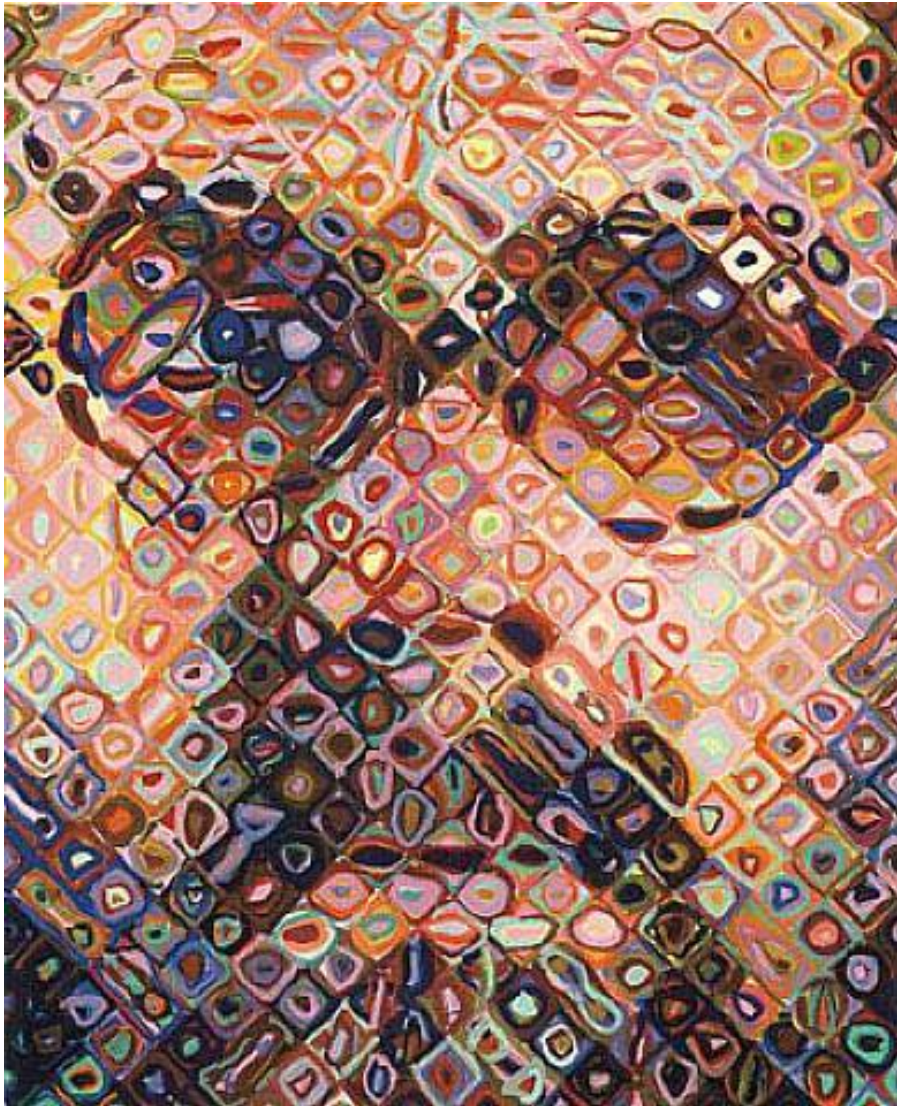


# Virtue Signalling and Binararity

by Friedrich Hansen (April 2018)



*Self-Portrait*, Chuck Close, 2002-03

**I**n fairness to the Millennials and their obvious problem with maturation or growing up: it certainly is not their fault that the sexual revolution of 1968 has turned the world upside down, namely by opening up the Protestant bottleneck of pent up emotions and thus ushering in the present era of

emotional incontinence. Today, all feelings are thrown on the marketplace of public opinion. As a result, the Millennials, as the true heirs of the Baby boomers, seem to have lost the inner tensions of moral dualism—productive tensions to be sure which, for a millennium, had been the motor of innovation in the monotheist West. Athens only provided the tools of science but Jerusalem gave us inner dualism and the enquiring mind. The decline of western universities and also industrial innovation leaves us in little doubt that the death of religion is being followed by the death of science.[\[1\]](#) Instead, barren binary logic has taken over not only Western technology and ideas but also the sexual discourse.

It was in the Renaissance that the shift from inner, moral [Hitler and Röhm](#) in 1934.

Yet, soon enough, in the postwar period, life resumed its course that had been interrupted by the Great War in the *Fin de Siècle*. As if nothing had been learned from decadence after WWII, the parents of the Millennials drugged themselves brim-full in order to shift quickly from Adam II to Adam I, meaning to manage guilt by enhancing feelings of the ego, or what the baby boomers worshipped as self-realization. Now, their offspring, the Millennials, have to pick up the pieces and live with the disastrous cultural and economic consequences. Still influenced by the hippies, the problem with the Millennials is that they overvalue expressionism and authenticity and undervalue relationships and family. This is the result of thinkers like Hobbes, Kant, Nietzsche, Freud, Ernst Cassirer, Susanne K. Langer,[\[5\]](#) Hans Jonas, Hannah Arendt, Herbert Marcuse and Martin Heidegger all of whom cherished aesthetic Adam I or the cognitive, outer self over the covenantal (moral) inner self of religion. Historically, relationships have been managed by the inner Adam II, who is closer to our conscience and always superior to Adam I in

mastering the language of the soul.

It was only with the Renaissance that egotistic individualism and Adam I gradually took the lead, by marginalizing the Christian roots of the West. For the human person emerged from the inner Adam who has been inaugurated at Sinai with the covenant between the Israelites and their unique God. Humans are not designed to live alone and be merely authentic; this is a modern deformity of the mind. We are social animals according to both streams of Western ideas from Athens and Jerusalem alike.

Now, it is typically lonely young men who miss the right balance between relations over authenticity. This is most visible in the mass killings by the enigmatic "Mad Max" types. Park MacDougald speaks of "Fascists and Revolutionaries" in [Logotherapy](#).



Auschwitz survivor Victor Frankl

After five hundred years of Protestant centrifugal “expressionism” and the politics of authenticity at the cost of relationship and the centripetal family, the habit of “posturing” for claiming the moral high ground is coming to an end. After the postwar *Sturm und Drang* of identity politics in the name of authentic-being-the-new-politics-of-networking show that the future depends pretty much on “relations” and coherence. We can also see that the rainbow coalition, infatuated with Adam I and mere “intersectionality” cannot deliver leadership, which is why Hillary Clinton lost to Donald Trump. With LGBT..X there is too much authenticity and diversity and too little unity. Leadership, however, is a centripetal challenge and therefore depends on Adam II—with language being absolutely critical.

Nevertheless, what we are seeing under President Trump is a discourse gradually upending the visual turn of the Renaissance. Populism is driving the inversion of the “centrifugal” axis of modernity toward “centripetal” values such as family and nation (with religion to follow in due course). This is where the historical role of the post-narcissist, millennial culture comes in, which is set to push the baby boomers into oblivion. The Millennials are the first generation who are forced by the mirror technology and social media to reflect on their own narcissism.

Language-wise, the overall motive of the digital revolution bids a farewell to static pride, reflecting the industrial age of production and outcomes, “ready made” in the arts, settled public roles and professions, all dominated by binary hardware and the GDP. It is being substituted by the dynamic verbiage, reflecting the breaking of digital binary codes with an emphasis on process, the dissolution of fixed roles, perhaps also gender fluidity as well as worldwide mass migrations. Yet, the centripetal anti-globalist counter-movement is well underway and any transition is going to be protracted—just as it was with the parallelism, observed by the art historian Aby Warburg, of medieval Christian and secular Renaissance culture.[\[7\]](#)

In the West today we inhabit an anti-intellectual world of feeling and sentimentality still pouring out of the deeply Protestant gender wars. Judaism, however, got the gender balance right 5,000 years ago and is therefore able to keep that balance in Israel and in the diaspora. By contrast, while the self-destructive Protestant gender wars are approaching their climax, the Millennials are perhaps best placed to take

note; for the exhaustion of Protestant expressionism and authenticity has been exposed by the binary antagonisms of the vicious culture of social media, whose anti-intellectualism has become asphyxiating. This will probably bring identity politics to an end far more quickly than many seem to expect. For unlike previous revolutionary movements, the gender wars are marked by a glaring lack of personalities and leadership. At the same time, western conservatives, mostly Catholics, are caught in defensive mode. A retreat into mere localism seems to be all that remains if we follow Notre Dame University professor Patrick Deenen in his new book.[\[8\]](#) All that counts for him seems to be trustworthiness, reliable human relations, and physical, not digital, dialogue protected by safe geographical and moral borders.

All the unifying aspects of populism are denounced by liberals at their own peril.

Already, the yearning for meaningful dialogue is resurfacing giving us this rare moment of a brilliant dialogue between [Michael Hobbes from Malcolm Harris](#) points out: *“The implication, of course, is that much of the ‘learning’ we do doesn’t actually result in learning anything, which has led Caplan[\[11\]](#) and others to argue that school (especially college) is not primarily about enriching yourself with human capital but about ‘signaling’—securing credentials that show you are intelligent, motivated, and compliant enough to jump through whatever hoops are set in front of you.”*

This is just part of the general infantilization of our society (Frank Furedi) which puts pressure towards our reliance on centrifugal posturing rather than committed real action. Curiously, posturing has a pantheist source, namely

“its close kinship with Calvinism in their common denial of human agency and will.” William Ellery Channing [interesting exchange](#) about the disintegration of adult authority, between Heather MacDonald and Frank Furedi. While Furedi blamed this on the lifestyle of self-victimization as the new universalistic psychology, MacDonald put it down to the culture of protest identity or the race card, both particularistic ideologies. [\[15\]](#) Furedi argued “Our older approach to socializing students rested on morality—the idea that certain beliefs and standards of conduct exist that everyone should strive for. But psychology has wiped away the notion of shared beliefs, which means that people determine whether a given action or belief is moral based on how it makes them feel. If you appeal to normative ideals, you are attacked for trying to impose your values on others.”

MacDonald: “This argument that colleges are filled with relativists has become extremely prevalent, but I have a different view. I think that we have hysterical moralists on campus. These student radicals believe unwaveringly that they know the truth, and their truth is that America is racist. To them, their colleges and their country are unequivocally racist, sexist, homophobic, and fascist. They have not the slightest hesitation about passing unrelenting, unappealable moral judgment on anyone who does not fit in those intersectional categories of transcendent victimhood.” The last term reminds me of Heidegger’s concept of “transcendental phenomenology,” but the common ground Furedi and MacDonald are missing is the “Age of Feeling;” marked as it is by the inevitable Heideggerian infatuation with space and romantic overflow, it leaves them with emotional incontinence, individual logorrhoea and mob hysteria as the main outlets of the “snowflakes.” However, there is yet another side to this: The Protestant confusion about the deed versus mere gesture (virtue signalling) reflects the essential difference between

Adam II (focus of MacDonald) and Adam I (focus of Furedi) which seems to be at the heart of the controversy. Typical for this is the confusion between metaphysics and transcendence is MacDonald's term "transcendental victimhood." Since the term victimhood belongs to the world of gestures managed by Adam I rather than deeds as managed by Adam II, it continues on the road of Christian incarnation (half god/half man), which is a typical Greek hybrid feature. Yet it is a categorial error and MacDonald should speak not of transcendence but of sexual transgression which is the agency of Adam I. It all comes down to what Joseph B. Soloveitchik called the "decoupling of emotions" from what he took to be the reign of religious Adam II. The inner Self, through most of Western history, has been in control of emotions. Today, Adam I oversees the emotions but he cannot control them properly. Today's notion of feelings as the arbiter over right and wrong has a very long history going back at least to the Renaissance. On this last point I tend to agree with MacDonald: "I don't see how one could claim today that colleges are nonjudgmental, excessively tolerant places. They are precisely the opposite. Traditional religion is not the only form of morality; these social-justice progressives have a form of morality just as rigid as the world's most dogmatic religions."

Millennials are most likely to finally become fed up with self-victimization. Furedi, for the time being, recommends: "Unfortunately, most people who buy into this philosophy can't be reasoned out of it. Our job is to dissuade people who might be considering that way of thinking." Millennials are less prone to addiction, psychic infirmities or drop out than their predecessors the Baby Boomers, they seem less fragile at the price of many carrying through life the comfortable fiction of victim ideology. They actually seem to mistake the inevitable everyday portion of self-suppression as being state-enforced, which means they cannot discern between the inner and outer



person. In the same vein, black