

- Why is the social imaginary so important for us to understand?

This is a very helpful concept precisely because it takes account of the fact that the way we think about many things is not grounded in a self-conscious belief in a particular theory of the world to which we have committed ourselves. We live our lives in a more intuitive fashion than that. The fact that "I am a woman trapped in a man's body" makes sense to Joe Smith probably has far less to do with him being committed to an elaborate understanding of the nature of gender and its relationship to biological sex than to the fact that it seems intuitively correct to affirm someone in his or her chosen identity and hurtful not to do so, however strange the particulars of that self-identification might have seemed to previous generations.

- Carl Trueman

III. Understanding Our Culture: Origins

a. Rousseau and the Romantics

- Jean-Jacques Rousseau
 - o One's inner feelings are the essence of who they truly are
 - o People are basically good, but society has a corrupting influence on them
- Authenticity
 - o What is meant by the term "authenticity"?
 - o What is the good in it?
 - o How has it come to shape culture?
 - o How are we affected by the "age of authenticity"?
- Romanticism
 - o Meditating on nature shapes human beings morally and empathetically
 - o Being sensitive to nature is necessary for one to be a truly authentic human being
 - o The more one is shaped by sophisticated society, the less "authentic" they become
- Key underlying assumptions of Romanticism
 - o The objectivity of human nature
 - o The morality of human nature

b. Marx and Nietzsche

- What if human nature and meaning has no intrinsic and moral significance?
- Karl Marx
 - Materialism
 - The only things that exist are time, matter, and energy
 - The material conditions of our lives shape how we think about reality
 - Economic relationships
 - Economic relationships are the center of reality
 - All forms of human community become political
 - Alienation
 - The feeling of being at odds with our surroundings (psychological)
 - Specifically, in Marx, alienation is economic – being separated from the fruits of one's labor
 - Religion
 - First, it's not real, and thus has no abiding significance
 - Second, it meets the psychological needs of workers and economic interests of employers – keeps the people in line
 - Third, getting rid of false religion is critical to freeing the working class
 - *Conclusion: religion is a sign of intellectual weakness and oppression*
 - *Result: the pre-political is no more...*
- Friedrich Nietzsche
 - Assumption: The Enlightenment has successfully rendered belief in God obsolete and unnecessary; God is not real
 - Problem: Enlightenment philosophers failed to come to the necessary conclusions of proving that there is no God
 - Morality
 - Religion and morality are manipulative – one exerting power over another
 - Moral codes hinder people from being strong
 - Human beings should take on the challenge of self-creation – to be whoever they want to be, feeling no obligation to conform to the standards of anyone else
 - If there is no God, then we are our own masters
 - Moral codes are actually just personal taste

- The Superman (i.e. Oscar Wilde)
 - First, life should be lived like an artist – creating and performing
 - Second, art should be detached from any moral codes
 - Third, ethics is aesthetics – a matter of taste
- Summarizing concepts introduced by Marx and Nietzsche
 - The pre-political is abolished
 - Moral codes are manipulative and must be abolished to discover true freedom
 - True freedom works itself out in self-creation
 - Iconoclasm is most commonly sexual in nature