose it, the turn to violence is not unknown in the annals of American fundamentalism. More importantly, even when no resort to actual violence is made, the tropes of warfare and “battle” are frequently intoned – the “battle for the American mind,” the battle for American school children, the battle for the family, for traditional marriage, the battle for the American soul. And while these usages may be metaphorical, they signify something important about

the current state of relations between religion and the liberal state, and the state of liberalism itself.

The sense of embattlement is, after all, reciprocal. Just as religious traditionalists, both outside and inside the liberal state, perceive the values and the way of life that they espouse as under assault – by liberalism – the defenders of liberalism see the liberal state as being under assault – by fundamentalists. Each side sees itself as under attack, and therefore perceives the necessity of defending itself by any legitimate means. The definition of “legitimate” means of self-defense of course widens as the sense of threat grows.

There is a lively dispute going on now about whether liberalism is in a state of crisis of the sort that characterizes or precipitates the state of emergency and, if so, what the nature of the crisis is, and what kind of defense measures it calls for. Proponents of the crisis characterization include both religious and secular “conservatives,” who see the liberal state as beset by internal and external threats, existential threats which, from the point of view of these conservative apologists for liberalism warrant all kinds of emergency measures, including the suspension of civil rights. The crisis characterization is also endorsed from a critical perspective, which calls into question the ability of the liberal polity to defend itself without contradicting its own stated principles.

I am not going to take a stand on whether liberalism is in such a state of crisis – I would not want to underestimate either the resilience and ongoing dominance of liberalism worldwide or the extent of the threats it faces from both within and without. But whether or not the state that liberalism currently finds itself in is appropriately characterized as a crisis, an emergency or a “war,” it seems clear that liberal democracies today are facing serious challenges both to their basic security and to their ability to sustain and defend the liberal democratic principles for which they purport to stand. What is far from clear is what constitutes an appropriate response to these challenges – where “appropriate” entails both effectiveness (in protecting the state and/or its people) and consistency with the liberal democratic principles that are supposed to define, and limit, the state. The oft-repeated slogan, “the constitution is not a suicide pact,” gives voice to the resulting dilemma.

However we resolve the dilemma, and the underlying question about the existence of state of crisis and the seriousness of the threats faced by liberalism, it seems undeniable that liberalism is in a state – at the very least, a state of excitement, of nervous agitation, of anxiety provoked by the sense of threat. In short, liberalism is in a romantic state. War rhetoric has always been intimately connected with romanticism and a romantic vision

14. The influence of romanticism on the legal thought of Oliver Wendell Holmes, and the consequent intertwining of romanticism and liberal legalism has been explored

of militarism, soldiering, self-sacrifice, and heroism in the service of noble ideals.¹⁴ Notwithstanding the fundamental tension that exists between the glorification of militarism and civilian liberal values, liberals have often succumbed to the romance of war in which the individual, and the rights of the individual are subsumed into “the greater cause” of collective self-defense.

The bellicose rhetoric that abounds in contemporary political discourse is both a cause and a symptom of liberalism’s romantic state. In the face of conservative attacks, liberalism finds itself on the defensive. Its entry into a romantic state may have been a cause of those attacks – the provocation that inspired conservative religious reaction – but it is also the reason that liberalism has not been able to muster a stronger response to those attacks. What response, after all, could liberalism offer? A defense of the romanticist view underlying current “liberal” policies would hardly be persuasive to conservatives who adhere to the rationalist view of traditional moral psychology. But neither is it particularly persuasive to liberals themselves, at least those in the majority who have never completely repudiated the rationalist view in favor of the romanticist one, or vice versa. Most liberals, like most liberal political theorists, have never attended to the clash between their rationalist and their romanticist conceptions because they rarely attend to the psychological foundations of their political positions at all. As a result, the abiding tension between the rationalist and the romanticist versions of liberalism is unacknowledged, hence unresolved. A romantic defense of liberalism’s romantic conception of freedom and the human psyche is not wholly persuasive to liberals any more than to cultural conservatives because most liberals have neither confronted the tension within their psychological presuppositions nor are they ready to reject the rationalist view that sets bounds to liberal freedom. Far from being wholly at odds with the defenders of the traditional moral psychology, they share the basic fear that animates fundamentalism, that is, the fear that unbridled freedom will lead not to a romantic utopia but to the classic nightmare version of anarchy in which life is nasty, brutish, and short. They are, in a word, ambivalent, unresolved about the respective merits of romanticist and rationalist views of human psychology, and consequently unable to mount an emotionally compelling or intellectually powerful – or even cogent – response to conservative attacks.

This, then, is the state that liberalism currently is in. It is a romantic state, borne not just of the integration of romantic notions into liberal political philosophy, but also of the ongoing war within liberal political philosophy between these romantic notions and rival rationalist ideas. That internal battle has in turn provoked an external battle, a conservative reaction that

in several books and articles, including Anne C. Dailey, “Holmes and the Romantic Mind,” 48 *Duke Law Journal* 429 (1998), George P. Fletcher, *Romantics at War: Glory and Guilt in the Age of Terrorism*, and Ruth Gavison, “Holmes’ Heritage: Living greatly in the Law,” 78 *B.U. Law Review* 843 (1998).

has led to concerted attacks on the fundamental principles of liberalism – or more precisely on the romantic notions that liberal policy-makers have adopted and written into law. That battle has in turn led to a sense on liberalism's part of being threatened, and this sense of threat is both objective and subjective. There is more than an element of paranoia, not to mention racism and sheer manipulation, in the sense of existential threat that is currently being promoted and used to justify the "war on terror" in the context of the larger "war of civilizations" that putatively is taking place between "East" and "West." That sense of threat demands treatment, along the lines of collective psychiatric treatment, in order to restore a sense of reality and eliminate the xenophobia, the Islamophobia, and, closer to home, the mutual incomprehension on the part of liberal secularists and religious traditionalists, that has distorted our perception of the actual dangers and risks. On the other hand, there are actual threats, some of which stem from radical religious movements dedicated to resisting the encroachments of romantic liberalism.

This analysis has shown that such religious movements have more in common with both romanticism and liberalism than either they or their romantic and liberal adversaries would believe. What they share is a common ambivalence regarding the respective merits of rationalist versus romanticist views of human psychology, morality, and freedom. Both secular liberalism (aka "secular humanism") and the religious traditions that profess to be opposed to liberalism and secularism exhibit the same internal tension: both are riven between traditional rationalism and the romantic critique of reason that undermines the psychological premises of rationalism which historically set the limits on human freedom of action.

We have seen this ambivalence expressed in three important arenas of human experience: liberalism in love, liberalism on faith, liberalism at war. In each of these areas, liberalism exhibits the basic tension between rationalist and romanticist views of human freedom and psychology. Liberalism thus appears to be not only in a romantic state, but also in an ambivalent state. And that of course only heightens liberalism's sense of nervous agitation while diminishing its ability to respond in any coherent fashion to conservative attacks. A coherent response will not be generated unless and until liberalism's defenders confront the underlying romanticism of the policies that come under attack and the unresolved tension between that romanticism and the traditional rationalist view of morality and psychology that persists in liberal thought to this day. Only then will liberalism return to the interrupted task of developing a theory of human psychology that is adequate to the political task of determining the moral boundaries of freedom.