FOUR

THE LACK OF MODERNITY

> When religion ceased to be a political force, politics became a substitute religion.
>
> —Lewis Mumford

According to Buddhism the three roots of evil are *lobha* greed, *dosa* ill will, and *moha* delusion. Traditionally these are personal problems, but today they must also be understood more structurally, as institutionalized.

Our economic system promotes and requires greed in at least two ways: desire for profit is necessary to fuel the engine of economic growth, and consumers must be insatiable in order to maintain markets for what can be produced. Although justified as raising standards of living worldwide, economic globalization seems rather to be increasing inequality, unemployment, and environmental degradation. The United Nations Development Report for 1997 pointed out that 1.3 billion people now live on less than one dollar a day, and estimated that there are ninety-three countries having a per capita income below what they had a few decades ago.

Long after the end of the Cold War, the U.S. federal government continues to devote the largest percentage of its resources to maintaining an enormously expensive war machine. Most other countries continue to spend more on arms than social services. There is no sign that the military-industrial complex, or the lucrative international market in

arms sales, will be diverted into plowshares anytime in the forseeable future.

The media that might inform us about these problems distract us with "infotainment" and sports spectacles in order to promote their real function, advertising. One would expect universities to be encouraging and developing the critical thinking necessary to reflect on these developments, but in the midst of the greatest economic expansion in history we are told that budget cutbacks are necessary because there is less money available for education. Increasingly, the need to become more market oriented is diverting academia into corporate research and advanced job training for those eager to join and benefit from a morally questionable world order.

In short, our global economy institutionalizes greed; the military-industrial complex at the heart of most developed nation-states institutionalizes aggression; our media and even our universities institutionalize ignorance of what is actually happening.

Unlike the original Buddhist roots of evil, these institutional roots of evil are rationalized as operating according to a logic (e.g., "laws of the market") that is inevitable because it is "natural." From my lack perspective, however, they are better understood as the results of particular historical forces that can and should be challenged. This chapter attempts to understand how those forces encouraged the development of such problematical institutions, which today control the earth and all its "resources" (including us). Nation-states have divided up the earth's surface and waters and airspace as well as its peoples; transnational corporations exploit the resources of these areas for their own purposes; these claims are policed by war machines that have the power to unleash irresistible violence against those who challenge this world order; and these three are serviced by scientific and technological establishments that exist primarily to meet their insatiable pursuit of ever greater power and wealth. . . . How did all this come to be?

This chapter argues that our collective sense of lack has been an important factor in developing these institutions. It offers another episode in the social history of lack, supplementing the previous chapter's account of our individualistic idolatries with a lack history of our institutional idolatries. "Men are literally hypnotized by life and by those who represent life to them," Ernest Becker has argued; replace "life" with "being" and we begin to realize how our sense of lack is also a source of social domination. All power is sacred power, Becker adds, "because it begins in the hunger for immortality, and it ends in the absolute subjection to people and things that represent immortality

power" (1975, 49). Again, substituting "being" for "immortality" hints at the *spiritual* roots of our modern world. In particular, the supposed secularity of the nation-state, corporate capitalism, and mechanistic science may be problematized by summarizing what is known about their origins. We will see that there was something compulsive and delusive about their development because it was motivated by a profound social anxiety—a collective sense of lack—which became "liberated" in the sixteenth century and then channeled into these directions.

THE ORGANIC PARADIGM

> 'Tis all in peeces, all cohaerence gone;
> All just supply, and all Relation:
> Prince, Subject, Father, Sonne, are things forgot,
> For every man alone thinkes he hath got
> To be a Phoenix, and that there can bee
> None of that kinde, of which he is, but hee.
>
> — John Donne, *An Anatomy of the World* (1611)

At the beginning of the Renaissance Europeans still understood the world and its creatures according to an organic paradigm: Everything, including human society, has its ordained place within a hierarchical cosmos created and maintained by God. Feudal society was unified, at least theoretically, in a Holy Roman Empire, which, as the joke has it, was not holy, not Roman, and not really an empire. But the messy reality matters less to us than the political ideal that provided a stability based on the authority of antiquity: a supposed continuation of the Roman empire, offering a groundedness in the past that was as much a feature of the organic paradigm as its opposite, groundlessness (and attempted self-grounding) is an essential feature of the modern world. Medieval groundedness was self-consciously religious in that civil authorities acknowledged the moral authority of the Church founded by Peter authorized by Christ.

A similar continuity existed for knowledge both sacred and secular: the spiritual and technological superiority of the ancients was taken for granted. Even in the sixteenth century doctors who trained at Padua, the foremost medical school in Europe, swore an oath to defend the authority of Aristotle. Later Francis Bacon still needed to rail against the myth that the ancients' arts and sciences existed in their purest form at the beginning of time. The medieval attitude has been the more common, however, not only in Europe but throughout world history,

as in the four *kalpas* of Indian myth (which slowly deteriorate from an initial golden age) and the East Asian belief in *mappo* (the decline of the Buddhist dharma since Shakyamuni). If such myths are unbelievable today, our modern myth of progress would have been no more believable to medieval society; and so far as the medieval criterion of improvement was primarily a moral one, perhaps the evidence is no better for ours.

The church's understanding of sin and how to cope with it made the organic paradigm a self-contained system, which, despite wretched poverty and widespread suffering, "worked" in the sense that our human sense of lack was explicitly acknowledged and addressed: All of us inherit the original sin of Adam. Our lack was thus contained because its origins and solution were built into the structure of the Christian universe, which had an inescapable moral dimension. Chapter Two discusses how in the late eleventh century our sins became spiritual offenses against God the impartial Judge, for which we must bear punishment. Such an understanding of lack is quite different from a Buddhist one, but the important point is that each channels the effects of lack both individually and socially. To anticipate what follows: a mechanistic paradigm—the universe as a machine functioning according to objective and morally indifferent laws—implies very different ways of coping with our lack.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries this medieval paradigm collapsed. From a lack perspective, it was like opening Pandora's box. An enormous amount of anxiety became liberated, because the worldview and institutions that had been managing it were overthrown. "In religion, politics, economics, and society, cherished authorities by the score were under attack, and centuries-old values no longer commanded unquestioned adherence. . . . The sense that all solid landmarks had disappeared pervades the writing of the age—either because men were toppling the landmarks or because they were seeking them in vain" (Rabb 37). The rug was pulled out from beneath religion (the Reformation), government (widespread insurrections and revolution), war (gunpowder made warfare more aggressive), the economy (the discovery of new lands and new forms of business organization), science (the collapse of Aristotelianism), and last but not least nature itself (an exceptional number of natural disasters, especially in the seventeenth century: bad weather, poor harvests, soil exhaustion, famines, and plagues, leading to riots, banditry, etc.). It is not surprising, then, that historians have consistently identified a widespread fear of chaos as the main feature of that era. It preoccupied the forms of discourse that have

survived. "It is not difficult to believe that in that age of perplexing change many men and women, many of lowly position and simple understanding, but also not a few neither simple nor humble, were racked by anxiety for their future here and hereafter. It was a period of storm and stress seldom equalled and probably never surpassed" (Haller 27). The old order was dying, and no one knew what new order, if any, would replace it.

The main point of this chapter is that if we look at this collapse and the reconstruction that followed from a lack perspective, we can gain a new insight into what happened. The usual explanation is a triumphalist narrative about the decline of an otherworldly religious worldview, which had constrained social and economic development, replaced by the rise of a more dynamic secular society and free market economy. But if lack is fundamentally a spiritual problem, because susceptible only to a spiritual solution, the usual dualism between an earlier otherworldly society and a later this-worldly one does not fit anymore. If (to reformulate the Mahayana claim) the bounds of a secular society are not different from the bounds of a religious one, we should look for the conscious or unconscious *spiritual* motivations affecting the rise of modern institutions and perhaps still built into them. People in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries needed to create new structures, intellectual and institutional, in order to cope with the disorder that threatened them on all sides—in my terms, with the lack-anxiety now liberated by the collapse of the organic understanding of sin and salvation. . . . What insight does this yield into the birth of our modern world?

THE REFORMATION

> A mighty fortress is our God,
> A bulwark never failing . . .
>
> —Lutheran hymn

The Protestant Reformation is a natural way to begin this story because the schism in Western Christendom between 1517 (when Luther posted his ninety-five theses) and 1564 (when Calvin died) was so instrumental in breaking down the organic paradigm. This is not the place to discuss the causes of that schism, but it is significant that the preceding centuries had witnessed an increasing preoccupation with death, suggesting that the Christian worldview—which offered a solution to death (and to lack)—was already losing its grip on people's

minds. During this period, writes Philippe Aries, the earlier acceptance of death was replaced by more violent representations of it, including a new fascination with bodily decomposition. He quotes Huizinga: "No other epoch has laid so much stress as the expiring Middle Ages on the thought of death" (Huizinga 134). The physical fact of death replaced the images of final judgment; death was no longer a transition to eternal life but an end in itself. "Those who were formerly Christians discovered their own mortality. They banished themselves from heaven because they no longer had the strength to believe in it in a coherent manner" (Alberto Tenenti, in Aries 128–29). This brought the problem of our lack back into the center of human preoccupation.

As long as there was only one Church there was no church. Religious institutions and ideals were not distinguished from secular ones in the ways we now take for granted. Since the same worldview was more or less maintained by everyone (except Jews and heretics, which is why they were so threatening), salvation through the Church's institutions and mediation "worked" because it was believed to work. When that Church acrimoniously split and God helped neither side to destroy the impiety of the other, the long-term effect of this contest between lack solutions was to discredit that type of solution to lack anxiety.

Martin Luther (1483–1546) had been a model Augustinian monk, but his efforts within the Catholic framework of prayer, penance, charity, etc., brought no relief from his deep sense of sinfulness—i.e., did not allay his sense of lack—and the extraordinary success of his alternative suggests that many others felt the same way. His solution postulated a wider gap between weak, corrupt humanity and the righteousness of God. Left to itself, human nature is all falsehood and impurity, a condition hopeless without the intercession of God himself, the source of all goodness and truth. Since humans by themselves can do virtually nothing, the solution is through faith alone in his mercy. It is a free acquittal of the guilty that has nothing to do with sacraments or any other mediation by church or clergy; one can rely only on the Bible, the sole infallible source of religious truth. This was an attempt to return to the original Christianity of Biblical times as Luther understood it.

Two implications of this reformation turned out to be crucial. Projecting all goodness onto a Deity who is elevated so far above our world initiated a dangerous development that would empty this fallen world of its spiritual and moral dimensions. The irrelevance for our

salvation of any institutional mediation or even personal good works closed the world off from being the place where religious activities could assuage our lack. Luther's emphasis on justification by faith alone offered a new interpretation of lack that precariously balanced pessimism about human nature with optimism about God, but in the process eliminated the intricate web of mediation that constituted, in effect, the sacral dimension of this world. "[T]o project the experience of the sacred onto an immaterial God is to shortchange sacredness as a dimension of material life and turn it into an object of worship that is beyond our world and thus alien to life. Sacrality hypostatized (or reified) can easily be sacrality lost" (Maguire 37). And so it would be.

The medieval continuity between the natural and the supernatural had meant that true reality manifested sacramentally in the spiritual potentialities of this temporal world, potentialities that could be developed. The new broom of the Reformers swept this away—not out the door but, as we shall see, under the carpet. What transformed the religiously saturated medieval world into the secular one we experience today was less the disappearance of God than the disappearance of this continuity between sacred and temporal.

Lack of mediation threw each Christian back upon his or her own lack. Luther could challenge the Church because he believed God wanted him to do so. This sanctified the principle of a direct and private relationship with God, which encouraged a proliferation of divisive interpretations of Scripture and, over time, an individualism that required working out one's own solution to one's own lack.

The doctrine of predestination taught by John Calvin (1509–1564) further developed both implications. Because of original sin humanity has lost its free will except to do evil. Without free will all our efforts to resolve our lack are useless. Only divine grace can restore the freedom to do good, but grace is bestowed only upon the elect, that small portion of the human race God has chosen for salvation. His salvation is a free act of his mercy, without any regard for human merit. Why does God condemn all others to eternal damnation? "For no other reason than that He wills to exclude them." Calvin himself admitted that this is a "horrible" doctrine, but God's omniscience and omnipotence allowed no other conclusion.

What effect did this have on the way Calvinists experienced their lack? All conventional religious activities were thrown out the window; there is absolutely nothing you can do that will qualify you for heaven, because it's all decided before you are born. Yet this powerlessness over

our final destiny is not something we humans can live with. Predestination aggravates the anguish of our condition, our lack, unbearably. So a way out of this impasse must be discovered, and it was—or rather, several ways were constructed. If all religious expedients are discredited, secular ones need to be devised: expedients that (so far as motivated by the need to resolve our sense of lack) were infused with a spiritually driven dynamism, although (so far as that motivation is unconscious) a dynamism that tended to take on a life of its own.

THE NATION-STATE

> The Nation exists before all things and is the origin of all. Its will is always legal, it is the law unto itself.
>
> —Emmanuel Joseph Sieyes, "What Is the Third Estate?" (1789)

> "Nationalism" is the pathology of modern developmental history, as inescapable as "neurosis" in the individual, with much the same essential ambiguity attaching to it, a similar built-in capacity for descent into dementia . . .
>
> —Tom Nairn (1977)

In the last few centuries the most successful god—that is, the god that people have been the most willing to die for—has been one's own nation. By far the most popular religion today is nationalism, argued Arnold Toynbee, the religion of the masses being the "worship of the deified community concealed under the fine name of patriotism" (98–99). Historians have noticed the curious fact that until the 1630s and 1640s the outcome of the religious struggles remained in doubt "and no government could ignore the force of the passions they aroused. Thereafter, however, religion ceased to be a violent issue" (Rabb 80). The sudden change makes sense when we realize that a new religion finally crystallized during that chaotic period. As this suggests, the nation-state has been one of the main beneficiaries of the Protestant Reformation. Its development was the political consequence of that schism, but it should be understood as a theological consequence as well. We cannot understand the state until we realize how it also serves a religious function for us.

The struggle between the church and its reformers increased the leverage of civil rulers and the balance of power between church (spiritual authority) and state (worldly authority) swung decisively to the

latter. In the sixteenth century most kings were still basically feudal landlords. By 1650 they had become the supreme embodiments of a rapidly absolutizing state that in effect used them to centralize all civil authority and then discarded them.

The development of the nation-state was thus a two-stage process. Initially, the subordination of Christianity enabled some rulers to reappropriate the church's mantle of religious charisma. They became *absolute* (literally, "unconditioned") *rulers* because they filled the vacuum of spiritual authority by becoming "secular gods" accountable only to God—who was now conveniently far away, high up in his heaven. The long-term consequence was to centralize all political power in their persons. The eventual disappearance of such absolute rulers did not work to decentralize that absolute power; on the contrary, it in turn freed state institutions from any external authority. Since the state was now believed to represent and embody the people, the nation-state in effect became politically self-grounding and morally responsible to nothing outside itself.[1]

In lack terminology: since the Christian schism problematized that solution to our sense of lack and strengthened feudal overlords, an alternative was increased allegiance to those rulers, whose new aura of spiritual and moral authority radiated the promise of a more worldly solution to lack. Without an absolute sovereign the bureaucratic state could not have developed, for its institutions evolved as the way he or she exercised absolute power. But the sovereign's authority was a direct consequence of his new religious charisma—i.e., of the fact that his subjects came to view him as a person in whose majestic being they could collectively ground their own lack of being. "The kings and emperors who proclaimed themselves divine did not do so out of mere megalomania, but out of a need for a unification of experience, a simplification of it, and a rooting of it in a secure sense of power" (Becker 1975, 68). Here Becker refers to the early kings of Babylon and Egypt, but his point is just as valid for the sun kings that emerged in seventeenth-century Europe, whose majesty also offered the promise of a secure sense of power in a world falling apart.

The impersonal state evolved in order to mediate this relationship, with the gradual effect of distancing the sovereign so far from his subjects that his religious role (as a solution to lack) became differentiated from the state's bureaucratic role. With the eventual overthrow of such rulers, the lack that had empowered them continued to empower the nation-states that had coalesced around them. People's collective

sense-of-self became increasingly constructed around, identified with, their nationality. In the process, however, the religious (i.e., lack) origins of the nation-state have been obscured and issues of moral responsibility impersonalized into the issue of what is best for the nation—e.g., *realpolitik*. The objectification of lack legitimized the new political institution only by becoming alienated from its original spiritual (and ethical) function. As usual with such objectifications, the state returned the favor by subjecting citizens to its own *raison d'etat*. Beware of the state, warned Nietzsche, for it will try to persuade you that it is the people. But it was the state that made the nation, and not vice-versa.[2]

Medieval feudalism tended to fragment because it was a loose structure of mutual obligations based on a hierarchical network of interpersonal relations. Contracts were symbiotic and this applied even to the monarch, who was by no means sovereign (although some polities were more theocratic than others, such as France). Kings usually understood themselves as sitting on top of a pyramid of personal loyalties, not as monarchs of the Roman or Byzantine sort. In the early middle ages the king was often regarded as an elected officer and his position was not necessarily hereditary; even later he was part of the community of the realm and responsible to its laws. Such a system diffused power and fostered what has been called a "massive sublife of numberless associations," which generated their own systems of rules and courts to adjudicate them. The society that resulted was criss-crossed with overlapping groups and conflicting loyalties and legal systems. One's *patria* was the town or region where one was born. Loyalty was personal, wars dynastic, and armies mostly mercenary.

Such personalized governance tended to reflect the idiosyncracies of the local ruler. Since it operated through his household, it was portable and could be set up wherever the royal family established its residence. But such authority worked to undermine itself by shifting effective power downward to the lower links of lord-vassal relations. The long-term trend was fragmentation into increasingly autonomous systems that often quarreled with one another.

This tendency toward "feudal anarchy" was restrained by loyalty to the church, the only responsibility that transcended local group attachments. Because all authority ultimately derived from God, politics too was a branch of theology. Fallen humanity required repressive controls to help people live a Christian life; one must submit even to evil rulers who were scourges sent by God.

It is not surprising, then, that the final schism in the church's moral authority also created a political crisis that resulted in a century-long struggle for stability. The favorite conceit of seventeenth-century political thought was the chaos that threatened society if lack of imposed order allowed reversion to a state-of-nature. After an exhausting thirty years' war that reduced the population by a third and brought Europe to the edge of a anarchic abyss, the Treaty of Westphalia (1648) was widely celebrated as a once and for all settlement of all the outstanding problems by all the major powers. It enshrined noninterference in the domestic affairs of other states and (to counter the Papacy) recognized that only secular states could exercise political sovereignty. When Pope Innocent rejected the treaty as "null, void, invalid, iniquitous, unjust, damnable, reprobate, inane, empty of meaning and effect for all time," he could be and largely was ignored.

This signified the emergence of a new world order: a collection of individuating nation-states ruled by increasingly absolute sovereigns. Power came to rest solely with the monarch, but to exercise it

> he first had to increase his own prominence, had to magnify and project the majesty of his powers by greatly enlarging his court and intensifying his glamour. The absolute ruler's court was no longer the upper section of his household, a circle of relatives, close asociates, and favored dependents. It was an extensive, artifically constructed and regulated, highly distinctive world that appeared to outsiders (and to foreigners) to be a lofty plateau, an exalted stage at the center of which the ruler stood in a position of unchallengable superiority. (Poggi, 68)[3]

Such mystification worked to transfer spiritual authority from Pope to King. James I of England (1603–1625) emphasized that he was, in effect, the new stand-in for God. The monarchy is "the supremest thing on earth . . . accountable to none but God only." If to deny God was blasphemy, to dispute a king was sedition. "What God is to Nature, the King is to the State" (Toulmin 127).[4]

But how can one person wield such vast authority? New institutions were needed to make that authority effective. In England, for example, Tudor ministers had no army, no police, not even a corps of salaried civil servants to implement their policies. In most places the crown was dependent upon unpaid justices of the peace drawn from

the ranks of the local nobility and gentry. This presupposed an accommodation with the interests of the landed classes. As the centralizing authority of the crown increased, however, one after another institution of the royal household "went out of court" to become a bureaucratic department of state, still subject to the will of the king but free from day-to-day interference. In the 1530s Thomas Cromwell, Henry VIII's chief minister and closest confidant, initiated the division of the royal household into the principle ministries of modern government. The King's council, originally an informal circle of advisers, evolved into the Privy Council, a more regularized committee of ministers who determined and implemented royal policy.

All this required a new conception of law, which by no coincidence paralleled the new understanding of natural law that the "natural philosophy" of Bacon and Descartes was helping to establish. The traditional understanding had based legal validity ultimately on the will of God, but his agency operated through the slow sedimentation of custom and negotiated accommodations among various semi-autonomous spheres (clerical law, guild regulations, etc.). The idea that the sovereign will of a ruler could replace common law with new statute law was revolutionary, borrowed as chapter Two shows from the Papal reformation. Because a ruler increasingly addressed himself to the whole population, in more uniform and abstract terms applicable everywhere and to everyone, there was a "leveling effect" that tended to eliminate the traditional plurality of overlapping authorities. In relation to the irresistible sovereignty of the king, everyone else was in principle equally subjugated—just as the absolute sovereignty of the Protestant Deity eliminated mediation and transcended everyone and everything equally.

Absolutism was not established without resistance. In the middle of the seventeenth century there were upheavals in many places, most dramatically in Cromwell's Commonwealth (1649–1659) and the French Frondes (1648–1652). In the long run, however, the revolutionaries were unable to maintain responsible national governments without sun-kings (or father-kings) to legitimize the fragile political entities that were still crystallizing. In other words, the best explanation of their failure may be a religious one: the problem of legitimacy and loyalty was how to transfer spiritual and moral authority from a fragmenting church to civil rulers, whose new charisma offered a more secular solution to one's felt lack of being. More pluralistic or impersonal alternatives lacked this charisma.

Absolute sovereignty nevertheless contained the seeds of its own destruction. As the king's power develops from a collection of various rights and prerogatives, it

> becomes instead more unitary and abstract, more *potential,* as it were. As such, it begins to detach itself conceptually from the physical person of the ruler; we might put it another way and say that it subsumes the ruler within itself, radiating *its own* energy through him. (Poggi 74)

Discussing the Prussian model, Poggi points out that:

> the state was made transcendent over the physical person of its head through the depersonalization and objectification of its power. Public law shaped the state as an artificial, organizational entity operating through individuals who in principle were interchangeable and who in their official activities were expected to employ their certified abilities in stewardship, loyalty to the state and commitment to its interests. (76)

As the king and his glamorous court ascended ever higher above the everyday workings of state power, they became less relevant and more dispensable to those workings: finally a mere theoretical foundation for absolute power that, once centralized into the state, no longer needed such a foundation.

The most important philosopher of the new nation-state was Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), for whom politics is a secular affair detached from the usual theological argument for the divine right of kings. In place of divine right, he attempted to reconstruct society as a simple mechanical construct grounded on axioms about human nature. Following the metaphysical example of Descartes (whom he read and knew personally), he applied the new deductive method to human society.

Hobbes's social theory was a direct response to the social chaos he experienced first-hand. He prided himself as "the first of all that fled" the English civil war, and wrote his *Leviathan* (1651) during French exile. Hobbes concluded that the greatest evil is civil war and the greatest good civil peace. Man's distinctive quality is egoism, more precisely "a perpetual and restless desire for power after power, that ceaseth only in death." We may wonder whether this is truly "a general

inclination of all mankind," but it has considerable validity as a description of how many people reacted to the political chaos of his times, when lack of social stability did not allow other inclinations to flower fully. The only antidote was "that great *Leviathan* . . . that mortal God, to which we owe under the immortal God our peace and defense," a sovereign who is able to establish order because it is to the advantage of all others to submit to his authority, as the wielder of supreme authority and who can guarantee his subjects' rights. A modern nation-state requires an irresistible force at the center that constrains the activities of all those under it. This solution provided

> order, peace and control through a set of accepted rules governing the operation of a machine. His sovereign, who was the external embodiment of contracted unity and dispenser of these rules, operated from outside the machine like a technician. The state, created *ex nihilo,* was an artificial ordering of individual parts, not bound together by cohesion, as an organic community, but united by fear. (Toulmin 211–12)

This Leviathan is "but an artificial man . . . in which the sovereignty is an artificial soul" providing not life but "artificial motion." One could not find a better image for the new bureaucratic machinery of the state. A society of individuals equally subjugated to an absolute ruler requires bureaucracy, which provides fairness and consistency because it is based on a set of rational rules applying to all. Its formality increases objectivity by reducing subjective decision making. In the Weberian ideal-type, bureaucratic role identification minimizes personal relations by maximizing functional relations. The more personal interaction is subordinated to functionally motivated interaction, the more efficient the bureaucracy and the more people become parts of a social machine—interchangeable parts, for such a bureaucracy "equalizes" people by abstracting the rights and obligations they have in common. From another perspective, it is the victory of means over ends, form over content. The impersonal efficiency of instrumental rationality overshadows the results of such procedures, perhaps most obviously in modern judicial systems.

"An artifical ordering of parts united by fear" gets at the heart of the issue: the contrast between the mutuality of an organic community and the fear that motivates Hobbes's contractual state. This ordering is

externally imposed and supervised because in a social contract the self-interest of others is perceived as a constant threat to our own self-interest, for "except that they be restrained through fear of some coercive power, every man will dread and distrust each other." The absence of trust in the public realm precludes the possibility of mutuality; that is the reason for overarching law, which comes to be perceived as the only effective means to address conflict. The objectivity of bureaucratic procedure engenders trust in the institution, which takes the form of law and respect for law. But this develops at the cost of personal trust.

> As trust diminishes among individuals, bureaucracies, particularly legal bureaucracies, become more integral to the maintenance of social order and ultimately to the existence of society itself. In this context, law can be viewed as being inversely related to personal trust. With respect to trust, bureaucracy can be viewed as the antithesis of community. (Cordella 35)

The local breakdown of traditional communities creates "mobile and atomised populations whose claim to humanity rests more and more on the assertion of inidividual rights vis-à-vis an impersonal, distant and highly bureaucratised government apparatus." (Camilleri 24). This tends to become a vicious circle, benefiting only the self-aggrandizing state: the breakdown of personal trust and mutualist community makes citizens more dependent on the state to achieve safe and peaceful societies, and greater state sovereignty tends to replace the role of mutualist communities. That in turn generates the modern distinction between public and private (trust and mutuality become limited to the most intimate relationships) and thus promotes the very individualism that it postulates.

The Anabaptists (Mennonites, Amish, Hutterites, etc.) understood that such a state is inherently coercive and reacted against it. They rejected the Lutheran/Calvinist accommodation with the new nation-state (and the new capitalist mode of production) by refusing to engage in its civil affairs, because state authority was antithetical to their own mutualist vision of community. Today the Anabaptists are usually viewed as hopelessly old-fashioned, but perhaps they saw a basic problem that the rest of us are just beginning to understand.

No one would willingly invest his or her loyalty in such a bureaucracy, which is why a "mortal God" was needed. That deity became

dispensable once obedience to his institutions had been established at the cost of localized authorities and mutualist loyalties. The sovereignty of absolute rulers had been based upon their new role (taken over from the church) as the temporal agents of almighty God's spiritual and moral authority. Louis XIV believed that military victory or defeat was God's reward or punishment, for a sovereign good or bad was an agent of God. When that role became questionable sovereigns too became disposable, leaving the nation-state as "no longer derived from the divinely ordained harmony of the universal whole, . . . no longer explained as a partial whole which was derived from, and preserved by, the existence of a greater: it was simply explained by itself" (Gierke 40). Today the nation-state remains self-justifying and self-empowering, devoted wholly to its own interests.

More precisely, a self-empowering *process*: for those interests constantly need to be modified as demographic, military, economic, and political environments change. The equilibrium of such an international system is thus precarious and requires constant readjustment. This ongoing tension cannot be relieved by the operation of binding international norms, for strictly speaking there are no such norms except those that the greater powers temporarily agree upon and can impose on lesser ones. *Self-justifying* means the disappearance of any overarching moral principles regulating states' conduct, for what international law there is operates among states and not above them. Hence:

> persistent tension between, on the one hand, the absoluteness of the notions of sovereignty and *raison d'état* (which articulated and legitimated each systems' commitment to self-aggrandizement), and, on the other, the continuous and inescapable presence of other states bounding that "will to sovereignty." Over and over again, each state came up against *limits* to its sovereignty in the form of competing states striving to satisfy their own self-defined interests. (Poggi 90).

Although much of the competition among developed nations has shifted from military to economic, our situation otherwise remains much the same. The present political polytheism is inherently unstable. The "sense of insecurity, of which nationalism was supposed to be the cure, persisted in the culture of the nation-state" (Nandy 265). At the time they

emerged nation-states were a plausible solution to the social chaos that enveloped the early seventeenth century, but the instability of such an international "community" led to incessant competition largely unbridled by any moral restraints, and eventually to two world wars. The political tragedies of the twentieth century make one wonder how much the cure was better than the disease.

With royal charisma replaced by impersonal state power, the religious grounding of civil authority finally disappeared—or did it? Do supposedly secular institutions merely obscure the religious basis of human allegiance even today? My point is that the nation-state has continued to derive its power over us from our sense of lack, which engenders a need to identify with and ground ourselves in something greater than ourselves. Each person, says Becker, "will knuckle under to some kind of authority, some source of sustaining and transcending power which gives him the mandate for his life"—for his very being. Our visits to the moon were commemorated not by leaving shrines or making offerings there, but by planting a cluster of national flags (Becker 1971, 151, 198). In a world no longer united by any ostensible religious belief, we have devised other sources of transcendent power to commit ourselves to. In his famous lecture on "Politics as a Vocation," Max Weber said that political entities have an ability shared only with religions—to impart meaning to death; the warrior's death in battle is a consecrated one. The basic problem, however, is that although nation-states have provided a weak substitution for community (citizenship) and an even weaker solution to the problem of life (patriotism), they are otherwise unable to fulfill the promise (to satisfy our lack) that nurtured them.

Perhaps this gives us some insight into the type of spiritual aberration that states are liable to, when they reject bureaucratic utilitarianism in favor of a quest for self-transcendence that involves surrendering to some higher supraindividual destiny. Since the instrumentalist and impersonal machinery of the state cannot give us what we unconsciously seek from it—a collective solution to our lack—one might learn from the Anabaptists; however, one might conclude instead that the nation needs to be transformed into a "purer" institution that can resolve our lack. If states retain the traces of their religious origins, as I am arguing, we can expect periods when its citizens are tempted to make it into a better religion. The results have been tragic, especially the fascisms and state socialisms of the twentieth century. Fascism, for example, was "an attempt to escape from the disciplines of 'stateness,' from

not only the emphasis on depersonalization which follows from the state's bureaucratic and legal character but also the idea of state and society as distinct realms" (Dyson 59).[5]

As Friedrich Hölderlin put it, what has always made the state a hell on earth has been that man has tried to make it his heaven. This failure is not incidental but essential to its unconscious spiritual function for us. Insofar as we collectively try to become real through the nation-state, it can never become real enough to satisfy us, because it too is a human construct, "empty" and ungrounded despite the national origin myths spun to mystify it. In lack terms, our objectified and depersonalized lack anxiety internally feeds the unresolvable tension between state and civil society, and externally feeds the incessant competition among nations that constitutes the precarious "international order." In short, so far as the state has become a religious institution for us, it is doomed to be a poor one.

Yet what is the alternative? From its inception, there has been an ongoing argument about the proper activities of the state. The younger Johann Fichte, Alexander von Humboldt, and Immanuel Kant, for example, hesitated to acknowledge that the state has any common purpose except security. They saw it as a common framework within which subjects pursue their own ends. On the other side, Gottfried Leibniz, the later Fichte, and Johann Herder attributed a more substantive cultural mission to the state; for Hegel the people are that part of the state that does not know what it wants.

Historically, at least, the argument was settled by Karl Marx: the end of royal sovereignty led to states restructuring themselves to sustain capitalist domination.[6] Today this means states identify so much with the economy that they operate largely at the service of the industrial process. As Dan Hamburg concluded from his years in the U.S. Congress (D, Calif.): "The real government of our country is economic, dominated by large corporations that charter the state to do their bidding. Fostering a secure environment in which corporations and their investors can flourish is the paramount objective of both [political] parties" (25). Economic growth is unanimously endorsed by all political leaders as the standard to judge each state's performance, as self-justifying and validating whatever burdens it might cause the state to impose upon society (Poggi 133).

The result of this is very different from the pseudo-religious aspirations of fascism, but today we are realizing that such a state can be just as problematic.

CORPORATE CAPITALISM

> Gold constitutes treasure, and he who possesses it has all he needs in this world, as also the means of rescuing souls from Purgatory, and restoring them to the enjoyment of Paradise. (Christopher Columbus)

At the same time the nation-state was taking shape, other gods were also being born: other secular projects that, since they too seemed to offer a way to fill in our sense of lack, may also be understood as religious. As people began to have doubts about the afterlife, or at least confusion about the way to get there, economic success in this life became more important. But if the spiritual motivation behind this attraction was repressed and unconscious, one should also expect this economic drive to be distorted in some uncomfortable ways.

This brings us to what Max Weber wrote about Puritanism and the origins of capitalism; a lack reading supplements Weber's argument by adding another perspective on that development. If Weber is correct that capitalism originated in the "this-worldly" asceticism of Puritan ethics, lack implies that capitalism remains essentially religious in its psychological structure.

According to *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism,* Calvinist belief in predestination encouraged what became an irresistible need to determine whether one was among the chosen. Such predestination devalued everything conventionally religious—ritual, confession, penance, acts of charity, etc.—in favor of economic success that came to be accepted as demonstrating God's favor. That had the effect of importing ascetic values from the monastery into worldly vocations, as one labored to prove oneself saved by reinvesting rather than consuming any surplus. This original motivation slowly evaporated but our preoccupation with capital and profit has not. On the contrary, it has become our main obsession. Since we no longer have any other goal, there being no other final salvation to believe in, in this way too the means has become our end. As Weber emphasized, the ascetic vocational ethos may have lost its original meaning yet that does not make it any the less powerful. Our type of salvation still requires a future orientation.

Lack fills in a psychological gap in this model. If my arbitrary Calvinist destiny is already decided and there is absolutely nothing I can do to qualify for heaven, why should I bother to exert myself in any

way? The point is that we cannot live with this kind of aggravation to our anxiety; predestination exaggerates the anguish of our condition and destiny—our lack—unbearably. A way out *must* be discovered. There is no direct causal relation between material success and eternal salvation; wealth can only be a sign of God's approval. But psychologically there tends to be no significant difference: working hard for such a sign provides an opportunity to direct one's lack anxiety in a way that can hope to alleviate it—with the nice extra fillip that since you can never be sure of God's grace (your business might fail tomorrow) you can never relax enough to enjoy the fruits of your labors.

In a way analogous to the eventual overthrow of absolute sovereigns, the Calvinist God could also eventually disappear, but by then it did not matter because he too was not needed anymore. The psychological structures that had formed—use capital to get more capital; always jam tomorrow, never jam today—had taken on a life of their own and objectified into new economic institutions, which in turn have objectified us into their servants.

The main difference between medieval and modern economic thinking is that the former subordinates economic motivations to the moral authority of the Deity, while the latter accepts no such moral supervision. In secular terms, the first subsumes the economy to the society, the second subsumes society to economic expediency, which it liberates from social restraints (usually religious in form).

A good example of religious restraints against such a "liberation" was the medieval Church's condemnation of usury—what we now call interest, something necessary for money to function as capital. Usury was prohibited because a usurer profits from something (i.e., time) that belongs only to God; money is infertile, so it is against nature for money loaned to spawn more money. Jacques Le Goff's analysis of penance, purgatory, and usury in the late Middle Ages supplements Weber's argument by showing how the Church unwittingly undermined its own prohibition. Originally its doctrine of sin and penance focused on the act rather than the actor. Over time that doctrine became more internalized, as Confession changed from a collective and public event, reserved for the most serious sins, to a more private act that after 1215 was obligatory at least once a year. The confessor's priority changed from chastising a fault to cleansing the person.

This new preoccupation with daily intentions encouraged an introspection that would eventually transform ways of thinking and behaving. It also led to the development of a new intermediary realm,

Purgatory, for further contrition and cleansing the sinner. But the duration of this purgation could vary according to the prayers and concern of loved ones still on earth—which might show itself by buying masses and indulgences from the church to hasten their graduation to paradise.

Thus was built the system of "spiritual materialism" that Luther challenged. One unintended result was to legitimate usury. The accumulated wealth of a contrite usurer could be used, in effect, to buy his way out of Purgatory. "In a society where all conscience was a religious conscience, obstacles were, first of all—or finally—religious. The hope of escaping Hell, thanks to Purgatory, permited the usurer to propel the economy and society of the thirteenth century ahead toward capitalism" (Le Goff 93). Since a usurer would need to save money to buy the services of the church, his psychological structure may not have been much different from the Puritan asceticism Weber described. In both cases, a new *religious* attitude inadvertently worked to make money the supreme value.

The development of modern economic theory, like modern political theory, is usually presented as a shift from a religious to a naturalistic explanation. The organic synthesis of medieval Europe fractured into different spheres—religious, political, economic, scientific—each assuming an independent vitality by acting according to the laws of its own nature. States operate according to their own *raison d'état,* and markets fluctuate according to a calculus of impersonal economic factors. From a lack perspective, however, this development is better understood as a shift from a conscious to an unconscious religious paradigm. If lack—our need to become *real*—is a constant spiritual drive, we can see religious motivations functioning both in the evolution of the nation-state and in the development of market capitalism. Once crystallized into institutions, those objectified motivations do not disappear along with the Calvinist Deity or the spectacular courts of sun kings. To be willing to die for one's country is to assign a spiritual role to the nation (cf. the eagerness of early Christian martyrs) that is impervious to any distinction we may make between church and state.

The same is true for market capitalism. Weber's sociology of religion distinguished more ritualistic and legalistic religions, which adapt to the world, from salvation religions more hostile to it, which seek to inject a new message or promise into everyday life. Their efforts to ensure the perpetuation of grace in the world ultimately require reordering the social system, including its economics. Weber noticed that adherents of this type of religion usually "do not enjoy inner repose

because they are in the grip of inner tensions." This suggests that market capitalism began as, and still remains, a form of salvation religion: dissatisfied with the world as it is and compelled to inject a new promise into it, motivated (and justifying itself) by faith in the grace of profit and concerned to perpetuate that grace, with a missionary zeal to expand and reorder (rationalize) the economic system. Then our secular economic values are not only derived from religious ones (salvation from injecting a revolutionary new promise into daily life), they are much the same future-oriented values, although largely unconscious owing to the loss of reference to any otherworldly dimension.

The psychohistories (or religio-histories) that Weber and Le Goff outline might have been only footnotes to history had they not encouraged, and been encouraged by, some corresponding developments in economic organization. The first corporations with limited legal liability were established in the middle of the sixteenth century, perhaps the earliest in Florence in 1532. Both the place and date are revealing. Recent discoveries meant there were vast profits to be made in the East and in the New World; Vasco da Gama's trip to India in 1498 resulted in profits sixty times its costs. But such ventures were expensive and risky, given the debtors' prisons that awaited bankrupts and their families. The clever solution was limited liability: you could lose only what you invested. This required a special charter from one's ruler, which he was usually pleased to provide for a cut of the profits. The significant points here are, first, that from their beginnings corporations were involved in colonial exploitation, because that is what they were created to do; and second, that this has usually involved an incestuous relationship with the state, which used them to exploit distant resources that could not otherwise be "developed." Without the enormous resources that such corporations imported from the colonies—initially vast amounts of gold and silver (which resulted in severe and destabilizing inflation in the sixteenth century)—the bureaucratic nation-state could not have developed, for there was insufficient domestic capital available for such centralized control.

Prior to gunpowder warfare was primarily defensive: the issue was usually whether an army could wait out a siege. This changed forever in 1494, when Charles VIII of France used artillery to breach the walls of the Italian city-states. As the gunpowder revolution spread, "a feeling of insecurity swept all of Europe" (Herz 474). War became more aggressive, which led to the development of large standing armies and the expense of financing their military adventures, leading in turn to the

development of the first banks. The result is that nation-states evolved early into what Lewis Mumford (1970) calls "war states": "all the great national states, and the empires formed around a national core, are at bottom war states; their politics are war politics; and the all-absorbing preoccupation of their governing classes lies in collective preparation for armed assault" (349). Paul Kennedy has more recently argued that war and its consequences provided more urgent and sustained pressures toward nation building than any philosophical considerations or social changes (90). Charles Tilly expresses the point most succinctly: "war made the state and the state made war" (42). But what motivated this aggression?

A Japanese colleague once commented to me that what he found most striking in the history of the West was its extraordinary aggressiveness. For approximately three-quarters of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries Europe tore itself to pieces. From a comparative standpoint, it is curious that this did not result in forcible reunion. Every other "high culture" area had been dominated by an empire that believed itself to be supreme and essentially alone in its world; the states system that developed in Europe was therefore unique (Poggi 88). One factor was probably the religious disagreements that stiffened the backs of resisters, but another was the timely discovery of New Worlds, which increasingly diverted the attention of rulers to more profitable ventures overseas.

Nevertheless, I suspect that this aggression, whereby a tiny corner of the Eurasian landmass came to dominate the rest of the globe, is not something fully explained by religious civil war. Nor is it something we should take for granted, any more than we should accept the nation-state or the transnational corporation as something inevitable. Consider the timing: at virtually the same moment that the organic paradigm collapsed, liberating vast amounts of lack anxiety and preoccupying elites everywhere with the problem of subduing chaos, Western Europe began to conquer the rest of the world. Psychologically we know that one personal response to increased anxiety and fear can be aggression; does the historical development of Europe suggest that the same may be true collectively? One way to secure ourselves is to expand by dominating and incorporating the other. Thanks to new technological developments, the other was not only that nation-state coalescing next door; it was that newly discovered land across the sea, more vulnerable to conquest.

The New World also offered a new world for religious projection. As interminable internecine strife made Europe seem irredeemable,

America became much more than an abode of heathen to be converted and exploited. For some it was an empty land where religious and/or civil utopias could be achieved (as we shall see in the next chapter). For others its primitives exemplified a simple human happiness prior to the corruptions of civilization. For both, the New World became a place where our lack was or could be resolved.

The disintegration of the organic paradigm into different spheres, each operating according to its own objective laws, is usually taken to have liberated those spheres from any moral authority. If, however, the formation and function of these spheres reveal religious motivations, then a moral dimension is also inescapable insofar as religion always has ethical implications. Then, instead of accepting the moral neutrality that these "secular" spheres claim for themselves, we should look for the ways they deny or diffuse ethical responsibility.

A good example of such diffusion is provided by the limited-liability corporation and its twin the joint-stock market, the first chartered in England in 1553. Shares in a corporation could now be traded freely and even anonymously. Legally, the primary responsibility of a corporation is neither to its employees nor to its customers but to its stockholders, today mostly unknown, scattered here and there, usually with no interest in a corporation's business except its profitability. Medieval production had been mostly for local markets, which meant that responsibility for one's actions was also mostly local, to one's immediate community. Contrast that with what happened in Bhopal, India, in 1984, where a Union Carbide plant leaked toxic gases that killed up to 10,000 people and permanently injured another 50,000. The plant had been poorly supervised, and recommendations from earlier problems and accidents had not been implemented by top management. So who was responsible? The CEO and members of the board of Union Carbide, like the thousands of anonymous people who own it, live far away, and *legal* liability—usually only financial—is quite different from having to *live* with the consequences.

This difference has great consequences for the way that impersonal institutions like transnational corporations can conduct their business. It has been said that "a principle purpose of corporations is to shield the managers and directors who run them, and shareholders who profit, from responsibility for what the corporation actually does." Today the most powerful ones have learned to play off nations and communities against one another in order to obtain the most profitable

operating conditions—the biggest tax breaks, the cheapest labor, the least environmental regulation, and so forth. Such corporations have become freer than nation-states, which remain responsible to their own borders and peoples. With no such fixed obligations, corporations can reinvent themselves at will, in a different location and even in a different business, if it is convenient for them to do so.

Of course, to be incorporated means that corporations gain a legal, not a physical, body. Like the bodies of humans and other animals, however, corporations are dissipative systems that absorb energy (e.g., raw materials) that is processed (e.g., manufacturing), and in order to thrive income must exceed expenditure. Unlike us, however, there is no intrinsic limit to their growth. The result is a fictitious but immortal person (because entitled to U.S. Bill of Rights protections)[7] with no emotional bonds to anyone or anything else, whose organizational structure diffuses all ethical (apart from legal) responsibility so thoroughly among anonymous stockholders that the possibility of genuine responsibility to anything else evaporates. Just like nation-states, transnational corporations have become self-justifying and self-empowering processes, with increasing access to all the world's resources but devoted solely to pursuing their own interests.

The problem, then, is not what corporations do wrong but what they do well—for themselves, that is. Thomas Hobbes called corporations "worms in the body politic," and in *The Wealth of Nations* Adam Smith's references to them are uniformly disparaging. Yet our depersonalized lack has made them into what they are. "The economy" is a collective objectification of our desire not so much for a "higher standard of living" as for an economic solution to our lack. Unfortunately for that ambition, there is no economic solution to our spiritual lack. Just as I can never be wealthy enough to feel real, so the economy can never be big enough, corporations can never be profitable enough, and consumers can never consume enough. All of this manifests a demonic preoccupation with growth as an end in itself. The tomorrow-that-never-actually-comes gives us hope of resolving the lack that gnaws on us today; the reality is that our future orientation has become a way of evading a present we are less and less able to cope with.

MECHANISTIC SCIENCE

> My aim is to show that the celestial machine is to be likened not to a divine organism but to a clockwork. (Johannes Kepler)

Let's summarize the pattern so far. The collapse of the organic paradigm did not eliminate God; instead, it pushed him higher above human affairs, by severing the continuity between him and us, between the natural and supernatural. Yet denying the intermediaries that worked to sanctify this world merely created a need for more secular deities. Absolute rulers and the bureaucratic states that coalesced around them led to the formation of nations. In a parallel fashion, the asceticism of Puritan ethics filled the void by importing religious self-denial from the monastery. Thus both institutions, the nation-state and corporate capitalism, may be viewed as objectified forms of collective lack that have taken on a life of their own which nonetheless continues to draw its power from our identification with them. The lack of nation-states feeds upon our need to ground our hollow sense of self in something greater than ourselves; the lack of corporate capitalism feeds upon and legitimates the limitless desire for profit that was liberated by the loss of religious security. In both cases the institutionalization of this lack alienates it from our control (and our moral standards), so that today all of us, even CEOs and prime ministers, are subject to the impersonal dynamic of the market and the "national interest" of *raison d'état*.

If knowledge is power, as Francis Bacon famously put it, is a further parallel to be found in the new mechanistic science that provided technical support for the military and economic ambitions of the nascent states? What insight can a lack perspective grant into the origins and perspectives of modern science?

Copernicus's heliocentric hypothesis (1543) shook the firmament as much as gunpowder did. One could no longer trust even one's own senses, a problem aggravated by the invention of the telescope and microscope. Luther and Calvin thought they could refute Copernicus by citing the Old Testament, but their theologies unwittingly helped to banish its God from the new material universe.

Understood most broadly, science is a matter of learning how the world works, and in a religious society this is naturally a religious activity. When everyday life is permeated with the influence of a sacral dimension, scientific causality is also a sacred causality, and the impetus to understand that causality also spiritual. Today we take it for granted that scientific knowledge is something employed to manipulate the natural world, but our preoccupation with such power should not be anachronistically identified with the medieval attitude. As the old name for science suggests, the organic paradigm did not differentiate philosophy from "natural philosophy." The spiritual search for wisdom included

an attempt to understand the workings of God in the natural world. How does nature manifest God's mind and will? How do its phenomena embody his "signature"? And, most important, what does this understanding of the world reveal about our role in it, i.e., about the meaning of our lives? Notice that this spiritual impetus does not separate facts from values: the quest to discover *what is* is not distinguished from our existential need to determine how we (part of *what is*) should live. In God's cosmic plan they are nondual.

Being so closely integrated, it is not surprising that the old theology and natural philosophy were overthrown together. The central concept that Protestant reformers and early scientists both challenged was hierarchy: the idea that the universe was composed of a graded chain of beings, extending from God in the highest heaven at the periphery of the cosmos, down through hierarchies of angelic beings inhabiting various celestial spheres, and then through the ranks to humans, animals, plants and minerals of the lowest terrestrial sphere at the center of the cosmic system. The Reformation worked to depopulate this hierarchy by denying any need for intermediaries between God and his world. Calvin, in particular, minimized the role of angels in governing the universe: "For the Holy Spirit designed to provide that no one should dream of primacy or domination in regard to the government of the Church" (*Institutes,* quoted in Mason 70). Since the Deity predetermined all events from the beginning, the workings of the Calvinist universe were orderly and in principle fully determinate.

This had important scientific implications. According to the theory of mechanics generally accepted in the late Middle Ages, a body in motion required the constant action of a mover, and the integration of Aristotelian natural philosophy with Christian theology had identified the movers of heavenly bodies with the angelic beings mentioned in the Bible. The physics of Galileo (1564–1642), Kepler (1571–1630), and Newton (1642–1727) can thus be understood as part of this larger process of moving away from the hierarchical conception of cosmic rule, with its multitude of spiritual powers, toward an absolutist theory of the governance of the universe, according to which physical events were subject to immutable laws—originally those decreed by the Creator, only later the impersonal laws of modern physics.

A similar development occurred in anatomy. Michael Servetus (1511–1553) first published his theory of the blood's "lesser circulation" (through the lungs) in a theological treatise, the *Restitutio Christianismi* (1553), for such a hypothesis was implied by his denial of the Trinity.

His medical training led Servetus to doubt that the human body was governed by a threefold hierarchy of natural, vital, and animal spirits, for "in all of these there is the energy of the one spirit and of the light of God." He concluded that there was only one type of blood.

These new theories suggested analogies with absolute rule that were not overlooked by the natural philosophers themselves. More than a century before Louis XIV (r. 1643–1715) was hailed as *le Roi soleil,* Copernicus in *De Revolutionibus* referred to the Sun enthroned as the ruler of the universe: "So the Sun sits as upon a royal throne, ruling his children, which circle around him." William Harvey (1578–1657) compared the heart to "the prince in a kingdom, in whose hands lie the chief and highest authority, rules over all; it is the original and foundation from which all power is derived, on which all power depends in the animal body." His book on blood circulation (1628) was dedicated to Charles I, "the sun of the world around him, the heart of the republic."

In addition to these specific implications, there was what has been described as a concordance between the early Protestant ethos and the scientific attitude:

> In their early days, both the Swiss and the German Reformers taught that man should reject the guidance and the authority of the priests of the Catholic faith and should seek for spiritual truth in his own religious experience: he should interpret the Scriptures for himself. Similarly the early modern scientists turned away from the systems of the ancient philosophers and the medieval schoolmen to search for scientific truth in their own empirical and theoretical experiences: they interpreted Nature for themselves. (Mason 65–66)[8]

This led to a break with Aristotelianism and the Arabic theories that had been dominant. "The witches, the astrologers, the alchemists, the hermeticists, the cabalists, and even some of the neoplatonists, hungered to find the key that could unlock some all-encompassing secret. They would have access to the true structure of the universe if only they discovered the proper method" (Rabb 52–53). Galileo's insight turned out to be the revolutionary one: "the Book of Nature is written in mathematical symbols" by "the great Geometer," so the key to its hidden laws is to be found by discovering the mathematical laws of the cosmos.

Today we take this perspective so much for granted that it is difficult for us to realize how much it assumes a new and quite peculiar

understanding of the relationship between God and nature. The Absolute Deity rules the universe not through a hierarchy of spiritual subordinates serving him but with a rational system of "hidden laws." As long as these laws constituted God's "signature" this was not quite a mechanistic view of the universe, but it was an intermediate step necessary for a fully mechanistic paradigm to develop. Again we encounter the consequences of depopulating the middle ground between God and us of all spiritual intermediaries. Where the medieval worldview saw the influence of God filtering through a hierarchy of agents, of varying degrees of blessedness and power according to their station and role in that hierarchy, the great Geometer was not to be identified with the fallen world he ruled impersonally from afar.

Since God was the ultimate source of all value, this was also the beginning of our bifurcation between fact and value. As the originator and guarantor of value gradually disappeared into the heavens, the world he left behind slowly but surely became de-valued.

This opened up exciting new possibilities: Those who comprehended his hidden laws could use them to manipulate nature for their own purposes. Originally this way of thinking was not very different from the magic employed by the Renaissance magus, who also tried to manipulate the world according to its secret laws. However,

> mechanizing the world picture removed the controls over environmental exploitation that were an inherent part of the organic view that nature was alive, sensitive, and responsive to human action. Mechanism took over from the magical tradition the concept of the manipulation of matter but divested it of life and vital action. The passivity of matter, externality of motion, and elimination of the female world soul altered the character of cosmology and its associated normative restraints. (Merchant 111)

Francis Bacon (1561–1626) kept the feminine imagery but turned it to rather different ends. He described nature as a "common harlot" who needed to be "tortured" in order to make her yield her secrets. Nature should be tortured to discover God's signature, and could be tortured because God was no longer "in" it. For this God needed to be far away, yet not *too* far away. Again, the political and economic parallels are instructive. Unless God were far away, there was no room and no need for absolute rulers; but if he were too far away they lost their divine

right. Unless God were far away there was no space for the capitalist ethos to develop; but if he were too far away there was no incentive to import asceticism into the economic sphere. In each case God's new role was awkward and unstable, necessary for a while but soon to be supplanted.

The preoccupation of Bacon's era, subduing chaos, soon erased the traces of God's signature. Nature no longer signified something divine but appetites. "Matter is not devoid of an appetite and inclination to dissolve the world and fall back into the old Chaos," so bonds and handcuffs must be applied to its protean nature in order to restrain it. "The end of our foundation is the knowledge of causes and secret motions of things and of the enlarging of the bounds of human empire, to the effecting of all things possible" (Bacon, in Merchant 171, 186).[9]

Knowledge as power for the improvement of man's estate: a great, perhaps irresistible attraction for a culture of rampant lack in a world threatened by chaos. Without the religious security provided by a universal church, the only security to be found was one that humans made themselves.

The first writer to use the term "laws of Nature" consistently was René Descartes (1596–1650), whose *Discourse on Method* referred to "laws established in Nature by God." "God sets up mathematical laws in nature as a king sets up laws in his kingdom," he wrote to Marin Mersenne in 1630. Descartes became the foremost exponent of the new mechanical philosophy. In addition to founding analytic geometry, he was the first to outline a system of universal mechanics that would explain all changes in the motion of bodies as caused by the impacts between them. This was the scientific consequence of his radical dualism between the physical world, whose essence is extension, and the mental world whose essence is thinking. For Descartes too a deity was necessary to create and maintain the world, but God's role was shrinking fast. The English Puritans of the seventeenth century soon developed an idea abhorrent to Calvin but implicit in Calvin's writings: that the Deity was himself bound by his own ordinances.

The laws of Newton's mechanics (*Principia,* 1687) explained for the first time both terrestrial and heavenly motion, eliminating the need for anything more than a Creator. The Newtonian universe was now self-sustaining and completely mechanical, except for retaining God in the wholly passive role of a privileged observer. "The Deity endures for ever, and is everywhere present, and by existing always and everywhere, He constitutes duration and space . . . [He is] a being incorporeal, liv-

ing, intelligent, omnipresent, who in infinite space as it were in his sensory, sees the things themselves intimately, and thoroughly perceives them, and comprehends them wholly by their immediate presence to himself."[10] Newton's postulation of an absolute space and time, and an ether pervading them, was thus connected with his understanding of such a single privileged observer in the universe.

On this account, the mechanistic worldview finally eliminated all traces of its spiritual origins only with Einstein's relativity theories. And with the refutation of ether the parallel with political and economic absolutism becomes complete. The Protestant "transcendentalization" of God gave the new Deity less and less to do, which reduced his day-to-day authority and led to his disappearance. But that disappearance had profound implications for the new intermediaries that had grown up to fill the vacuum between him and us. Once their sacral qualifications became dubious, absolute sovereigns were replaced by the bureaucratic states that had grown up to wield their authority. Puritan this-worldly asceticism for the sake of heaven yielded to the impersonal institutions of corporate capitalism and the more secular desire for profit. And the spiritual quest to discover the great Geometer's signature evolved into replicable experimentation to discover and exploit the impersonal laws of the physical sciences, including the indifferent natural selection motivating Darwinian evolution. Mechanism replaced organism in all three: in the functional bureaucratic rationality of Hobbes's "artificial man," in the supposedly objective laws regulating the operations of the market, and of course in the scientific laws determining the motion of physical objects and the development of living ones.

From a lack perspective, however, such scientific knowledge can never know enough, and our technological power can never be powerful enough, because they can never provide what we (motivated by that sense of lack) most want from them: an understanding of the world that also explains the meaning of our own lives by describing our role in the universe. Such value questions cannot be answered by an experimental discipline whose technique for pursuing knowledge involves determining the relationships among de-valued facts. Since facts cannot really be separated from values, scientists cannot avoid surreptitously reimporting value implications (e.g., Daniel Dennett on Darwinism) by supposedly deriving them from the "objective facts." The basic problem with such attempts is not our inability to derive an "ought" from an "is," but the fundamental dualism between them that the scientific method takes for granted in the process of experimenting on the natural world.

Its mechanistic approach does not refute the sanctity of the world; it merely ignores such a perspective, since it has no way to deal with it.

As with the nation-state (which can never be secure enough) and the economy (which can never be big enough), the scientific/technological project represses this failure into its future orientation: We do not yet know enough. Important discoveries are made, but every important answer breeds several more questions, even as every technological application of those answers breeds more moral dilemmas that our science and technology cannot themselves resolve for us.

To sum up: insofar as modern science has become our collective effort to ground ourselves intellectually, by coming to an understanding of what the universe is and what our role in it is, it can never resolve our lack. Its experimental approach dualizes the one-who-wants-to-know from the objectified world that is known, because its functionalist perspective dervies from, and is at the service of, our drive for ever greater control over the natural world. Scientifically, we respond to this inadequacy by funding further research, that is, by deferring to the future. In the meantime we preoccupy ourselves with the power that our increasing knowledge defers on us. What should this power be used for? Our inability to answer this question makes the means, in effect, our ends.

THE COSMOPOLIS

> The dream of *foundationalism*—i.e., the search for a permanent and unique set of authoritative principles for human knowledge—proves to be just a dream, which has its appeal in moments of intellectual crisis, but fades away when matters are viewed under a calmer and clearer light. (Toulmin 174)

Descartes is usually identified as the founder of modern philosophy, because Cartesian thought distinguishes itself from theology, or at least embarks on the path of that differentiation. Both in its methodology (self-grounding doubt) and in its conclusions (self-grounded subjectivity), Cartesianism broke with previous ways of thinking, which were mostly religiously oriented. Philosophy achieves its own ground, for the arguments are meant to be evaluated solely according to the merit of their own logic.

In *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity*, Stephen Toulmin offers a different understanding of these origins. Instead of accepting

the usual self-description of modern philosophy, Toulmin places its foundationalist project in historical context. As we have seen, the problem for the seventeenth century was instability, and this instability had philosophical implications. The Christian schism and the fragmenting theologies originating from it were a serious challenge to the type of theologically oriented thinking that had prevailed up to then. The philosophical response to this intellectual disorder was foundationalism: a search for the permanent and authoritative principles of all human knowledge. These principles were to be discovered by human rationality alone, without dependence on divine revelation or any other authority. Such foundationalism became the preoccupation of philosophy until the middle of the twentieth century, and that approach is far from dead today.

Toulmin distinguishes the philosophical response to intellectual disorder into two historical phases: a more humanistic and literary period, exemplified by the influence of Michel Montaigne (1533–1592) up to about 1630, followed by a more rationalist and foundationalist period exemplified by Descartes. The eclipse of Montaigne's more broad-minded tolerance occurred because of a growing dissatisfaction with skepticism

> which led people, in turn, into an unwillingness to suspend the search for provable doctrines, an active distrust of disbelievers, and finally to *belief in belief itself.*
>
> If Europeans were to avoid falling into a skeptical morass, they had, it seemed, to find *something* to be "certain" about. The longer fighting continued, the less plausible it was that Protestants would admit the "certainty" of Catholic doctrines, let alone that devout Catholics would concede the "certainty" of Protestant heresies. The only other place to look for "certain foundations of belief" lay in the epistemological proofs that Montaigne had ruled out. On reflection, perhaps, human experience might turn out to embody clarities and certainties that Montaigne and the skeptics had overlooked. (Toulmin 55, his italics)

For Montaigne "there is nothing that throws us so much into dangers as an unthinkable eagerness to get clear of them" (*Essays* 124), but the widespread difficulty in coping with an excess of lack anxiety kept his skeptical tolerance from providing a viable alternative to *some*

dogma to be believed in, either Christian or rational. In either case, nothing less than certainty would do. People will die for a dogma who will not stir for a conclusion, as Cardinal Newman put it, but in some cases the difference is hard to see. So Descartes founded modern philosophy and modern subjectivity by attempting to ground knowledge on the indubitability of his own doubt. This preoccupation with deductive logic based on axiomatic self-grounding was followed by Baruch Spinoza, who not only constructed his *Ethics* in deductive form but rewrote Descartes' *Meditations* into the same geometric format. Religious certainty had been wounded, but lack continued seeking to secure itself, and intellectually this meant a compulsive need for propositional certainty. If philosophical certainty is not to be found outside us, it must be located inside, in our mental processes. Cartesian dualism juxtaposed the mechanical causality of natural phenomena with the logical rationality of human thought and intentionality. The foundationalist trajectory of modern philosophy was set.

As Toulmin emphasizes, this self-grounding rationalist dream was always illusory:

> We no longer ground all our knowledge in universal, timeless systems today, only because the rationalist dream was always illusory. Descartes never faced classical skepticism *on its own ground;* instead, he pointed to subjects in which, within practical limits, formal logic can provide a kind of coherence to which Montaigne had done something less than full justice; but the implication that these examples were the model for all intellectual disciplines remains an unfulfilled dream. Nor does the fact that no such model is available today imply the "death" of Rationality; rather, it marks our awakening from a transient, ambiguous daydream. (174)

Again we can notice a parallel with the political, economic and scientific responses to a transcendentalized God. Descartes' break with the old paradigm was not very clean, for he soon found it necessary to reintroduce God to protect his cogitations from deceptions that might otherwise be introduced by an evil deceiver. Cartesian and other rationalist philosophy still required a deity to maintain the universe, but his tenure too proved to be limited. . . . And what secular god would take *his* place? We do not need to look very far. The eventual disappearance of the philosophers' God left his religious and moral functions to a

subjectivity increasingly alienated from a factual "objective" world desiccated of value and meaning. Philosophy today may have awakened from the transient daydream of foundationalism, but the nihilistic implications of the Cartesian legacy continue to haunt our nightmares.

THE IDOLATRY OF MODERNITY

> To what powers has a man given himself in order to solve the paradoxes of his life? On what kind of objective structure has he strung out his meanings and fenced off his own free energies? . . . Each person *lives* his version of the real without knowing it, by giving his whole uncritical allegiance to some kind of model of power. (Becker 1971, 186)

Our human lack was unable to cope with bifurcating the supernatural from the natural—with desacralizing the everyday world by transcendentalizing God—so it filled the void by creating more worldly deities, which have evolved into the "secular" institutions that now control the earth and its creatures. Today each claims to operate according to its own objective and morally neutral laws, but those laws presuppose the mechanistic and atomistic paradigm of modernity. Rather than escaping ethical issues, they deny or diffuse responsibility for their consequences. "National interest" allows us to rationalize acts of state that most of us would refuse to perform as individuals. The limited liability of corporations and the anonymity of the stock market ensures we remain largely ignorant of, and protected from, the social and ecological consequences of our pooled economic decisions. Scientific research and its technological application are perceived as neutral in themselves, but nature divested of a spiritual dimension, and thus of spiritual protection, can be freely dissected and divested of its "resources."

We may summarize by contemplating what has happened to the lack that was originally "built into" these now impersonal institutions. If the human sense of lack is a constant, how does our collective lack still manifest in them, now that absolute sovereigns, the Protestant ethic, and God's signature have faded away?

The important point is that the deity has not really disappeared. From a lack perspective, "God"—that is, the solution we cannot help seeking for our lack—is still present in the functioning of the nation-state, the market economy, and the Enlightenment scientific/technological project, because

these collectivities do not self-exist but are "empty" processes that depend on our energy input and continue to be motivated by what may be described as *institutional* lack. The history of the nation-states system demonstrates that they are externally unstable and internally self-aggrandizing. Economically, GNP is never big enough, corporations are never profitable enough, consumers never consume enough. And the same is true for our scientific and technological establishments: the Faustian problem is not that we do not yet know enough, but that we never can, so far as their functionalist perspective subordinates them to our drive for ever greater control over the world.

Each, then, may be considered a victory of means over ends. The objectification of our lack into impersonal "secular" institutions means that basic questions about the meaning of our lives—the central spiritual issue for a being that needs to understand and resolve its own sense of lack—have become alienated into a "not yet enough" that can never be enough. For all three, power has become an end in itself, which is why there is something demonic about them. Power, although sometimes a good servant, is a bad master, because you can never have enough power if power itself is the goal. That points to the basic nihilism of "secular" modernity: the lack of an overtly spiritual grounding to our lives means that this preoccupation has become religiously compulsive. Because this compulsion is not understood by us, these institutions have taken on lives of their own which subordinate us to them while accepting no subordination to anything else.

Secularity has been a basic concept for our understanding of modernity, but the distinction we usually make between a secular society and a religiously grounded one needs to be replaced by one between societies that are ostensibly spiritual and those that are unconsciously spiritual: spiritual, that is, in the basic existential sense of addressing our inescapable need to ground ourselves and feel *real*. Remember what Norman Brown said about the Oedipus complex, or rather Oedipus project: It is essentially the attempt to deny our conditioned origins and defend our fragile sense of independence by becoming self-sufficient. In my Buddhist terms, it is the ongoing (because never successful) attempt to overcome the sense of nonbeing or unreality that we become conscious of as a sense of lack. The problem with deifying the nation-state, corporate capitalism, and the Enlightenment scientific/technological project is, finally, that our lack cannot be resolved in those ways.

If the spiritual need to ground ourselves must be addressed, the issue becomes whether we will choose authentically spiritual versions of

this quest, or whether we continue to pursue unconscious and therefore idolatrous ones. This chapter has offered a broader understanding of the three Buddhist roots of evil—greed, hatred, and delusion—which in turn suggests a broader understanding of idolatry. "Whatever idols man remains rooted to are idols designed precisely to hide the reality of the despair of his condition; all the frantic and obsessive activity of daily life, in whatever country, under whatever ideology, is a defense against full human self-consciousness" (Becker 1974, 194). Idolatry occurs whenever we try to "become real" by completely identifying with something *in* the world as the source of our power. Psychologically idolatry is akin to fetishism, and like fetishists, idolators gain their security at the price of living in a more constricted world, with narrowed perception and fewer possibilities. Insofar as our modern world is dominated by nationalism, corporate capitalism, scientism, and technopoly, today we all live in such a constricted world, with other possibilities foreclosed by our blinkered, socially permitted perceptions. This is the very "essence of idolatry—to let *what is* define *what could and ought to be*" (Lerner 25).

Yet what is the alternative? If idolatry is inauthentic religion, what does authentic religiosity look like? Again, I think Becker points the way: The problem of life is how to "grow out of" our idolatries by expanding our allegiances and preoccupations:

> Human beings believe either in God or in idols. There is no third course open. For God is the only object who is not a concrete object. . . . God is abstract necessity, the unconditioned, and this is liberating rather than opposing or confining, even though we submit our energies to it. Humanity achieves its highest freedom when energies are allied with the unconditioned cosmic process. Free human beings must turn to God as ultimate support for meaning because truly free people have nowhere else to turn. That is, to God as the highest ground for meanings, as the uncompromising critical perspective on earthly authority (Becker, in Liechty 59).

Buddhism uses a different vocabulary to make much the same point: all things, including ourselves and Buddhas, are "empty" (*sunya*), so we should not be attached to any of them. The touchstone of authentic spirituality is not whether one believes in God but whether one believes in and works to ground one's energies in what Becker calls the unconditioned cosmic process.

What does this imply for the modern institutions whose religious roots have been discussed in this chapter? I think it becomes obvious that we should not look to the nation-state nor to corporate capitalism nor to the scientific/technological establishments that service their ambitions for solutions to the problems they have created (e.g., the environmental crisis, addictive consumerism, increasing social injustice). This is not just because they have created the problems, but because to a large extent they *are* the problems. Instead of appealing to national governments for solutions, we need to work for more decentralized political institutions that will allow for increasing local self-governance and more direct participation. Instead of hoping that transnational corporations and market mechanisms can be used to solve the problems they themselves have created,[11] we need to rein them in by rewriting their corporate charters, the legal umbilical cords that could be used to subordinate them to greater social concerns. And since scientific inquiry is functionally unable to set self-limits on what it tries to discover and how those discoveries are to be used, scientific ambitions, like corporate ones, must be firmly subordinated to more democratically determined goals. Today the many ethical issues raised by genetic research, in particular, make this an urgent issue. It will not be easy to decide how this new knowledge should be developed and used, but it is becoming more evident that the worst solution may be leaving it to market forces and their political allies and technological servants.

This approach to history through a Buddhist understanding of our lack stands Marx on his head. Instead of reducing a superstructure of philosophical and religious ideology to some materialist infrastructure, I have argued that an unacknowledged repression of a spiritual character has played a significant role in the development of modernity. Yet Marx may have been right about something else. If the approach adumbrated here is valid, it is not enough for us just to understand it. The three roots of evil must be exposed and challenged, not only personally but structurally in the idolatrous institutions of modernity.