

SEX, ECONOMY, FREEDOM, AND COMMUNITY

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"It all turns on affection now," said Margaret. "Affection. Don't you see?"

—E. M. Forster, *Howards End*¹

I

The sexual harassment phase of the Clarence Thomas hearing was handled by the news media as if it were anomalous and surprising. In fact, it was only an unusually spectacular revelation of the destructiveness of a process that has been well established and well respected for at least two hundred years—the process, that is, of community disintegration. This process has been well established and well respected for so long, of course, because it has been immensely profitable to those in a position to profit. The surprise and dismay occasioned by the Thomas hearing were not caused by the gossip involved (for that, the media had prepared

us very well) but by the inescapable message that this process of disintegration, so little acknowledged by politicians and commentators, can be severely and perhaps illimitably destructive.

In the government-sponsored quarrel between Clarence Thomas and Anita Hill, public life collided with private life in a way that could not have been resolved and that could only have been damaging. The event was depressing and fearful both because of its violations of due process and justice and because it was an attempt to deal publicly with a problem for which there is no public solution. It embroiled the United States Senate in the impossible task of adjudicating alleged offenses that had occurred in private, of which there were no witnesses and no evidence. If the hearing was a "lynching," as Clarence Thomas said it was, that was because it dealt a public punishment to an unconvicted and unindicted victim. But it was a peculiar lynching, all the same, for it dealt the punishment equally to the accuser. It was not a hearing, much less a trial; it was a storytelling contest that was not winnable by either participant.

Its only result was damage to all participants and to the nation. Public life obviously cannot be conducted in that way, and neither can private life. It was a public procedure that degenerated into a private quarrel. It was a private quarrel that became a public catastrophe.

Sexual harassment, like most sexual conduct, is extremely dangerous as a public issue. A public issue, properly speaking, can only be an issue about which the public can confidently know. Because most sexual conduct is private, occurring only between two people, there are typically no witnesses. Apart from the possibility of a confession, the public can know about it

only as a probably unjudgeable contest of stories. (In those rare instances when a sexual offense occurs before reliable witnesses, then, of course, it is a legitimate public issue.)

Does this mean that sexual conduct is *only* private in its interest and meaning? It certainly does not. For if there is no satisfactory way to deal publicly with sexual issues, there is also no satisfactory way to deal with them in mere privacy. To make sense of sexual issues or of sex itself, a third term, a third entity, has to intervene between public and private. For sex is not and cannot be any individual's "own business," nor is it merely the private concern of any couple. Sex, like any other necessary, precious, and volatile power that is commonly held, is everybody's business. A way must be found to entitle everybody's legitimate interest in it without either violating its essential privacy or allowing its unrestrained energies to reduce necessary public procedures to the level of a private quarrel. For sexual problems and potentialities that have a more-than-private interest, what is needed are common or shared forms and solutions that are not, in the usual sense, public.

The indispensable form that can intervene between public and private interests is that of community. The concerns of public and private, republic and citizen, necessary as they are, are not adequate for the shaping of human life. Community alone, as principle and as fact, can raise the standards of local health (ecological, economic, social, and spiritual) without which the other two interests will destroy one another.

By community, I mean the commonwealth and common interests, commonly understood, of people living together in a place and wishing to continue to do

so. To put it another way, community is a locally understood interdependence of local people, local culture, local economy, and local nature. (Community, of course, is an idea that can extend itself beyond the local, but it only does so metaphorically. The idea of a national or global community is meaningless apart from the realization of local communities.) Lacking the interest of or in such a community, private life becomes merely a sort of reserve in which individuals defend their "right" to act as they please and attempt to limit or destroy the "rights" of other individuals to act as they please.

A community identifies itself by an understood multiplicity of interests. But it lives and acts by the common virtues of trust, goodwill, forbearance, self-restraint, compassion, and forgiveness. If it hopes to continue long as a community, it will wish to—and will have to—encourage respect for all its members, human and natural. It will encourage respect for all stations and occupations. Such a community has the power—not invariably but as a rule—to enforce decency without litigation. It has the power, that is, to influence behavior. And it exercises this power not by coercion or violence but by teaching the young and by preserving stories and songs that tell (among other things) what works and what does not work in a given place.

Such a community is (among other things) a set of arrangements between men and women. These arrangements include marriage, family structure, divisions of work and authority, and responsibility for the instruction of children and young people. These arrangements exist, in part, to reduce the volatility and the danger of sex—to preserve its energy, its beauty, and its pleasure; to preserve and clarify its power to join not just husband

and wife to one another but parents to children, families to the community, the community to nature; to ensure, so far as possible, that the inheritors of sexuality, as they come of age, will be worthy of it.

But the life of a community is more vulnerable than public life. A community cannot be made or preserved apart from the loyalty and affection of its members and the respect and goodwill of the people outside it. And for a long time, these conditions have not been met. As the technological, economic, and political means of exploitation have expanded, communities have been more and more victimized by opportunists outside themselves. And as the salesmen, saleswomen, advertisers, and propagandists of the industrial economy have become more ubiquitous and more adept at seduction, communities have lost the loyalty and affection of their members. The community, wherever you look, is being destroyed by the desires and ambitions of both private and public life, which for want of the intervention of community interests are also destroying one another. Community life is by definition a life of cooperation and responsibility. Private life and public life, without the disciplines of community interest, necessarily gravitate toward competition and exploitation. As private life casts off all community restraints in the interest of economic exploitation or ambition or self-realization or whatever, the communal supports of public life also and by the same stroke are undercut, and public life becomes simply the arena of unrestrained private ambition and greed.

As our communities have disintegrated from external predation and internal disaffection, we have changed from a society whose ideal of justice was trust and fair-

ness among people who knew each other into a society whose ideal of justice is public litigation, breeding distrust even among people who know each other.

Once it has shrugged off the interests and claims of the community, the public language of sexuality comes directly under the influence of private lust, ambition, and greed and becomes inadequate to deal with the real issues and problems of sexuality. The public dialogue degenerates into a stupefying and useless contest between so-called liberation and so-called morality. The real issues and problems, as they are experienced and suffered in people's lives, cannot be talked about. The public language can deal, however awkwardly and perhaps uselessly, with pornography, sexual hygiene, contraception, sexual harassment, rape, and so on. But it cannot talk about respect, responsibility, sexual discipline, fidelity, or the practice of love. "Sexual education," carried on in this public language, is and can only be a dispirited description of the working of a sort of anatomical machinery—and this is a sexuality that is neither erotic nor social nor sacramental but rather a cold-blooded, abstract procedure that is finally not even imaginable.

The conventional public opposition of "liberal" and "conservative" is, here as elsewhere, perfectly useless. The "conservatives" promote the family as a sort of public icon, but they will not promote the economic integrity of the household or the community, which are the mainstays of family life. Under the sponsorship of "conservative" presidencies, the economy of the modern household, which once required the father to work away from home—a development that was bad enough—now requires the mother to work away from home, as well. And this development has the wholehearted endorse-

ment of "liberals," who see the mother thus forced to spend her days away from her home and children as "liberated"—though nobody has yet seen the fathers thus forced away as "liberated." Some feminists are thus in the curious position of opposing the mistreatment of women and yet advocating their participation in an economy in which everything is mistreated.

The "conservatives" more or less attack homosexuality, abortion, and pornography, and the "liberals" more or less defend them. Neither party will oppose sexual promiscuity. The "liberals" will not oppose promiscuity because they do not wish to appear intolerant of "individual liberty." The "conservatives" will not oppose promiscuity because sexual discipline would reduce the profits of corporations, which in their advertisements and entertainments encourage sexual self-indulgence as a way of selling merchandise.

The public discussion of sexual issues has thus degenerated into a poor attempt to equivocate between private lusts and public emergencies. Nowhere in public life (that is, in the public life that counts: the discussions of political and corporate leaders) is there an attempt to respond to community needs in the language of community interest.

And although we seem more and more inclined to look on education, even as it teaches less and is more overcome by violence, as the solution to all our problems (thus delaying the solution for a generation), there is really not much use in looking to education for the help we need. For education has become increasingly useless as it has become increasingly public. Real education is determined by community needs, not by public tests. Nor is community interest or community need going to receive much help from television and the other pub-

lic media. Television is the greatest disrespector and exploiter of sexuality that the world has ever seen; even if the network executives decide to promote "safe sex" and the use of condoms, they will not cease to pimp for the exceedingly profitable "sexual revolution." It is, in fact, the nature of the electronic media to blur and finally destroy all distinctions between public and community. Television has greatly accelerated the process, begun long ago, by which many communities have been atomized and congealed into one public. Nor is government a likely source of help. As political leaders have squirmed free of the claims and responsibilities of community life, public life has become their private preserve. The public political voice has become increasingly the voice of a conscious and self-serving duplicity: it is now, for instance, merely typical that a political leader can speak of "the preciousness of all life" while armed for the annihilation of all life. And the right of privacy, without the intervening claims and responsibilities of community life, has moved from the individual to the government and assumed the name of "official secrecy." Whose liberation is that?

In fact, there is no one to speak for the community interest except those people who wish to adhere to community principles. The community, in other words, must speak in its own interest. It must learn to defend itself. And in its self-defense, it may use the many powerful arguments provided for it by the failures of the private and public aims that have so nearly destroyed it.

The defenders of community should point out, for example, that for the joining of men and women there need to be many forms that only a community can provide. If you destroy the ideal of the "gentle man" and remove from men all expectations of courtesy and

consideration toward women and children, you have prepared the way for an epidemic of rape and abuse. If you depreciate the sanctity and solemnity of marriage, not just as a bond between two people but as a bond between those two people and their forebears, their children, and their neighbors, then you have prepared the way for an epidemic of divorce, child neglect, community ruin, and loneliness. If you destroy the economies of household and community, then you destroy the bonds of mutual usefulness and practical dependence without which the other bonds will not hold.

If these and all other community-made arrangements between men and women are removed, if the only arrangements left between them are those of sex and sexual politics, instinct and polity without culture, then sex and politics are headed not only toward many kinds of private and public suffering but toward the destruction of justice, as in the confrontation of Clarence Thomas and Anita Hill.

II

But to deal with community disintegration as merely a matter of sexual disorder, however destructive that disorder may be, is misleading. The problem is far more complex than I have been able to suggest so far. There is much more to be said on the issue of sex, and I will return to it, but for the sake of both truth and clarity I must first examine other issues that are related and, in some respects, analogous to the issue of sex.

It is certain, as I have already said, that communities are destroyed both from within and from without: by internal disaffection and external exploitation. It is cer-

tain, too, that there have always been people who have become estranged from their communities for reasons of honest difference or disagreement. But it can be argued that community disintegration typically is begun by an aggression of some sort from the outside and that in modern times the typical aggression has been economic. The destruction of the community begins when its economy is made—not *dependent* (for no community has ever been entirely independent)—but *subject* to a larger external economy. As an example, we could probably do no better than the following account of the destruction of the local wool economy of the parish of Hawkshead in the Lake District of England:

The . . . reason for the decline of the customary tenant must be sought in the introduction of machinery towards the end of the eighteenth century, which extinguished not only the local spinning and weaving, but was also the deathblow of the local market. Before this time, idleness at a fellside farm was unknown, for clothes and even linen were home-made, and all spare time was occupied by the youths in carding wool, while the girls spun the "garn" with distaff and wheel. . . . The sale of the yarn to the local weavers, and at the local market, brought important profits to the dalesman, so that it not only kept all hands busy, but put money into his pocket. But the introduction of machinery for looms and for spinning, and consequent outside demand for fleeces instead of yarn and woven material, threw idle not only half of the family, but the local hand-weavers, who were no doubt younger sons of the same stock. Thus idleness took the place of thrift and industry among a naturally industrious class, for the sons and daughters of the statesmen, often too proud to go out to service, became useless encumbrances on the estates. Then

came the improvement in agricultural methods [that is, technological innovations], which the statesman could not afford to keep abreast of. . . . What else could take place but that which did? The estates became mortgaged and were sold, and the rich manufacturers, whose villas are on the margin of Windermere, have often enough among their servants the actual descendants of the old statesmen, whose manufactures they first usurped and whose estates they afterwards absorbed.²

This paragraph sets forth the pattern of industrial exploitation of a locality and a local economy, a pattern that has prevailed for two hundred years. The industrialization of the eastern Kentucky coal fields early in the present century, though more violent, followed this pattern exactly.³ A decentralized, fairly independent local economy was absorbed and destroyed by an aggressive, monetarily powerful outside economy. And like the displaced farmers, spinners, and weavers of Hawkshead, the once-independent mountaineers of eastern Kentucky became the wage-earning servants of those who had dispossessed their parents, sometimes digging the very coal that their families had once owned and had sold for as little per acre as the pittance the companies paid per day. By now, there is hardly a rural neighborhood or town in the United States that has not suffered some version of this process.

The same process is destroying local economies and cultures all over the world. Of Ladakh, for example, Helena Norberg-Hodge writes:

In the traditional culture, villagers provided for their basic needs without money. They had developed skills that enabled them to grow barley at 12,000 feet and to manage

yaks and other animals at even higher elevations. People knew how to build houses with their own hands from the materials of the immediate surroundings. The only thing they actually needed from outside the region was salt, for which they traded. They used money in only a limited way, mainly for luxuries.

Now, suddenly, as part of the international money economy, Ladakhs find themselves ever more dependent—even for vital needs—on a system that is controlled by faraway forces. They are vulnerable to decisions made by people who do not even know that Ladakh exists. . . . For two thousand years in Ladakh, a kilo of barley has been a kilo of barley, but now you cannot be sure of its value.⁴

This, I think, speaks for itself: if you are dependent on people who do not know you, who control the value of your necessities, you are not free, and you are not safe.

The industrial revolution has thus made universal the colonialist principle that has proved to be ruinous beyond measure: the assumption that it is permissible to ruin one place or culture for the sake of another. Thus justified or excused, the industrial economy grows in power and thrives on its damages to local economies, communities, and places. Meanwhile, politicians and bureaucrats measure the economic prosperity of their nations according to the burgeoning wealth of the industrial interests, not according to the success or failure of small local economies or the reduction and often hopeless servitude of local people. The self-congratulation of the industrialists and their political minions has continued unabated to this day. And yet it is a fact that the industrialists of Hawkshead, like all those elsewhere and since, have lived off the public, just as surely as do the despised clients of "welfare." They have lived off a

public of industrially destroyed communities, and they have not compensated for this destruction by their ostentatious contributions to the art, culture, and education of the professional class, or by their "charities" to the poor. Nor is this state of things ameliorated by efforts to enable a local population to "participate" in the global economy, by "education" or any other means. It is true that local individuals, depending on their capital, intelligence, cunning, or influence, may be able to "participate" to their apparent advantage, but local communities and places can "participate" only as victims. The global economy does not exist to help the communities and localities of the globe. It exists to siphon the wealth of those communities and places into a few bank accounts. To this economy, democracy and the values of the religious traditions mean absolutely nothing. And those who wish to help communities to survive had better understand that a merely political freedom means little within a totalitarian economy. Ms. Norberg-Hodge says, of the relatively new influence of the global economy on Ladakh, that

Increasingly, people are locked into an economic system that pumps resources out of the periphery into the center—from the nonindustrialized to the industrialized parts of the world, from the countryside to the city, from the poor to the rich. Often, these resources end up back where they came from as commercial products . . . at prices that the poor can no longer afford.⁵

This is an apt description not just of what is happening in Ladakh but of what is happening in my own rural county and in every other rural county in the United States.

The situation in the wool economy of Hawkshead at the end of the eighteenth century was the same as that which, a little later, caused the brief uprising of those workers in England who were called Luddites. These were people who dared to assert that there were needs and values that justly took precedence over industrialization; they were people who rejected the determinism of technological innovation and economic exploitation. In them, the community attempted to speak for itself and defend itself. It happened that Lord Byron's maiden speech in the House of Lords, on February 27, 1812, dealt with the uprising of the Luddites, and this, in part, is what he said:

By the adoption of one species of [weaving] frame in particular, one man performed the work of many, and the superfluous laborers were thrown out of employment. Yet it is to be observed, that the work thus executed was inferior in quality; not marketable at home, and merely burried over with a view to exportation. . . . The rejected workmen . . . conceived themselves to be sacrificed to improvements in mechanism. In the foolishness of their hearts they imagined that the maintenance and well-doing of the industrious poor were objects of greater importance than the enrichment of a few individuals by any improvement, in the implements of trade, which threw the workmen out of employment, and rendered the laborer unworthy of his hire.⁶

The Luddites did, in fact, revolt not only against their own economic oppression but also against the poor quality of the machine work that had replaced them. And though they destroyed machinery, they "abstained from bloodshed or violence against living beings, until in 1812

a band of them was shot down by soldiers." Their movement was suppressed by "severe repressive legislation" and by "many hangings and transportations."⁷

The Luddites thus asserted the precedence of community needs over technological innovation and monetary profit, and they were dealt with in a way that seems merely inevitable in the light of subsequent history. In the years since, the only group that I know of that has successfully, so far, made the community the standard of technological innovation has been the Amish. The Amish have differed from the Luddites in that they have not destroyed but merely declined to use the technologies that they perceive as threatening to their community. And this has been possible because the Amish are an agrarian people. The Luddites could not have refused the machinery that they destroyed; the machinery had refused them.

The victory of industrialism over Luddism was thus overwhelming and unconditional; it was undoubtedly the most complete, significant, and lasting victory of modern times. And so one must wonder at the intensity with which any suggestion of Luddism still is feared and hated. To this day, if you say you would be willing to forbid, restrict, or reduce the use of technological devices in order to protect the community—or to protect the good health of nature on which the community depends—you will be called a Luddite, and it will not be a compliment. To say that the community is more important than machines is certainly Christian and certainly democratic, but it is also Luddism and therefore not to be tolerated.

Technological determinism, then, has triumphed. By now the rhetoric of technological determinism has become thoroughly mixed with the rhetoric of national

mysticism so that a political leader may confidently say that it is "our destiny" to go to the moon or Mars or wherever we may go for the profit of those who will provide the transportation. Because this "destiny" has become the all-shaping superstition of our time and is therefore never debated in public, we have difficulty seeing that the triumph of technological determinism is the defeat of community. But it is a fact that in both private conversation and public dialogue, the community has neither status nor standing from which to plead in its own defense. There is no denying, of course, that "community" ranks with "family," "our land," and "our beloved country" as an icon of the public vocabulary; everybody is for it, and this means nothing. If individuals or groups have the temerity to oppose an actual item on the agenda of technological process because it will damage a community, the powers that be will think them guilty of Luddism, sedition, and perhaps insanity. Local and community organizations, of course, do at times prevail over the would-be "developers," but the status of these victories remains tentative. The powers that be, and the media as well, treat such victories as anomalies, never as the work of a legitimate "side" in the public dialogue.

Some time ago, for example, my friends in the Community Farm Alliance asked me to write a newspaper piece opposing the Bush administration's efforts to revise the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade; the proposed revisions would destroy all barriers and restrictions to international trade in food, thus threatening the already precarious survival of farm communities in the industrial countries and also the local availability of food in Third World countries. I wrote the article and sent it to the editor of the op-ed page of the *New York*

Times, who had invited me to make such submissions—and who rejected my article on the ground that the subject was "not sexy." I conclude that if the opponents of the GATT revisions should win, their victory will have an effect limited to the issue—that is, such a victory would not cause their point of view to be acknowledged, much less represented, among the powers that be, and the public standing of community interests would be no higher than before.

The triumph of the industrial economy is the fall of community. But the fall of community reveals how precious and how necessary community is. For when community falls, so must fall all the things that only community life can engender and protect: the care of the old, the care and education of children, family life, neighborly work, the handing down of memory, the care of the earth, respect for nature and the lives of wild creatures. All of these things have been damaged by the rule of industrialism, but of all the damaged things probably the most precious and the most damaged is sexual love. For sexual love is the heart of community life. Sexual love is the force that in our bodily life connects us most intimately to the Creation, to the fertility of the world, to farming and the care of animals. It brings us into the dance that holds the community together and joins it to its place.

In dealing with community, as in dealing with everything else, the industrial economy goes for the nucleus. It does this because it wants the power to cause fundamental change. To make sex the preferred bait of commerce may seem merely the obvious thing to do, once greed is granted its now conventional priority as a motive. But this could happen only after a probably instinctive sense of the sanctity and dignity of the

body—the sense of its having been “fearfully and wonderfully made”⁸—had been destroyed. Once this ancient reticence had been broken down, then the come-on of the pimp could be instituted as the universal spiel of the marketplace; everything could be sold on the promise of instant, innocent sexual gratification, “no strings attached.” Sexual energy cannot be made publicly available for commercial use—that is, prostituted—without destroying all of its communal or cultural forms: forms of courtship, marriage, family life, household economy, and so on. The devaluation of sexuality, like the devaluation of a monetary currency, destroys its correspondence to other values.

In the wake of the Thomas-Hill catastrophe in Washington, the *New York Times Sunday Magazine* contained a skin lotion advertisement that displayed a photograph of the naked torso of a woman. From a feminist point of view, this headless and footless body represents the male chauvinist's sexual ideal: a woman who cannot think and cannot escape. From a point of view somewhat more comprehensive—the point of view of community—it represents also the commercial ideal of the industrial economy: the completely seducible consumer, unable either to judge or to resist.

The headlessness of this lotionable lady suggests also another telling indication of the devaluation of sexual love in modern times—that is, the gravitation of attention from the countenance, especially the eyes, to the specifically sexual anatomy. The difference, of course, is that the countenance is both physical and spiritual. There is much testimony to this in the poetic tradition and elsewhere. Looking into one another's eyes, lovers recognize their encounter as a meeting not merely of two bodies but of two living souls. In one

another's eyes, moreover, they see themselves reflected not narcissistically but as singular beings, separate and small, far inferior to the creature that they together make.

In this meeting of eyes, there is an acknowledgment that love is more than sex:

'This Ecstasy doth unperplex,'

We said, 'and tell us what we love;

We see by this it was not sex;

*We see we saw not what did move.'*⁹

These lines are from John Donne's poem “The Ecstasy,” in which the lovers have been joined by the “double string” of their mutual gaze. This is not a disembodied love. Far from it. For love is finally seen in the poem as “that subtle knot, which makes us man” by joining body and soul together, just as it joins the two lovers. Sexual love is thus understood as both fact and mystery, physical motion and spiritual motive. That this complex love should be reduced simply to sex has always seemed a fearful thing to the poets. As late as our own century, for example, we have these lines from Wallace Stevens:

If sex were all, then every trembling hand

*Could make us squeak, like dolls, the wished-for words.*¹⁰

The fear of the reduction of love to sex is obviously subject to distortion. At worst, this fear has caused a kind of joyless prudery. But at best, it has been a just fear, implying both an appropriate awe and a reluctance that humans should become the puppets of a single instinct. Such a puppetry is possible, and its sign, in modern terms, is the body as product, made delectably

consumable by the application of lotions and other commercial liquids. But there is a higher, juster love of which the sign is the meeting of the eyes.

In the poetry that I know, the most graceful and the richest testimony to the power of the eyes is in act three, scene two, of *The Merchant of Venice*, where Portia says to Bassanio:

Beshrew your eyes,

They have o'erlook'd me and divided me,

One half of me is yours, the other half yours,—

Mine own I would say: but if mine then yours,

And so all yours.

Portia is no headless woman. She is the brightest, most articulate character in the play. Witty and charming as these lines are, they are not frivolous. They attest to the sexual and the spiritual power of a look, which has just begun an endless conversation between two living souls. This speech of hers is as powerful as it is because she knows exactly what she is doing. What she is doing is giving herself away. She has entered into a situation in which she must find her life by losing it. She is glad, and she is frightened. She is speaking joyfully and fearfully of the self's suddenly irresistible wish to be given away. And this is an unconditional giving, on which, she knows, time and mortality will impose their incapable conditions; she will have remembered the marriage ceremony with its warnings of difficulty, poverty, sickness, and death. There is nothing "safe" about this. This love has no place to happen except in this world, where it cannot be made safe. And this scene finally becomes a sort of wedding, in which Portia says to Bassanio, "Myself, and what is mine, to you and yours /

Is now converted. . . . I give them with this ring."

There is no "sexism" or "double standard" in this exchange of looks and what it leads to. The look of which Portia speaks could have had such power only because it answered a look of hers; she has, in the same moment, "o'erlook'd" Bassanio. She is not speaking as a woman submitting to the power of a man, much less to seduction. She is speaking as one of a pair who are submitting to the redemptive power of love. Responding to Portia's pledge of herself to him, Bassanio cannot say much; he is not so eloquent as she, and his mind has become "a wild of nothing, save of joy." He says only:

when this ring

Parts from this finger, then parts life from hence,—

O then be bold to say Bassanio's dead!

But that is enough. He is saying, as his actual wedding will require him to say, that he will be true to Portia until death. But he is also saying, as she has said, that he is dead to his old life and can now live only in the new life of their love. He might have said, with Dante, "Of a surety I have now set my feet on that point of life, beyond the which he must not pass who would return."¹¹

This is a play about the precedence of affection and fidelity over profit, and so it is a play about the order of community. Lovers must not, like usurers, live for themselves alone. They must finally turn from their gaze at one another back toward the community. If they had only themselves to consider, lovers would not need to marry, but they must think of others and of other things. They say their vows to the community as much

as to one another, and the community gathers around them to hear and to wish them well, on their behalf and on its own. It gathers around them because it understands how necessary, how joyful, and how fearful this joining is. These lovers, pledging themselves to one another "until death," are giving themselves away, and they are joined by this as no law or contract could ever join them. Lovers, then, "die" into their union with one another as a soul "dies" into its union with God. And so here, at the very heart of community life, we find not something to sell as in the public market but this momentous giving. If the community cannot protect this giving, it can protect nothing—and our time is proving that this is so.

We thus can see that there are two kinds of human economy. There is the kind of economy that exists to protect the "right" of profit, as does our present public economy; this sort of economy will inevitably gravitate toward protection of the "rights" of those who profit most. Our present public economy is really a political system that safeguards the private exploitation of the public wealth and health. The other kind of economy exists for the protection of gifts, beginning with the "giving in marriage," and this is the economy of community, which now has been nearly destroyed by the public economy.

There are two kinds of sexuality that correspond to the two kinds of economy. The sexuality of community life, whatever its inevitable vagaries, is centered on marriage, which joins two living souls as closely as, in this world, they can be joined. This joining of two who know, love, and trust one another brings them in the same breath into the freedom of sexual consent and into the fullest earthly realization of the image of God. From

their joining, other living souls come into being, and with them great responsibilities that are unending, fearful, and joyful. The marriage of two lovers joins them to one another, to forebears, to descendants, to the community, to Heaven and earth. It is the fundamental connection without which nothing holds, and trust is its necessity.

Our present sexual conduct, on the other hand, having "liberated" itself from the several trusts of community life, is public, like our present economy. It has forsaken trust, for it rests on the easy giving and breaking of promises. And having forsaken trust, it has predictably become political. In private life, as in public, we are attempting to correct bad character and low motives by law and by litigation. "Losing kindness," as Lao-tzu said, "they turn to justness."¹² The superstition of the anger of our current sexual politics, as of other kinds of anger, is that somewhere along the trajectory of any quarrel a tribunal will be reached that will hear all complaints and find for the plaintiff; the verdict will be that the defendant is entirely wrong, the plaintiff entirely right and entirely righteous. This, of course, is not going to happen. And because such "justice" cannot happen, litigation only prolongs itself. The difficulty is that marriage, family life, friendship, neighborhood, and other personal connections do not depend exclusively or even primarily on justice—though, of course, they all must try for it. They depend also on trust, patience, respect, mutual help, forgiveness—in other words, the *practice* of love, as opposed to the mere *feeling* of love.

As soon as the parties to a marriage or a friendship begin to require strict justice of each other, then that marriage or friendship begins to be destroyed, for there

is no way to adjudicate the competing claims of a personal quarrel. And so these relationships do not dissolve into litigation, really; they dissolve into a feud, an endless exchange of accusations and retributions. If the two parties have not the grace to forgive the inevitable offenses of close connection, the next best thing is separation and silence. But why should separation have come to be the virtually conventional outcome of close relationships in our society? The proper question, perhaps, is not why we have so much divorce, but why we are so unforgiving. The answer, perhaps, is that, though we still recognize the feeling of love, we have forgotten how to practice love when we don't feel it.

Because of our determination to separate sex from the practice of love in marriage and in family and community life, our public sexual morality is confused, sentimental, bitter, complexly destructive, and hypocritical. It begins with the idea of "sexual liberation": whatever people desire is "natural" and all right, men and women are not different but merely equal, and all desires are equal. If a man wants to sit down while a pregnant woman is standing or walk through a heavy door and let it slam in a woman's face, that is all right. Divorce on an epidemic scale is all right; child abandonment by one parent or another is all right; it is regrettable but still pretty much all right if a divorced parent neglects or refuses to pay child support; promiscuity is all right; adultery is all right. Promiscuity among teenagers is pretty much all right, for "that's the way it is"; abortion as birth control is all right; the prostitution of sex in advertisements and public entertainment is all right. But then, far down this road of freedom, we decide that a few lines ought to be drawn. Child molestation, we wish to say, is not all right, nor

is sexual violence, nor is sexual harassment, nor is pregnancy among unmarried teenagers. We are also against venereal diseases, the diseases of promiscuity, though we tend to think that they are the government's responsibility, not ours.

In this cult of liberated sexuality, "free" of courtesy, ceremony, responsibility, and restraint, dependent on litigation and expert advice, there is much that is human, sad to say, but there is no sense or sanity. Trying to draw the line where we are trying to draw it, between carelessness and brutality, is like insisting that falling is flying—until you hit the ground—and then trying to outlaw hitting the ground. The pretentious, fantastical, and solemn idiocy of the public sexual code could not be better exemplified than by the now-ubiquitous phrase "sexual partner," which denies all that is implied by the names of "husband" or "wife" or even "lover." It denies anyone's responsibility for the consequences of sex. With one's "sexual partner," it is now understood, one must practice "safe sex"—that is, one must protect oneself, not one's partner or the children that may come of the "partnership."

But the worst hypocrisy of all is in the failure of the sexual libertarians to come to the defense of sexually liberated politicians. The public applies strenuously to public officials a sexual morality that it no longer applies to anyone privately and that it does not apply to other liberated public figures, such as movie stars, artists, athletes, and business tycoons. The prurient squeamishness with which the public and the public media poke into the lives of politicians is surely not an expectable result of liberation. But this paradox is not the only one. According to its claims, sexual liberation ought logically to have brought in a time of "naturalness," ease, and

candor between men and women. It has, on the contrary, filled the country with sexual self-consciousness, uncertainty, and fear. Women, though they may dress as if the sexual millennium had arrived, hurry along our city streets and public corridors with their eyes averted, like hunted animals. "Eye contact," once the very signature of our humanity, has become a danger. The meeting ground between men and women, which ought to be safeguarded by trust, has become a place of suspicion, competition, and violence. One no longer goes there asking how instinct may be ramified in affection and loyalty; now one asks how instinct may be indulged with the least risk to personal safety.

Seeking to "free" sexual love from its old communal restraints, we have "freed" it also from its meaning, its responsibility, and its exaltation. And we have made it more dangerous. "Sexual liberation" is as much a fraud and as great a failure as the "peaceful atom." We are now living in a sexual atmosphere so polluted and embittered that women must look on virtually any man as a potential assailant, and a man must look on virtually any woman as a potential accuser. The idea that this situation can be corrected by the courts and the police only compounds the disorder and the danger. And in the midst of this acid rainfall of predation and retribution, we presume to teach our young people that sex can be made "safe"—by the use, inevitably, of purchased drugs and devices. What a lie! Sex was never safe, and it is less safe now than it has ever been.

What we are actually teaching the young is an illusion of thoughtless freedom and purchasable safety, which encourages them to tamper prematurely, disrespectfully, and dangerously with a great power. Just as the public economy encourages people to spend money

and waste the world, so the public sexual code encourages people to be spendthrifts and squanderers of sex. The basis of true community and household economy, on the other hand, is thrift. The basis of community sexuality is respect for everything that is involved—and respect, here as everywhere, implies discipline. By their common principles of extravagance and undisciplined freedom, our public economy and our public sexuality are exploiting and spending moral capital built up by centuries of community life—exactly as industrial agriculture has been exploiting and spending the natural capital built up over thousands of years in the soil.

In sex, as in other things, we have liberated fantasy but killed imagination, and so have sealed ourselves in selfishness and loneliness. Fantasy is of the solitary self, and it cannot lead us away from ourselves. It is by imagination that we cross over the differences between ourselves and other beings and thus learn compassion, forbearance, mercy, forgiveness, sympathy, and love—the virtues without which neither we nor the world can live.

Starting with economic brutality, we have arrived at sexual brutality. Those who affirm the one and deplore the other will have to explain how we might logically have arrived anywhere else. Sexual lovemaking between humans is not and cannot be the thoughtless, instinctual coupling of animals; it is not "recreation"; it is not "safe." It is the strongest prompting and the greatest joy that young people are likely to experience. Because it is so powerful, it is risky, not just because of the famous dangers of venereal disease and "unwanted pregnancy" but also because it involves and requires a giving away of the self that if not honored and reciprocated, inevitably reduces dignity and self-respect.

The invitation to give oneself away is not, except for the extremely ignorant or the extremely foolish, an easy one to accept.

Perhaps the current revulsion against sexual harassment may be the beginning of a renewal of sexual responsibility and self-respect. It must, at any rate, be the beginning of a repudiation of the idea that sex among us is merely natural. If men and women are merely animals, it is hard to see how sexual harassment could have become an issue, for such harassment is no more than the instinctive procedure of male animals, who openly harass females, usually by unabashed physical display and contact; it is their way of asking who is and who is not in estrus. Women would not think such behavior offensive if we had not, for thousands of years, understood ourselves as specifically human beings—creatures who, in some ways animal-like, are in other ways God-like. In asking men to feel shame and to restrain themselves—which one would not ask of an animal—women are implicitly asking to be treated as human beings in that full sense, as living souls made in the image of God. But any humans who wish to be treated and to treat others according to that definition must understand that this is not a kindness that can be conferred by a public economy or by a public government or by a public people. It can only be conferred on its members by a community.

III

Much of the modern assault on community life has been conducted within the justification and protection of the idea of freedom. Thus, it is necessary to try to see how

the themes of freedom and community have intersected.

The idea of freedom, as Americans understand it, owes its existence to the inevitability that people will disagree. It is a way of guaranteeing to individuals and to political bodies the right to be different from one another. A specifically American freedom began with our wish to assert our differences from England, and its principles were then worked out in the effort to deal with differences among the states. The result is the Bill of Rights, of which the cornerstone is the freedom of speech. This freedom is not only the basic guarantee of political liberty but it also obligates public officials and private citizens alike to acknowledge the inherent dignity and worth of individual people. It exists only as an absolute; if it can be infringed at all, then probably it can be destroyed entirely.

But if it is an absolute, it is a peculiar and troubling one. It is not an absolute in the sense that a law of nature is. It is not absolute even as the moral law is. One person alone can uphold the moral law, but one person alone cannot uphold the freedom of speech. The freedom of speech is a public absolute, and it can remain absolute only so long as a sufficient segment of the public believes that it is and consents to uphold it. It is an absolute that can be destroyed by public opinion. This is where the danger lies. If this freedom is abused and if a sufficient segment of the public becomes sufficiently resentful of the abuses, then the freedom will be revoked. It is a freedom, therefore, that depends directly on responsibility. And so the First Amendment alone is not a sufficient guarantee of the freedom of speech.

As we now speak of it, freedom is almost always understood as a public idea having to do with the liberties of individuals. The public dialogue about freedom

almost always has to do with the efforts of one group or another to wrest these individual liberties from the government or to protect them from another group. In this situation, it is inevitable that freedom will be understood as an issue of power. This is perhaps as necessary as it is unavoidable. But power is not the only issue related to freedom.

From another point of view, not necessarily incompatible, freedom has long been understood as the consequence of knowing the truth. When Jesus said to his followers, "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free,"¹³ he was not talking primarily about politics, but the political applicability of the statement has been obvious for a long time, especially to advocates of democracy. According to this line of thought, freedom of speech is necessary to political health and sanity because it permits speech—the public dialogue—to correct itself. Thomas Jefferson had this in mind when he said in his first inaugural address, "If there be any among us who would wish to dissolve this Union or to change its republican form, let them stand undisturbed as monuments of the safety with which error of opinion may be tolerated where reason is left free to combat it."¹⁴ The often-cited "freedom to be wrong" is thus a valid freedom, but it is a poor thing by itself; its validity comes from the recognition that error is real, identifiable as such, dangerous to freedom as to much else, and controvertible. The freedom to be wrong is valid, in other words, because it is the unexcusable other half of the freedom to be right. If freedom is understood as merely the privilege of the unconcerned and uncommitted to muddle about in error, then freedom will certainly destroy itself.

But to define freedom only as a public privilege of private citizens is finally inadequate to the job of protecting freedom. It leaves the issue too public and too private. It fails to provide a circumstance for those private satisfactions and responsibilities without which freedom is both pointless and fragile. Here as elsewhere, we need to interpose between the public and the private interests a third interest: that of the community. When there is no forcible assertion of the interest of community, public freedom becomes a sort of refuge for escapees from the moral law—those who hold that there is, in Mary McGroarty's words, "no ethical transgression except an indictable one."¹⁵

Public laws are meant for a public, and they vary, sometimes radically, according to forms of government. The moral law, which is remarkably consistent from one culture to another, has to do with community life. It tells us how we should treat relatives and neighbors and, by metaphorical extension, strangers. The aim of the moral law is the integrity and longevity of the community, just as the aim of public law is the integrity and longevity of a political body. Sometimes, the identities of community and political body are nearly the same, and in that case public laws are not necessary because there is, strictly speaking, no "public." As I understand the term, *public* means simply all the people, apart from any personal responsibility or belonging. A public building, for example, is a building which everyone may use but to which no one belongs, which belongs to everyone but not to anyone in particular, and for which no one is responsible except "public employees." A community, unlike a public, has to do first of all with belonging; it is a group of people who belong

to one another and to their place. We would say, "We belong to our community," but never "We belong to our public."

I don't know when the concept of "the public," in our sense, emerged from the concept of "the people." But I am aware that there have been human situations in which the concept of "the public" was simply unnecessary. It is not quite possible, for example, to think of the Bushmen or the Eskimos as "publics" or of any parts of their homelands as "public places." And in the traditional rural villages of England there was no public place but rather a "common." A public, I suppose, becomes necessary when a political body grows so large as to include several divergent communities.

A public government, with public laws and a public system of justice, founded on democratic suffrage, is in principle a good thing. Ideally, it makes possible a just and peaceable settlement of contentions arising between communities. It also makes it possible for a mistreated member of a community to appeal for justice outside the community. But obviously such a government can fall short of its purpose. When a public government becomes identified with a public economy, a public culture, and public fashions of thought, it can become the tool of a public process of nationalism or "globalization" that is oblivious of local differences and therefore destructive of communities.

"Public" and "community," then, are different—perhaps radically different—concepts that under certain circumstances are compatible but that, in the present economic and technological monoculture, tend to be at odds. A community, when it is alive and well, is centered on the household—the family place and economy—and the household is centered on marriage.

A public, when it is working in the best way—that is, as a political body intent on justice—is centered on the individual. Community and public alike, then, are founded on respect—the one on respect for the family, the other on respect for the individual. Both forms of respect are deeply traditional, and they are not fundamentally incompatible. But they are different, and that difference, once it is instituted in general assumptions, can be the source of much damage and much danger.

A household, according to its nature, will seek to protect and prolong its own life, and since it will readily perceive its inability to survive alone, it will seek to join its life to the life of a community. A young person, coming of age in a healthy household and community, will understand her or his life in terms of membership and service. But in a public increasingly disaffected and turned away from community, it is clear that individuals must be increasingly disinclined to identify themselves in such a way.

The individual, unlike the household and the community, always has two ways to turn: she or he may turn either toward the household and the community, to receive membership and to give service, or toward the relatively unconditional life of the public, in which one is free to pursue self-realization, self-aggrandizement, self-interest, self-fulfillment, self-enrichment, self-promotion, and so on. The problem is that—unlike a married couple, a household, or a community—one individual represents no fecundity, no continuity, and no harmony. The individual life implies no standard of behavior or responsibility.

I am indebted to Judith Weissman for the perception that there are two kinds of freedom: the freedom of the community and the freedom of the individual.¹⁶

The freedom of the community is the more fundamental and the more complex. A community confers on its members the freedoms implicit in familiarity, mutual respect, mutual affection, and mutual help; it gives freedom its proper aims; and it prescribes or shows the responsibilities without which no one can be legitimately free, or free for very long. But to confer freedom or any other benefits on its members, a community must also be free from outside pressure or coercion. It must, in other words, be so far as possible the cause of its own changes; it must change in response to its own changing needs and local circumstances, not in response to motives, powers, or fashions coming from elsewhere. The freedom of the individual, by contrast, has been construed customarily as a license to pursue any legal self-interest at large and at will in the domain of public liberties and opportunities.

These two kinds of freedom, so understood, are clearly at odds. In modern times, the dominant freedom has been that of the individual, and Judith Weissman believes—correctly, I think—that this self-centered freedom is still the aim of contemporary liberation movements:

*The liberation of the individual self for fulfillments, discoveries, pleasures, and joys, and the definition of oppression as mental and emotional constraints . . . this combination existing at the heart of Shelley's Romantic radicalism remains basically unchanged in later feminist writers. . . .*¹⁷

Freedom defined strictly as individual freedom tends to see itself as an escape from the constraints of community life—constraints necessarily implied by

consideration for the nature of a place; by consideration for the needs and feelings of neighbors; by kindness to strangers; by respect for the privacy, dignity, and propriety of individual lives; by affection for a place, its people, and its nonhuman creatures; and by the duty to teach the young.

But certain liberationist intellectuals are not the only ones who have demanded this sort of freedom. Almost everybody now demands it, as she or he has been taught to do by the schools, by the various forms of public entertainment, and by salespeople, advertisers, and other public representatives of the industrial economy. People are instructed to free themselves of all restrictions, restraints, and scruples in order to fulfill themselves as individuals to the utmost extent that the law allows. Moreover, we treat corporations as "persons"—an abuse of a metaphor if ever there was one!—and allow to them the same liberation from community obligations that we allow to individuals.

But there is a paradox in all this, and it is as cruel as it is obvious: as the emphasis on individual liberty has increased, the liberty and power of most individuals has declined. Most people are now finding that they are free to make very few significant choices. It is becoming steadily harder for ordinary people—the unrich, the unprivileged—to choose a kind of work for which they have a preference, a talent, or a vocation, to choose where they will live, to choose to work (or to live) at home, or even to choose to raise their own children. And most individuals ("liberated" or not) choose to conform not to local ways and conditions but to a rootless and placeless monoculture of commercial expectations and products. We try to be "emotionally self-sufficient" at the same time that we are entirely and helplessly

dependent for our "happiness" on an economy that abuses us along with everything else. We want the liberty of divorce from spouses and independence from family and friends, yet we remain indissolubly married to a hundred corporations that regard us at best as captives and at worst as prey. The net result of our much-asserted individualism appears to be that we have become "free" for the sake of not much self-fulfillment at all.

However frustrated, disappointed, and unfulfilled it may be, the pursuit of self-liberation is still the strongest force now operating in our society. It is the dominant purpose not only of those feminists whose individualism troubles Judith Weissman but also of virtually the entire population; it determines the ethics of the professional class; it defines increasingly the ambitions of politicians and other public servants. This purpose is publicly sanctioned and publicly supported, and it operates invariably to the detriment of community life and community values.

All the institutions that "serve the community" are publicly oriented: the schools, governments and government agencies, the professions, the corporations. Even the churches, though they may have community memberships, do not concern themselves with issues of local economy and local ecology on which community health and integrity must depend. Nor do the people in charge of these institutions think of themselves as members of communities. They are itinerant, in fact or in spirit, as their careers require them to be. These various public servants all have tended to impose on the local place and the local people programs, purposes, procedures, technologies, and values that originated

elsewhere. Typically, these "services" involve a condescension to and a contempt for local life that are implicit in all the assumptions—woven into the very fabric—of the industrial economy.

A community, especially if it is a rural community, is understood by its public servants as provincial, backward and benighted, unmodern, unprogressive, unlike "us," and therefore in need of whatever changes are proposed for it by outside interests (to the profit of the outside interests). Anyone who thinks of herself or himself as a member of such a community will sooner or later see that the community is under attack morally as well as economically. And this attack masquerades invariably as altruism: the community must be plundered, expropriated, or morally offended for its own good—but its good is invariably defined by the interest of the invader. The community is not asked whether or not it wishes to be changed, or how it wishes to be changed, or what it wishes to be changed into. The community is deemed to be backward and provincial, it is taught to believe and to regret that it is backward and provincial, and it is thereby taught to welcome the purposes of its invaders.

I have already discussed at some length the honored practice of community destruction by economic invasion. Now it will be useful to look at an example of the analogous practice of moral invasion. In 1989, Actors Theater of Louisville presented the premiere performance of Arthur Kopit's play *Bone-the-Fish*. The Louisville *Courier-Journal* welcomed Mr. Kopit and his play to town with the headline: "Arthur Kopit plans to offend almost everyone." In the accompanying article, Mr. Kopit is quoted as saying of his play:

I am immodestly proud that it is written in consistently bad taste. It's about vile people who do vile things. They are totally loathsome, and I love them all. . . . I'm almost positive that it has something to offend everyone.

The writer of the article explains that "Kopit wrote 'Bone-the-Fish' out of a counterculture impulse, as a reaction against a complacency that he finds is corrupting American life."¹⁸

My interest here is not in the quality or the point of Mr. Kopit's play, which I did not see (because I do not willingly subject myself to offense). I am interested in the article about him and his play merely as an example of the conventionality of the artistic intention to offend—and of the complacency of the public willingness not to be offended but passively to accept offense. Here we see the famous playwright coming from the center of culture to a provincial city, declaring his intention to "offend almost everyone," and here we see the local drama critic deferentially explaining the moral purpose of this intention. But the playwright makes three rather curious assumptions: (1) that the Louisville theater audience may be supposed (without proof) to be complacent and corrupt; (2) that they therefore deserve to be offended; and (3) that being offended will make them less complacent and less corrupt.

That Louisville theatergoers are more complacent and corrupt than theatergoers elsewhere (or than Mr. Kopit) is not an issue, for there is no evidence. That they deserve to be offended is not an issue for the same reason. That anyone's complacency and corruption can be corrected by being offended in a theater is merely a contradiction in terms, for people who are corrupted by complacency are by definition not likely to take offense.

People who do take offense will be either fundamentally decent or aggressively corrupt. People who are fundamentally decent do not deserve to be offended and cannot be instructed by offense. People who are aggressively corrupt would perhaps see the offense but would not accept it. Mr. Kopit's preferred audience is therefore one that will applaud his audacity and pay no attention at all to his avowed didactic purpose—and this perhaps explains his love for "vile people."

If one thinks of Louisville merely as a public, there is not much of an issue here. Mr. Kopit's play is free speech, protected by the First Amendment, and that is that. If, however, one thinks of Louisville as a community or even as potentially a community, then the issue is sizable, and it is difficult. A public, as I have already suggested, is a rather odd thing; I can't think of anything else that is like it. A community is another matter, for it exists within a system of analogies or likenesses that clarify and amplify its meaning. A healthy community is like an ecosystem, and it includes—or it makes itself harmoniously a part of—its local ecosystem. It is also like a household; it is the household of its place, and it includes the households of many families, human and nonhuman. And to extend Saint Paul's famous metaphor by only a little, a healthy community is like a body, for its members mutually support and serve one another.

If a community, then, is like a household, what are we to make of the artist whose intention is to offend? Would I welcome into my house any stranger who came, proud of his bad taste, professing his love for vile people and proposing to offend almost everyone? I would not, and I do not know anybody who would. To do so would contradict self-respect and respect for loved

ones. By the same token, I cannot see that a community is under any obligation to welcome such a person. The public, so far as I can see, has no right to require a community to submit to or support statements that offend it.

I know that for a century or so many artists and writers have felt it was their duty—a mark of their honesty and courage—to offend their audience. But if the artist has a duty to offend, does not the audience therefore have a duty to be offended? If the public has a duty to protect speech that is offensive to the community, does not the community have the duty to respond, to be offended, and so defend itself against the offense? A community, as a part of a public, has no right to silence publicly protected speech, but it certainly has a right not to listen and to refuse its patronage to speech that it finds offensive. It is remarkable, however, that many writers and artists appear to be unable to accept this obvious and necessary limitation on their public freedom; they seem to think that freedom entitles them not only to be offensive but also to be approved and subsidized by the people whom they have offended.

These people believe, moreover, that any community attempt to remove a book from a reading list in a public school is censorship and a violation of the freedom of speech. The situation here involves what may be a hopeless conflict of freedoms. A teacher in a public school ought to be free to exercise his or her freedom of speech in choosing what books to teach and in deciding what to say about them. (This, to my mind, would certainly include the right to teach that the Bible is the word of God and the right to teach that it is not.) But the families of a community surely must be allowed an equal freedom to determine the education of their

children. How free are parents who have no choice but to turn their children over to the influence of whatever the public will prescribe or tolerate? They obviously are not free at all. The only solution is trust between a community and its teachers, who will therefore teach as members of the community—a trust that in a time of community disintegration is perhaps not possible. And so the public presses its invasion deeper and deeper into community life under the justification of a freedom far too simply understood. It is now altogether possible for a teacher who is forbidden to teach the Bible to teach some other book that is not morally acceptable to the community, perhaps in order to improve the community by shocking or offending it. It is therefore possible that the future of community life in this country may depend on private schools and home schooling.

Does my objection to the intention to offend and the idea of improvement by offense mean that I believe it is invariably wrong to offend or that I think community and public life do not need improving? Obviously not. I do not mean at all to slight the issues of honesty and of artistic integrity that are involved. But I would distinguish between the intention to offend and the willingness to risk offending. Honesty and artistic integrity do not require anyone to intend to give offense, though they certainly may cause offense. The intention to offend, it seems to me, identifies the would-be offender as a public person. I cannot imagine anyone who is a member of a community who would purposely or gladly or proudly offend it, though I know very well that honesty might require one to do so.

Here we are verging on a distinction that had better be explicitly made. There is a significant difference between works of art made to be the vital possessions of

a community (existing or not) and those made merely as offerings to the public. Some artists, and I am one of them, wish to live and work within a community, or within the hope of community, in a given place. Others wish to live and work outside the claims of any community, and these now appear to be an overwhelming majority. There is a difference between these two kinds of artists but not necessarily a division. The division comes when the public art begins to conventionalize an antipathy to community life and to the moral standards that enable and protect community life, as our public art has now done. Mr. Kopit's expressed eagerness to offend a local audience he does not know is representative of this antipathy. Our public art now communicates a conventional prejudice against old people, history, parental authority, religious faith, sexual discipline, manual work, rural people and rural life, anything local or small or inexpensive. At its worst, it glamorizes or glorifies drugs, promiscuity, pornography, violence, and blasphemy. Any threat to suppress or limit these public expressions will provoke much support for the freedom of speech. I concur in this. But as a community artist, I would like to go beyond my advocacy of the freedom of speech to deplore some of the uses that are made of it, and I wish that more of my fellow artists would do so as well.

I wish that artists and all advocates and beneficiaries of the First Amendment would begin to ask, for instance, how the individual can be liberated by disobeying the moral law, when the community obviously can be liberated only by obeying it. I wish that they would consider the probability that there is a direct relation between the public antipathy to community life and local ("provincial") places and the industrial destruction

of communities and places. I wish, furthermore, that they could see that artists who make offensiveness an artistic or didactic procedure are drawing on a moral capital that they may be using up. A public is shockable or offendable only to the extent that it is already uncomplacent and uncorrupt—to the extent, in other words, that it is a community or remembers being one. What happens after the audience becomes used to being shocked and is therefore no longer shockable—as is apparently near to being the case with the television audience? What if offenses become stimulants—either to imitate the offenses or to avenge them? And what is the difference between the artist who wishes to offend the "provincials" and the industrialist or developer who wishes to dispossess them or convert them into a "labor force"?

The idea that people can be improved by being offended will finally have to meet the idea (espoused some of the time by some of the same people) that books, popular songs, movies, television shows, sex videos, and so on are "just fiction" or "just art" and therefore exist "for their own sake" and have no influence. To argue that works of art are "only" fictions or self-expressions and therefore cannot cause bad behavior is to argue also that they cannot cause good behavior. It is, moreover, to make an absolute division between art and life, experience and life, mind and body—a division that is intolerable to anyone who is at all serious about being a human or a member of a community or even a citizen.

Ananda Coomaraswamy, who had exhaustive knowledge of the traditional uses of art, wrote that "the purpose of any art . . . is to teach, to delight, and *above all to move*" (my emphasis).¹⁹ Of course art moves us! To assume otherwise not only contradicts the common

assumption of teachers and writers from the earliest times almost until now; it contradicts everybody's experience. A cathedral, to mention only one of the most obvious examples, is a work of art made to cause a movement toward God, and this is in part a physical movement required by the building's structure and symbolism. But all works of any power move us, in both body and mind, from the most exalted music or poetry to the simplest dance tune. In fact, a dance tune is as good an example as a cathedral. An influence is cast over us, and we are moved. If we see that the influence is bad, we may be moved to reject it, but that is a second movement; it occurs only after we have felt the power of the influence. People do not patronize the makers of pornographic films and sex videos because they are dispassionate appreciators of bad art; they do so because they wish to be moved. Perhaps the makers of pornographic films do not care what their products move their patrons to do. But if they do care, they are writing a check on moral capital to which they do not contribute. They trust that people who are moved by their work will not be moved to sexual harassment or child molestation or rape. They are banking heavily on the moral decency of their customers. And so are all of us who defend the freedom of speech. We are trusting—and not comfortably—that people who come under the influence of the sexual pandering, the greed, the commercial seductions, the moral oversimplification, the brutality, and the violence of our modern public arts will yet somehow remain under the influence of Moses and Jesus. I don't see how anyone can extend this trust without opposing in every way short of suppression the abuses and insults that are protected by it. The more a society comes to be divided in its as-

sumptions and values, the more necessary public freedom becomes. But the more necessary public freedom becomes, the more necessary community responsibility becomes. This connection is unrelenting. And we should not forget that the finest works of art make a community of sorts of their audience. They do not divide people or justify or flatter their divisions; they define our commonwealth, and they enlarge it.

The health of a free public—especially that of a large nation under a representative government—depends on distrust. Thomas Jefferson thought so, and I believe he was right. In subscribing, generation after generation, to our Constitution, we extend to one another and to our government a trust that would be foolish if there were any better alternative. It is a breathtaking act of faith. And this trust is always so near to being misapplied that it cannot be maintained without distrust. People would fail it worse than they do if it were not for the constant vigilance and correction of distrust.

But a community makes itself up in more intimate circumstances than a public. And the health of a community depends absolutely on trust. A community knows itself and knows its place in a way that is impossible for a public (a nation, say, or a state). A community does not come together by a covenant, by a conscientious granting of trust. It exists by proximity, by neighborhood; it knows face to face, and it trusts as it knows. It learns, in the course of time and experience, what and who can be trusted. It knows that some of its members are untrustworthy, and it can be tolerant, because to know in this matter is to be safe. A community member can be trusted to be untrustworthy and so can be included. (A community can trust its liars to be liars,

for example, and so enjoy them.) But if a community withholds trust, it withholds membership. If it cannot trust, it cannot exist.

One of the essential trusts of community life is that which holds marriages and families together. Another trust is that neighbors will help one another. Another is that privacy will be respected, especially the privacy of personal feeling and the privacy of relationships. All these trusts are absolutely essential, and all are somewhat fragile. But the most fragile, the most vulnerable to public invasion, is the trust that protects privacy. And in our time privacy has been the trust that has been most subjected to public invasion.

I am referring not just to the prying and snoopings of our secret government, which contradict all that our public government claims to stand for, but also to those by now conventional publications of private grief, of violence to strangers, of the sexual coupling of strangers—all of which allow the indulgence of curiosity without sympathy. These all share in the evil of careless or malicious gossip; like careless or malicious gossip of any other kind, they destroy community by destroying respect for personal dignity and by destroying compassion. It is clear that no self-respecting human being or community would tolerate for a moment the representation of brutality or murder, on television or anywhere else, in such a way as to allow no compassion for the victim. But worst of all—and, I believe, involved in all—is the public prostitution of sex in guises of freedom ranging from the clinical to the commercial, from the artistic to the statistical.

One of the boasts of our century is that its artists—not to mention its psychologists, therapists, anthropologists, sociologists, statisticians, and pornographers

—have pried open the bedroom door at last and shown us sexual love for what it “really” is. We have, we assume, cracked the shell of sexual privacy. The resulting implication that the shell is easily cracked disguises the probability that the shell is, in fact, not crackable at all and that what we have seen displayed is not private or intimate sex, not sexual love, but sex reduced, degraded, oversimplified, and misrepresented by the very intention to display it. Sex publicly displayed is public sex. Sex observed is not private or intimate and cannot be.

Could a voyeur conceivably crack the shell? No, for voyeurs are the most handicapped of all the sexual observers; they know only what they see. True intimacy, even assuming that it can be observed, cannot be known by an outsider and cannot be shown. An artist who undertakes to show the most intimate union of lovers—even assuming that the artist is one of the lovers—can only represent what she or he alone thinks it is. The intimacy, the union itself, remains unobserved. One cannot enter into this intimacy and watch it at the same time, any more than the mind can think about itself while it thinks about something else.

Is sexual love, then, not a legitimate subject of the imagination? It is. But the work of the imagination does not require that the shell be cracked. From Homer to Shakespeare, from the Bible to Jane Austen, we have many imaginings of the intimacy and power of sexual love that have respected absolutely its essential privacy and thus have preserved its intimacy and honored its dignity.

The essential and inscrutable privacy of sexual love is the sign both of its mystery and sanctity and of its humorlessness. It is mysterious because the couple who are in it are lost in it. It is their profoundest experience

of the being of the world and of their being in it and is at the same time an obliviousness to the world. This lostness of people in sexual love tends to be funny to people who are outside it. But having subscribed to the superstition that we have stripped away all privacy—and mystery and sanctity—from sex, we have become oddly humorless about it. Most people, for example, no longer seem to be aware of the absurdity of sexual vanity. Most people apparently see the sexual pretension and posturing of popular singers, athletes, and movie stars as some kind of high achievement, not the laughable inanity that it really is. Sexual arrogance, on the other hand, is not funny. It is dangerous, and there are some signs that our society has begun to recognize the danger. What it has not recognized is that the publication of sexual privacy is not only fraudulent but often also a kind of sexual arrogance, and a dangerous one.

Does this danger mean that any explicit representation of sexual lovemaking is inevitably wrong? It does not. But it means that such representations *can* be wrong and that when they are wrong, they are destructive.

The danger, I would suggest, is not in the representation but in the reductiveness that is the risk of representation and that is involved in most representations. What is so fearfully arrogant and destructive is the implication that what is represented, or representable, is all there is. In the best representations, I think, there would be a stylization or incompleteness that would convey the artist's honest acknowledgment that this is not all.

The best representations are surrounded and imbued with the light of imagination, so that they make one aware, with profound sympathy, of the two lives, not just the two bodies, that are involved; they make

one aware also of the difficulty of full and open sexual consent between two people and of the history and the trust that are necessary to make possible that consent. Without such history and trust, sex is brutal, no matter what species is involved.

When sexual lovemaking is shown in art, one can respond intelligently to it by means of a handful of questions: Are the lovers represented as merely "physical" bodies or as two living souls? Does the representation make it possible to see why Eros has been understood not as an instinct or a "drive" but as a god? Are we asked to see this act as existing in and of and for itself or as joined to the great cycle of fertility and mortality? Does it belong to nature and to culture? Can we imagine this sweetness continuing on through the joys and difficulties of homemaking, the births and the upbringing of children, the deaths of parents and friends—through disagreements, hardships, quarrels, aging, and death? Does it encourage us to forget or to remember that "certainly it must some time come to pass that the very gentle Beatrice will die"?²⁰

And finally we must ask how the modern representations of lovemaking that we find in movies, books, paintings, sculptures, and on television measure up to the best love scenes that we know. The best love scene that I know is not explicitly sexual. It is the last scene of *The Winter's Tale*, in which Shakespeare brings onto the same stage, into the one light, young love in its astounding beauty, ardor, and hope, and old love with its mortal wrongs astoundingly graced and forgiven.

The relevance of such imagining is urgently practical; it is the propriety or justness that holds art and the world together. To represent sex without this fullness of imagination is to foreshadow the degradation

and destruction of all that is not imagined. Just as the ruin of farmers, farming, and farmland may be predicted from a society's failure to imagine food in all its meanings and connections, so the failure to imagine sex in all its power and sanctity is to prepare the ruin of family and community life and of much else. In order to expose the privacy of sex, we have made of it another industrial specialization, leaving it naked not only of clothes and of customary discretions and courtesies but also of all its cultural and natural connections.

There are, we must realize, kinds of nakedness that are significantly and sometimes ominously different from each other. To know this, we have only to study the examples that are before us. There is—and who can ever forget it?—the nakedness of the photographs of prisoners in Hitler's death camps. This is the nakedness of absolute exposure to mechanical politics, politics gravitating toward the unimagining "efficiency" of machinery. I remember also a photograph of a naked small child running terrified down a dirt road in Vietnam, showing the body's absolute exposure to the indifference of air war, the appropriate technology of mechanical politics.

There is also the nakedness in advertising, in the worst kinds of fashionable or commercial art. This is the nakedness of free-market sexuality, the nakedness that is possible only in a society in which price is the only index of worth.

The nakedness of the death camps and of mechanical war denotes an absolute loss of dignity. In advertising, novels, and movies, the nakedness sometimes denotes a very significant and a very dangerous loss of dignity. Where the body has no dignity, where the sanctity of its own mystery and privacy is not recog-

nized by a surrounding and protecting community, there can be no freedom. To destroy the dignity of the body—the dignity of any and every body—is to prepare the way for the enslaver, the rapist, the torturer, the user of cannon fodder. The nakedness or near-nakedness of some tribal peoples (I judge from the photographs that I have seen) is, in contrast, always dignified, and this dignity rests on a trust so complex and comprehensive as to be virtually unimaginable to us. The public nakedness of our own society involves no trust but only an exploitiveness that is inescapably economic and greedy. It is an abandonment of the self to self-exploitation and to exploitation by others.

There is also the nakedness of innocence, as, for example, in Degas's *Seated Bather Drying Herself*, in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, in which the body is shown in the unaware and unregarded coherence and mystery of its own being. This quality D. H. Lawrence saw and celebrated:

*People were bathing and posturing themselves on the beach
and all was dreary, great robot limbs, robot breasts
robot voices, robot even the gay umbrellas.
But a woman, shy and alone, was washing herself under
a tap
and the glimmer of the presence of the gods was like lilies
and like water-lilies.²¹*

Finally, there is the nakedness of sexual candor. However easy or casual nakedness may have been made by public freedom, the nakedness of sexual candor is not possible except within the culturally delineated conditions that establish and maintain trust. And it is utterly private. It can be suggested in art but not

represented. Any effort to represent it, I suspect, will inevitably be bogus. What must we do to earn the freedom of being unguardedly and innocently naked to someone? Our own and other cultures suggest that we must do a lot. We must make promises and keep them. We must assume many fearful responsibilities and do much work. We must build the household of trust.

It is the community, not the public, that is the protector of the possibility of this candor, just as it is the protector of other tender, vulnerable, and precious things—the childhood of children, for example, and the fertility of fields. These protections are left to the community, for they can be protected only by affection and by intimate knowledge, which are beyond the capacities of the public and beyond the power of the private citizen.

IV

If the word *community* is to mean or amount to anything, it must refer to a place (in its natural integrity) and its people. It must refer to a placed people. Since there obviously can be no cultural relationship that is uniform between a nation and a continent, “community” must mean a people locally placed and a people, moreover, not too numerous to have a common knowledge of themselves and of their place. Because places differ from one another and because people will differ somewhat according to the characters of their places, if we think of a nation as an assemblage of many communities, we are necessarily thinking of some sort of pluralism.

There is, in fact, a good deal of talk about pluralism

these days, but most of it that I have seen is fashionable, superficial, and virtually worthless. It does not foresee or advocate a plurality of settled communities but is only a sort of indifferent charity toward a plurality of aggrieved groups and individuals. It attempts to deal liberally—that is, by the superficial courtesies of tolerance and egalitarianism—with a confusion of claims.

The social and cultural pluralism that some now see as a goal is a public of destroyed communities. Wherever it exists, it is the result of centuries of imperialism. The modern industrial urban centers are “pluralistic” because they are full of refugees from destroyed communities, destroyed community economies, disintegrated local cultures, and ruined local ecosystems. The pluralists who see this state of affairs as some sort of improvement or as the beginning of “global culture” are being historically perverse, as well as politically naive. They wish to regard liberally and tolerantly the diverse, sometimes competing claims and complaints of a rootless society, and yet they continue to tolerate also the ideals and goals of the industrialism that caused the uprooting. They affirm the pluralism of a society formed by the uprooting of cultures at the same time that they regard the fierce self-defense of still-rooted cultures as “fundamentalism,” for which they have no tolerance at all. They look with wistful indulgence and envy at the ruined or damaged American Indian cultures so long as those cultures remain passively a part of our plurality, forgetting that these cultures, too, were once “fundamentalist” in their self-defense. And when these cultures again attempt self-defense—when they again assert the inseparability of culture and place—they are opposed by this pluralistic

society as self-righteously as ever. The tolerance of this sort of pluralism extends always to the uprooted and passive, never to the rooted and active.

The trouble with the various movements of rights and liberties that have passed among us in the last thirty years is that they have all been too exclusive and so have degenerated too readily into special pleading. They have, separately, asked us to stop exploiting racial minorities or women or nature, and they have been, separately, right to do so. But they have not, separately or together, come to the realization that we live in a society that exploits, first, everything that is not ourselves and then, inevitably, ourselves. To ask, within this general onslaught, that we should honor the dignity of this or that group is to ask that we should swim up a waterfall.

Any group that takes itself, its culture, and its values seriously enough to try to separate, or to remain separate, from the industrial line of march will be, to say the least, unwelcome in the plurality. The tolerance of these doctrinaire pluralists always runs aground on religion. You may be fascinated by religion, you may study it, anthropologize and psychoanalyze about it, collect and catalogue its artifacts, but you had better not believe in it. You may put into "the canon" the holy books of any group, but you had better not think them holy. The shallowness and hypocrisy of this tolerance is exposed by its utter failure to extend itself to the suffering people of Iraq, who are, by the standards of this tolerance, fundamentalist, backward, unprogressive, and in general not like "us."

The problem with this form of pluralism is that it has no authentic standard; its standard simply is what one group or another may want at the moment. Its professed freedom is not that of community life but

rather that of a political group acting on the pattern of individualism. To get farther toward a practicable freedom, the group must measure itself and its wants by standards external to itself. I assume that these standards must be both cultural and ecological. If people wish to be free, then they must preserve the culture that makes for political freedom, and they must preserve the health of the world.

There is an insistently practical question that any person and any group seriously interested in freedom must ask: Can land and people be preserved anywhere by means of a culture that is in the usual sense pluralistic? E. M. Forster, writing *Howards End* in the first decade of this century, doubted that they could. Nothing that has happened in the intervening eighty-odd years diminishes that doubt, and much that has happened confirms it.

A culture capable of preserving land and people can be made only within a relatively stable and enduring relationship between a local people and its place. Community cultures made in this way would necessarily differ, and sometimes radically so, from one place to another, because places differ. This is the true and necessary pluralism. There can, I think, be no national policy of pluralism or multiculturalism but only these pluralities of local cultures. And if these cultures are of any value and worthy of any respect, they will not be elective—not determined by mere wishes—but will be formed in response to local nature and local needs.

At present, the rhetoric of racial and cultural pluralism works against the possibility of a pluralism of settled communities, exactly as do the assumptions and the practices of national and global economies. So long as we try to think of ourselves as African Americans or

European Americans or Asian Americans, we will never settle anywhere. For an authentic community is made less in reference to who we are than to where we are. I cannot farm my farm as a European American—or as an American, or as a Kentuckian—but only as a person belonging to the place itself. If I am to use it well and live on it authentically, I cannot do so by knowing where my ancestors came from (which, except for one grandfather, I do not know and probably can never know); I can do so only by knowing where I am, what the nature of the place permits me to do here, and who and what are here with me. To know these things, I must ask the place. A knowledge of foreign cultures is useful, perhaps indispensable, to me in my effort to settle here, but it cannot tell me where I am.

That there should be peace, commerce, and biological and cultural outcrosses among local cultures is obviously desirable and probably necessary as well. But such a state of things would be radically unlike what is now called pluralism. To start with, a plurality of settled communities could not be preserved by the present-day pluralists' easy assumption that all cultures are equal or of equal value and capable of surviving together by tolerance. The idea of equality is a good one, so long as it means "equality before the law." Beyond that, the idea becomes squishy and sentimental because of manifest inequalities of all kinds. It makes no sense, for example, to equate equality with freedom. The two concepts must be joined precisely and within strict limits if their association is to make any sense at all. Equality, in certain circumstances, is anything but free. If we have equality and nothing else—no compassion, no magnanimity, no courtesy, no sense of mutual obligation and dependence, no imagination—then power and

wealth will have their way; brutality will rule. A general and indiscriminate egalitarianism is free-market culture, which, like free-market economics, tends toward a general and destructive uniformity. And tolerance, in association with such egalitarianism, is a way of ignoring the reality of significant differences. If I merely tolerate my neighbors on the assumption that all of us are equal, that means I can take no interest in the question of which ones of us are right and which ones are wrong; it means that I am denying the community the use of my intelligence and judgment; it means that I am not prepared to defer to those whose abilities are superior to mine, or to help those whose condition is worse; it means that I can be as self-centered as I please.

In order to survive, a plurality of true communities would require not egalitarianism and tolerance but knowledge, an understanding of the necessity of local differences, and respect. Respect, I think, always implies imagination—the ability to see one another, across our inevitable differences, as living souls.

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Chapter 8: Sex, Economy, Freedom, and Community

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