A WORLD IN CONVULSIONS:
THE NEW ORTHODOXY AND THE SOCIAL ORDER

PATRICK HUNOUT

1. Where does the social order go? Traditional Values and the New Orthodoxy

Radical **individualism** is familiar in contemporary values. "Do your own thing", "Seek you own bliss", "Challenge authority", "If it feels good, do it", "Shun conformity", "Don't force your values on others", "Assert your personal rights", "Protect your privacy", "To love others, first love yourself", "Listen to your own heart", "Prefer solo spirituality to communal religion", "Be self-sufficient", "Expect others likewise to believe in themselves and to make it on their own…": such slogans define the heart of social individualism, which finds its peak expression in the contemporary Western countries. They encourage people to think that they can find happiness and self-accomplishment without the community, instead of finding them *within the community.*

Paradoxically, however, it seems difficult even for the most reclusive personalities to find happiness without some sort of harmonious interaction with the others. But for today's radical individualism, we pay a price: a social recession that imperils children, corrodes civility, and diminishes happiness. When individualism is taken to an extreme, individuals become its ironic casualties. This is notably the thesis of the Communitarian movement. In 1991, the press started referring to Amitai Etzioni, a George Washington University professor, as the "guru" of the communitarian movement. Etzioni, who was influenced by ideas drawn from the traditional German community spirit, defended prominently in *The Moral Dimension: Toward a New Economics* (1988), *The Spirit of Community: Rights, Responsibilities, and the Communitarian Agenda* (1993), and *The Limits of Privacy* (1999), that the tension between Personal privacy and the common good should be diminished through a limitation on the importance of individualism.

Individualism is not the only component of the new systems of values that started to spread within our societies in the late 1960's. A second important element is based on the concept that self accomplishment and happiness are to be found in pleasure. This is the **hedonic component** of contemporary morality. This covers sexual pleasure, as shown by the success in the 1970's of the novel *Emmanuelle* (and its cinematic derivatives), by Emmanuelle Arsan, for which an unrestricted sexuality was becoming an honor, not a shame - inverting traditional values (Arsan 1994-1970). In this culture, personal attractiveness and youth become capital values (Houellebecq 1998, 2001). Consuming goods can be also a source of this pleasure that is supposed to guarantee happiness - in opposition to the sterner former morality, which insisted on the accomplishment of duties and responsibilities, on work and constructive values (the Communitarian Movement was also on the track here as it suggested balancing *individual rights with responsibilities).*

Consumerism is a third major component of contemporary Western morality. A lot has been said about the society of consumption. Control over others, through processes of possession, domination, and seduction, are the main mechanisms at work here. Possessing material goods (or the wealth that allows possession of them) is supposed to be the natural goal of human action, and the sole source of prestige, respect, and social status. This of course is encouraged by advertising and marketing campaigns that sometimes run very deep, such as those purveyed by the automotive industry. In response to consumerism, some people withdraw from business and worldly preoccupations, and turn towards the wisdom of

India or other Far East countries where spirituality is still rooted in the culture. (Gandhi had well defined Indian identity as a spiritual one, opposed to Western "materialism".) This is a reaction against the excesses of the *possession* values for which this wisdom substitutes *detachment*. In general, as Redfield (1993) rightly observed, spiritual consciousness and preoccupations are progressing significantly in the Western countries, in one way or another. One can see this through clothing or hairstyle fashions, musical trends, or trendy restaurant decor, which express the fascination that Westerners feel for the spiritual Far East.

The values we portray above have been developing in all economically advanced societies, and beyond, over the last six decades. They may have fed the ambiguous image of the West, envied and rejected, admired and derided, in the rest of the world. They may have led to the reactions in an Arab world that felt threatened and dissolved by them, a fear implied in the 11 September 2001 attacks. They are, in any case, the most powerful cause of the deep destabilization of our society.

The *tripartite model of societal change* (Hunout 1995-1996) constitutes an attempt to reach global understanding of the current transformations occurring in contemporary societies. The model suggests the consistency that exists between three dimensions of current Policy making: economic flexibility that produces precariousness, immigration that produces anomie, and individualism that produces a cellular, atomistic society. These three trends contribute to further destruction of the social link. Going back to the new morality, it is remarkable that it closely corresponds to the basic interests of the New Leviathan. Individualism helps develop "autonomous" and "proactive"

individuals, whose behaviors adapt in a quicker and easier way to economic and technological changes, and whose sophisticated tastes (presented as a way to "personal identity") allow some outlet for innovative - although often useless products. Individualism helps destroy the ancestral community links, facilitating the recourse to peopling mass immigration that emphasizes class inequalities and favors the authoritarian governance of society; in turn, multi-ethnicity breaks further the ancestral community links, and contributes to strengthening atomistic individualism that becomes the only way to survive in a society deprived of a collective project. In the heart of the quest for the "self" that contemporary individuals believe to be a process that frees them from the weight of societal and family constraints, hides a new, infinitely subtle form of slavery.

Facing this erosion of the social link, can we, as suggested by Myers (2000), without attempting to recover a past that may never have existed or squashing basic liberties, expose the corrosive forces at work and renew the social fabric? The response is of a political nature. The model suggests a triad of new policies, economic ones based on solidarity, ethnic ones respecting cultural identities, and societal ones aiming at the reinforcement of congeniality – not necessarily through government intervention, but firstly through the adoption of new behaviors.

Our publications have emphasized how social capital is eroded by the penetration of individualist, consumerist, and hedonist values into the most intimate areas of social life. To a large extent, these values are market values associated with the techno-structural economy described by economist J. K. Galbraith. Although the erosion of social capital has its

skeptics, just like climate warming has had its own, it is not doubtful today that social capital is declining in most countries with a developed economy. It is not doubtful either that this evolution is negative for our society.

The reconstruction of the social capital essential for the development of a cohesive society cannot be solely the responsibility of experts and policymakers. We do not want to build a new techno-structure dedicated to social capital, nor do we think that public bridging policies could efficiently thwart the erosion of the social bond. What we suggest is that the policies carried forward by the current power, promoting individualism, multi-ethnicity and the techno-structural economy, are to be reoriented if we are to spare this society a somber future.

Readers may have noticed that people's behavior becomes increasingly intermittent and cyclical. Contemporary society is a body in convulsions, alternating periods of explosive change with phases of complete lack of energy. This strange, sinusoidal process signals a deep, progressive global transformation, if not the agony of the old order.

Historically, the first large-scale attempt in the West to restore an ailing community has been the one of Christianism. Its precepts were aiming at restoring trust and predictability (do not lie), channeling sexuality (aimed at procreation), strengthening family (through the promotion of faithful monogamist unions), moderating egocentrism (be modest), soothing tension in interpersonal relationships (love each other), and struggling against depression and nihilism (prohibition of suicide, developing acceptance of negativity as part of God's design). Overall, these precepts were restoring social capital. Later, the state Persecutions against

Christians objectively served their cause, as they transformed them into martyrs, victims of the excessive violence of their time, and living proofs of the rightness of their values. Such precepts give a contrario an idea of what Roman society had become at that time, and why there was a radical need for a change.

Similarly, our time needs a moral reformation, which would necessarily take a new shape and content. This reformation will need to address the crisis of the values that dovetail the finishing order.

2. A Fragile Economy

In 2006 two major economists, John Kenneth Galbraith and Milton Friedman, passed away. Their respective approaches were perhaps the most opposite in the field of economics. While Friedman incarnated monetarism and the neo-liberal presuppositions of mathematical economics, Galbraith had developed a socioeconomic approach to the understanding of consumption, production, and economic development. Their departures may herald a time when the need for new paradigms will be felt more strongly.

Classical and neo-classical economics assume that corporate decisions regarding the volume of production are based on consumer demand.

The meeting of collective demand and Collective supply is expected to determine the level of production. Galbraith's first major book, published in 1952, *American Capitalism*: *The Concept of Countervailing Power*, argued that giant firms had replaced small ones to the point where the perfectly competitive model no longer applied to much of the American economy, by far the largest and most modern at that time (Galbraith

1952a). But, he argued, the power of large firms was offset by the countervailing power of large unions and consumer organizations, so that consumers were protected by competing centers of power.

In his most famous work, *The Affluent Society* (1958), Galbraith's main argument was that, as society becomes relatively more affluent, private business must "create" consumer wants through advertising and price policies, and while it generates artificial affluence through the production of commercial goods and services, globally the "public sector" becomes neglected as a result. He pointed out that markets alone will under provide or fail to provide at all for many public goods, whereas private goods are typically overprovided due to the process of advertising creating artificial demand above people's basic needs.

Almost forty years later, he updated his approach in a book entitled *the good society, the humane agenda* (1996), in which he deplored the worsening of the inequalities in the American society. He explained that American society has become obsessed with the overproduction of consumption goods, and that this increases the risk of inflation and recession by creating an artificial demand for useless products.

Galbraith's magnum opus was his 1967 book, *The New Industrial State*, in which he argued that the American economy was dominated by large firms and introduced the concept of a "technostructure". "The mature corporation," wrote Galbraith, "had readily at hand the means for controlling the prices at which it sells as well as those at which it buys." This work expanded on Galbraith's theory of the firm, arguing that the orthodox theories of the perfectly competitive firm

fell far short in analytical power. Firms, Galbraith claimed, were oligopolistic, autonomous institutions vying for market share (and not profit maximization), which wrested power away from owners, regulators, and consumers via either conventional means (e.g. vertical integration, advertising, product differentiation) or less conventional ones (e.g. bureaucratization, capture of political favor). The issue of "political capture" by firms was expanded upon in his 1973 *Economics and the Public Purpose*, but new themes were added – notably, that of public education, the political process and stressing the provision of public goods.

Although influenced by Keynesianism and social-democrat statism, some of Galbraith's major proposals are close to the positions taken by The Social Capital Foundation, which proposes a renewed, interdisciplinary paradigm that includes some aspects of Galbraith's analysis.

Thus, we support similar views when he advocates the formation of a large, educated middle-class (through a program he called "investment in men"). Galbraith in effect supported developing a "New Class" of citizens, "with its emphasis on education and its ultimate effect on intellectual, literary, cultural and artistic demands..." he wished to entrust the future of America into the hands of the members of this class, asserting that their ability to see beyond "the conventional wisdom" entitled them to govern.

Similarly, when he argued that American post-war success arose not out of "getting the prices right" in an orthodox sense, but rather out of "getting the prices wrong" and allowing industrial concentration to develop - which could be successful only provided there was a "countervailing power" against potential abuse, in the form of trade unions, supplier and

consumer organizations, and government regulation – this countervailing power can be assimilated with the development of social capital based on an organized civil society and on strong associational engagement.

Many have since argued the formula for East Asian success later in the century was based precisely on this combination of oligopolistic power and countervailing institutions, and most of Galbraith's analysis can be enlarged to the globalized concentration process that developed through national and international mergers and acquisitions in the last three decades. In addition, several of our publications have underlined the importance for economic development of a cohesive society based on a strong social capital. "Rhineland capitalism" or the "social market economy" developed after W.W.II in West Germany and Scandinavia is a success story that demonstrates the crucial importance of social capital for economic success on the long haul. It has been shown, in effect, that these social market economies succeed better than others on the long term (Albert 1991) and that they are based on a strong community spirit both at macro- and microeconomic levels (Hunout 1992, 1997, 1999b).

The economy associated with the consumption society involves structural contradictions that, if not corrected by a certain degree of social capital, entail regular crises. In principle, this type of economy functions optimally when there is a large market of solvent consumers who are intent upon realizing their "deepest personal being" by purchasing the goods delivered by the system of production. For cultural reasons (strength of the community spirit), certain economies, such as the US and France, are particularly dependent on consumption, while others, such as Northern Europe and

Japan, tend to save and invest more. But nowadays, all have developed large markets where individual consumers buy products and services, and this has become an essential aspect of modern capitalism. Thus in the US, household consumption accounts for 70% of GDP.

As a consequence, this economy needs, to work optimally, that a large number of people gain some substantive purchasing power through access to employment, decent wages, and social welfare. Simultaneously, though, the profits of the capitalist enterprise tend to diminish when wages, social contributions, and taxes are too high. It ensues that there is a tense, permanent quest for an optimum balance between the necessity of a large, solvent market, and the necessity for large-scale profit generation which results in 'flexibility' tactics, job cuts, and neo-liberal social welfare dismantlement.

The policy of the US Federal Reserve in recent decades demonstrates this - raising interest rates when there was anticipation of 'inflation', i.e., when the wages increase, then decreasing them when the prospective for corporate profitability is improving.

The so-called 'sub-prime crisis' that broke out in 2007 is also informative. In an economy that depends on consumption, but where employment, household purchasing power, and social welfare have been sacrificed to the benefit of military expenses and corporate shortterm profit, it may be tempting to support demand through risky credit financing to those who - all the time more numerous – are unable to generate by themselves the resources necessary to be part of the consumption society, while they share the aspirations it suggests through social influence (notably advertising) and social comparison.

In 1951, Marriner S. Eccles, a former chairman of the US Federal Reserve (1934-1948), explained the 1929 crisis this way:

"As mass production has to be accompanied by mass consumption, mass consumption, in turn, implies a distribution of wealth - not of existing wealth, but of wealth as it is currently produced - to provide men with buying power equal to the amount of goods and services offered by the nation s economic machinery. Instead of achieving that kind of distribution, a giant suction pump had by 1929-30 drawn into a few hands an increasing portion of currently produced wealth. This served them as capital accumulations. But by taking purchasing power out of the hands of mass consumers, the savers denied to themselves the kind of effective demand for their products that would justify a reinvestment of their capital accumulations in new plants. In consequence, as in a poker game where the chips were concentrated in fewer and fewer hands, the other fellows could stay in the game only by borrowing. When their credit ran out, the game stopped ".

One can immediately see that as described here, the causes of the two crises, 1929 and 2007, are very similar.

Environmental waste can be included in this facet of the analysis. The biggest destruction of natural resources in all time is not simply mechanically linked with the use of certain technologies to produce goods and energy or to transport people. It is associated with the values underpinning the consumption society. These values have both promoted and been promoted by powerful industrial interests, such as the automotive industry, or the very techno-structural nuclear power industry. Climate warming has resulted

from a lifestyle that is based on self accomplishment through the consumption of products that are regarded as socially indispensable far beyond their real utility. The automotive industry, as one important example, is one of the rare industries that did not decrease its prices despite decades of amortization and massive government investments in roads, highways, and traffic organization; it anchored the idea that the goods it produces are an integrative part of a normal life, a source of social status, and even a sign of male virility. To ensure another for these pricey products, it was necessary to recourse to bank credit and revenue redistribution - to which Ford associated its name.

Going back to the climate issue, it is still, despite this, widely considered a technical one, as if the downgrading of the environmental situation happened by chance. There is little reflection regarding our values and the place of unrestricted consumption among them. Nonetheless, the catastrophe announced is the direct consequence of the materialist myth of the highest possible standard of living for all within a consumption society and of the widespread development of economies with a high demand of energy. It is also the consequence of the incompetence and the egocentric lack of common sense of those who are in power. Instead, the concept of bearing responsibility for preserving the environment and transmitting it to the future generations is a communitarian one.

3. The Failure of Multiethnicity

Does mass immigration destabilize our societies by multiplying cultural benchmarks and breaking ancestral community links? Geller et al. (2003) have examined this issue among ethnic majorities and minorities in economically advanced

countries of Europe, Latin America, Asia, and the United States. Actually, as they detail the increase of migration and resulting growth of minority ethnic groups in modern, industrialized countries, they also see how an increase in environmental stressors and a disintegration of social cohesiveness are linked with an upsurge in psychopathology. Their research shows that positive resources gained from social networks can help offset the deleterious effects of life stressors. As individuals become increasingly atomistic and abandon many of their cultural traditions, they become isolated from their families and communities, making them more vulnerable to the negative effects of stress. Thus, migration has been linked with increased physical illness and psychological disorders among uprooted and displaced minorities; even among majority culture members, increasing social disconnectedness and a loss of distinct, stable cultural benchmarks contribute to increased susceptibility to stress. As economically advanced countries continue to see a decrease in social cohesiveness, they also see higher rates of psychiatric disorders in ethnic majority and minority members alike.

Meanwhile, it has become increasingly popular to speak of racial and ethnic diversity as a civic strength. From multicultural festivals to pronouncements from political leaders, the message is the same: our differences make us stronger. Or, as expressed in a Burger King commercial TV in the US in the 90's: "Different Is Better". But a massive new study by the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University (Putnam 2007), based on detailed interviews of nearly 30,000 people across the US, has suggested that, the greater the diversity in a community, the lower the social capital is (e.g., the fewer people vote do volunteer work, give to charity, or work on community projects, etc.). In the most diverse communities, neighbors trust one another about half as much as they do in the most homogenous settings. This study, the largest ever on civic engagement in America, found that virtually all measures of civic health are lower in more diverse settings.

The data of this new study comes from a survey Putnam conducted among residents in 41 US communities, including Boston. Residents were sorted into the four principal categories used by the US Census: Black, White, Hispanic, and Asian. They were asked how much they trusted their neighbors and those of each racial category, and questioned about a long list of civic attitudes and practices, including their views on local government, their involvement in community projects, and their friendships. What emerged in more diverse communities was a bleak picture of civic desolation, affecting everything from political engagement to the state of social ties.

"People living in ethnically diverse settings appear to 'hunker down' - that is, to pull in like a turtle", Putnam writes. In documenting that hunkering down, Putnam challenged the two dominant schools of thought on ethnic and racial diversity, the "contact" theory and the "conflict" theory. Under the contact theory, more time spent with those of other backgrounds leads to greater understanding and harmony between groups. Under the conflict theory, that proximity produces tension and discord. Putnam's findings reject both theories. In more diverse communities, he says, there were neither great bonds formed across group lines nor heightened ethnic tensions, but a general civic malaise. And in perhaps the most surprising result of all,

levels of trust were not only lower between groups in more diverse settings, but even among members of the same group.

This corroborates the views expressed by The Social Capital Foundation, according to which immigration policies ultimately carry forward the objective to weaken social cohesion, divide citizens, weaken civic engagement, diminish the control of civil society over the political class, and maintain or strengthen authoritarian leadership.

Economists Matthew Kahn and Dora Costa (2003a, 2003b) reviewed 15 recent studies, all of which linked diversity with lower levels of social capital. Greater ethnic diversity was linked, for example, to lower school funding, census response rates, and trust in others. Kahn and Costa's own historical research had documented higher desertion rates in the Civil War among Union Army soldiers serving in companies whose soldiers varied more by age, occupation, and birthplace.

If ethnic diversity is a liability for social connectedness, a parallel line of emerging research suggests, however, that it can be a big asset when it comes to driving productivity and innovation. In high-skill workplace settings, the different ways of thinking among people from different cultures can be a boon (Page 2007). By hanging out with people different than you, you are likely to get more insights. Diverse teams tend to be more productive. In other words, those in more diverse communities may do more bowling alone, but the creative tensions unleashed by those differences in the workplace may vault those same places to the cutting edge of the economy and of creative culture. Through the concept of the "diversity paradox", Page suggested that the contrasting positive and

negative effects of diversity can coexist in communities, but only up to a point. If civic engagement falls off too far, it is easy to imagine the positive effects of diversity beginning to wane as workplace settings: social integration at large involves many more processes than just cognitive convergence for problem-solving within a professional team.

While acknowledging that racial and ethnic divisions may prove more stubborn, Putnam argues that such examples bode well for the longterm prospects for social capital in a multiethnic America. He cites work done by Page and others, and uses it to help frame his conclusion that increasing diversity is ultimately valuable and enriching. As for smoothing over the divisions that hinder civic engagement, Putnam suggests expanding support for English-language instruction and investing in community centers and other places that allow for"meaningful interaction across ethnic lines."

But this "conclusion", which does not seem to fit perfectly in with the findings drawn from his research, may well be a tribute paid by Putnam to political correctness. Numerous examples in France (riots of November 2005), Holland (assassination of filmmaker Theo Van Gogh in 2004), Germany (various race connoted attacks and arsons from the 1990s to now), South Africa (explosion of crime around the collapse of apartheid in the 1990s) and other countries, show on a daily basis that multiethnicity is feeding an always more violent and mistrustful society even several generations after the first generation of immigration.

Whenever violence and crime occur, the social bond has eroded, i.e. society loses its organic unity, integrity, or Cohesiveness, becomes more and more atomized, and as a result - individuals and groups

progressively tend to view each other less as human beings and more as objective means to be used to achieve selfish goals. The guiding value by which the social link is eroded becomes: "I want what I want when I want it and I'll get it at your cost if need be. Everything and everybody that assists me in this process is good and everything and everybody that obstructs me in this process is bad. Therefore, even the use of violence and crime is justified to rid myself of any such obstruction if need be". Hirschi (1969) suggested that the four basic elements of the social bond are attachment to families, commitment to social norms and institutions, involvement in conventional (versus deviant or criminal) activities, and lastly the common value system within an individual's society or subgroup.Because these bonds teach, prescribe or suggest us patterns of "normal" behvior,especially in the early stages of life, when a bond is weakened or broken then unusual behavior for individuals may occur.

Senekal, Schurink and Oliphant (2003) examined the taboo subject of violence and crime in a multiethnic context on the basis of a South- African example. South Africa has been plagued by crime and violence for many years. However, the country experienced an alarming rise in serious violence in the years leading up to 1994 when it became a political democracy. While there have been fluctuations in the rates and manifestations of violent crime after this historic event, it remains extremely high. Authors point out the links between the "multiethnic society", characterized by a weak social contract and high levels of anomie, and the rise in levels of crime and violence.

4. The Destruction of Community Involvement

The concept of "social capital" is precisely another way to formulate the problem. Social Capital has been theorized about by a long list of scholars, from Emile Durkheim to Ferdinand Tönnies, Pierre Bourdieu (a former member of the Editorial Board of The International Scope Review), Robert Putnam, Robert Bellah, Francis Fukuyama, Patrick Hunout, and others. Social capital, according to the definition provided by The Social Capital Foundation, is a set of values and values that promote cooperation within society. The values that constitute it cover a wide range from reciprocity between two friends all the way up to complex and elaborately articulated doctrines like Christianity or Confucianism. They are instantiated in an actual human relationship (Fukuyama 1999): the norm of reciprocity potentially exists in my dealings with all people, but is actualized in my dealings with friends, networks, clients, collaborators, civil society, and the like, which arise as a result of social capital more than they constitute social capital itself. The values of social capital must lead to cooperation in groups and therefore are related to traditional virtues like honesty, the keeping of commitments, trust, reliable performance of duties, and reciprocity. A norm like the one present in southern Italy which enjoins individuals to trust members of their immediate nuclear family but to take advantage of everyone else is clearly not a basis for social capital outside the family (Putnam, Leonardi and Nanetti 1994). Similarly, the Mafia achieves cooperative ends on the basis of shared values, and therefore has social capital, but it also produces abundant negative externalities for the larger society in which they are embedded. Any form of truncated social capital such as the Mafia, French "grandes écoles" and other closed networks and pressure groups, are not real social capital, but fragmentsof social capital the use of which opposes the interest of the wider

community.

Robert Putnam fed a debate on the erosion of social capital in the US in an article published in 1995 called "Bowling Alone", and later in his book *Bowling Alone: the Collapse and Revival of American Community* (2000). Are people (here, Americans) losing their social bonds, why does it matter, and what has to be done? Practically nobody bowls alone, nor does Putnam claim they do. What he does show is that people who used to join bowling leagues have, in recent years, dropped out and instead simply bowl with friends. And the same holds for membership in practically all other voluntary associations. Putnam collected a vast array of data to support his two points: participation has dwindled in almost every activity, and the fraying social fabric imposes heavy costs: the fewer our social bonds are, the more likely we will suffer from depression, nervousness, and other health problems. We also will be more likely not to vote, not to trust our neighbors', to sue and so on - quite a list.

Considering the decline in turnout in US national elections over the last three decades, from a relative high point in the early 1960s, voter turnout had by 1990 declined by nearly a quarter. Broadly similar trends also characterize participation in state and local elections and in most countries alike, except in those (such as Belgium or Denmark) where voting has been made mandatory by law, which hides the discrediting of the political class. But it is not just the voting booth that has been increasingly deserted. Since 1973, the number of Americans who report that "in the past year" they have "attended a public meeting on town or school affairs" has fallen by more than a third (from 22 percent in 1973 to 13 percent in 1993). Similar (or even greater)

relative declines are evident in responses to questions about attending a political rally or speech, serving on a committee of some local organization, or working for a political party. The proportion of Americans who reply that they "trust the government in Washington" only "some of the time" or "almost never" has risen steadily from 30 percent in 1966 to 75 percent in 1992. Similar observations have been made in Europe. In total, people's direct engagement in politics and government has fallen steadily and sharply over the last generation, despite the fact that average levels of education - the best individual-level predictor of political participation - have risen sharply throughout this period.

Religious affiliation is by far the most common associational membership among Americans. Yet religious sentiment in America seems to be becoming somewhat less tied to institutions and more self defined. Net participation by Americans, both in religious services and in church-related groups, has declined by perhaps a sixth since the 1960s. For many years, labor unions provided one of the most common organizational affiliations among American workers. Yet union membership has been falling for nearly four decades, with the steepest decline occurring between 1975 and 1985. The parent-teacher association (PTA) has been an especially important form of civic engagement because parental involvement in the educational process represents a particularly productive form of social capital. Participation in parent-teacher organizations has dropped drastically over the last generation, from more than 12 million in 1964 to barely 5 million in 1982 before recovering to approximately 7 million recently. Of course, part of this decline and recovery reflects fluctuations in numbers of children in school.

Next, we turn to evidence on membership in civic and fraternal organizations. These data show some striking patterns. First, membership in traditional women's groups has declined more or less steadily since the mid-1960s. For example, membership in the national Federation of Women's Clubs is down by more than half (59 percent) since 1964, while membership in the League of Women Voters is off 42 percent since 1969. Similar reductions are apparent in the numbers of volunteers for mainline civic organizations, such as the Boy Scouts (off by 26 percent since 1970) and the Red Cross (off by 61 percent since 1970). In sum, after expanding steadily throughout most of the last century, many major civic organizations in the U.S. have experienced a substantial and nearly simultaneous decline in membership over the last decades. Perhaps the traditional forms of civic organization whose decay we have been tracing have been replaced by vibrant new organizations, but these new organizations, from the point of view of social connectedness, are different from classic "secondary associations". For the vast majority of their members, the only act of membership consists in writing a check for dues or reading a newsletter. Many of us did not need Putnam's research to experience the difficulty that one nowadays has to mobilize people within movements or projects oriented towards the good of the community. Most civil associations have problems gaining new members or keeping the existing ones, even in the countries that have relatively less individualistic cultures, such as Germany and Japan. Aspiration to change does exist, but few are those who actually are willing to invest their energy or financial means; mistrust and fear of taking risks dominate their behavior. This seems to suggest more individualistic values and a strong mistrust towards the public sphere.

Mutatis mutandis, similar remarks can be made about other economically advanced countries. Yet, many students of the new democracies that have emerged over the past decade and a half have emphasized the importance of a strong and active civil society for the consolidation of democracy. Especially with regard to the postcommunist countries, democratic activists have lamented the absence or obliteration of traditions of independent civic engagement and a widespread tendency toward passive reliance on the state. To those concerned with the weakness of civil societies in the developing or postcommunist world, the advanced Western democracies have typically been taken as models to be emulated. There is striking evidence, however, that the vibrancy of Western civil societies has notably declined over the past several decades (Fukuyama 1999). In Europe, the West is imposing its "social model" on the former soviet Eastern countries, but this model is eroding within Western Europe itself.

5. The Depressed Society

The picture of a "depressed" society, where most indicators of the lack of well-being, such as psychiatric disorders, suicides, divorce, and loneliness, is widespread and increasing. Society is suffering from contemporary developments, as if a centrifugal force was exerting its effects on its members and keeping them away from one another, either in terms of personal relationships or in terms of collective capacity for action.

What researcher David G. Myers called "the American paradox" (2000) can be easily extended to all economically advanced countries, such as Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the Northern and

Western European countries, and Japan. (No doubt similar developments also can be expected in the very near future in countries that have been considered more "traditional" but that are now "catching up" with the West). Myers defines this paradox this way:

We now have doubled real incomes and double what money buys. We have espresso coffee, the World Wide Web, sport utility vehicles, and caller ID. And we have less happiness, more depression, more fragile relationships, less communal commitment, less vocational security, more crime, and more demoralized children. On the one hand, there has been a prodigious increase in the wealth produced, even though one can state that this increase did not benefit all categories of population equally. On the other hand, there has been an erosion of the link that keeps us together within society. Myers said that a "social recession" coexists with the relative "economic expansion".

We are better paid, better fed, better housed, better educated, and healthier than ever before, we have faster communication and more convenient transportation than we have ever known, and our average disposable income in constant currency is more than double that of the mid-1950s. This enables us to have, among other accouterments of an unprecedented wealth, twice as many cars per person today as then and to eat out two and half times as often. From 1900 to the present, life expectancy has risen from 47 to 76 years. However, from 1960 until the early 2000's, our countries slid into a deepening social recession that dwarfed the comparatively briefer economic recessions that often dominate news and politics. Since 1960, the divorce rate has doubled, the teen suicide rate has tripled, the recorded violent crime rate has quadrupled, the prison

population has quintupled, the percent of babies born from unmarried parents has sextupled, ccohabitation (a predictor of future divorce) has increased sevenfold, and depression has soared - to ten times the pre-World War II level, by one estimate. The American National Commission on Civic Renewal combined social trends such as these in creating its 1998 "Index of National Civic Health" - which has plunged since 1960.

Problems seem to be concentrated particularly among youth. Writing with Elizabeth Gilman, psychologist Edward Zigler (1993) reported a consensus among researchers: in the past thirty years of monitoring the indicators of child well-being, never have these indicators looked so negative. In 1960, just over one in ten children did not live with two parents. Today, a third do not. Youth need to be confronted with limits to build their own personality. But today's youth are narcissistic, prey to social influence through corporate advertising strategies and the mirage of fashion - as a mirror of their personal identity. The weakening of family ties entails a lack of support, authority, and moral benchmarks. This results in higher anomie for adolescents. While the research by Atteslander & al. (1999: 95) showed a negative correlation between anomie levels and life satisfaction in the general population, anomie has a particularly negative impact in the periods of life where adult personality is being formed. Adolescent suicide is directly correlated with those high anomie rates. While social capital is normally used to support individuals, it is now so truncated that it may be used to conclude adolescent "suicidal pacts".

Scott, Deane and Ciarocchi (2003) have shown that globally, suicide mortality has increased by around 60% in the past 45 years. Suicide is one of the five leading

causes of death for 15-24 year olds. Even worse, for every completed suicide, as many as 40 more attempt suicide. Depression most often accompanies suicide attempts as well as suicide itself. Depression is one of the most debilitating disorders, being associated with, but not limited to, impaired social judgments, school difficulties, job loss, unsatisfactory marital relations, and feelings of loneliness and hopelessness. Depression is widespread and increasing globally. It is predicted, according to Scott and al., to become the second largest health problem worldwide by the year 2020. The type of economic development that is currently underway promotes individualism and low social integration, both of which increase suicide risk. Notably, individualists have smaller and less satisfying social support networks, report more feelings of hopelessness, and are more likely to think about suicide. House, Landis & Umberson (1988) calculated that the magnitude of the effect of social support on death rates approximates the effect of smoking.

Loneliness, with which depression and suicide can be associated, is rising in our societies. Jones and Hebb (2003) reviewed psychological research on loneliness. Their conclusions show the existence of a link between the rise of loneliness and the erosion of social capital. To summarize, while some experiential precursors of loneliness are social isolation and a lack of social contact, many studies suggest that it is emotional conflict within on-going relationships (e.g., arguments, ill-will, misunderstandings) rather than the loss of contact or termination of relationships that is most often conducive to the development of loneliness. Although loneliness is clearly related to various objective situational and social factors, it appears to be even more strongly related to subjective psychological factors including expectations

regarding relationships and satisfaction with available friends and relationship partners – in other words, the **quality** of relationships. Increases in factors that inhibit or disrupt close, warm, reciprocal and mutually satisfying relationships increase the likelihood of loneliness - this includes influences such as Individualistic values and practices that may, among other effects, increase demands and decrease compromise-readiness. Kowalski (2003) addressed the issue of the quality of relationships by examining the changes in moral behavior and what underpins them through a particular theme: the escalation of incivility and impropriety in Western culture. A few examples:

1) In response to receiving an invitation to a wedding that you cannot attend, you carefully select, wrap, and mail a gift to the bride and groom. A year after the wedding, you realize that you have still not received a thank you note from the couple.
2) As you are driving down the road, you are suddenly cut off by another driver who is trying to cross several lanes of the highway in a short period of time. After narrowly avoiding an accident, you blow your horn at the driver who proceeds to "flip you off".
3) You are a high school teacher who is telling his class about an upcoming test. In response to your discussion of the material that will be covered on the test, a student in your class curses at you and raises a question regarding what right you have to give the kinds of tests that you administer.
4) Having worked at a particular company for over 10 years, you feel that you have a good relationship with your immediate supervisor. He/she has assigned you to work on a particularly important project to which you have devoted an nordinate amount of time. Unhappy with the finished product, however, he/she

publicly humiliates you in front of all of your co-workers.

5) Persons in distress in a public setting are not helped by passer-bys or travellers. The explanation is indifference and selfish comfort associated with the fear of not being supported by the others should any danger be involved.

These situations represent just a sampling of the types of rude, offensive, selfish or hurtful behaviors that many of us are exposed to. This may indicate that the notion that "the other" has to be respected is not well integrated any longer by an increasing part of the population. Today, societal values no longer dictate that people stay relatively settled in their jobs and communities or follow prescribed rules for appropriate behavior - rather, people live more transitory lives characterized by increased isolation from others. This may urge them to follow less strictly the rules of conventional civility. The rise of impropriety may also be a sign of a diminished mental health of the population. Conventional civility, though, had its merits. The same way conventional Christian morality was contributing to fasten the social bond, traditional civility was soothing human relationships and diminishing the probability of conflicts. By adding respect to the communication code, it was a factor of stability, predictability and harmony in personal relationships. Any attempt to recreate social capital should begin with the reestablishment of civility, as it contains the first step for any community link – the **recognition** of the other as human being and relationship partner.

As for social isolation itself, a 2006 study (McPherson, Smith-Lovin & Brashear 2006) compared the social network module of the 2004 General Social Survey (GSS) to the 1985 GSS, the last to include network questions.

The survey went on to probe the respondents about their relationship to the people they mentioned, and the Relationship of these people to one another. (The key question of interest was this: "From time to time, most people discuss important matters with other people. Looking back over the last six months who are the people with whom you discussed matters important to you? Just tell me their first names or initials".)

The new findings are striking: Americans on average had only two close friends to confide in, down from an average of three in 1985. The percentage of people who noted having no such confidant rose from 10 percent to almost 25 percent; and 19 additional percent said they had only a single confidant (often their spouse), raising the risk of serious loneliness in case the relationship ended.

Both kin and non-kin confidants were lost in the past two decades, but the greater decrease of non-kin ties leads to more confidant networks centered on spouses and parents, with fewer contacts through voluntary associations and neighborhoods. Young (ages 18-39), white, educated (high school degree or more) men seem to have lost more discussion partners than other groups. The data may overestimate the number of social isolates, but these shrinking discussion networks reflect an important social change.

Due to processes of individualization and social fragmentation in modern societies, social contacts have come under increasing pressure. Individuals are finding it increasingly hard to develop and maintain a meaningful personal network, and more and more people can be characterized as socially isolated, experiencing feelings of loneliness or not participating in society (Hortulanus, Machielse and Meeuwesen 2006).

Unfortunately, social isolation has deleterious effects on health, first recognized in epidemiologic research of the late 1970s and 1980s and replicated and extended since then (Brummett & al.2001). Social isolation has been shown repeatedly to prospectively predict mortality and serious morbidity both in general population samples and in individuals with established morbidity, especially coronary heart disease. The magnitude of risk associated with social isolation is   comparable with that of cigarette smoking and other major biomedical and psychosocial risk factors.

Some sporadic but ancient research suggests that cancer itself is a disease the triggering of which is not purely organic, but is linked with long-term stress and unresolved life problems that affect the immune system (Krasnoff 1959, Brown & al. 1961, Hiroomi 1999). The explosion of cancer in modern societies can be understood as a civilization disease (Stefansson 1960).

Going back to the decrease in social capital, it exists also between men and women: Aguiar de Souza and Ferreira (2004) reflected on the evolution of gender relations, which seem to show signs of a more difficult adjustment between males and females in terms of matching expectations: as an example of this unhappy matching, we would gladly mention the discourse of the creators of the website meet bride.com which says they help Western men and Russian women to meet:

"Why date or marry a Russian woman, you might ask? The inspiration for the MeetABride website grew out of the frustrations the website's creators had over trying to find nice American women to date. American women can have Attitudes that is difficult to deal with.

They are often demanding and hard to please. Russian women on the other hand are so unspoiled. In many less-developed countries, like countries of the former Soviet Union, women have a much lower social status than men. Russian men are often abusive and disrespectful toward women. This is what Russian women are used to. Compared to that, the life you can give her will make her so happy and grateful. Russian women tend to be devoted adoring wives. In Western societies women have an equal status to men, as it should be. Russian women see American men as kind, sensitive, respectful, understanding, compassionate and dependable, and for the most part American men are this way. Many American women take these qualities in American men for granted. However, because of what Russian women are used to, they will never take these qualities for granted. These qualities make American men very appealing to Russian women. Perhaps the best evidence that Russian women make good wives and life companions is the low divorce rate between American men and Russian women. According to data supplied by the United States Census Bureau and the Dept. of Immigration and Naturalization (INS), the divorce rate for marriages between American men and American women is 48%, and the divorce rate for marriages between American men and foreign women is 20%".

Here, it is clearly a better matching of role expectations that authors point out as a success factor in male-female romantic relationships. Conversely, unsuccessful male-female relationships within a given community (here an international one) are attributed to the difficulty of matching reciprocal expectations.

This observation is confirmed by the global analysis of the multiplication

of interethnic marriages. Is the rate of interethnic marriages a sign of a better "societal integration", a fairly common portrayal? It seems that it is NOT, in reality. In effect, although the conventional sociological explanation in terms of class endogamy may explain the global increase in interethnic marriages, it does not explain the male-female proportions within intermarriages. In the US, on average, Asian women and Black men are more demanded as spouses than are Asian men and Black women. This, according to some research, is because Asian women tend to be perceived as slightly more feminine and Black women as slightly less feminine than White women, and Asian men as slightly less masculine and Black men as slightly more masculine than White men. Apparently, men want women who let them feel more like men, and vice versa for the women. In a society where male-female roles are less clearly separated than ever before, perhaps is it is easier to switch to another ethnic group than to adapt to complex, embroiled, and destabilizing new role expectations within one's original ethnic group.

Role matching may be all the more difficult as gender relations are undermined by the widespread dissemination of pornography in mass culture. The quantitative importance of the adult industry today is enormous. It's easy dissemination through the Internet is such that never before in the history of telecommunications media has such material been so easily accessible by so many people, including minors, in so many homes, with so few restrictions.

Yet, exposure to pornography can have serious consequences. Replicated studies have demonstrated that exposure to significant amounts of increasingly graphic forms of pornography has a dramatic effect on how adult consumers view women, sexual abuse, sexual relationships, and gender relations in general.

Research on non-violent pornography demonstrates that both men and women have more negative views of family life after watching a minimal amount (six videos) of non-violent pornography (Schneider, Gruman & Coutts 2005). In pornographic media, men and women are depicted engaging in varied sexual behaviors without love or emotional involvement (Prince, Goldfarb, & Messaris 1987, Zillmann & Bryant 1989). Sexual activities as represented by pornographic movies tend to deemphasize intimacy, love, affection, and human connection (Jensen & Dines 1998). Previous experimental studies (e.g., Zillmann & Bryant 1989) had shown that exposure to traditional pornography resulted in greater acceptance of premarital and extramarital sex and nonexclusive sexual behavior.

Violent pornography – in the form of of XXX-rated movies, snuff films, or R-rated slasher films – can even after short-term exposure increase men's acceptance of rape myths and result in more negative views of women (Schneider, Gruman & Coutts 2005). Garcia (1986) found "subjects with a greater degree of exposure to violent sexual materials tended to believe that: (a) women are responsible for preventing their own rape, (b) rapists should not be severely punished, and (c) women should not resist a rape attack. In addition, researchers found that exposure to violent sexual material correlated significantly with the belief that rapists are normal. Malamuth and Ceniti (1986) write that "study results consistently showed a relationship between one's reported Likelihood to rape and responses

associated with convicted rapists such as sexual arousal to rape stimuli, callous attitudes toward rape, beliefs in the rape myths, and hostility towards women." Zillman and Bryant (1989) showed that continued exposure to pornography had serious adverse effects on beliefs about sexuality in general and on attitudes toward women in particular. They also found that pornography desensitizes people to rape as a criminal offense.

As they grow up, children are especially susceptible to influences affecting their development. Now, the exposure of youth to pornography is enormous, even at early age. Each year about 40 percent of teens and preteens visit sexually explicit sites either deliberately or accidentally, studies show. Wolak, Mitchell, and Finkelhor (2006) found that 42 percent of a US nationally representative sample of 1,500 Internet users ages 10 to 17 had been exposed to online porn in the last year, Similarly, Australian sociologist Michael Flood (2007) reported that 38 percent of boys aged between 16 and 18 deliberately accessed such material.

In a study surveying 471 Dutch teens aged 13 to 18, Peter and Valkenburg (2006a, 2006b) found that the more often young people sought out online porn, the more likely they were to have a "recreational" attitude toward sex-specifically, to view sex as a purely physical function like eating or drinking. They also found a relationship between porn use and the feeling that it wasn't necessary to have affetion for people to have sex with them. There was a link between the type and explicitness of sexual media the teens saw and their Tendency to view women as sexual "play things." The more explicit the material viewed, the more likely young people were to see women in these ways - and Internet movie

pornwas the only media type to show a statistically significant relationship, they found. Studies suggest a correlation between exposure to pornography and increased rates of sexually transmissible disease among youth and teen pregnancy, because adult-like love is interpreted as sex disassociated from responsibility and commitment (Postman 1994, Minnery 1986).

Sørensen (2005) analyzed the increased spread of pornography in Denmark, and what effects this might produce on young girls' and boys' interpretations of gender. In Denmark, pictures of sexuality has been represented legally in the public arena since a change within the legislation liberated pictorial pornography in 1969. However, in recent years references to sexual matters have proliferated. But what is new - and this presents us with a massive challenge - is the increased imprint of pornography in mass culture. This is the case not merely in advertising, but as a general trend in fashion coverage, in youth magazines, in TV programmes and music videos, and not least in campaigns launched by young people themselves. This researcher shows how the revival of stereotyped gender images is connected with this breakthrough of pornography in mass culture (Cawood & Sørensen 2002, Sørensen 2002). The British media researcher Brian McNair has dealt with this phenomenon and he uses the term "porn chic" (McNair 1996, 2002). "Porn chic" designates the cultural process by which pornography slips into our everyday lives as a commonly accepted andoften idealized cultural element.

On bill boards, in music videos, in fashion reportage, new underwear or wardrobe fashion styles, and in youth magazines there is an increasing use of figures, stylistic features and verbal expressions which

are not in themselves pornographic though they are quoting from a pornographic universe. Much regular pornography, both soft-core and ordinary hard-core porn, makes use of gender-role stereotypes which seep into the mass culture as it draws on pornographic references. Now, the division of gender roles in mainstream hard-core is most conservative, and porn movies often depict the domination and humiliation of women. "The non-violent material studies portray women as 'masochistic, subservient, nymphomaniacs and over responsive to serving the male interest" wrote the US Attorney General's Commission on Pornography (1986). " An enormous amount of the most sexually explicit material (…) is material that we would classify as 'degrading', the term we use to encompass the undeniably linked characteristics of degradation, subordination and humiliation, depicting people, usually women, as existing solely for the sexual satisfaction of others, usually men, or that depicts women in decidedly subordinate roles in their sexual relations, or depicts people engaged in sexual roles most people consider humiliating" (ibid., part II, chap.5).

Going now over to another gender-related issue, the divorce rate has quadrupled in only 30 years. Is this increase caused by a weakening in expectations for commitment? Has the ideal of a stable and committed couple been devalued? Is this a sign (or alternatively a cause) of a crisis of the social bond at large? Cramer (2003) reviewed the research literature on changes in the practice of divorce over the last 100 years in economically advanced countries, and examines the suggested explanations for those changes. He examined the rise in divorce that could be observed in most economically advanced countries in recent decades: divorce rates in

most of these countries - though sometimes influenced by legislative changes - are in fact very high. Recent data show a 75% rate (as percentage of marriages) in the case of Belgium, which has the highest divorce rate in the world. Divorce rates for that country show a steady increase since the 1960's, with a strong acceleration in the mid 1990's. Cramer's findings suggest that commitment values are affected by the rise of individualistic short-term, hedonic attitudes. Unfortunately, although divorce can be a solution to unhappy social arrangements, for many, it is a difficult life experience from which it is not easy to recover, and which may have long-lasting effects. This experience may affect the trust that the concerned or their children will place in potential partnerships in their later lives, and thus may undermine their capacity to form in future solid romantic and family relationships.

Evanthe Schurink (2003) has done interesting research on homelessness, a phenomenon that returned to all economically advanced countries in the past two decades, contrary to predictions that it would disappear in the course of economic progress. She argued that homeless people pass through a sequence of stages during which their bond with conventional society becomes weaker. Focusing on the process of becoming homeless, she shows that homelessness does not happen overnight, and it is not a fixed status. Homelessness is a process in which, apart from economic losses, people loose a sense of belonging, a psychological sense of home. They gradually drift away from their family and community. Their links to conventional society (family, colleagues, non-homeless friends) become blurred and ultimately break down. They no longer have conventional informal and formal social support systems, but become part of the

homeless subculture, with new values and values. If this process is not stopped and reversed, they become entrenched in a homeless status.

The global picture is of a society that is losing not only its bonds, but the instruments that would allow to maintain and to develop them, such as civility and civic engagement – an evolution that results in increased collective malaise and deviance.

6. *The False Responses of Politics, the New Religions, Psychopharmacology, and Psychotherapy*

In the face of the global developments we portray - a weak economy, in prey to financial speculation, generates the waste of human resources and environmental destruction, an individualist and hedonic morality that entails a dangerous weakening of the social bond, and the failure of multi-ethnicity which erodes social cohesion, feeds crime, and weakens democratic governance - the responses that the powers-that-be have generated are mostly erroneous and can have consequences that may worsen rather than solve the problems.

The discrediting of politics and of the political class is blatant nowadays, not only because the values underpinning civic engagement at large are declining, but because in all countries, the "right" wing and the "left" wing are proposing packages none of which really meet the needs of the citizens.

It would be very difficult to restructure these packages and center the political debate on the real issues, because the press and the mass media themselves are under control or under influence, and would not contribute to the formulation of a line independent of the current

political parties - the formation of public opinion and the formulation of the alternatives are predetermined. It is distressing to see how in most countries the political leaders at the highest level lack vision. Their value seems increasingly debatable, both in itself and because an increasingly tense situation would require high-calibre leadership. A widespread response to the problems, particularly in the US and the UK but also in other countries, has been called the "surveillance society": more restrictive laws, more power for police, multiplied surveillance devices such as cameras and drones, and expanded criminal databases are expected to help control the social deviance that was massively triggered by the New Leviathan's policy. But this will temporarily alleviate some of the effects of this policy, not eradicate their cause.

Another source of false responses to the problems are the new religions. These are gaining ground. To those who feel isolated and lost, the deal they propose consists in reconstructing a community, a unified system of belief, a renewed family link which gives sense to life. People might believe they could find in the new cultic movements a response to their needs for moral security and social support. In reality, however, this attempt mostly hides deception, domination, and exploitation within the new paradise. As Hexham and Poewe (2003) have shown, the expansion of the new religions can be related to the loss of moral benchmarks that confronts Individuals. Since the late 1960's numerous New Religious Movements, often identified as "cults" or "sects" thus appeared in Western societies. Until 1979, however, only a few people paid serious attention to such movements. Then on 18 November 1978 over 800 people died in Jonestown, Guyana, in what appeared to be a mass suicide. Fifteen years later, vivid television

pictures of the last hours of David Koresh and the Branch Davidians at their compound in Waco, Texas, on 19 April 1993, reinforced the view that cults may be dangerous. Add to this the Solar Temple suicides in Canada and Switzerland, and the Aum initiated gas attack on 20 March 1995 against commuters in the Tokyo underground, and a very scary picture emerged.

Ohsawa (2003) analyzed the social consciousness of contemporary Japanese society by investigating the context of the Aum terrorist attacks. He suggested that the Japanese religious group Aum can be seen as an extreme reflection of Japanese society in general. An account of why Aum held such fascination, especially among the youth, provides insight into contemporary Japanese consciousness. Second, it locates Aum within a Japanese post-war history that the author divides into two stages: the era of ideal and the era of fiction. The Aum incident can be interpreted as the end of the second stage leading, paradoxically, to the return of the ideal of total destruction. It explains why Aum's negative eschatology, which seeks the total destruction of the world, is attractive for Japanese youth, suggesting that the popularity of a cult such as Aum is a symptom of the social disintegration brought forth by advanced capitalism. As one can see, sects, social disintegration and terrorism may well have close links within different configurations.

The increase in the consumption of drugs also is linked to a decrease in psychosocial well-being. The word "drugs" may actually have tow meanings. On one hand, it can refer to illegal or Nonprescription drugs, such as heroin, cocaine, crack, crystal meth, haschich and ecstasy, that people take in search for an artificial paradise (although legal, alcohol may also be included in this category). On the other hand, it can cover the medical drugs that health professionals prescribe to their patients, such as tranquillizers, stimulants, anxiolytics, antidepressants and other mood-altering products – the "happy pills". Various data shows that the consumption of both is important, and that it has soared in the recent decades.

As one example and according to the National Institute of Health (NIH 1988), approximately 20 million Americans abuse drugs and or alcohol – around 6.5% of the population (Fisher 1989, Fisher and Breakey 1991, Institute of Medicine 1988, Spinner and Leaf 1992, Stahler and Cohen, 1995, Susser et al. 1989). In Western and South-Eastern Europe, cocaine abuse has significantly increased over the past few years, notably in Spain, the UK and Italy (INCB 2008). In Spain, the prevalence rate for the abuse of cocaine powder among the general population increased from 1.8 percent in 1995 to 3 percent in 2005, and the annual prevalence for cocaine abuse among minors quadrupled from 1994 (1.8 percent) to 2004 (7.2 percent).

Unfortunately, the use of such drugs can lead to addiction, overdose, mental and physical health problems, depression and suicide.

As for prescription drugs, they are intended to ease mental health problems as well as psychosocial un-wellness and stress. Psychotropic drugs, whatever the substances used, rank from second to tenth among the most consumed medicinal products in western nations (Zarifian 1996). In the case of France, which holds the world record for the consumption of such drugs (the per capita consumption

in France of anxiolytic, hypnotic, antide-pressant, and neuroleptic drugs is about three times greater than in Germany or Britain: 11% of adults in France take psy-chotropic drugs at least once a week and for at least six months), research has shown that overconsumption is actively encouraged by the pharmaceutical in-dustry, strengthening previous tendencies to rationalize and medicalize psychoso-cial issues: "There is a clear intent to give doctors [general medical practicioners] a monolithic representation [of mental health] reduced only to symptoms and accessible only to drugs. (…) The manner in which the link between suicide and depression is presented is an example of disinformation with the final objective of having more antidepressants prescribed." (Zarifian 1996). Zarifian criticized the med-ical profession for relying too heavily on chemical solutions for mental distress. He suggested that unemployment and in-creasing social breakdown contribute to mental problems, but that the boundary between normal and abnormal is be-coming blurred, leading to a "pharmaco-logical medicalization of existence."

Alas, the massive use of such drugs is not without side effects for health, some of them probably unknown, not to speak of the cost involved for the healthcare sys-tem. This portrays a society which flees its own problems and refuses to admit to be stress-generating.

Le Moigne (2003) formulated another cri-tique of psychotropic drug use prescrip-tion, showing how it is associated with some specific aspects of social isolation. Implicit treatment values allow for pre-scriptions among the elderly since, in their case, loneliness and organic diseases are often combined; housewives' consump-tion is also encouraged because their situation is seen as a problem of sheer solitude.

On the contrary, the treatment of the suf-ferings linked to poverty, unemployment, or working conditions collides with moral reprobation even though these forms of vulnerability are rooted in a deficit of soli-darity. The diffusion of psychotropic drugs thus appears to articulate two tenden-cies at once: it underlines the current ero-sion of the social link, and it expresses a normative vision of this phenomenon.

Prescription drugs can also be subject to illegal abuse. The 2005 results of the Moni-toring the Future study, an annual colla-boration by the National Institute on Drug Abuse and the University of Michigan, found a 26 percent rise in teenage abuse of Oxycontin -- a powerful opiate -- since 2002. Illegal distribution of prescription drugs occurs through pharmacy diver-sion, physicians, doctor shopping, fake prescriptions, and robbery, all of which divert the pharmaceutical onto the illicit market – or through clandestine manu-facturing. Overall, the number of teens abusing prescription drugs has tripled since 1992.

The 2007 report of the International Nar-cotics Control Board shows that the abuse of prescription drugs alone in the US is higher than heroin, cocaine and me-tamphetamine. Approximately 6,4 million people in that country abuse prescription drugs containing controlled substances, mostly pain relievers (4,7 million). Nearly 10% of students in their final Year of sec-ondary school (17-18 years old) reported having abused prescription drugs in the past year. One third of all new abusers are 12- 17 years old, and prescription drugs are the drug of choice among 12-13 years old. The number of deaths caused by methadone and fentanyl abuse has increased these last years, by25% in 2006 for methadone in Mary-land. The problem is also important in Canada.

In the face of the rise of loneliness and of the absence of efficient social integration systems, the last decade has seen the development of websites and telephone lines expected to allow romantic encounters and new friendships. Russell et al. (2003) have analyzed the use of the Internet as a way to alleviate loneliness; their results suggest that the use of the Internet as a tool for encountering other people can be regarded as a way to alleviate difficult or threatening personal relationships. Ultimately, the efficiency of the "alternative" encounter methods to create or recreate lasting social links is dubious - the use of alternative encounter methods may be more appropriate for expanding existing social networks than it is for providing a firm basis for creating new ones. Our research (Hunout 2002b) shows that these systems develop when the social link is ailing, as a response to the difficulty to create or maintain satisfactory relationships, but that, paradoxically, they can be fully efficient only if society is still capable of maintaining a certain level of trust.

A common reaction to problems is to address mental health professionals for psychological support. The help that was formerly provided by the community is now provided by specialists on a paid basis. Doherty and Hunout (2003) have studied this issue and argued that traditional psychotherapy in its many forms has ignored the societal dimensions of human problems, privileging individual dimensions to the detriment of community bonds. Although most psychotherapists sincerely attempt to do a good job, they may in an implicit way encourage a purely individualistic approach to personal accomplishment. Doherty and Hunout trace the reasons for the split between the interior sphere of life and the community sphere, show how this split plays out in the therapeutic setting, and describe ways to bring a community perspective into therapy. In other words, they suggest that psychotherapy may be indispensable to personal development, but cannot be promoted to the rank of a collective response to collective problems, unless it is seriously adapted to integrate the collective dimension of psychological life.

Unfortunately, all inappropriate responses will worsen the situation more than they will do any good. The mainstream individualistic, hedonic, and consumerist values erode social capital. They weaken civic engagement and community involvement. They increase economic fragility and encourage environmental waste. The escalation of incivility and violence, the problematic adjustment in male-female reciprocal expectations, the loss of ethno-cultural benchmarks, along with increased consumption of drugs and rates of depression and suicide, are among the consequences of the widespread development of the new orthodoxy.

The path that The Social Capital Foundation suggests to redress the situation is to strive for the development of an autonomous, strong and vibrant civil society. This starts with the reexamination of our personal values and priorities, and of the way we relate to others on a daily basis. It continues with a new organization of community life, renewed management patterns, and a new view on ethnicity and culture. It ends with the reinterpretation of public policies and the role of government.

But this agenda will be developed later, and in another place.

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