THE 21\textsuperscript{ST}-CENTURY CITY AND ITS VALUES: URBANISM, TOLERATION, AND EQUALITY

October 1, 2004

SESSION 2: TOLERATION

\textbf{Ira Katznelson:} Good afternoon. I'm Ira Katznelson. I'm a member of the political science and history departments here at Columbia, and with Hilary Ballon I've helped organize this event. I say "with Hilary Ballon," but in this case alphabetical order actually genuinely reflects the order of responsibility and effectiveness in shaping this so far very fascinating event.

And welcome to the session on toleration. If heterogeneity and diversity—as we heard this morning—are the most cherished values of cities and urbanism, then the complex concept of toleration must be its underpinning. Imagine an urban environment not characterized . . . alas, we don't have to work too hard to imagine urban environments not characterized by toleration.

Toleration, we should remind ourselves, has not been the norm in human history. Even when majorities and minorities of different kinds lived side by side in relative peace, that is not toleration, which at minimum must signify some legitimacy to this heterogeneity, even if on unequal terms. And it requires not just ideas of toleration, but authoritative endorsement and enforcement. Toleration is a compound word, it refers to layers of meaning.

I'm not about to launch into a lecture. I'm about to introduce our principal speaker, but just think of the following five very quickly, one sentence each. Toleration raises questions of normativity. How desirable is it to tolerate the other? Toleration raises questions about group distance. How proximate are the tolerant and tolerated? How wide is our zone of human toleration? Toleration raises questions of social extensiveness. How many aspects, how many zones, how many spheres of life are covered by toleration? Toleration raises questions of doctrine. What doctrines support the practice of toleration, which religious or secular doctrines? And finally, what spatial range will toleration have? How far does toleration extend spatially? Sometimes limited historically to particular small locales, like Strasbourg in early modern Europe, and sometimes toleration might extend to the whole globe.
Now there's no one I'd like to hear more talk about toleration than Martha Nussbaum, a distinguished classicist, philosopher, student of literature, student of human development, student of gender, I could go on. She is one of our most interesting and illuminating intellectuals who is currently Ernst Freund Distinguished Service Professor of Law and Ethics at my second-favorite university, the University of Chicago.

I'm not going to go into a long introduction. Almost everyone in this room is familiar with one or another or many aspects of her scholarship, her writing, her speaking. It's a great pleasure to introduce Martha Nussbaum.

**Martha Nussbaum:** Well thank you very much, and thank you for inviting me here on this very exciting occasion to come to my second-favorite city. So the first bit will be history of philosophy and philosophy, and then we'll get to the city at the end.

Toleration is an urgent preoccupation in modern liberal democracies. All such democracies are based on an idea of equal respect for citizens, but all contain a plurality of religious and secular comprehensive doctrines, to use John Rawls's phrase. That is, doctrines in terms of which people make sense of life to themselves and search for its moral basis and its ultimate meaning. Equal respect for citizens in such circumstances seems to require respect for their freedom and equality as they pursue matters of such fundamental importance. All such democracies, therefore, have strong reasons to support an idea of toleration understood as involving respect, not only grudging acceptance, and to extend toleration to all religious and secular doctrines, limiting only conduct that violates the rights of others. This norm is widely shared.

There's no modern democracy, however, in which toleration of this sort is a stable achievement. Toleration is always under siege from the forces of intolerance, and constant vigilance is required lest a powerful group impose its ways on an unwilling and relatively powerless minority. In the United States, Christian language and sentiments are often casually introduced in public-policy statements in ways that suggest the unequal dignity of non-Christians. And there are other danger signs that I'll mention later.

In India, the subject of much of my current writing, the forces of Hindu fundamentalism have produced terrible violence against the Muslim minority. Even the recent election does not make minority rights secure. And one could, of course, multiply such examples. How then can a respectful pluralistic society shore up the fragile human basis of toleration, especially in a world in which we need to cultivate toleration not only within each state but also among peoples and states in this interdependent world?

So now I'm going to turn to the history of Western philosophy to confront this question, and at the end I'll return to the contemporary scene and to the modern city.

I begin with John Locke's letter on toleration, a central text for the entire subsequent tradition. Locke's thought about toleration is complex and it's impossible to understand the argument of his letter fully without connecting it to the rest of his political thought, but let me, however, attempt a summary.
Locke insists that in matters of religious belief and religious conduct, as long as it doesn't violate the rights of others, the state must strive to protect "[a]bsolute liberty, just and true liberty, equal and impartial liberty." Not only must the state refuse the use of coercion to compel religious homogeneity, it must strenuously protect all its citizens from coercion on the part of others. Moreover no person is to be "prejudiced in his civil enjoyments," as Locke puts it, because of religion. Magistrates must go beyond non-persecution to zealous protection of all citizens in their rights so that "the goods and health of subjects be not injured by the fraud or violence of others." For both citizens and state actors the norm of toleration requires not only grudging preservation of rights but a spirit of what Locke calls "charity, bounty, and liberality." Church officials ought to advise their members of "the duties of peace and goodwill towards all men, as well towards the erroneous as the orthodox." They should industriously exhort their members, and especially civic magistrates to "charity, meekness, and toleration."

Locke advances several different arguments for this norm. Some rely on Christian doctrines, some assume a skeptical attitude toward religious beliefs. What concerns me here, however, is a strand in the argument that's both central to the work and more pertinent to our modern debates than any other. Modern readers of Locke may justly feel that some of his arguments are too internal, requiring a framework of Protestant ideas for their success. But this criticism can't be made against the line of argument that concerns me, and this is that all citizens have rights, that is, rightful claims over liberty, property, and other prerequisites of well-being. Moreover, these rights are equal. It is wrong for these rights to be undermined on grounds of religious difference.

Locke emphasizes the centrality of this part of the argument by stating, "The sum of all we drive at is that every man ... enjoy the same rights that are granted to others." This argument is based on Locke's general political theory, and in particular on his idea of the social contract and its relation to rights. The key idea, I believe, is that of respect for persons. To say that persons have rights and should not be interfered with is a way of saying that persons deserve respect from one another. With regard to the fundamentals of well-being they are all equally entitled, and these entitlements must be interfered with either by the state or through state inaction by one another.

Locke recognizes that people are not always generous and peaceable. Indeed his insistence on the duty of churches to exhort their members to toleration, generosity, and peace acknowledges the presence of a problem. People are inclined to go against the Lockean ideal. Locke's political surroundings did much to illustrate such violations.

But nothing is said about how a Lockean state can grapple with this problem beyond asking people to be nice to one another. Perhaps Locke believes that the problem is only temporary, the artifact of recent religious strife and bad clerical behavior. He simply lacks interest in the psychological underpinnings of intolerance. Locke thus leaves his own project in a position that is at best uncertain, at worst highly precarious and unstable. Without trying to figure out why intolerance is so ubiquitous, however speculative all such accounts are bound to be, it's difficult to say anything useful about the likelihood that toleration can remain stable. So let me now
turn to Kant and to his famous doctrine of radical evil which does, I think, offer a profound diagnosis of bad behavior.

Kant is deeply influenced by the social-contract doctrines of both Locke and Rousseau. His state is basically Lockean in structure, uses a Lockean understanding of rights, and understands the limits of state action in roughly Locke's way. Kant does, however, feel the need to fill a gap in Locke's account by supplying in his book on religion a moral psychology of evil that explains why intolerance and other forms of bad behavior are likely to remain a permanent problem in human societies.

Evil is radical, according to Kant. That is, it goes to the very root of our humanity, because human beings have—prior to any experience—a propensity to both good and evil in the form of tendencies that are deeply rooted in human nature. Thus we are such that we could follow the moral law, but there's also something in us that makes it virtually inevitable that in some circumstances we will disregard the moral law and act badly. What are those circumstances?

Our animal nature is not itself the problem. Animal need, says Kant, is limited and easily satisfied. The tempter, the invisible enemy inside, is something peculiarly human, namely a propensity to competitive self-love, which manifests itself whenever human beings are in a group. He writes, "Envy, addiction to power, avarice, and the malignant inclinations associated with these assail his nature, which on its own is undemanding, as soon as he is among human beings." And Kant italicizes that phrase. "Nor is it necessary to assume that these are sunk into evil and are examples that lead him astray; it suffices that they are there, that they surround him, and that they are human beings, and they will mutually corrupt each other's moral disposition and make one another evil."

Kant's account is powerful, although he's surely too sanguine about the opportunity of many of the world's people to satisfy bodily need. He's also surely right in holding the bodily need as not the biggest cause of bad behavior. Even when people are well fed and housed, and even when they have the other prerequisites of well-being they still behave badly to one another and violate one another's rights. And even though an innate propensity is a difficult thing to demonstrate, Kant seems right when he suggests that people require no special social teaching in order to behave badly, and indeed regularly do so despite the best social teaching.

Kant is offering a general explanation for the origins of bad behavior, not a particular explanation of intolerance, but it has an obvious relevance to Locke's problem. Wherever people are together they form themselves into religious groups and vie for superiority among themselves. This process—difficult to explain with reference to the internal ideologies of the religions, which may be strongly in favor of peace and compassion, as Locke stresses for the case of Christianity—is well explained by Kant's idea of a propensity to competition activated by the mere presence of a group.

Now Kant's account, while attractive in many respects, is I think clearly incomplete. It's all very well to say that there are tendencies in human beings such that the presence of others will elicit competition and aggressive behavior, but Kant says much too little about the nature of those tendencies. Perhaps he thinks there's nothing more to be said. Radical evil is just the disposition to manifest competitive
and morality-defying behavior in the presence of others. It seems to me that we can say more. In two books on the emotions, I've argued that understanding the roots of much bad behavior requires thinking about human beings' problematic relationship to their own mortality and finitude, their desire to transcend conditions that are painful for any intelligent being to accept. The earliest experiences of a human infant contain a jolting alternation between blissful completeness in which the whole world seems to revolve around its needs and an agonizing awareness of helplessness when good things do not arrive at the desired moment, and the infant can do nothing to ensure their arrival. The expectation of being attended to constantly, the so-called infantile omnipotence so well captured in Freud's phrase "His majesty the baby," is joined to the anxiety and shortly the shame of knowing that one is not in fact omnipotent, but utterly powerless. Out of this anxiety and shame emerges an urgent desire for completeness and fullness that never completely departs however much the child learns that it is but one part of a world of finite, needy beings. And this desire to transcend the shame of incompleteness leads to much instability and moral danger.

In writing about the role of shame and disgust in the process of group formation and social intolerance, I have argued that the type of social bad behavior with which I'm most concerned here can be traced to a child's early pain at the fact that it is imperfect, unable to achieve the blissful completeness that in certain moments it's encouraged to expect. This pain leads to shame and revulsion at the signs of one's own imperfection. And then, what most concerns me, here shame and revulsion in turn are all too often projected outward onto subordinate groups, who conveniently symbolize the problematic aspects of bodily humanity, those from which people would like to distance themselves. Thus my account of prejudice and hatred, whether religious or ethnic or sex-based, is more complicated than Kant's, invoking not mere plurality but also the hatred of weakness, helplessness, and ultimately death that's omnipresent in our relationship to our humanity.

And I argue that a primary reason why people form groups of the sort that engage in bad behavior toward others is a futile attempt to recover completeness and safety. By defining their own group as the good, normal one, lacking in nothing, and by surrounding themselves on all sides with such people, people gain the illusion of safety and control, projecting onto subordinate others the weaknesses that they wish not to accept in themselves. By stigmatizing and persecuting others, they conceal from themselves their own vulnerability. Thus, unlike Kant, I think that radical evil is not a bare disposition to behave badly; it has an underlying content and a narrative history. Radical evil concerns the hatred of finitude. It's about narcissism, we might say, and the fear of death that's such a powerful prop in human narcissism. Thus the remedy for radical evil will have to address the problem of narcissism, not curing it, for life is too painful for human beings ever to accept it as it is, but mitigating its role in human life.

This narrative history of radical evil has implications for the social treatment of evil that Kant's far more abstract account does not, but for now let me return to Kant's genetic account which is compatible with mine although it doesn't entail it. I'm going to return to my own account in my concluding section by way of Walt Whitman.

Whenever human beings are together, then bad behavior is a likely outcome, and intolerance is one prominent form that it often takes, as one form of competitive
self-love. Intolerance then is not easy to eradicate. People will seek to violate the rights of others, and in particular to establish the superiority of their own religious doctrines. To individual human beings Kant gives extensive advice. To counteract the bad tendencies in their nature they have the duty to surround themselves with a group of people who are all working for the victory of the good tendencies over the bad. People are unlikely to achieve a stable victory on their own, but in a group of like-minded strivers they have a better chance, forming a counter-society that will strengthen the moral disposition and protect it from the temptations that worldly society offers. That's actually the role that Kant sees for religion: it's a social force that supplies us a support structure for morality. Given that we're all morally weak and liable to error, we have an ethical duty to join such a society. Much of the text is then devoted to distinguishing good churches from bad churches, asking what type of religious community could actually do the job that Kant has laid out. Most existing churches, Kant argues, are actually a bad moral influence, since they teach people to placate God in extraneous ways and encourage competitive and subordinating behavior. But any of the major faiths could be suitably reformed and made to do the work.

What, however, of the liberal state? Given the ubiquity of the propensity to evil, what could such a state do to protect itself from the forces of bad behavior, generally, and intolerance in particular? Well, it can certainly use coercion to protect people's property rights and other rights that they have under the social contract. Here Locke and Kant are in agreement. But I've suggested that this leaves equal respect in a fragile position. So it would be nice to think that the state could find some further ways of supporting good behavior in general, toleration in particular.

Kant is just as averse as Locke to state-based religious coercion. He argues against it on both moral and prudential grounds. He says, "[W]oe to the legislator who would want to bring about through coercion a polity directed to ethical ends, for he would thereby not only achieve the very opposite of ethical ends, but also undermine his political ends and render them insecure." Even when people make a bad choice and join a bad church or no church Kant holds that respect for their autonomy requires absolutely respecting their liberty. Like Locke, he insists that no person's civil liberties may be infringed on grounds of religious membership or practice, but he goes even further than Locke because he includes atheists as well under his protections.

So, there's a problem. Respect for autonomy requires us to tolerate the bad churches, which is what Kant thinks most actual churches are. Such churches actually strengthen evil and undermine toleration. So what can the state do to protect itself? Kant's answer, and the only answer he believes he can give consistently with his defense of autonomy, is that the state can and should foster a vigorous, critical culture, including strong protections for the freedom of speech and debate. Moreover, this state support should extend to generous funding for education and scholarship, especially higher education and critical scholarship on ethical matters.

All this is fine, as far as it goes, but the same principle that protects the scholarship Kant likes also protects the scholarship that he detests, and the same public openness that creates the conditions for rational religion to come into existence also gives wide scope for the mobilization of prejudice and hatred. This being the case,
the state that Kant envisages remains in a fragile condition. He has to rely on the sophistication and rationality of a general public who are, as he himself says, very much inclined to the emotional and rhetorical appeals of the bad churches. In his suspiciousness about the passions and the sentiments he seems unwilling to propose any emotional dimension to public rhetoric in favor of rational religion and the good moral dispositions. To the extent that the good does prevail, Kant thinks, it must be because of good scholarship and enlightened argument. Kant advances beyond Locke in his profound understanding of human psychology, but his liberalism combined with his mistrust of the passions prevents him from doing very much about these threats.

The dilemma with which Kant's thought leaves us becomes more acute still when we consider the global society to which Kant's thoughts so powerfully pointed the way. As Kant stressed in his writings about international peace, one of the worst expressions of radical evil lies in the conduct of nations toward other nations. Wars of conquest, colonial domination, all of these are outgrowths of the competitive tendencies that Kant so well identified. And it's not surprising that intolerance of the different beliefs and ways of life of others is so often a part of those projects. But if the tolerant state is impotent to stop threats to its own stability internally, it has a harder time still once we articulate the goal in world terms, as that of respecting humanity wherever it is, and protecting the religious freedom and respect of all world citizens.

Now the tradition did provide one profound answer to my question which Kant knew and rejected. Rousseau, whose psychology is the source for Kant's, understood that the state that's going to protect toleration needs to think about the moral emotions. In the important section of *The Social Contract* called "Civil Religion," Rousseau argues that complete toleration in spiritual matters is of the greatest importance, but that it needs to be undergirded by the promulgation of what he calls a civil religion consisting of "sentiments of sociability, without which it is impossible to be a good citizen or a faithful subject." This religion, which is a kind of moralized deism fortified by patriotic sentiment, will hold the state together and create moral unanimity among citizens. Prominent among the dogmas of this religion is actually the badness of intolerance. Around these and other dogmas the sovereign will create ceremonies and rituals, engendering strong bonds of sentiment connected to morality and patriotic duty. Outside this common core people can believe what they like, but all must adhere to the core with respect to both conduct and belief. So, thinks Rousseau, the state must repress not only conduct harmful to others, but also non-harmful conduct expressing a lack of adherence to the civil religion. And it should go further, repressing nonconforming belief and speech. In particular Rousseau claims, "It is impossible to live in peace with those whom one believes to be damned." And so he thinks that the state must repress any religious doctrine that teaches that a particular religion is the only road to salvation. In Rousseau's state, then Roman Catholicism and most existing forms of Protestantism would not be tolerated.

Rousseau has taken the problem of evil seriously and made a proposal that may be sufficient to cope with it. Obviously, however, his solution would be unacceptable to Locke, to Kant, and to anyone who finds the idea of a liberal Lockean state attractive. The cure is worse than the disease. He's purchased stability at much too high a price.
Another grave problem with Rousseau's civil religion is that it provides a very bad basis for international relations. The sentiments that cement the homogeneity of Rousseau's society make it highly suspicious and intolerant of foreigners, and prone to warlike behavior toward them. Rousseau likes this consequence. Indeed one reason why he feels the need for a civil religion to supplement Christianity is that he finds Christianity too passive, meek and mild. Anyone who finds Kant's idea of a peaceful and tolerant world order attractive will find here yet further reasons to reject Rousseau's proposal.

Rousseau's psychological insight, however, does not disappear once one rejects his solution. He seems right to insist that the state needs to take the problem of evil seriously and to devise some kind of public psychology to address it, a civil religion, if you will. And yet Kant seems right in his insistence that the problem of radical evil can not be addressed by state coercion, a free political and religious debate. So what's the solution? How can a respectful pluralistic society shore up the fragile bases of toleration, especially in a world in which we need to cultivate toleration, not only internally but also between peoples in an interlocking world?

Kant is surely right that one important part of the solution is the vigilant protection of the freedoms of speech, press, and scholarship. Intolerance thrives in a situation in which opinion is curtailed, and we can observe that intolerant groups usually, if now always, seek the curtailment of these freedoms as a road to domination. One further thing a liberal society may certainly do, and that most societies do already, is to attach rituals and ceremonies to the basic freedoms promoted by the society, inspiring citizens to love those values by linking the values to music, art, and ritual. This stratagem is dangerous given the propensity of all forms of patriotism to lead to the demonization of foreigners and local subversives; nonetheless, it seems to me that there are reasonable ways to institutionalize such ceremonies that don't buy into these dangers. Where toleration is concerned, a reasonable civil religion would include for example a celebration of the diversity of the traditions and comprehensive doctrines that are contained within a nation as a source of its strength and richness. In general there's a lot that a tolerant state may do through persuasion and rhetoric without abridging any freedoms of speech, assembly, and publication.

An attractive further proposal was actually made by John Stuart Mill in his essay called "The Utility of Religion." Here Mill, not liking religion himself but recognizing the importance of religious sentiments in giving force to moral motivation, suggests what he calls the *religion of humanity*, a moral ideal that can be promulgated through public education. According to this moral ideal a good person is one who cares deeply about humanity generally, her thoughts and feelings learn the habit of being carried away from her own parochial concerns, they're habitually fixed on what Mill calls this "unselfish object, loved and pursued as an end for its own sake." She learns to view helping others as a part of her own good. She identifies her good with that of humanity as a whole.

These ideas are closely linked to some that I've been trying to develop in other work concerning compassion as a moral sentiment that can be cultivated by public institutions and public education. I've argued that a liberal society without offending against respect for pluralism can still employ a moral ideal of this sort and promote a moral education aimed at underwriting it. This ideal would serve as a basis for public
political culture in connection with norms of equality and equal respect. In effect, such a moral education would be the psychological underpinning to public norms that can command what Rawls called an *overlapping consensus* among people who otherwise disagree. And so, as I argue, it need not be seen as divisive or in any way illiberal when made part of public education.

But how more precisely would such a moral education be institutionalized? A good part of it, I think, would in fact take the form of developing institutions that express the views of equal respect and due attention to the needs of all, a just tax system, a just health-care system, a just welfare system. But institutions remain stable only when human beings have the will to sustain them, a fact that the collapse of the social safety net in the United States since the Reagan era has made an all-too-vivid reality. Therefore, I would argue, education at all levels should focus on putting forward something like Mill’s religion of humanity, conveying the sense that all human lives are of equal worth and all are worthy of being lived with dignity and a decent minimum level of well-being.

More concretely, public education can cultivate awareness of the problems human beings face on the way to their well-being in different parts of one’s own nation and in different parts of the world and can impart a sense of urgency concerning the importance of giving all world citizens decent life chances. Children can learn with increasing sophistication the economic and political obstacles human beings face on the way to their well-being, and can learn to see ways in which a just society might overcome these problems. At the same time education can try to minimize the role of greed and competitive accumulation in society by portraying greedy accumulation in a negative light and showing how it subverts the legitimate strivings of others, a teaching to which the major religions give lip service, even if they do not always insist in on it in practice.

Where toleration is concerned the religion of humanity takes in the first instance an institutional form here again in the form of strong protections for religious liberty and a support for the idea of equal respect for different comprehensive doctrines. Enhanced penalties for crimes involving ethnic, racial and religious hatred would also be very prominent parts of the institutional side of such a program, expressing society’s very strong disapproval of intolerance and the actions to which it gives rise.

Although my proposal is Kantian in the sense that no civil penalties attach to people who speak in favor of greed, inequality, and even intolerance so long as they do no harm to others, it seems perfectly appropriate for public education and the media culture of a democratic society to focus on imparting norms that do support the values of a liberal society and a decent world culture. Thus where toleration is concerned, I would support education at all levels aimed at conveying understanding of, and respect for, different religious and secular doctrines and different ethnic and national traditions. Although knowledge does not guarantee good behavior, ignorance is a virtual guarantee of bad behavior. Stigmatization of the other is much easier when people know nothing or nothing complicated about a different religious or cultural tradition, whether local or foreign, as I think we see in the U.S. today with the case of Islam. But education can surely go further, fostering a sense of respect for people and their equal worth, their equal entitlement to lives with human dignity, of which religious freedom is one big part.
Because my understanding of radical evil is more complex than Kant's, I also argued in a recent book on shame and disgust that public culture needs to devote special emphasis to minimizing the negative effects of narcissism and of the aggression that's so closely connected to people's unwillingness to tolerate their own neediness, finitude, and embodiment. Many aspects of the inhibition of narcissism will once again be institutional. I insist, for example, that the disgust people feel at something is never a sufficient reason to render a practice illegal when it causes no harm to others, that shame is never a good device to use in criminal punishment. And I consider many ways in which the law can protect citizens from shaming and minimize the harmful effect of stigma. But much of the program must be once again informal and educational, devising ways to bring children up in a climate that fosters equal respect and minimizes the baneful social influence of disgust and stigmatization.

Once again, such teachings could be the object of what Rawls calls an overlapping consensus in a liberal society. They're given lip service by all the major religions, even though they're not carried out in reality. There's no reason why a more psychologically complex version of Mill's religion of humanity can not be widely taught and promulgated in public and private education, in the rhetoric of leaders and other political actors. These norms, I think, should be fostered together with support for a robust critical culture of the sort that Kant favors. In this way we reassure those who disagree with us, showing them that our proposal is not Rousseau's civil religion. And as Mill emphasized, we protect the ideas of the public culture from becoming near empty shells with no passion sustaining them, if we do debate them vigorously and constantly.

What examples might we draw as we ponder these questions? At this point a discussion might take many different directions. If I were giving this lecture in India I would now start to talk about Rabindranath Tagore, who used music and the arts to produce educational revolution, a big part of which was a poetry of freedom, mutual respect, and sheer love of difference as he expressed it, for example, in the song that he wrote that's now India's national anthem, which celebrates the nation's regional and ethnic differences as sources of strength.

Here in the United States, I could talk about Roosevelt's canny use of rhetoric during the New Deal, which led Americans to believe that the poor are not shiftless and lazy, but victims of economic catastrophe. I could also speak about the civil-rights movement, whose success was due in no small measure to Martin Luther King Jr.'s mastery of emotive rhetoric and to the movement's use of the blues, jazz, and gospel in connection with ideas of human freedom and equality.

But our topic today is the city, so let me speak instead in concluding about the rhetoric of the great American city. New York has been a particular source of a type of civic poetry and art that expresses a love of differences and celebrates the great energy that comes from difference when difference is respected and not feared. I think especially of Walt Whitman, who crafted a public poetry of inclusiveness for all America during and in the wake of the horror of the Civil War, modeled on his love of New York and his sense of what New York stood for. "Walt Whitman, a kosmos [sic], of Manhattan the son," he announces himself early in "Song of Myself," and immediately he juxtaposes to the idea of New York the key values of his ideal America.
Whoever degrades another degrades me,
And whatever is done or said returns at last to me
By God! I will accept nothing which all cannot have their
counterpart of on the same terms.

What is the connection between these values and the idea of New York? Whitman shortly makes it explicit.

Through me many long dumb voices,
Voices of the interminable generations of prisoners and
slaves,
Voices of the diseas'd and despairing and of thieves and
dwarfs

And of the rights of them the others are down upon,
Of the deform'd, trivial, flat, foolish, despised
Through me forbidden voices,
Voices of sexes and lusts, voices veil'd and I remove the
veil . .

New York functions as a metaphor for the turbulent diversity that is Whitman's
America, and for the daring and energy of that diversity, all the forbidden people and
things that dare to speak their names here. You can see that Whitman is addressing
the roots of shame and disgust in a way that goes to the heart of my own
understanding of intolerance. He says that if we learn to love and celebrate what is
noisy, messy, and tumultuous, including prominently our bodies and our own messy
sexuality, then we will be likely to hate and oppress others.

I'm reminded of the painter Red Grooms, who said this about his great painting,
Ruckus Manhattan:

What I wanted to do was a novelistic portrait of Manhattan from Battery Park
to Grant's Tomb. I also felt it had to include the dark sides of life as well as
the lighter ones: prostitutes, thieves, and gamblers, tourists, shoppers,
babies, moms, and dads. I wanted to get it all in, it got quite busy.

In both Whitman and Red Grooms this poetry of diversity is not free from difficulty.
The dark side of life is dark. But there's a kind of love undergirding the whole
enterprise, and the suggestion is that this love, which is at bottom a love of the
messier parts of ourselves, can carry us forward. When we don't like our fellow
citizens or approve of what they do we can still love them as parts of the great city
that we celebrate and are. The poetry of inclusion carries us forward, helping us to
investigate corners of life we usually view with suspicion, including, as Whitman
knew so well, aspects of human sexuality that we usually cordon off as forbidden
territory, telling ourselves that what makes us uncomfortable is outside and other.
Thus Whitman's invitation to love the body provides a solvent for turbulent hatreds that grow out of our inability to tolerate ourselves.

There would be so much more to say about this topic, but I don't have time to pursue it. Let it suffice as a sign of what poetry, the public arts, and the noisy life of a great city can offer to America in a time of suspicion and intolerance.

Radical evil is not a piecemeal affair. What Kant and Mill rightly want is a whole new view of human relations, not just progress on this or that issue. And it's clear that radical evil is alive and flourishing in the United States now. Suspicion and mistrust of other peoples and groups seems to be growing. Rather than being encouraged to see the world as an international society in which we must all support the aspirations of people everywhere to decent and dignified lives, we're all too often encouraged to think in terms of U.S. preeminence and to see other nations as looming threats to U.S. power and safety, what I would call a narcissistic view of politics.

Domestically the dominant religion increasingly asserts its hegemony over minority religions and nonreligion, and public rhetoric often gives sanction to this aim. In the proposed gay-marriage amendment we see deep-rooted anxieties about sexuality, taking a hateful and repressive form. To counteract the influence of all this division we need not only good liberal doctrines and arguments, and not only, though it is crucial, the vigilant protection of free speech, we need a poetry of the love of free citizens and of their noisy, chaotic, sometimes shockingly diverse lives. Without this good liberal principles are just dead words on paper. As Whitman said:

To hold men together by paper and seal . . . is no account,
That only holds men together which aggregates all in a living principle. . . .

And as he concluded in that poem, this means that American urgently needs poets, and we should add dancers and composers and musicians and painters and architects and sculptors.

But enough about New York. At this point, Chicago patriot that I am, I want to describe Chicago's new Millennium Park, which creates a public space that is its own poem of diversity. As you approach the park from Michigan Avenue you encounter first the Crown Fountain with those wonderfully comic faces of Chicagoans of all different ages and races and types slowly changing on huge screens. Every five minutes or so the two faces that are up on the screen at the time spit jets of water out of their mouths onto the waiting bodies of children who frolic in the shallow pool below, often joined at first shyly and gingerly by their parents and grandparents. My daughter, a cultural historian, calls this "an ejaculatory aesthetic." Well, yes, yes, that is its charm. As Whitman said of the young men bathing, so too of those huge faces, "They do not think whom they souse with their spray."

If you watch all this from a certain angle you will also see the plumes of the Frank Gehry band shell curling upward, a silver helmet that has suddenly decided to abandon military aggression and turn into a bird. From another angle you see the buildings of Michigan Avenue and the clouds above, but reflected as crazy curves in Anish Kapoor's sculpture *Cloud Gate*, a huge inverted stainless steel kidney bean. On Gehry's improbably curving bridge over the highway, people meander, pause, talk to
strangers. The interactive public space celebrates diversity together with astonishing beauty, and both together with the pleasures of the body, as young and old paddle contentedly or stare at the reflected clouds.

Thinking about this example we might go one step further and say that America's great cities, New York, Chicago, and any others anyone might be able to think about, are not only the homes of poets and artists, they are themselves poems of the public acknowledgement and celebration of humanity, messy as it is. If there is hope that Whitman's vision of love and inclusion can prevail over the forces of hate arrayed against it, creating a civil religion of the best sort, there's no better place for that hope to take root than here.