for it in India. Hindu notions of reincarnation could not be more explicit: Our souls reincarnate into higher or lower creatures in the next life, based on the virtue of our conduct during this life. But as with the ethic of community, the big surprise for me was that after a few months I began to *feel* the ethic of divinity in subtle ways.

Some of these feelings were related to the physical facts of dirt and cleanliness in Bhubaneswar. Cows and dogs roamed freely around town, so you had to step carefully around their droppings; you sometimes saw people defecating by the roadside; and garbage was often heaped into fly-swarmed piles. It therefore began to feel natural to me to adopt the Indian practice of removing my shoes when I entered any private home, creating a sharp boundary between dirty and clean spaces. As I visited temples I became attuned to their spiritual topography: the courtyard is higher (more pure) than the street; the antechamber of the temple higher still, and the inner sanctum, where the god was housed, could be entered only by the Brahmin priest, who had followed all the necessary rules of personal purity. Private homes had a similar topography, and I had to be sure never to enter the kitchen or the room where offerings were made to deities. The topography of purity even applies to your own body: you eat with your right hand (after washing it), and you use your left hand to clean yourself (with water) after defecation, so you develop an intuitive sense that left = dirty and right = clean. It becomes second nature that you don't give things to others using your left hand.

If these new feelings were just a new ability to detect invisible dirt rays emanating from objects, they would have helped me to understand obsessive-compulsive disorder, but not morality. These feelings were more than that. In the ethic of divinity, there is an order to the universe, and things (as well as people) should be treated with the reverence or disgust that they deserve. When I returned to Chicago, I began to feel positive essences emanating from some objects. It felt right to me to treat certain books with reverence—not leaving them on the floor or taking them into the bathroom. Funeral services and even burial (which had previously seemed to me to be such a waste of money and space) began to make more emotional sense. The human body does not suddenly become an object, like that of any other animal corpse, at the moment of death. There are right ways and wrong ways of treating bodies, even when there is no conscious being inside the body to experience mistreatment.

I also began to understand why the American culture wars involved so many battles over sacrilege. Is a flag just a piece of cloth, which can be burned as a form of protest? Or does each flag contain within it something nonmaterial such that when protesters burn it, they have done something bad (even if nobody were to see them do it)? When an artist submerges a crucifix in a jar of his own urine, or smears elephant dung on an image of the Virgin Mary, do these works belong in art museums?[21] Can the artist simply tell religious Christians, "If you don't want to see it, don't go to the museum"? Or does the mere existence of such works make the world dirtier, more profane, and more degraded?

If you can't see anything wrong here, try reversing the politics. Imagine that a conservative artist had created these works using images of Martin Luther King Jr. and Nelson Mandela instead of Jesus and Mary. Imagine that his intent was to mock the quasi-deification by the left of so many black leaders. Could such works be displayed in museums in New York or Paris without triggering angry demonstrations? Might some on the left feel that the museum itself had been polluted by racism, even after the paintings were removed?[22]

As with the ethic of community, I had read about the ethic