

Anno Domini 1994, February 13


Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73119

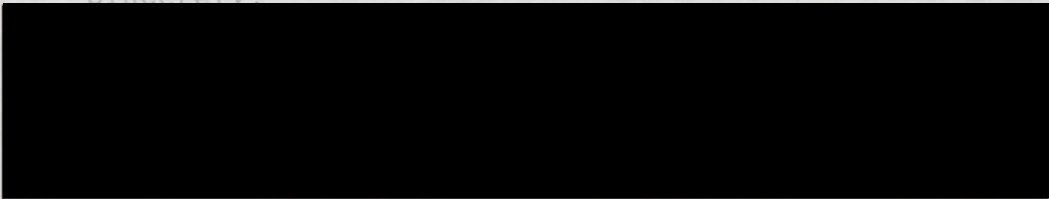
Mr. Brian Lamb
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Dear Mr. Lamb:

About a month or so ago I brought a fascinating book to your attention. Since that time, I have noticed a number of references to this book, particularly in THE DETROIT NEWS and THE DAILY OKLAHOMAN. I am including a copy of a review that Pat Buchanan did recently which appeared in the DO under date of February 12, 1994.

I am including a photocopy of pages 17 and 18 of the book, DEGENERATE MODERNS, on which pages the author speaks of the thesis and form of his work.

Sincerely,



Only he who wants nothing for himself, who is not subjectively "interested", can know the truth. On the other hand, an impure selfishly corrupted will to pleasure destroys both resoluteness of spirit and the ability of the psyche to listen in silent attention to the language of reality.¹⁵

It is the curse of this age to have to prove on its own pulse and in the degrading minutiae of the biographies of its *prominenti* the lessons that the Catholic Church in her wisdom (which was once the collective wisdom of the West) knew all along. Paul Johnson, reaping the harvest of the new biographical realism, has documented the decline of the West in the personal lives of its intellectual elite. Johnson gives the evidence but seems reluctant to come up with the conclusion. The evidence, however, is all in, and the verdict is clear: modernity is rationalized lust.

In the memoir she wrote about her life with the liberal Protestant theologian Paul Tillich, Hannah Tillich describes her husband's "inclination to pornography", his equally pornographic life and, most interestingly, their connection with his intellectual pursuits. After his death, she describes opening his desk and what she discovered there, and presents the postmodern age with one of its most apt epiphanies:

I unlocked the drawers. All the girls' photos fell out, letters and poems, passionate appeal and disgust. Beside the drawers, which were supposed to contain his spiritual harvest, the books he had written and the unpublished manuscripts, all lay in unprotected confusion. I was tempted to lay between the sacred parts of his highly esteemed lifework those obscene signs of the real life that he had transformed into the gold of abstraction, King Midas of the spirit.¹⁶

So now, thanks to the frankness engendered by the sexual revolution, we know that the best explication of the theories of modernity comes from the biographical details of its proponents. Given the nature of the lives they led, we also know why they were so interested in transformations into abstraction. We also know now—and with hindsight it's hard to imagine that so many people took them seriously at the time—that what the Midases of modernity produced was more fool's gold than anything else.

The thesis of this book is simple: modernity was rationalized sexual misbehavior. All the intellectual and cultural breakthroughs of modernity were in some way or other linked to the sexual desires their progenitors knew to be illicit but which they chose nonetheless. Their theories were ultimately rationalizations of the choices they knew to be wrong. The lives of the

¹⁵ Josef Pieper, *The Silence of St. Thomas: Three Essays* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1965), pp. 19–20.

¹⁶ Hannah Tillich, *From Time to Time* (New York: Stein & Day, 1973), p. 241.

moderns are, then, an uncanny substantiation of the power and scope of the moral law. "All who desert you", St. Augustine says in his *Confessions*,¹⁷ "and set themselves up against you merely copy you in a perverse way." St. Augustine is talking about God here and those who rejected him in his age; however, his words apply equally well to the moral law and those who reject it in ours.

So much for the simplicity of the book's thesis. Its form is dual, a meditation on the lives of some of the seminal modern thinkers followed by an application of that thinking in the lives of contemporary epigoni. Critical parlance notwithstanding, there is no postmodern age, just thinkers following the ever-constricting ruts of sexual liberation in increasingly compulsive, increasingly self-negating ways. If there is ever to be a postmodern era, it will have to rise out of the negation of what went before it and not in increasingly etiolated theories or increasingly violent forms of self-destruction.

¹⁷ St. Augustine, *Confessions* (London: Penguin, 1961), p. 51.