

that emphasizes duty, respect for one's elders, service to the group, and negation of the self's desires. I could still see its ugly side: I could see that power sometimes leads to pomposity and abuse. And I could see that subordinates—particularly women—were often blocked from doing what they wanted to do by the whims of their elders (male and female). But for the first time in my life, I was able to step outside of my home morality, the ethic of autonomy. I had a place to stand, and from the vantage point of the ethic of community, the ethic of autonomy now seemed overly individualistic and self-focused. In my three months in India I met very few Americans. But when I boarded the plane to fly back to Chicago I heard a loud voice with an unmistakably American accent saying, "Look, you tell him that this is the compartment over *my* seat, and I have a *right* to use it." I cringed.

The same thing happened with the ethic of divinity. I understood intellectually what it meant to treat the body as a temple rather than as a playground, but that was an analytical concept I used to make sense of people who were radically different from me. I personally was quite fond of pleasure and could see little reason to choose less of it rather than more. And I was quite devoted to efficiency, so I could see little reason to spend an hour or two each day saying prayers and performing rituals. But there I was in Bhubaneswar, interviewing Hindu priests, monks, and laypeople about their concepts of purity and pollution and trying to understand why Hindus place so much emphasis on bathing, food choices, and concerns about what or whom a person has touched. Why do Hindu gods care about the state of their devotees' bodies? (And it's not just Hindu gods; the Koran and the Hebrew Bible reveal similar concerns, and many Christians believe that "cleanliness is next to godliness.")¹⁶

In graduate school I had done some research on moral dis-

gust, and that prepared me to think about these questions. I had teamed up with Paul Rozin (one of the leading experts on the psychology of food and eating) and Clark McCauley (a social psychologist at nearby Bryn Mawr College). We wanted to know why the emotion of disgust—which clearly originated as an emotion that keeps us away from dirty and contaminating things—can now be triggered by some moral violations (such as betrayal or child abuse) but not by others (such as robbing a bank or cheating on one's taxes).¹⁷

Our theory, in brief, was that the human mind automatically perceives a kind of vertical dimension of social space, running from God or moral perfection at the top down through angels, humans, other animals, monsters, demons, and then the devil, or perfect evil, at the bottom.¹⁸ The list of supernatural beings varies from culture to culture, and you don't find this vertical dimension elaborated in every culture. But you do find the idea that high = good = pure = God whereas low = bad = dirty = animal quite widely. So widely, in fact, that it seems to be a kind of archetype (if you like Jungian terminology) or innately prepared idea (if you prefer the language of evolutionary psychology).

Our idea was that moral disgust is felt whenever we see or hear about people whose behavior shows them to be low on this vertical dimension. People feel degraded when they think about such things, just as they feel elevated by hearing about virtuous actions.¹⁹ A man who robs a bank does a bad thing, and we want to see him punished. But a man who betrays his own parents or who enslaves children for the sex trade seems monstrous—lacking in some basic human sentiment. Such actions revolt us and seem to trigger some of the same physiology of disgust as would seeing rats scampering out of a trash can.²⁰

That was our theory, and it was rather easy to find evidence