

## BULLETIN -- APRIL 2

**The final installment: purity / degradation.** Dr. Jonathan Haidt has given us a way to understand the underpinnings of morality, citing five values / counter-values that are the foundations of all ethical philosophy. These five values are care, fairness, loyalty, authority, and purity. Each has an opposite “counter-value,” if you will, which can also be identified as sin: harm, injustice, betrayal, anarchy, and degradation. The first three values and counter-values can pretty much find consensus across religious and party lines; although there may be serious differences about how care and harm, for instance, are carried out in practice. The Affordable Care Act (Obamacare) would be a good example.

The U.S. bishops have long advocated some type of national health care coverage for all, coverage that would be available to rich and poor and leave no one out in the lurch when they are in need of basic or emergency care. We know that religious institutions have long filled in gaps in such care in the communities where they have been established. Catholic hospitals have generally enjoyed the reputation of never turning anyone away, and have often eaten the cost of treatment of those who are not able to pay. Such charity is often perceived by those of a socialist mindset as too wedded to religious moral beliefs, such as regarding sterilization or abortion. For that reason, the ACA and the Department of Health and Human Services have not been favorable to any exceptions to the myriad requirements that all insurance and all health care provide whatever services are *legal*, notwithstanding any religious or moral objections to procedures that believers hold to be sinful or intrinsically evil.

So there is obviously disagreement among those who maintain polar-opposite views about, say, abortion. One camp considers access to it to be part and parcel of health care; the other considers it to be harmful and abusive to both women and unborn children (and lethal to the latter) in every circumstance. Yet both arguments are based on concepts of *care*. Likewise, both arguments are based on avoiding harm, although the two sides clearly have different concepts about *who* is harmed in the choice for or against abortion. It's not easy to see a solution to the dilemma other than (on the part of believers) continuing convincing presentations of the reasons against abortion, with a view to a conversion of hearts and minds that would make the issue a moot point. Few people are interested in criminalizing abortion as it pertains to the mother herself, considering it would be only a compounding of the harm already done to a badly wounded soul and body.

Fairness/injustice and loyalty/betrayal are also pretty commonly accepted ethical concepts. Most people will agree in a general way about what is fair treatment and what is unjust. Likewise, most understand loyalty and betrayal, although the objects of each might be worlds apart. Some consider family loyalty supreme, while others would throw their family under the bus rather than betray their gang or “la Cosa Nostra” (“Our Thing”). But from there on, things get very dicey.

Moral relativism has come to hold such sway in the philosophies underlying academia and other facets of life that a word or concept like “authority” has become an automatic challenge to vast numbers of people. Truth becomes whatever we want to call it, regardless of the evidence or the rationality of the opposite position. Authority is regarded with skepticism and disdain, and the rapidity of change within a given 24-hour

news cycle (let alone a week!) gives rise to an atmosphere in which hope for anything stable seems pointless. In a world in which the very authority or truth of one's own body (male or female) is roundly mocked or denied as a meaningless concept, it's little wonder that there is such disagreement and even a refusal to care about anything in which people can establish belief.

Thus we come to the final installment: purity / degradation. In 50 years, the world has changed from one in which most people agreed in concept, if not in practice, on the values of sexual purity, chastity, virginity, and personal physical integrity to a no-holds-barred freedom of sexual expression that affects every aspect of our lives. I've often thought that the beginning of the end of civilization was the "sexual revolution" of the 1960's, which had its origins in both the eugenics movement of the "Progressive" era of the 1910's and 1920's and the "beat" generation of the 1950's. What drove the sexual revolution was libertinism, the willful rejection of all norms and virtues as restrictive and outmoded. It hit the seminaries as well, especially in the 1970's, after it had boiled over in colleges and universities. Dissident and so-called progressive Catholics even pushed for a relaxation of sexual mores in the seminaries. How else were we to learn about "life"?

When I was in the high school seminary, there were written rules about not having "particular" or exclusive friendships. Under no circumstances were students allowed in each other's private rooms. Violation was grounds for expulsion. The unspoken but clear concern was that no opportunity should be provided for homosexual activity. The "wisdom" of the 1960's scoffed at such long-standing rules, and stressed the honor system. By the mid-1970's, and into the 1980's and 1990's, such activity had predictably become somewhat commonplace, depending on the seminary and its own internal spirituality and policing. So much for "honor." Stories abound of students in that era being told by seminary authorities that they were being too rigid in their attitudes toward offending classmates. One student told me his faculty advisor suggested that he stop visiting a local church to spend time in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament. That kind of "overly-devotional" behavior was frowned upon, the priest warned. The student told the priest that he wondered if the students who hit the gay bars on Friday and Saturday nights were also being told to stop *their* activities. The priest suggested that the student had better examine his attitudes toward the behavior of the other students, and basically found fault with *him* for the observation.

Gosh darn and golly gee, the present age looks back at the 1950's as a time of hypocrisy and sexual repression. But as one lady parishioner recently told me, "If I never see another TV ad for one or another brand of personal hygiene ointment, cream, or application, it will already have been one too many." We have confused openness and frankness with being coarse and crass. In the 1970's we had a course in the seminary designed to "desensitize" us about sexual matters so we would not be squeamish in discussing them frankly with people who sought our counsel. Generally, though, I've found that people don't mistake their priest for their physician. It's helpful to have accurate knowledge, but it does not necessarily follow that everyone has to have every possible experience in order advise others. If nothing else, that would be impossible.

More on this next week, when we take a look at how the Church wound up in crisis because we allowed ourselves to be less than vigilant about our personal behaviors. Without boundaries, "openness" can quickly lead to degradation. God bless you!

Fr. Den

**Thought for the week:** “But what really astounds is the hubris reflected in today’s judicial Putsch. The five Justices who compose today’s majority are entirely comfortable concluding that every State violated the Constitution for all of the 135 years between the Fourteenth Amendment’s ratification and Massachusetts’ permitting of same-sex marriages in 2003. They have discovered in the Fourteenth Amendment a ‘fundamental right’ overlooked by every person alive at the time of ratification, and almost everyone else in the time since” (Justice Antonin Scalia, *Obergefell* dissent, June 26, 2015).