moral sense

A seminar held on

Wednesday 31st January 2001

Edited by John Wilson

The Smith Institute

THE SMITH INSTITUTE

the moral sense

A seminar held on
Wednesday 31st January 2001

Edited by John Wilson

Published by the Smith Institute

ISBN 1 902488 46 6

Preface

The Smith Institute has been set up to look at issues which flow from the changing relationship between social values and economic imperatives. The Institute takes its lead from the belief of the late John Smith MP that social justice and economic progress can go hand in hand, and it currently centres its work on these themes.

This booklet is based on the presentations made by Professor James Q Wilson and Rabbi Jonathan Sacks during a seminar held on 31st January 2001 at 11 Downing Street. We have tried to reflect the debate which followed. Inevitably, in transforming a live event into print, some of the colour and the texture of the original have been lost. We hope, however, that those who attended the seminar will recognise much of what is included here, and that those who read it fresh will respond to the flow of good ideas which emerged during the morning.

Introduction

Wilf Stevenson

It is interesting that in recent weeks senior politicians, both here and in America, have been using a new language to discuss the role of government in relation to social policy. The Chancellor has spoken of "an era of active citizenship and the enabling state". In his Arnold Goodman Lecture, which was delivered last year and which we are publishing today, he gives further examples of the way he is thinking about these problems. Since he referred in that speech to the work of Professor James Q. Wilson and Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, we thought that it would be interesting and informative to bring them together.

In his John Smith Memorial Lecture last November, Senator Ted Kennedy, speaking immediately after the American Presidential election, said, "Tuesday's close election is a strong signal that Americans hunger for a new common vision in government. Yet that vision continues to prove elusive." He went on to quote Stanford University historian David Kennedy, who observes that "a hundred years ago, as today, neither party could secure the majority needed to pursue its agenda. Platforms during this period of stalemate were largely based on nineteenth century models of government that were increasingly irrelevant to the broad economic and social forces at work in America." Senator Kennedy agreed with David Kennedy that "the political leaders who articulate a vision to accomplish this transition will break the political stalemate and create a durable legacy."

I am not saying that necessarily we will get that far today, but I do hope that we can discuss whether there is a new moral agenda, and, if so, whether this signals a new language for a new century. And to get us started, please welcome the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Gordon Brown.

Rt. Hon. Gordon Brown MP

Chancellor of the Exchequer

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to No. 11 Downing Street. The Smith Institute exists to discuss matters of social relevance and therefore I am particularly delighted to welcome to our seminar today, Professor James Q Wilson and Rabbi Jonathan Sacks.

Professor Wilson's book *The Moral Sense,* and his many other contributions to the study of criminology, government and society, have had a profound influence on me, as I believe his books have had a profound influence on many others in every continent. Professor Wilson claims that moralists have made the mistake of looking for universal moral rules and that a failure to find them has given rise to moral relativism. He argues from the Scottish Enlightenment that what are universal are not rules, but a set of dispositions to be moral. Dispositions or instincts for fairness, sympathy, self-control and duty. Dispositions or sentiments whose concrete form is, of course, influenced by the surrounding culture. Dispositions which co-exist with other dispositions such as selfishness, greed and vanity. Dispositions which show not that we are inherently good, but that we have in our nature the potential to be good. Dispositions to be moral and sociable, which will develop fully and properly only if the external conditions are right.

Our interest, I think, today is not just in discussing this moral sense, so graphically set out in his books by Professor Wilson, but in the implications for social policy. What does it mean for the importance of voluntary and community action, at a time when we recognise that so many of our social problems require person-to-person help and support? What does it mean for the duties of Government? If there is a disposition to be fair, and we believe for example that every child should have the best possible start in life, what does it mean for our policy towards children and to families? What does it mean for equality of opportunity?

Professor Wilson will be followed by Rabbi Sacks, whose intellectual and moral leadership, as well as the depth of his scholarship, is recognised, I think, by all in this room, and who led us so movingly last Saturday on the Holocaust Memorial Day with his speech in Westminster. As many of you

know, he sees society not as a contract, with individuals bound together in legal constraints based on self-interest, but as a covenant that draws its sense from shared values to which citizens subscribe. Again, it will be interesting to hear how Rabbi Sacks sees that in practice, in the role that he ascribes to families, neighbourhoods and voluntary organisations.

Now when you come into No. 11 Downing Street, you see two portraits. You see Gladstone, a Chancellor of the Exchequer in the nineteenth century, and Disraeli, another Chancellor. It is said when you came in and met Gladstone, you went away thinking he was the wisest person in the world. It is said when you came in to meet Disraeli, such was his charm that you went away thinking you were the wisest person in the world. We have today the wisest people, not just in this very distinguished audience, but in our speakers, and therefore it is a great pleasure for me to ask you to listen to Professor Wilson.

Professor James Q. Wilson

A Disabled Moral Discourse

My argument, which I will try to state briefly so we may have ample time to discuss it, is that moral discourse in the Western world is confused, to some degree even disabled, because many thoughtful people do not grasp the proper basis for such a discourse.

In the United States, the only country about which I can speak with much authority, we find this in several areas of life. In the United States, crime is widely regarded as the result of social forces – which, to some extent, surely it is, but it is also the result of a personal moral failing. We are told that the personal entitlements people have to the distribution of the rights and offices that a society may assign them (schools, contracts, jobs and the like) are the function, not of their personal qualities, but of their group identity. We are told, in some quarters, that schools should not teach moral values, but simply clarify people's concerns about moral values. And we are told everywhere that marriage is a convenient, but disposable arrangement; that one can more easily escape from a marriage than one can get out from under a mortgage.

Now there are many reasons for what I take to be this disabled moral discourse. I shall try and focus on one this morning, and that one is this. We have begun to think about morality in the Western world, particularly in the Anglo-American world, in a way that reflects a misunderstanding of moral judgments. The source of this confusion, I think, is the famous statement that David Hume made in the eighteenth century. It will be familiar to most of you in this room, as it is so often quoted; many of you have probably had to repeat it in philosophy exams. "In every system of morality," he writes, "I have always remark'd, that the author proceeds for some time in the ordinary way of reasoning ... when of a sudden I am surpriz'd to find that, instead of the usual copulations of propositions, *is*, and *is not*, I meet with no proposition that is not connected with an *ought*, or an *ought not*."

Hume was making the argument that 'is' statements are radically different from 'ought' statements. And in his book taken as a whole, *The Treatise of Human Nature,* he argued that moral statements derive not from reason, but from sentiments.

This view, which made little impression at the time, was taken up in subsequent centuries. In the middle of the 1930s, the philosopher A J Ayer wrote that moral statements are simply logically and empirically meaningless remarks, phrases that happen to end in an exclamation point, such as 'Vanilla ice-cream is good!' The true statements are those that are logically dependent on some prior statement, as, in mathematics, '2 + 2 = 4', or statements that can be empirically validated by some scientific method. Curiously enough, Professor Ayer never explained what the status of his own statement was that divided all other statements into these two categories.

But if you read in David Hume two pages past the famous quotation which I have repeated to you, you will find a very different tone. You will find a statement about moral sentiments that quite radically distinguishes him from one's preferences for ice-cream. He writes as follows: "There is no spectacle so fair and beautiful as a noble and generous action; nor any which gives us more abhorrence than one that is cruel and treacherous". And two pages beyond that, in *The Treatise of Human Nature,* he adds that moral sentiments arise from nature, and then speculates as to what nature may mean in this context. This speculation he does not entirely complete, but he says that they are clearly natural in one important sense, namely that, "These sentiments are so rooted in our constitution and temper, that without entirely confounding the human mind by disease or madness, 'tis impossible to extirpate and destroy them."

In short, moral sentiments are not simply the rubbish of human discourse. To be sure, they are not logically inferred from known prior propositions, and to be sure, they cannot readily be empirically validated, but these moral sentiments arise in us from powerful natural forces and we ignore them at our peril.

Popular Morality

But the view that there is a difference between a statement of what *is* and a statement of what ought to be has been, I think, the profound indirect source of the disability of the Western world's effort at moral discourse.

Thoughtful people in my country (presumably in yours as well) are often positivists, that is to say they believe that moral discussions are meaningless

and one cannot have a serious discussion about them. They are also moral relativists; they tend to believe that the morality of one person is as good as the morality of others, that every culture is equally good and no one should impose his or her morality on anyone else. If you listen to radio talk shows in the United States (something I do because my home is a long way from any place to shop and there's nothing else to listen to), you will frequently hear people challenge the speaker by saying, "But that's simply your moral view; I have a different moral view." And finally, of course, we are left with the notion of cynicism, that moral statements are simply nothing more nor less than covers for self-interest.

But in my view, the ordinary people do not think as these prescriptions would require. Ordinary people are not in fact positivists. They believe that playing with babies is better than torturing babies, and they make that distinction clear in every aspect of their lives. They are not relativists; they believe that cultures that discourage murder and incest and theft and robbery are better than cultures that encourage murder and incest and theft and robbery. And they believe that cultures should be ranked, along with the people in them, on the basis of the goals they apparently serve.

To be sure, people are cynics (especially, Sir, about politicians), but only up to a point. With respect to the most important aspects of their lives, they are not cynics at all. That is to say, parents care for their children. This is an argument that simply cannot be explained by any notion of self-interest, narrowly defined. If you believe that you play with your child simply because it is an investment in the future, so that your child at the age of 12 can accompany you on a pleasant outing to a football game, or so that your child at the age of 32 will support you in your old age, you have an economic discount rate that runs well down into the negative numbers. You cannot possibly get up at 2 o'clock in the morning to feed the child and to comfort it if you think that this investment is simply being done to advance your own material interests.

Moreover, people do not like unfairness in human affairs, even though the unfairness may not affect them directly. In the United States, in 1994, there was a scandal involving members of the House of Representatives who wrote cheques on their House banking account before money had been deposited in that account with which to cover the cheques. Now this is something an

ordinary person cannot do. In the case of the members of the House of Representatives, there was no financial loss of any consequence, because within a week or two the deposit would come from the Government and it would be deposited and the cheque would be covered. But when it became apparent that several hundred members of the House of Representatives had been doing this, even though this activity cost no one anything, many of these members lost reselection. They did not lose reselection because they had voted against the interests of their people, or voted for deficits, or voted for Bills that the people did not approve of, they lost their offices because they had behaved unfairly.

The people, I think, are right. That is to say, among the people there is an effort to maintain, without much guidance from above, some reasonable standard of moral discourse. Although they are often confused by their inability to carry on this argument in a meaningful way with others, they take morality seriously.

Morality is Rooted in Our Sociable Instincts

And they ought to, because morality reflects some combination of evolutionary development and divine design, by which our sociable instincts make us want to be moral.

The parent/child bond, the most important bond among people (especially the mother/child bond), is in many degrees the origin of human sympathy. Babies seek sociability, and within a few weeks after their birth they return the sociability that is offered to them. They seek out the breast, they root about, they suck, they cuddle, they smile, and the mother's and the parents' desire to reward this in the child, and the child's ability to return that reward with greater demands for sociability, is one of the most heartwarming experiences to which any human being can be subject.

Out of that sympathy, out of the fact that the child comes in time to recognise the sounds of distress in others, and to distinguish between the face of the mother of the child and the face of women who are not its mother and to direct more positively to one than the other, is the origin, I believe, of our desire to take into account, however feebly and however imperfectly, the well-being of others.

Similarly, the social bond that exists among people as they grow up helps us encourage the sense of fairness. As we grow up, we begin to play games with each other, and in these games we learn the rules. Initially, the rules we learn are simply the ticket of entry. If you want to play marbles or baseball or football, you must follow these rules or you will not be allowed to play, so this is clearly an appeal to the child's sense of self-interest. But once you begin playing the game, the rules acquire a justification of their own. There cannot be a game without these rules, and the fact that rules predetermine the game suddenly make the rules at least as important as the game itself.

Once you leave the realm of games and enter a larger life as you grow older, you begin to apply an equivalent sense of fairness into all manner of human affairs. So if someone crowds the line in front of you while you are waiting to enter a motion picture house, you will become upset, even though that crowding has no material effect on your chances of entering that theatre. So if someone cheats in class and gets an unfair grade, even though it may not affect your grade, you are often upset. Fairness, in short, grows out of this social bond.

Now sympathy and fairness, as well as other moral sentiments we could describe, are strong, hardy plants that, I think, come up in the breasts of virtually every child, but they do not grow without some degree of encouragement. In the West (and now I will speak primarily of the United States), events have occurred that have made it difficult for this growing to take place.

Single parent families have begun to harm children in the United States at an appalling rate. This is a fact that has been understood by Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan since the 1960s, but the evidence in support of his concern is now so powerful that even many sociologists agree with him. Single parent families, however studied and by whatever expert, show that their children are much more likely to become delinquent. The boys are much more likely to become idle. The girls are much more likely to become pregnant while unmarried. And this will be true of every ethnic group – Caucasian, African, American and Hispanic – and will persist after you control for income. Now income is not an unimportant factor, these families are both poor and headed by single parents, but the notion that we can eliminate the problems

caused by single parent families simply by raising their income, a desire that might be most worthwhile with respect to other perspectives, is inadequate.

The sentiments of fairness and sympathy, I think, are also harmed by arrangements that deny personal responsibility; that deny that crime involves an element of free choice, whatever the circumstances that drive it; that deny that people must aspire for high office and for the rights and privileges of society, on the basis of personal worth, and not on the basis of group identities.

The issue in the United States, often described as affirmative action, focuses one's attention on this matter. Affirmative action, properly understood, is not a problem for me. It simply means searching widely and energetically for the best qualified person and supplying, where necessary, additional training and opportunity to help them to compete in a fair way. Thus understood, it is the hallmark of a democratic approach to the distribution of rights and offices. But alas, affirmative action does not mean that in the colleges and universities of America. It means reserving by quota a significant number of entry positions to people who have a variety of characteristics, no one of which is the result of their own personal achievement.

Universalising Our Natural Sociability

There is, however, a limit to the sociability that produces our moral sentiments. Let me now take a moment to describe the most important of those limits.

Our sociability does not promote tolerance. Our sociability makes us most attached to people who are most like us: our family, our extended family, our neighbourhood, our school, our football team, our group of friends playing marbles in the school yard. Whatever the group, those in the group are always thought to be somehow more worthy than those outside the group.

Now there is an advantage to us in this tendency we all have to build walls that separate us from others. That advantage is that building those walls promotes among us feelings of loyalty and duty and patriotism. These, in my judgment, are all noble sentiments. But there is also a disadvantage that occurs from the construction of these walls. These walls produce ethnocentrism, discrimination, oppression and ethnic warfare. War today, in the last century,

and perhaps, in a larger perspective, most wars throughout most of human history, have not been about material conquest, have not been about the projection of one person's ideology over another; wars have been the conflicts of peoples. A line drawn in the Balkans, drawn there by events that happened half a millennium ago, is still a line over which people endlessly quarrel.

The task of religion and government is to make imperative the golden rule with respect to the fundamental rights that all people should enjoy. This is a difficult task, because it is not automatically reinforced by our natural moral sentiments. We have to be taught to extend those sentiments beyond the lines that define our boundaries, so that they reach other people. Not with respect to all matters – it is proper to treat those closest to you most favourably – but to reach across those boundaries with respect to fundamental matters.

The best argument I have heard in favour of this was made by a former American President, Abraham Lincoln. Before the Civil War, he was trying to explain to other Americans what was wrong with race-based slavery, and his argument was this. There is no way philosophically to endorse the slavery of blacks without also endorsing the slavery of whites. Whatever trait it was you thought African-Americans might have that could conceivably justify them being kept in a position of oppression – they were lazy, they were fun loving, they were less intelligent, they did not speak the language, they were not of your skin colour – those characteristics were also true of some whites. Therefore, since there could not be a philosophically intelligent justification of race-based slavery without also justifying the slavery of those close to you, there could be no justification for slavery at all. That argument, to me, was the most compelling one. It took, of course, 150 years for that argument to reach many other Americans and the struggle to make sure it has reached all Americans is not yet over.

He was saying, I think, something that one of the forbears of the Chancellor, Adam Smith, said also in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, that we become in time, as we mature, interested in being praiseworthy as well as being praised. In our heart of hearts, in the man within the breast, in what Freud and others later were to call the conscience, we are quite clear about the distinction we experience between the satisfaction of being praised, and the satisfaction of being praised when you believe you are entitled to the praise.

We also become, in our disinterested moments, aware of the need to find general justifications for our deepest preferences. Now many of us, myself included, are not disinterested much of the time. I am usually, as I suppose most people are, caught up with the daily rush of events, bringing with it all the passions and commitments that you bring to these activities. You are to some degree a Type A personality all of the time, rushing to get about your jobs and meet your plans.

But at times everyone is disinterested, and most of us should attempt to be disinterested for longer periods of time. When we are disinterested, that is to say, when we think calmly about ourselves and how we have behaved in the world, we realise that to understand how we ought to behave, we have to think of some general rules. Immanuel Kant provided such a rule, a rule that says you should not act such that the principle of your action could not be made universal. There are limits to the extension of that rule, but it is a good place to begin. It is not radically different from the golden rule of the Bible.

Government and the Moral Sentiments

If one thinks of how government is to act with respect to moral sentiments, my argument is simply stated. The overwhelming task of government is to enable people to live peaceably among themselves. It may wish to do many other things, such as change income distributions, or build better schools, or defend its territory, all no doubt noble things, but its fundamental task is to enable people to live peaceably one with the other. And this is a task which most governments in the world today fail to achieve, as is evidenced by civil war, ethnic hatred, and assassinations that occur all about us.

To enable people to live peaceably among themselves, it has to work with people as they are voluntarily constituted, with their families, with their neighbourhoods, with their self-defining groups, in order to get those groups to participate in the process of governing. But it has to do so within carefully defined boundaries, such that this participation is not a way of raising higher the wall that separates one people from another, but rather of lowering the wall, so that the sentiments you learn inevitably and that are encouraged necessarily by family and friends, are sentiments that you begin to extend out to others.

This can be done through all manner of associations. In the United States, the new American Administration has just created an office of faith-based organisations which is now being staffed by an old friend and colleague and former student of mine, John Dilulio. John Dilulio is a man of deep personal passion, of deep religious faith, who believes strongly that churches can play a transformative role in the lives of other people, and that this transformative role is vastly more important than the doctrinal differences that may happen to separate Jews and Christians and Muslims.

Whether he will succeed in that or not, I do not know. He must walk a very narrow path. On the one side he errs if he violates the constitutional ban which requires the separation of church and state. On the other side he errs if he requires small, poor, religious organisations to try to fill out the hundreds of forms that are necessary to get a grant from the government and to answer the demands of endless ranks of government auditors as to how they spend that money. But I hope he can walk that narrow line, because it seems to me this is a way of making the government more real, in ways that affect the lives of ordinary people.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

A View from The London Eye

I want to thank the Chancellor for convening this conversation. The great Israeli statesman, Abba Eban, was once invited back to the British university where he had been a student many years earlier. He began his speech by saying, "It was here I learnt the integrity, honesty and passion for truth that have been such a disadvantage to my political career!" In our present Chancellor, these virtues have been no disadvantage: they have added greatly to the depth and seriousness of political debate in Britain.

I want to add a corollary to his remarks today. Professor Wilson has spoken and written eloquently about 'the moral sense'. But that sense is less an instinct than a capacity that needs to be acquired, nurtured and sustained. To speak of the moral sense is to talk of individuals. But persons are never merely individuals. We are who and what we are because of a constant conversation – of gestures, acts and words – with others. This, as Professor Wilson has reminded us, begins in early childhood, in our first interactions with our parents. We are social animals and our moral dispositions are grounded in that fact. When families and communities are in good working order, we take them for granted. They are the way in which one generation hands on to the next its values, tacit codes of conduct, its 'habits of the heart'. They are our vehicles of socialisation. What happens, though, when we can no longer take them for granted? Then the moral sense becomes problematic. That is why we are having this discussion today, and why, for some years, thoughtful observers have raised questions about the state of health of civil society, the social matrix of the moral sense.

To see what is at stake, imagine that you are taking your nephew or niece for a ride on the giant ferris wheel on the other bank of the Thames, the London Eye, and using the occasion to say something about the structures of society. The first thing you both see are the great buildings of Westminster and Whitehall. These, you say, are the homes of government, and government is about the concentration and distribution of power. Next you see shops and offices, and in the distance the Stock Exchange. These, you explain, are the home of the market, and the market is about the production and distribution of wealth. Then your nephew or niece notices the dome of St. Paul's and the

various church spires still visible between the tower blocks and asks, "What are those?" You explain that they are houses of worship. "And what," he or she asks, "do they produce and distribute?" Our first inclination might be to say that they are not that sort of place at all. This, I want to suggest, would be an error, but no mere error. In a certain sense it is a defining error of our culture.

The great works of political philosophy since the seventeenth century – and the great political debate of the second half of the twentieth century – have focused on two entities: the state and the individual, and their respective institutions, governments and markets. The state is us in our collective action. The market is us in our individual choices. This looks like an exhaustive dichotomy. There is no room for a third entity. Hence for Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau the question was how individuals join together to make a state. Within the political arena itself, the question has been which to prefer as the solution to our problems: government or the market? The collective or the individual? Only at a certain stage in history do we begin to question the very terms in which we have framed a question. That is when we stand in the presence of what philosophers call a paradigm shift. That, I believe, is what is happening in contemporary politics. Problems exist that seem to resist solution, either by government action or the workings of the market. It is then that we have to ask whether our way of conceptualising society is adequate. Is there, beyond the individual and the state, a further entity, a third sector?

There is. The simplest way of identifying it is to perform a calculation. Imagine you have total power. You then decide to share it with nine others. The result is that you have one tenth of the power with which you began. Imagine next that you have a thousand pounds. This too you share with nine others. You now have one tenth of the sum with which you began. Now imagine that you have a certain quantum of love, or friendship, or influence, and you share this with nine others. Do you have less than *before*? To the contrary, you have more; perhaps even ten times as much.

The Logic of Social Goods

This simple exercise is sufficient to show us the logic of love or friendship or influence is quite different to that of power or wealth. These are things such that, the more I share, the more I have – and the reason is that they are goods which only exist in virtue of being shared. Let us call them *social goods.*

(As a religious leader, I would call them spiritual goods, but let us leave metaphysics aside.) It should be immediately apparent that they constitute a separate realm to that of governments and markets since they are not based on transactions of either power or monetary exchange. They are predicated on certain virtues: fidelity, reciprocity and trust. They give rise to the dispositions of which Professor Wilson has spoken, notably sympathy and fairness. They constitute our existence as social animals. They are the grammar of our sociability.

We are now in a better position to understand the landscape of which politics and economics are a part. At any given moment, power and wealth are arenas of conflict, because the more I share, the less I have. That is the beauty and necessity of governments and markets. They mediate conflict. They create a framework in which structured competition – the self-interested decisions of millions of people – yields benefits from which all, or at least most, gain. There is a word for such transactions. We call them *contracts*: the commercial contracts that constitute the market, and the social contract that creates the state. Contracts are agreements between parties, each of whom enters into them with expectation of gain.

Social goods, though, tend to arise from a different kind of relationship. Following biblical usage I call them *covenantal*, as opposed to contractual. A covenant is more binding, long-lived and open-ended than a contract. It is less about what we do than who we are. Marriage, the family, membership in a religious or ethical tradition, and loyalty to a nation are all (or historically have been) covenantal relationships. Rather than the conditional self-interested encounter of two individuals, they create a 'We' of which I am a part. They are arenas, not of mediated conflict but of co-operation. Their logic is not that of self-interest but rather of collective identity. They are where the more we share the more we have.

This, then, is the answer to the question about St. Paul's and the other houses of worship: they create and distribute social goods, the things that exist in virtue of being shared. They are not the only place to do so. So too do families, communities, neighbourhoods and voluntary organisations – indeed every institution held together not by calculations of advantage but by a sense of belonging, loyalty and trust. These are where we learn and

become articulate in the language Professor Wilson calls 'the moral sense'.

What has been fascinating in the intellectual history of recent decades has been the way in which three quite different disciplines – economics, sociobiology and political theory – have converged on the same conclusion. Economists such as James Coleman, Robert Putnam and Francis Fukuyama have developed the concept of *social capital*, to describe the way in which economic development depends on the presence or absence of *trust* – that hard-to-quantify phenomenon that makes collaborative enterprise possible. Quite simply, high trust economies are more creative and conducive to growth than their low trust counterparts.

Meanwhile, sociobiologists like Robert Axelrod, Anatol Rapoport and Michael Novak have been intrigued by the question of why, in the struggle for survival, animals – including, notably, the human animal – develop the capacity for apparently self-sacrificing behaviour. The answer at which they arrived, through computer simulations of the so-called 'iterated prisoners' dilemma', is that there are essential benefits to be derived from *reciprocal altruism*, the tendency to help others when one has the opportunity to do so, knowing that in the fullness of time they will help you. Indeed the evolutionary advantages of Homo sapiens, from the size of the human brain to the development of language, are now seen as ways of extending the scale and scope of this kind of reciprocity.

At the same time political theorists, especially in the United States, have been paying renewed attention to what Edmund Burke called the 'little platoons', what Alexis de Tocqueville described as the American tendency to form 'associations' and what sociologists like Peter Berger term 'mediating structures': those networks of relationship – family, friends, communities – that stand between the individual and the state and give society its 'thick texture' of character and continuity. This new approach to politics, called by some 'communitarian', and by others, 'civil society', is an attempt to move beyond the old paradigm of the atomic individual and the procedural state.

Despite their different interests and points of departure, all three disciplines are drawing attention to the same phenomenon, namely the long term need, in any competitive situation, for habits of co-operation. Whether we think of

football teams, political parties, or business corporations, victory ultimately goes not to the greatest individual talent but to the group best able to work together as a team. This is a simple insight once one has seen it, but what it represents is nothing less than a profound shift of paradigm from that central figure of the Enlightenment – the rational, calculating, consequence-maximising individual devoid of constitutive attachments to others – to persons-in-relationship joined by covenantal bonds of trust.

The Third Sector

Paradigm shifts happen when conventional explanations no longer work. Phenomena once dismissed as marginal come to be seen as central, and become problems to which traditional solutions are inadequate. That is what I believe has happened in the late-modern liberal democracies of the West.

Alongside rising standards of living and economic growth there have been disturbing social pathologies: rising crime, sporadic violence, drug and alcohol abuse, depressive and stress-related illness, and persistent concentrations of educational underachievement and unemployment. The gains of affluence have not been evenly distributed. Poverty, in particular, has proved intractable to both government- and market-based strategies. To be sure, standing as we are in the midst of the longest sustained boom of recent times, symptoms of discontent are only sporadic. Yet there is a widespread feeling that our social ecology is being eroded. Marriage is being replaced by consciously provisional partnerships. Instead of communities, we join life-style enclaves. When this happens, we lose something essential to our wellbeing as social animals. We lose our habits of co-operation, which are the basis of trust on which collaborative endeavour depends. We begin to lose the moral sense.

I have tried to suggest why this has happened. For a long time the Western imagination has been dominated by two entities, the government and the market, or the state and the individual. The logic of these institutions is contractual rather than covenantal. They speak to us as self-interested agents rather than persons linked to others through bonds of belonging. That is as they are and should be, but that is not all we need if we wish to sustain a just, compassionate and inclusive social order.

Two thinkers above all have shaped the modern mind, Karl Marx and Friedrich Nietzsche. Marx taught us to see social institutions as a mask covering the play of economic forces. Nietzsche persuaded us to see them as a veil hiding the pursuit of power. Between them they created the impoverished landscape I have described, in which there is no ultimate social reality beyond politics and economics.

I have argued the case for the importance of third sector institutions: families, neighbourhoods, communities, associations, voluntary bodies, and fellowships of various kinds, all of which are larger than the individual but smaller than the state. What is important about them is that they are held together not by the coercive use of power (the language of politics), nor by mechanisms of exchange (the language of economics), but by love, loyalty, faithfulness and altruism – by being there for other people when they need us, as they are there for us when we need them. They are where trust is born, where we develop our capacities for sympathy and fairness and where we learn the dispositions we call the moral sense.

Third sector institutions are covenantal rather than contractual. Their logic is quite different to that of governments and markets. Their importance is that they create the bonds of mutuality and concern for others without which the workings of the state and the economy are too impersonal to sustain a just and compassionate society. As they begin to fragment and fail, we become a society of strangers, a lonely crowd. Neighbourhoods become age- or income-segregated. Young people become less interested in politics, more interested in personal life plans. There is a general shift from religion to spirituality – from communities of faith to the private music of the soul. We prefer, in Robert Putnam's memorable phrase, to go 'bowling alone'. We forget that lovely insight of the great Victorian-Jewish philanthropist, Sir Moses Montefiore, who once said, "We are worth what we are willing to share with others."

Fortunately, James Q. Wilson is correct. There is something fundamental about the moral sense. It seeks expression. It is close to the core of what makes us persons. In the language of the Bible, "It is not good for man to be alone." Somehow we will rebuild our fractured families and communities, I hope sooner rather than later, and in this we all have a part to play. What matters

now is that we recognise the nature of the problem and develop a richer repertoire of politics that gives due weight to the role and significance of covenantal relationships and third sector institutions. They are what turn producers and consumers into citizens, and strangers into neighbours and friends. They are what gives politics its ultimate dignity as the pursuit of the common good.

Discussion

Sociability and Tolerance

Baroness Janet Cohen
I was particularly riveted by Professor Wilson's comments on the conflict between that sociability which we all need in order to have any morals at all, and the difficulty then of climbing over the wall and being tolerant of people who are not in our communities. As Gordon will know, I am a half Scot. I have never felt that half Scots have any trouble with being very good about communities, provided they are their own. The difficulty is leaping over the wall and being tolerant of communities who don't look as if they share your values and maybe threaten your community. This has enormous relevance, of course, for how we behave about immigration and race – immigration being the presenting sharp point.

First of all, is there a kind of philosophical guide (and it should come from America) on what we can cope with? How do you combine the concept of sociability and tolerance of others who are coming in and who may, in some sense, by their very existence, threaten to invade more sociable groups? What is the thinking on that, because it seems to me we are operating policy without really having addressed the true conflict that exists? We just say, "You ought to be good."

Julian Le Grand
Following on from that, I had a problem with the argument that Professor Wilson was putting forward, in terms of its internal consistency. You were arguing, if I understood it correctly (and, I think, rather plausibly), that a lot of our moral judgments come from a sort of fundamental intuition, a rather universal intuition, or some innate disposition towards moral judgments. And yet you also argued (again, I think, quite convincingly) that we tend to draw boundaries around those moral judgments and the extent to which we universalise them to other communities and so on. And you implied, too, that that also comes from a certain innate disposition.

Well, if the first has a moral status, why doesn't the second have a moral status as well, the drawing of boundaries? Like you, and indeed the previous

speaker, I am very hostile to the drawing of those boundaries. It is precisely one of the reasons why, for instance, I would support the European Union – not because of any economic reason, but because it is actually an historic experiment in trying to overcome boundaries of precisely that kind that have been immensely destructive over a thousand years. But it seems to me, from your own logic, you have a problem in actually justifying our jumping over those boundaries. I would be interested to see how you deal with that.

Response: James Q Wilson
How does the United States cope with such matters as immigration and race, and overcome the wall we like to erect among ourselves? It does so, I think, in two ways. The first is by constantly reminding ourselves of the second paragraph of the Declaration of Independence – that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, and so on. This document is not a contract signed among people (although at the end it is a contract, in the sense that the signatories promised their lives, their fortunes and their sacred honour to carrying it out). It is, to use Rabbi Sacks' term, a covenant, a pledge about the fundamental basis of society.

It is a pledge that has taken 250 years to have much extended meaning. But that pledge was reinforced by the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which said, "You may not discriminate on the basis of race, ethnicity, sex or national origin." The importance of converting the covenantal pledge in the Declaration in 1776 (which unfortunately was directed at your Ministers – I apologise for that!) into a Civil Rights Act which applied to Americans many decades later, is that the enforcement of the Act has been far more important in teaching people how to think than it has had an effect in modifying the behaviour of people. That is to say, some racists were sent to jail because they had violated the Act and other racists fear jail and thus avoid overt racism because they fear the Act, but for most people the law and the sentiment it embraces is taught in families and schools all over the country.

Why does it work in that sense? I think it worked in that sense because, after the passage of time, people, in a sense, were ready to reach across the wall. Now this does not solve the problem. When the economy turns bad, we turn against immigrants. In the United States, it happened in California.

The Governor acted badly at the point of this economic recession when immigrants were thought to be taking the jobs of native Americans, by passing a series of laws (which he knew in advance were constitutionally unenforceable) to try to penalise them by telling the children of the illegal immigrants that they could not go to school in the United States. It was a mistake, and he has paid the price for it. His political party has paid a very high price for it. And everyone understands that it was a high price and happily the economy is much better now.

We draw people along by constantly reminding them of the covenantal basis of our society and by enforcing these laws in ways that make it clear that except in times of duress, these laws mean what they say.

To turn to whether this comment was consistent or not with my prior observations, here I have to answer as a social scientist, not as a philosopher. The social science answer is this. For the first 100,000 years of man's existence on this earth, he lived in communities of perhaps forty families. A large village had 500 people in it. There was no outsider. The outsider lived a day's walk away. You never saw them, but if you did see them, you were at the ready, because they were naturally your enemies. So there was initially in our evolutionary history no conflict at all between moral sentiments that made you attach to family and friends and whatever you might owe to other people, because there were no other people to whom you would owe anything.

But things have changed. Migration, urbanisation and commerce have brought us all together. So now we have to ask the question, "Do those sentiments that we nurture in the family extend to people now whom we meet on a regular basis, in big cities, in commercial undertakings, in large enterprises?" And the answer to that question is that properly done, it works. The great lesson to me about the brilliant British effort to end slavery in the nineteenth century was that it involved not simply Quaker ministers preaching on doctrinal grounds that slavery was wrong, it also reflected British commerce. That is to say, having to deal with people, exchanging letters of credit, buying things on debt, trusting that things will be delivered from the Levant, from the Caribbean, from Africa, from Europe, from China, suddenly made them aware that trust extended had to be trust received. This combination of events began to demonstrate to people, I think, slowly, that

you could extend the reach of fundamental moral sentiments without paying a high price.

Now if you want me to justify the obligation to other people, distant friends, in a philosophical sense, I am not the person best prepared to do it. I think I could, but I would rather hear from Jonathan Sacks on that subject. To explain why the inconsistency existed, however, it flows directly from human experience, and the inconsistency is now being put under attack by human commerce and large-scale organisation.

Response: Rabbi Jonathan Sacks
On the central issue of how we reconcile strong communities with strong tolerance, I will give you three possible answers. The first one is the answer that comes from David Hume, which is that we have a natural bond of sympathy with others. It has to do with the moral emotions. Immanuel Kant said it had to do with moral reason – that is, all of our moral propositions must be universal. I have great reason to doubt the adequacy of both of those answers, because in the twentieth century, at critical moments, both sympathy for the other and universal concern for the other have actually failed.

And therefore let me give you the third answer, contained in the Hebrew Bible: "Thou shalt not oppress the stranger" – because you know what it feels like to be a stranger, because you were once strangers in the land of Egypt. In other words, I would add to Hume and Kant the extremely important dimension of memory. Memory is the moral guardian of mankind.

To give you a very simple example, when we had the discussions about Holocaust Memorial Day, it was a precondition of my supporting it that we took a Jewish tragedy, the Holocaust, and used that as a platform to understand other people's tragedies, the Cambodians, the Rwandans, the Bosnians and the Kosovans – in other words, to use our particularity to include other people's particularity.

In philosophical terms, a society has to be what Professor Wilson and I and many of us would wish it to be, a society with strong families and communities, but, at the same time, a tolerant society. There is no quick fix.

There is no single moral theory. We need both the liberal virtues of tolerance, coexistence and respect for diversity, and the communitarian virtues of solidarity and community. If we allow either of them to predominate at the cost of the other, then we face all the risks which Professor Wilson has spoken so eloquently about.

The Blame Culture

Rt. Hon. Tom Clarke MP
On the day that I got an invitation to this event, I saw on television the verdict in the trial involving that lovely young girl, Anna Climbie, and the two adults who were supposed to be looking after her, who had clearly behaved appallingly. What I thought emerged yet again from that was, if you like, the blame culture. It was nobody's fault; it was everybody's fault. Social workers – you're damned if you do, and you're damned if you don't. I wonder if you can add on that as being a modern phenomenon and, in any case, what your comments on that social situation are?

Response: James Q Wilson
I am not familiar with the case, although it sounds very similar to cases we have in the United States. We have child abuse. We have a few newborn children discarded in trash bins in Las Vegas casinos. We have babies suffering. These are horrible tragedies. But they have, perversely, one hidden virtue; they bring from all of us reaffirmation of the worth of these children. We may be in a worst form of political or economic or social conflict, but it is all set aside when we say, with virtual unanimity, "This is disgraceful." We are learning to see the world through the eyes of children, which I think, in many ways, is the best test of any policy aimed at human relationships. What will it do for the children?

Now I don't have a solution for the problem of child abuse. Happily it is a relatively small problem. Of necessity, I think, it is a small problem. But it does, when it occurs, remind us of how important these arrangements are.

Response: Rabbi Jonathan Sacks
I think our blame culture is evidence of a profound erosion of a principle

which is by no means self-evident, but which characterises what we might broadly call the Judeo-Christian tradition. That is that the centre of moral agency lies within each of us as choosing individuals. That has been eroded by a whole series of propositions. Since I am representing Judaism today, I can say we also have the distinction of producing some of the greatest heretics, thank goodness, of the modern world, and therefore we had Freud telling us it had to do with early childhood; Marx telling us that it had to do with structures of society; Spinoza saying that we are, in fact, all determined anyway.

That creates a blame culture, because we no longer locate responsibility within the self, and I think that's dangerous. It is really dangerous, because it is demoralising. If we think that social behaviour is solely generated by causes and factors that lie outside ourselves and our individual responsibility, then we do indeed create a culture in which it is very difficult for people to feel in control of their lives, and we create a culture in which all the things which Professor Wilson has spoken about actually become part of our disposition.

I love this story, because it is sometimes very difficult to get our own children to listen to our lessons. An American Rabbi spent a whole year to try and teach a very unruly class the book of Joshua. At the end of the year, he gave them an examination, and since he didn't think they were paying very much attention, he made the question extremely simple. He said, "Class, who destroyed the walls of Jericho?" And a young man at the back called Marvin put up his hand and said, "Please sir, it wasn't me".

The Rabbi then wrote in aggravation and despair to his parents, "Mr and Mrs Goldberg, I have been trying to teach your son for one year the book of Joshua and I asked the class, 'Who destroyed the walls of Jericho?' and your son said, "Please sir, it wasn't me.'" The next day, he got a very angry letter saying, "Dear Rabbi, If our son says it wasn't him, then it wasn't him!"

In despair, the Rabbi turned to the president of the congregation and said, "I told them ... the book of Joshua ... and I tried to teach them ... and when I asked them the question, 'Who destroyed the walls of Jericho?', Marvin said, 'Please sir, it wasn't me', and when I wrote to his parents, I get written back saying, 'If our son says it wasn't him, it wasn't him'. What am I supposed to do?" And the president got out his chequebook and said, "Look, here's a

cheque for $1,000 – have the walls repaired and stop complaining!"

I think we have to move beyond a culture of, "Please sir, it wasn't me."

The Third Sector and Fairness

Melanie Phillips
I'm very much persuaded of the moral and social restorative effects of the third sector institutions, but there seems to be a dilemma for politicians who want to release those beneficial effects. If politicians wish to use third sector institutions, they are tempted to give them lots of money and thus enter into a contract with those institutions, which many of them fear will compromise the very things that make them valuable in the first place. On the other hand, if politicians wish to prevent gaps emerging, if they are committed to equality and universality of provision, they fear that if they abandon the field, as it were, to third sector institutions and allow them independence, those gaps that emerge will be insupportable and unfair – and so they are tempted to make good the gaps and thus undermine the institutions. Do you as a panel have any solution to this dilemma?

Jon Snow
Rabbi, I was very taken by the third sector covenantal relationship, but I wonder whether you were entirely honest with your nephew in the Eye. When you looked down on the spires and the dome, wasn't the more honest answer, "I'm afraid those places are empty." And then the nephew says, "But hang on a minute, isn't the head of state the defender of their faith?" And you, I am sure, would have drawn a veil over that and moved on and said, "I can bring you comfort, because places that you cannot see from the Eye, mosques, Baptist churches in black areas, Congregational churches and other institutions are absolutely heaving with people." "What connection do they have to the two power sources that you have mentioned; the City and Parliament?" "Well not very much I'm afraid, nephew."

What do you do (and in a sense it's partly an extrapolation of what Melanie was saying)? How do you produce a situation in which the third sector has a connection with people who believe themselves to be beyond the third sector

and not in touch with either of the two power bases and not in touch either with your covenantal relationship, who believe they have no contact, no communion with the forces that you describe and feel and live excluded lives in increasing numbers?

Lord Young of Graffham
It's about 55 years or so since the distribution of health and welfare services largely passed from voluntary bodies to the state. What the last 30 years, I think, has demonstrated is that neither the state nor the market is delivering welfare and delivering health efficiently. We have seen that the state gets bogged down with bureaucracy and that there are many, many defects in the system. I would hesitate to go so far as to call it a 'third way', but there should be some other way of harnessing the voluntary bodies, taking the best that existed in the Victorian era (which has been much maligned but actually was good) and somehow encompassing that within the distribution of welfare from the state. Because there is no doubt in my mind, after spending some years myself in looking at the administration of the system, that it doesn't work, and no matter that changes have been made, it is not going to work. That, I think, is the key practical lesson out of the contributions I have taken out from today.

David Walker
Left-wingers in the room, of whom I presume there are one or two, might take some comfort presumably from Professor Wilson's observation, following Adam Smith, that one of the moral sympathies was a lust for fairness. He, being an American, thought simply about fairness in public affairs; a European traditionalist might say, a yen for fairness in terms of market outcomes. Other than the state, does he suggest that there are agencies (perhaps this vaunted third sector) which can guarantee to satisfy this elemental, as he put it, urge on people's part for fairness in their lives, of which obviously fairness in market outcomes must be allowed to belong in that category?

Lord Layard
Professor Wilson pointed out that there has been a failure of moral leadership in society. I am very concerned to know where you think it could be rebuilt – where it could really come from. Obviously it used to come from the

churches, but they are losing membership, because people find the creeds too difficult. I think the really disappointing thing in the present situation is that the less creedal places, say the Quakers, Unitarians, Ethical Society, Humanist Society, are not growing. They are not, as you might expect as people find the creeds too difficult, coming in to fill the void, and that's why there is a void. Of course the third sector is crucial, family, schools etc., but they still need leadership from somewhere, and I really don't see where it's going to come from. Jonathan Sacks said the Government has a limited role. I think our Government is playing an important role actually, at the moment, but it must be limited. So what are the institutions of the future which will supply the void and rebuild the walls of Jericho?

Response: Rabbi Jonathan Sacks
One question was, how do Governments avoid the Midas touch of killing the things that they want to help? I think the answer is that Governments have to respect the character of those institutions they support.

Somebody asked, aren't the churches empty? To which the answer is, it could well be that one part of the reason why they are empty is that for so long we haven't given them a job to do, responsibilities to bear. We find that an essential element of Synagogue life (and David Young alluded to it very obliquely) is that it combines also some very strong welfare obligations, and many people connect through that, rather than through a spiritual dimension.

What about the third sector institutions for those who are de-institutionalised, for those who have no community to belong to? I spent a day a few years ago at a place, a remand centre for persistent young offenders. It was teaching them skills; it was their last chance at a non-custodial sentence. I was very struck by the incredibly good work that was being done by this centre, and at the same time I asked the person who was teaching them the skills, who will be the networks for those young offenders, to find them jobs, to look after them and so on? And the answer was, no one.

I think that is condemning them to an extremely slim chance of building a life of hope, and therefore we have to look back, as somebody mentioned, at what happened in both the United States and Britain in the years between about

1830 and 1860. London, for instance, in the 1820s was every bit as violent as any city is today. There were great economic and social dislocations. What happened in both countries (and Professor Wilson has documented this in his big book about crime) is that those societies were re-moralised, not only by faith groups, but by voluntary organisations and charities. And I do believe the end result was that crime fell year on year all the way from 1850 to 1950, when it began its rise again. In other words, you can re-moralise a society, and it does not have to be done by religious groups alone.

Somebody asked what then happens about fairness and economic outcomes. There I agree, that is a job of the state. It is not a job that can be done by third sector institutions, and nothing I said should give the impression that I minimise the essential contribution of the state. All I wanted to do was add another component to our social landscape.

Response: James Q Wilson

Let me begin where Rabbi Sacks just ended. The United States does not have a lust for fairness and Adam Smith did not say that people should have a lust for fairness. We believe in fairness, but fairness as a judgment that goods and services should be distributed on the basis of personal desert and that every person should get what he or she deserves. Now countries differ with respect to this matter. In the United States, there is a widespread view that there should be a 'floor' under the income or services received by everyone, that no one should fall below the floor, but there is no agreement whatsoever that there should be a ceiling, so that incomes are widely unequal, as they are in the United States. This does not bother Americans. It bothers Swedes very deeply and Swedish incomes are much more narrowly compressed, and it bothers people in other countries.

Why it does not bother Americans is an interesting question. I think it has something to do with the belief, which is true in some fraction of cases, that the distribution should remain unequal, so that everyone's child has a chance to move up that unequal distribution. But the problem of fairness in the United States is not a problem of distributing wealth, the problem of fairness in the United States is a problem of distributing opportunity. Opportunity has to be distributed on the basis of claims of worth, which is to say, every child should have a chance to start out well educated, with a shot at making

as best a run as he or she can in the world.

Now the problem of doing this, with respect to the use of voluntary associations, raises precisely the dilemma that Melanie Phillips spoke about. On the one hand, we run the risk of harming the third party groups, particularly churches, by asking them to take money and regulations that they cannot control, or apply for grants that they cannot design. On the other hand, if we fail to do this, we run the risk of creating gaps. And so one has to have a balance.

Let me give you a concrete example from the United States of how that balance might be struck. We have extremely high rates of unmarried teenage pregnancies in the United States. In Washington DC, of all the women who are pregnant before the age of 18, 98% are unmarried, and the vast majority never marry. In New York City the percentage is lower; I think it is only 93%. Now what do you do with this? Well obviously what you want to do is to persuade girls not to get pregnant until they are married, or if they are pregnant before getting married, then get married afterwards. How do you achieve that? You don't solve the problem by giving them welfare, because that simply provides them with an individual home and certain benefits, and there are no costs then to not getting married. On the other hand, you do not withhold these benefits, because to withhold the benefits condemns the children to a life of terrible poverty.

In Massachusetts we have created a system called "Teenage Homes", in which any woman under the age of 18 who is pregnant without a husband, or who has a new child without a husband, is required to live in a home run by a voluntary association – at which time she gets all of the benefits she is entitled to under the state and federal welfare system. She assigns her food stamps to the Home, which helps pay the bills, and in the Home her opportunity to entertain boyfriends is sharply limited, her chances of obtaining drugs is reduced we hope to zero, she is required to go to school. The Home is managed by voluntary associations (the Salvation Army, the Methodist Church, the YWCA, whatever organisation steps forward), with the goal of raising those children in an environment supported by caring, responsive and experienced parents.

Now this may help the mothers themselves, we don't know, but the goal is to help the babies. The goal is to make sure babies grow up in an environment in which there is regularity and they are taught the essential things of life. So it is a way, I would suggest, of combining government payments to prevent poverty with placing people in an institutional environment which we hope, but as yet do not know, will encourage the mothers, and failing the mothers, the children as they grow up, to act more responsibly in the world.

How do we deal with the failure of moral leadership and the fact that so many people are not in churches and that many of the less creedal places are not growing? This is all certainly true. In the United States, the rate of church growth is fastest among the Pentecostal Churches. The Mormon Church is growing, and the Pentecostal Churches are growing rapidly. The Episcopalian Church, the Presbyterian Church and the Congregational Churches are sinking.

What do we learn from this? I think what we learn from this is that the central role that churches now play in a society such as in the United States is to offer a transformative experience to people – to approach people when they are desperate, when they are in need, when their lives are tattered or dirty or in shame, and to help them find a way of transforming themselves. Religion does not provide morality in society. If it did, Japan would be the most violent nation in the world; an essentially irreligious society which has, astonishingly, a remarkably low crime rate. No, what religion does, in my view, is to provide an opportunity for transformation, for helping people who have a love of God to get control of their lives.

Now the churches that do this in the United States are growing. We have an advantage. We have free enterprise among churches. There has never been an established church in this last century. We have churches coming, many of them have Ministers who have jobs during the day and teach on a Sunday in a rented store front, who are often drawing people in because they have problems. This is a service that no government can supply. The most successful 'church' in America is Alcoholics Anonymous. It takes no government grants; it takes no large grants from anybody, public or private; it meets in church basements; and it transforms, in a significant fraction of cases, the lives of alcohol and narcotics abusers. It could not have been invented either

by the state or by the market. It was invented by people who had been there themselves and watched their lives being destroyed and said, "I must find some way to transform my life and help other people transform theirs."

That is the role we ought to encourage. What does the Government do? Well, the Government can't simply ask organisations to apply for a federal grant. These organisations are too small to do it; they don't know how to do it; they could not deal with auditors if they tried to do it. We have to find some way of providing support where it is needed. I have long thought that the United States Government should borrow a chapter from the Mafia and create an off-shore foundation in the Cayman Islands or in the Bahamas. A foundation would receive federal money, and each foundation would then have the task as a private foundation of distributing money to organisations in the United States that need money, with no federal oversight, except the oversight of the foundations as a whole.

I also think that corporations in the United States, which now match the charitable contributions of their individual employees with their own charitable contributions going to educational, cultural, health and social organisations, should be allowed to do this as well with religious organisations. That is the difficult thing to do; ask an American Chief Executive Officer to allow corporate money to go to a religious organisation, they tremble. Why? They ought not tremble. There's nothing illegal about it. But it is, worst of all, unconventional – it hasn't been done before. But if it were done before, if it could be done now, money in vast amounts would go, directed by the people who know these organisations, the individual employees, to places where the organisations can make a difference.

If There Is a Moral Problem, Does Religion Hold the Answer?

Polly Toynbee

I am not quite sure why we think we are in this moral abyss, why we think we are in need of some sort of fundamentalist, Moral Rearmament revival. It seems to me that this is on the whole the conservative view of the world, which is always in a state of moral panic, always thinks yesterday was better

than today, the Victorians, the 1950s, whenever. We, in this country anyway, are living in a progressive era, when things are definitely getting better. As, in your country anyway, crime is going down, it doesn't seem to me to be an obvious time for a great sort of moral cataclysm or sense of anxiety. Things are getting better for a large number of people. People have more choice, more freedom. Many more people have jobs, opportunities. Life for women (50% of the population) is better now than it has ever been at any time in history. There has never been a better time for almost everybody to be alive than now, except perhaps the very rich in previous times.

So I am a little puzzled, and I think it is a perpetual conservative state of mind to always think that everything is going downhill and that there was a golden era. I actually think we are living in the golden era and we are doing pretty well. We could do a lot better. There are a lot of problems, a lot of social problems, but it is a question of looking forwards and not backwards.

In this country, for instance, very few people go to church. Being a non-believer myself, I regard that as progress for reason. The idea of using faith-based institutions, because they might be socially useful and socially coercive, seems to me to be retrograde. One ought to be able to find and use and support many of the good community aspects of what faith-based communities used to do in this country, but to do it in other ways – ways that are perhaps more rational. I celebrate the time that we live in now and not any other previous time, and I don't feel in a state of moral panic, although I do see huge amounts of room for improvement.

Sir Samuel Brittan
I will have to be brief at this time of the morning. It is a question for Rabbi Sacks, and I have been wondering the whole morning how to put it tactfully. I think I have found an indirect way of putting it.

A few days ago, we celebrated the hundredth anniversary of the death of the composer Verdi. Now some people think it is only some good tunes. In fact there is a great deal more than that, especially when the libretto is taken at several removes from the German dramatist, Schiller. What strikes me in so many of these operas is that it is always the priests, whether they are Christian priests, or whether they are pagan priests, who are demanding the most

vicious penalties – who are the most ferocious in insisting that Aida and Radamès are left to die in a tomb because of the help they gave to the Abyssinians. And one remembers particularly in Don Carlos the way in which the priests want to put to death the representatives from Flanders. And one can also not help noticing that the religious parties in the Israeli coalitions are often the biggest obstacle to the peace process in the Middle East.

Now I'd like Rabbi Sacks' view on why so many religious leaders fan the unpleasant aspects of communal feeling, that is the hatred and intolerance towards outsiders. Would he condemn this and how could we reduce it?

Response: Rabbi Jonathan Sacks
Would I condemn it? Yes! Would I explain it? Yes! And I say this as a religious leader, never, ever, give religious leaders power! Give us influence, but a total lack of power. If I can give you that lovely quotation from Kierkegaard, "When a King dies, his power ends. When a Prophet dies, his influence begins." I think any direct involvement of religious groups, as such, in the political process is fraught with disaster.

As to Polly Toynbee, are things getting better? Yes, in almost every respect, except the following. I can't overlook, and I don't think we can, that in the last 50 years (I take these facts from a book called *Britain on the Couch* by a British psychologist who has no religious interest or influence), if we look at depression, depressive illness, eating disorders, stress-related syndromes, alcohol and drug abuse, suicide and suicide attempts, especially among young people, we chart over the last 50 years on all of those indices a rise of between 300% and 1,000%.

So I think there are many gainers in the present, but there are also some losers, and that's why we have to think about those who suffer from the current dispensation. But on the fundamental point, I agree. We have to look to the future and not to the past. We cannot march boldly back into the twenty-first century thinking, but it's the nineteenth. I agree with that.

Response: James Q Wilson
Why do we need a moral revival? Isn't that simply a traditional conservative complaint, heard every time meetings of this sort are convened and a

conservative is allowed to speak? Possibly.

Let me begin with a different view. In 1840, Benjamin Disraeli wrote *Sybil*, in which he complained famously of the two nations, by which he meant then, in England, the nation of the rich and the nation of the poor. It was a moving document, and much of nineteenth century England was devoted to ways of trying to cope with that problem, finally putting in place, in the twentieth century, new programmes designed to end it.

The nation of the rich and the nation of the poor in the United States could not now be described by Benjamin Disraeli as two nations. The poor in the United States have vastly greater resources than all but the very rich in England of the 1840s. We have a different kind of two nations. We have the first nation, who are those of us who have jobs, are married, have occupations, professions, men and women who have accomplished so much, and there is a second nation. A second nation cut off from us culturally.

It is a nation in which 95% of all teenage mothers are unmarried. It is a nation in which half the children grow up without having two parents in their homes. It is a nation in which 1.5 million people are in prison and another 4 million are on probation or parole. It is a nation that has produced the city of Los Angeles, where 180,000 young men are members of gangs, the vast majority of whom do not have fathers at home. It is a nation in which the police try to patrol cities, knowing that in the inner parts of the city there are no fathers on the streets, and therefore only the naked exercise of state authority can, at best, control order. It is a world in which, on any given street corner in Philadelphia or Boston or Los Angeles, if you encounter a group of young men and you ask them who their fathers are, something approaching 100% do not know who they are.

Now that second world, that lost world, will never grow up to replace the first world. It will simply make the first world armed, hostile, suspicious, withdrawn from its fellow man, living in gated communities, behind the guard standing in front of condos, driving about in locked automobiles, and constantly demanding that more police be hired. That, in fact, is the conservative, narrowly defined response to the problem, and it is a response that I do not welcome. I want to bring that second nation, that dispossessed

nation, back into the possession of those things that the larger first nation has. Not because the second nation is poor, but because the second nation has lost all real chance of making a life for themselves.

Wilf Stevenson
Thank you very much. Thank you, the audience, for very penetrating and good points and for listening so intently to our speakers. You won't find in many situations in the United Kingdom discussions that range from Moses to the Mafia and from Sybil to Verdi. But I'm sure we will take a lot more than that away, because there were some very insightful things said today and, above all, we had wisdom.