

"SPIRITUALITY AND ITS ANTITHESES," Prairie Society Sep. 22, 1991

1. Light the chalice for the Autumnal Equinox....Can anyone put in a good word for it?

2. A song #5 #14 #64 #66 #100 → somewhere in the middle

3. Anne Pryor

4. Two weeks ago Scott Savage began his series by asking you for your definitions of spirituality and your illustrations of spirituality. He got lots of answers. (One that still has me thinking is that spirituality is anxiety....)

The range of your answers to his question led me to ask myself what spirituality is not? Let me begin by asking you the question. What is not spirituality? What is antithetical to spirituality?

In considering the question, I would ask you to think about spirituality in a broad sense, more or less religious, rather than in the narrower senses manifested in such phrases of the form, "the spirit of X." Human beings have the capacity to invest spirit into almost anything. I suppose you could talk about the spirit of tank warfare, or the spirit of double-entry bookkeeping, or even of the spirit of purse snatching. But try to think of spirituality in a broader sense.

In addition, I don't think spirituality should be identified with the virtuous. There are lots of things that are valuable that are not spiritual. And sometimes spirituality itself may not be virtuous. Religious people have often cultivated their spirituality at the expense of others or even their own expense.

#5 Turn Back O Friends

#14 How Can I Keep From Singing

#64 White Sands & Grey Sands

#66 Kookaburras

#100 Little boxes

INSTRUMENTAL RATIONALITY, deliberation, calculation, scheming, contrivance. Where, given our individual goals, we rational select the most efficient means available to us to achieve those goals.

This instrumental rationality tends to dominate modern societies, and the growth in the importance of instrumental rationality may have meant the decline of spirituality. Instrumental rationality usually characterizes behavior in markets and in bureaucratic organizations. In markets we usually look for the best deal, the best goods at the lowest prices, the best loan ~~and~~ at the lowest interest, etc. And that tends to be the limit of our concerns. We tend not to be especially interested in the welfare of the other person in the transaction, or the larger society. So in a sense capitalism is one of the antitheses of spirituality.* Karl Marx and Frederick Engels put it this way in the COMMUNIST MANIFESTO: the modern capitalist world has left no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous 'cash payment.' (Capitalism) has downed the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervour, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism, in the icy water of egotistical calculation. The German social scientist Max Weber wasn't a socialist by any means, but he too was sensitive to this aspect of capitalism. In 1910 he published THE PROTESTANT ETHIC AND THE SPIRIT OF CAPITALISM. I think he was aware of the irony in the phrase the "spirit of capitalism." In the book he argued that aspects of Reformation religion contributed to the rise of capitalism in the 17th c. In the middle ages those ~~he~~ who had a religious calling answered by withdrawing from worldly occupations. The Reformers gave a positive religious significance to work in the world. One could have a religious calling as a merchant, a scholar, and artisan. Work, profit, and the accumulation of profits could have a positive religious meaning. Today the spirit of capitalism has been secularized. People are driven to make money and to accumulate possessions. Weber closed his book with these words:

The Puritan wanted to work in a calling; we are forced to do so. . . . In the Puritan (preacher Richard Baxter's) view the care for external goods should only lie on the shoulders of the 'saint like a light cloak, which can be thrown aside at any moment.' But fate decreed that the cloak should become an iron cage. . . No one knows who will live in this cage in the future, or whether at the end of this tremendous development entirely new prophets will arise, or there will be a great rebirth of old ideas and ideals, or, if neither, mechanized petrification, embellished with a sort of convulsive self-importance. For of the last stage of this cultural development, it might well be truly said: 'Specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart: this nullity imagines that it has attained a level of civilization never before achieved.'

* Romantic poets
made the point:
Wordsworth, 'The
World is Too Much
with Us,'
PB p 92
↓
or Communist poets,
Bertolt Brecht
CMP p 56

The same kind of instrumental rationality characterizes modern bureaucracy, especially the best bureaucracies. Bureaucrats are rule-bound, their discretion is specifically limited. Their goals are given to them, each unit has specialized responsibilities. Bureaucrats are expected to be sober and unemotional; sentiments of friendliness or hostility to clients shouldn't affect their ~~judgments~~ judgments. Bureaucratic organizations are designed as instruments to efficiently achieve specific goals.

(Beyond

And spirituality isn't among them.

markets & bureaucracy, War - The A-Bomb over Hiroshima & Smart bombs in Iraq,

(This is not to say that we can do without markets or bureaucracies.....try it some time.)P

vs the passions of The Crusades or the wars of the French Revolution)