

After God

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INTRODUCTION

You cannot understand the world today if you do not understand religion. Never before has religion been so powerful and so dangerous. No longer confined to church, synagogue, and mosque, religion has taken to the streets by filling airways and networks with images and messages that create fatal conflicts, which threaten to rage out of control. When I began pondering these issues in the 1960s, few analysts or critics would have predicted this unexpected turn of events. The governing wisdom at that time was that modernization and secularization go hand in hand: as societies modernize, they secularize through a process that is inevitable and irreversible. I was never convinced by these arguments, for two reasons. First, all too often critics did not appreciate the intricate relation between secularity and the Western religious and theological tradition. As we will see, religion and secularity are not opposites; to the contrary, Western secularity is a *religious* phenomenon. Second, and closely related to this point, the critics who advanced the secularization theory usually had a simplistic understanding of religion, which tended to restrict its scope in a way that limited its importance. Secularists misinterpret religion as much as believers misunderstand secularism. Religion is not a separate domain but pervades all culture and has an important impact on every aspect of society.

To appreciate religion's abiding significance, it is necessary to consider not only its explicit manifestations but also its latent influence on philosophy, literature, art, architecture, politics, economics, and even science and technology. To the tutored eye, religion is often most influential where it is least obvious. Over the years, I have tracked the traces

of the elusive subject that has long obsessed me into places where it frequently remains hidden. I could not have anticipated the surprising twists and turns this journey has taken. To many friends and critics it has seemed that I stopped studying religion a long time ago. But this is not true—indeed, I have never left the study of religion behind but have always attempted to expand its scope and significance. The following pages are devoted to analyzing how we have arrived at this unanticipated juncture at the beginning of the twenty-first century and to elaborating an alternative vision better suited to addressing the urgent challenges that must be met if the future is not to turn deadly.

In the course of this endeavor, I have been consistently guided by leading eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European thinkers and writers. Though it has become fashionable to deny it, the fact is that our world has been decisively shaped by these seminal figures. Moreover, these men—and they were men—were Christian and, more specifically, Protestant. Modernity as well as postmodernity is inseparably bound up with Protestantism. Needless to say, other societies and cultures have followed different courses of development; but with the rise of globalization, it is no exaggeration to say that no society or culture has been untouched by this originally Western movement. It is undeniable that, for better and for worse, the world as we know it would not have come about without Protestantism. Max Weber did not know the extent to which he was right; were he writing today, the title of his book would have to be *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Globalization*.

It is important to note, however, that there is a significant difference between Weber's analysis and the argument I develop in this book. Whereas Weber places Calvinism at the center of his analysis, I focus more on the contribution of Luther and those who work in the tradition he began. This is not, of course, to deny that there is a very close relation between Lutheranism and Calvinism or that Calvinism has played a major role in forming modern institutions and ideas. The continuing influence of Calvinism is nowhere more evident than in the United States. The history of the Protestants who came to this country from England, Scotland, and the Netherlands is already well known. But the story of Protestantism's ongoing influence is richer than this familiar narrative suggests. By returning to Luther and the revolution he launched, it is possible to detect an additional trajectory that complicates the emergence of modernity and by extension our own postmodern condition. In this complementary line of analysis, Germany plays a pivotal role. Without in any way minimizing the contributions of figures like Locke, Hume,

Smith, and Darwin, it is no less important to acknowledge the significance of Kant, Hegel, Schleiermacher, Friedrich and Wilhelm Schlegel, and Nietzsche, all of whom were implicitly or explicitly Lutheran. Other writers who were Lutheran but not German, like Kierkegaard, or German but not Lutheran, like Marx, were nonetheless decisively influenced by the German Lutheranism that surrounded them. To reread the past three centuries through their eyes is to see our own time anew.

I do, of course, realize that the argument developed in the following pages seems to run counter to many of the critical perspectives that have been most influential for the past several decades. For intellectual as well as political reasons, so-called metanarratives have been declared a thing of the past and have been replaced with micronarratives focused on the local rather than the global. Though rarely acknowledged, the interpretive perspectives of many self-professed avant-garde critics actually reflect and reinforce many of the most conservative aspects of the contemporary research university, where hyperspecialization produces scholars whose critical vision remains limited. When microanalysis produces nothing but micronarratives, it becomes impossible to know where one is because one does not know where one has come from. The inadequate appreciation of the Western religious tradition has led to the failure to understand how critical perspectives, which have been so influential in recent decades, are thoroughly imbricated in the Jewish and Christian traditions. As critics change with the times, they, like those they attack, “get religion.” But the more they write, the more embarrassingly evident it becomes that they do not get religion at all. The problem is that neither those who defend nor those who attack religion today have an adequate understanding of it.

Any investigation of the role religion plays in society and culture today must, therefore, begin by asking a question these very critical theorists have forbidden for several decades: What is religion? In formulating my response, I draw on the insights of social and natural scientists as well as theologians, philosophers, and literary critics. By elaborating an expanded notion of religion, it becomes both possible and necessary to explore aspects of culture usually overlooked in such investigations. The definition of the origin and function of religion that I develop in the first chapter frames the substance and structure of the entire analysis that follows.

In chapters 2 and 3, I examine the role that Luther’s turn to the subject played in the emergence of modernity and postmodernity. By privatizing, deregulating, and decentering the relation between the believer and

God, Luther initiated a revolution that was not confined to religion but extended to politics and economics. The Reformation was an information and communications revolution that effectively prepared the way for the information, communications, and media revolution at the end of the twentieth century. The far-reaching implications of Luther's self-contradictory subject are not fully articulated until the end of the turn of the nineteenth century, when religion, art, and politics intersect in the vexed notions of autonomy and representation. The understanding of the autonomous subject, which is inseparable from modern democracy and markets, and the conception of self-referentiality, which is definitive of the modern work of art, emerge at the same time and derive directly from the Christian understanding of God. Changes in religion, art, and philosophy influence political, economic, and technological developments, which, in turn, condition cultural evolution. In this way, nature, society, culture, and technology are joined in mutually conditioning and reciprocally transformative feedback loops. When art displaces religion as the focus of spiritual striving, religious prophets become avant-garde artists whose mission is to realize the kingdom of God on earth by transforming the world into a work of art.

Secularity, I have suggested, is a religious phenomenon. In chapter 4, I explore the way in which secularity emerges within the Judeo-Christian tradition. Throughout the history of the West, God has repeatedly disappeared by becoming either so transcendent that he is irrelevant or so immanent that there is no difference between the sacred and the secular. During the opening decades of the nineteenth century, the immanence of idealism and romanticism displaced the transcendence of deism. Theologians, philosophers, and artists, who were among the most influential founders of modernism, understood nature and history to be the self-embodiment of God. Their belief grew out of creative reinterpretations of the classical Christian doctrines of the Incarnation and the Trinity. The implications of this unexpected turn do not become evident until the advent of twentieth-century death of God theology and the social and cultural changes it both reflects and indirectly promotes. This insight leads to the unexpected but nonetheless inescapable conclusion that contemporary secularity is actually implicit in classical Christology as it was defined in the great church councils of the fourth and fifth centuries.

In chapters 5 and 6, the focus shifts to developments during the last half of the twentieth century and first years of the new millennium. What the nineteenth century conceptualized the twentieth century actualized.

As transcendence gives way to immanence, the avant-garde agenda of transforming the world into a work of art is realized through new technologies that increasingly obscure the line supposedly separating image and reality. When images become real and reality appears to be nothing more than shifting images, more and more people become obsessed with finding a firm foundation they believe can provide certainty and security in a world that often seems to be drifting toward mere chaos. But the quest for self-certainty and security quickly turns destructive. In the complex systems and networks that make up today's world, uncertainty and instability can be creative. The new emerges far from equilibrium at the *edge* of chaos in a surprising moment of creative disruption that can be endlessly productive.

The religious wars threatening to rend the world in the opening decade of the twenty-first century have their roots in the culture wars whose most recent peak came during the 1960s. Here once again opposites share more than initially is evident. Hippies, radicals, Evangelicals, and Pentecostals were all searching for authentic personal experience in the name of which they could resist centralized systems and hierarchical power. By the end of the millennium these shared values had prepared the way for a political and economic agenda based on the principles of privatization, decentralization, and deregulation. The neofoundationalism of the New Religious Right underwrites the neoconservatism and neoliberalism that reign as the governing ideology today. With these developments, it becomes clear that unquestioned religiosity and moralism are actually much more dangerous than the beliefs and practices they are designed to resist. Through another unexpected reversal, ostensible opposites reveal a hidden identity. The very counterculture charged with leading society down the slippery slope of relativism and nihilism is actually a spiritual or even religious phenomenon, and the moral zealots who attack relativism in the name of absolutism are nihilists who reject the present world for the sake of a future kingdom they believe is coming.

The most pressing dangers we currently face result from the conflict of competing absolutisms that divide the world between oppositions that can never be mediated. In the final two chapters, I develop an alternative interpretive framework (or, more precisely, schema) that entails different values, ones that promote policies and programs better adapted to the complexities of contemporary life. In a world where to be is to be connected, absolutism must give way to relationalism, in which everything is codependent and coevolves. After God, the divine is not

elsewhere but is the emergent creativity that figures, disfigures, and refigures the infinite fabric of life. A religion without God issues in ethics without absolutes to promote and preserve the creative emergence of life across the globe.

As one begins to comprehend the scope of the problems we face, it is difficult not to despair—the obstacles do seem insuperable. Processes have been set in motion that cannot be reversed, and it is unclear whether people will be willing or able to make the changes required to delay, if not avoid, looming disaster. The acknowledgment of peril can, however, provoke committed struggle rather than resignation to inevitable defeat. Even if the cause is lost, its pursuit is just. To affirm possibility while confessing impossibility requires risking a faith that embraces uncertainty and insecurity as conditions of creative emergence. This absolutely paradoxical faith is the consummation of the revolution Luther began.

CHAPTER TWO

The Protestant Revolution

THE DIVIDED SUBJECT

Modernity is a *theological* invention. In his recent book on the Reformation, Patrick Collinson notes that Thomas Carlyle claimed: “if Luther had not stuck to his guns at the Diet of Worms, where he stood before the Holy Roman emperor and refused to recant (‘Here I stand’), there would have been no French Revolution and no America: the principle that inspired those cataclysmic events would have been killed in the womb.”¹ Though the notion of history that Carlyle’s point represents has lately become suspect, there is no doubt that modernity as it has emerged in the West and spread throughout the world would not be what it is without the Reformation. Indeed, it is not an exaggeration to insist that Luther and the theologians and philosophers who inspired his work (i.e., the Rhineland mystics and medieval nominalists) were actually the first modernists. What began as a theological revolution became a social, political, and economic revolution that continues to transform the world today. The distinctive institutions of the modern world—democracy, the nation-state, and the free market—are inseparable from Protestantism and its history. This is not to imply, of course, that different sociocultural traditions can never become modern; it is, however, to insist that the ongoing interplay between modernity and Westernization would have been impossible apart from the changes the Reformation set in motion. The religious and political conflicts that continue to rend the world today are unintelligible apart from the theological genealogy of modernity. It is, therefore, necessary to extend Max Weber’s famous analysis of

“the Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism” to a consideration of Protestantism and the spirit of globalization.

At the heart of the revolution Luther unleashed lies his radical notion of the self or human subjectivity. His vision grows out of a reinterpretation of the letters of Saint Paul and the theology of Saint Augustine. As we have seen, in any symbolic network, notions of God, self, and world are codependent. In this chapter, I will consider how Luther’s refiguring of theology, anthropology, and cosmology prepared the way for what eventually became the modern world. In the next chapter, I will analyze how late-eighteenth- and nineteenth-century theologians, philosophers, poets, and artists directly and indirectly refined and extended the Reformation account of subjectivity in ways that created the conditions for the rise of postmodernism at the end of the twentieth century. In the course of this analysis, it will become clear that the Reformation was, in effect, an information and communications revolution that not only anticipated but actually set in motion developments without which the information and communications revolution sweeping across the globe today would have been impossible.

Beginnings are never precise and inevitably vary with the interpretive schemata with which they are framed. Does modernity begin with the scientific revolution: Copernicus’s heliocentrism (1543), Galileo’s discovery of sunspots (1612), Newton’s law of universal gravitation (1687), or Renaissance humanism (1400–1650)? Or with political revolutions: the American Revolution (1776), the French Revolution (1789), or the Russian Revolution (1917)? Or, perhaps, an artistic revolution: Manet’s *Olympia* (1863) or Gropius’s Bauhaus (1919)?² During the last several decades, cultural critics working in a wide variety of disciplines have repeatedly turned to Heidegger’s philosophical account of the rise of modernity for guidance. Like many others, Heidegger associates the advent of modernity with the emergence of modern science and its application in new technologies. What distinguishes his analysis is the claim that science and technology mark the culmination of what he describes as “the western ontotheological tradition.” In the course of Western history, Heidegger argues, human beings replace God as the source of creative and destructive power. The work of Descartes marks a decisive turning point in this narrative of human development. Cartesian philosophy effectively reverses the Copernican revolution: whereas Copernicus had displaced man from the center of the universe by discovering that the earth circles the sun, Descartes insisted that everything revolves around man. From this point of view, Heidegger explains, “That which is objective is

swallowed up into the immanence of subjectivity.”⁷³ Descartes overcame the doubt created by the advent of the modern world by collapsing truth into the self-certainty of the *ego cogito*. With this inward turn of consciousness, objectivity appears to be constituted by and to exist *for the sake of* subjectivity. Reason, in turn, becomes calculative in science and instrumental in technology. Heidegger identifies the telos of this trajectory as Nietzsche’s metaphorical proclamation of the death of God. No longer determined by an Other, man becomes self-determining:

What is decisive is that man himself expressly takes up this position as one constituted by himself, as he intentionally maintains that it is that taken up by himself, and that he makes it secure as the solid footing for a possible development of humanity. Now for the first time is there any such thing as a “position” of man. Man must depend upon himself the way in which he must take his stand in relation to whatever is objective. There begins that way of being human which means the realm of human capability as a domain given over to measuring and executing, for the purpose of gaining mastery over that which is as a whole.

This will to mastery is most forcefully expressed in Nietzsche’s will to power, in which “the will wills itself.”⁷⁴ In this absolute voluntarism, divine creativity becomes human destructiveness, which, according to Heidegger, ultimately portends nuclear holocaust. Through a paradoxical reversal, the search for security that launched the turn to the subject results in radical insecurity created by what Hegel describes as “the fury of destruction.”⁷⁵ While Heidegger’s analysis is helpful, it is inadequate; though he appreciates the theological stakes of the developments he charts, he does not realize that it was Luther in one of his hymns, rather than Nietzsche, who first declared the death of God. Nietzsche’s will to power grows out of the theological voluntarism Luther borrowed from the medieval nominalist William of Ockham and his theological followers at the University of Erfurt. It is, therefore, necessary to extend Heidegger’s analysis of the relation between philosophy and the rise of the modern world by tracing its theological roots back to the late Middle Ages and the Reformation.

Whether considered philosophically, theologically, or historically, modernity presupposes self-reflexivity—to be modern, it is necessary to regard oneself as *different* from others who have gone before. The word *modern* derives from the Latin *modo*, which means “just now.” As the notion of modernity has developed in the West, it has been constituted not simply by the binary opposition between the modern (present) and the

nonmodern (past) but by a more intricate triadic, or more precisely trinitarian, structure: ancient, medieval, modern. The Middle Ages were not, of course, the middle for the people who lived through them; rather, they came to be defined as the middle by those who regarded themselves as modern. Medieval historian Francis Oakley maintains: “The very idea of a middle age interposed between the world of classical antiquity and the dawn of the modern world was ultimately of humanist vintage. What is lost in simplicity is gained in firmness during the Reformation era, drawing added strength from the Protestant depiction of the thousand years preceding the advent of Martin Luther as an age of moral turpitude, religious superstition, and untrammelled credulity. Even more clearly than their humanist predecessors, the reformers saw their own era as one of revival and restoration, though the restoration this time was not simply of the arts of learning, and of ‘good letters,’ but also of the Christian faith to its original purity.”⁶ The theological roots of modernity are, however, even deeper than Oakley realizes. In his *History of Christian Thought*, Paul Tillich argues that the twelfth-century Italian mystic Joachim of Floris developed the interpretation of history that formed the background for most revolutionary movements throughout the Middle Ages as well as the modern era. Expanding what had come to be known as the “economic” doctrine of the Trinity to form an account of history as a whole, Joachim identified three overlapping ages or dispensations: the age of the Father, which runs from Adam to John the Baptist and the birth of Christ; the age of the Son, which extends from King Uzziah (Isaiah 6) to 1260 CE; and the age of Spirit, which begins with Benedict and the founding of monasticism in the sixth century and also ends in 1260 CE.⁷ Though the dates now seem arbitrary and the overlapping of the periods is confusing, what proved decisive for later developments was the tripartite structure and the overall trajectory of Joachim’s schema. Within this narrative, the long march of history is characterized by the spread of freedom across the world. While the age of the Father is governed by the law, in the age of the Son “sacramental reality makes the law unnecessary.” The abiding authority of the clergy, however, limits the freedom of everyone else. The third era—the age of Spirit—marks the culmination of this developmental process: freedom no longer is limited to a few but now is enjoyed by everyone. As Tillich explains: “The inner part of this period is freedom, that is, autonomy, not being subject to any more state or church authorities. For Joachim there is a higher truth than that of the church, namely, the truth of the Spirit. From this it follows that the church is relative. It is *inter utrumque*, between both the period of

the Father and the period of Spirit. Its shortcomings are due not only to distortions, but also to its relative validity. In this scheme the church is relativized. Only the third period is absolute; it is not authoritarian any more, but autonomous. Every individual has the divine Spirit within himself.”⁸ If, as Joachim insists, “every individual has the divine Spirit within himself,” then the authority and hence the power of the church is undermined. What Joachim theorized, Luther actualized.

In *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, William James cites Luther and the Protestantism he inspired as paradigms of the sick soul: “In the extreme of melancholy the self that consciously is can do absolutely nothing. It is completely bankrupt and without resources, and no works it can accomplish will avail. Redemption from such subjective conditions must be a free gift or nothing, and grace through Christ’s accomplished sacrifice is such a gift.”

God, says Luther, is the God of the humble, the miserable, the oppressed, and the desperate, and of those that are brought even to nothing; and his nature is to give sight to the blind, to comfort the broken-hearted, to justify sinners, to save the very desperate and damned. . . . But here lieth the difficulty, that when a man is terrified and cast down, he is so little able to raise himself up again and say, “Now I am bruised and afflicted enough; now it is the time of grace; now it is time to hear Christ.”

“Nothing in Catholic theology,” James concludes, “has ever spoken to sick souls as straight as this message from Luther’s personal experience.”⁹ As these remarks suggest, Luther’s theology is radically existential—it grows out of his tortured personal experience. He did not initially set out to break with the Catholic Church; to the contrary, Luther was a devout monk and a faithful member of the Augustinian order, who thought changes were necessary to strengthen the church. He was, however, torn by psychological conflicts brought about by a profound sense of guilt that grew out of a very complicated relationship with his father.¹⁰ The more tormented Luther’s inner turmoil, the more urgent his religious quest became; and yet, the more he tried to fulfill his religious obligations, the less he was able to do so. His sense of personal corruption and impotence increased until he reached what can best be described as the tipping point. Like Paul on the road to Damascus and Augustine in the garden, Luther underwent a transformative experience in the Tower. He was in his early thirties and lecturing on the Psalms at the University of Wittenberg when his life changed radically. In his lectures as well as life,

Luther was preoccupied with the interrelated problems of righteousness and justification and was struggling to come to terms with the opening verses of Psalm 71:

In thee, O Lord, I have taken refuge;
 never let me be put to shame.
 As thou art righteousness rescue me and save my life;
 hear me and set me free, be a rock for me,
 where I may ever find safety at thy call.

The difficulty Luther faced was that his sense of sin was so deep that he felt there was nothing he could do to fulfill the law, and therefore, salvation seemed impossible. The turning point in his life came when he understood a crucial passage in Paul's Epistle to the Romans in a new way:

For I am not ashamed of the Gospel. It is the saving power for everyone who has faith—the Jew first, but the Greek also—because here is revealed God's way of righting wrong, a way that starts from faith and ends in faith; as Scripture says, "he shall gain life who is justified through faith." (1:16–17)

Luther's reinterpretation of these verses forms the cornerstone of Reformation theology. Justification, he concludes, comes through faith alone and not, as medieval Catholic theology held, by accumulating merit or by doing good works. Redemption, in other words, is a free *gift* and as such can never be earned. The agent of justification is God, not man, and therefore, human righteousness is passive rather than active. To appreciate the revolutionary implications of Luther's insight, it is necessary to understand the social, political, and cultural context in which it arose.

The dynamics of personal and sociocultural transformation follow the same pattern. As we have discovered, the systems and networks that provide meaning and purpose tend to drift toward disequilibrium as circumstances change. When gradual modifications of organizational structures are no longer adequate for effective adaptation, a phase shift occurs and new organizing schemata emerge. As a result of the complexity and nonlinearity of emergent systems, once networks reach the condition of self-organized criticality, an event can have effects disproportionate to its ostensible cause. Just as a seemingly minor event can have major consequences in an individual's life, so the experience of a single person can be amplified through positive feedback loops until it leads to global transformations. What made Luther's ideas resonate at the time was the fact that his experience embodied the uncertainties and anxiet-

ies of his era. As Tillich observes, “toward the end of the Middle Ages the anxiety of guilt and condemnation was decisive. If one period deserves the name of the ‘age of anxiety’ it is the pre-Reformation and Reformation. The anxiety of condemnation symbolized as the ‘wrath of God’ and intensified by the imagery of hell and purgatory drove people of the late Middle Ages to try various means of assuaging their anxiety. . . . In short they asked themselves ceaselessly: How can I appease the wrath of God, how can I attain divine mercy, the forgiveness of sin?”¹¹ This anxiety grew out of the insecurity and uncertainty that resulted from the dissolution of the social structure, ecclesiastical order, and theological synthesis that had developed in the High Middle Ages. With the fall of Rome in 410 and end of the empire at the hands of Odoacer and his barbarian confederacy in 476, Europe was thrust into turmoil for several centuries. The void created by this political defeat created the opportunity for the church to expand and consolidate its power.

As a result, by the time of the emperor Charlemagne in the early ninth century, there had emerged in the West a single public society—church, empire, Christian commonwealth, call it what you will—a universal commonwealth that was neither voluntary nor private. To that commonwealth all Europeans, even after the collapse of the Carolingian Empire, felt they belonged. And the idea of a universal Christian commonwealth coterminous with Christendom, sustained in theory by the memories of ancient Rome and guaranteed in practice by the universal and international character of the ecclesiastical structure itself, lingered long after the appearance of the national monarchies, until, with the advent of the Protestant Reformation, the unity of that ecclesiastical structure was itself finally destroyed.¹²

At the height of the church’s power in the eleventh century, the pope declared himself the true emperor whose power did not depend on secular authorities. By claiming the title *pontifex maximus*, the bishop of Rome assumed the imperial mantle that can be traced back to Caesar Augustus. In the centuries preceding the Reformation, “the papacy could make a credible claim to have reconstituted and prolonged, in its own attenuated, religiopolitical version, the universal empire that it was the glory of Rome to have created.”¹³

While the reach of the church was expanding, the face of Europe was changing. As advances in agricultural technology increased the productivity of medieval farming significantly, manors were able to move from operating at a subsistence level to producing a surplus that could

be marketed. With more food of better quality available, the population began to increase; between 1000 and 1250 the number of people living in Europe doubled. Urban populations grew and there was a revitalization of industry and commerce. When trade routes again opened, rural life and parochialism started to give way to city dwelling and cosmopolitanism. These developments triggered a remarkable intellectual revival, which began around 1000. Learning migrated from schools associated with local cathedrals to new universities established in major urban centers. Changing circumstances brought new challenges as well as opportunities. Nowhere was this more apparent than in theology.

These events did not, of course, take place in a vacuum. Ecclesiastical and theological developments were closely related to the emergence of European identity, which, in turn, was bound up with the encounter with Islam. Having reached Gibraltar by the early eighth century, Islam continued to expand northward throughout the Iberian Peninsula until it reached as far as Toledo and beyond. At the same time, Mohammedan tribes tightened their grip on portions of what had been the Eastern Empire. Throughout the early Middle Ages, Christians from the West regularly made pilgrimages to the Holy Land to pray at the Holy Sepulcher. In 1009 Hakem, the Fatimid caliph of Egypt, without warning ordered the destruction of the Holy Sepulcher and all Christian buildings in Jerusalem. This religious conflict and social unrest only increased the desire of Western Christians to travel to Jerusalem, which had been under Muslim control since the eighth century. Bishops, princes, and knights as well as thousands of people from lower social classes undertook the arduous journey to the Holy Land. When the Seljuk Turks took over Jerusalem in 1070, it became apparent that the entire Eastern Empire faced the possibility of falling under Muslim control. While tensions and intermittent conflicts between Eastern and Western Christendom delayed efforts to counter this expansion, the West eventually responded to the eastern emperor's request for aid from the pope. The Reconquista began in Iberia well before the retaking of Toledo in 1085 but did not end until Granada was returned to Christian rule in 1492. The early success in Toledo encouraged efforts to recapture major Christian centers in the East. While it is generally acknowledged that the First Crusade was undertaken in 1095 to regain control of the Holy Sepulcher and the last of eight Crusades began in 1270 under the direction of Saint Louis, the Crusades actually continued until the end of the seventeenth century. Though the motives of crusaders were not merely religious, there is no doubt that these conflicts played a major role in shaping Europe's sense

of itself as Christian. The ramifications of these developments are still being felt today.

The encounter between Christendom and Islam had a significant impact on Western philosophy and Christian theology. When Muslims migrated to Spain, they brought with them a wealth of philosophical, theological, and literary materials. Many of these texts were Arabic translations of Greek philosophy and early Christian writings, which were often accompanied by extensive commentaries in Arabic. After being rendered into Latin, these works were distributed throughout the West. The most important writer to be rediscovered during this period was Aristotle. As a result of Augustine's enormous influence, early Christian theology had drawn its philosophical inspiration almost entirely from Plato and Neoplatonism. In the East, by contrast, Arabic philosophers took Aristotle as their guide. The recovery of Aristotle sent shockwaves through European intellectual communities. Aristotle's writings provided a sophisticated and highly coherent vision of God, self, and world that differed significantly from what had become traditional Christian wisdom. While many rejected Aristotle and forcefully reasserted different versions of Christian Platonism, others sought to refigure Christian doctrines in Aristotelian terms. Thomas Aquinas was the most influential person to accept the challenge of rethinking traditional theology in relation to Aristotle's works.

By bringing together Christian doctrine and Aristotelian philosophy, Aquinas created an intellectual synthesis that has often been described as the theological counterpart of the Gothic cathedral. Reason was his guide, Aristotelian logic his method. Thomas's theological edifice rests upon the fundamental distinction between the natural and the supernatural, which he elaborates through a series of complementary binaries: nature/grace, reason/faith, philosophy/theology, natural virtues/theological virtues, and state/church. For Thomas, these distinctions never become oppositions; in every case, the latter completes and fulfills, without destroying, the former. The Thomistic synthesis, however, points in two opposite directions: on the one hand, the natural domain is understood as distinct from but subordinate to the supernatural, and on the other hand, the natural realm in all of its manifestations is characterized by an autonomy that eventually leads to its independence from the supernatural. In this way, the formation of the medieval synthesis already marks the beginning of its dissolution, which, in turn, prepares the way for modernity and eventually postmodernity.

In my analysis of religious networks, I argued that images of God,

self, and world are codependent. I also noted that there are two primary theistic models of God—one in which God’s reason governs God’s will and the other in which divine will is antecedent to and has priority over divine reason. Aquinas provides the clearest example of the former alternative in the history of Western theology. His God is always reasonable and never arbitrary; indeed, for Aquinas, it is unthinkable for God to act in an irrational way. He makes this all-important point concisely in his *Summa Theologica*: “There is will in God, just as there is intellect: since will follows upon the intellect.” Because God’s will is informed by his reason (or intellect), the world is always rational. “Now God is the cause of all things by His intellect,” Aquinas explains, “and therefore it is necessary that the exemplar of every effect should pre-exist in Him, as is clear from what has gone before. Hence, the exemplar of the order of things ordered towards an end is, properly speaking, providence.” In brief, Aquinas concludes: “*Providence is the divine reason itself, which seated in the Supreme Ruler, disposes all things.*”¹⁴

The world, which is rationally created and governed, is organized hierarchically. Human being is located between spiritual beings known as angels and the natural domain, which includes animals, plants, and inorganic matter. Though comprised of body (matter) and soul (spirit), man, like God, is essentially rational: “The difference that constitutes man is rational, which is said of man because of his rational intellectual principle. Therefore the intellectual principle is the form of man.”¹⁵ While never overlooking the role of volition in human being, man, who is made in God’s image, should always allow reason to govern his will. Inasmuch as man is essentially rational, the proper telos of his life is the knowledge of God. The free exercise of human reason is necessary but not sufficient for salvation. Writing at the height of the church’s power, Aquinas argues that revealed knowledge, which must supplement the natural knowledge of God, is available only through participation in Catholic rituals. Since grace must be added to nature for renewal to be complete, salvation depends upon membership in the true Christian community. More specifically, grace is mediated to individuals through the channels of the sacraments administered by official representatives of the church. The efficacy of the sacraments depends upon the office rather than the person; that is, it is objective and not subjective. The sacrament necessary for salvation is Baptism, which washes away original sin. This ritual cleansing prepares the believer for the Eucharist, which, according to the doctrine of transubstantiation, allows one to participate in the ritual repetition of Christ’s redemptive sacrifice. Within this

schema, the individual's relation to God is never direct but is always mediated by the church hierarchy. As we will see in more detail below, Luther called into question this principle, which was the foundation of the church's power.

Aquinas's rational and systematic theology seemed perfectly consistent with an orderly world, and thus, his theological vision provided a schema that lent life meaning and purpose for many people in the High Middle Ages. By the fourteenth century, however, natural, social, and religious factors intersected to upset the medieval equilibrium and push Europe toward the edge of chaos. In the middle of the fourteenth century, a pandemic of the bubonic plague, or Black Death, swept across Europe killing at least twenty-five million people. The medieval history of the plague offers a cautionary tale about the impact of climate change in an era of globalization. The Black Death appears to have originated on the Central Asian steppe and spread to Europe with unexpected speed. In anticipation of issues considered in the final chapter, it is important to note that historians and scientists now believe that a temperature increase of approximately one degree Celsius resulted in "a series of ecological upheavals—storms, floods and earthquakes—and these disturbances may have forced the rodents out of their holes and into contact with humans."¹⁶ The plague traveled by land along trade routes and by sea to ports along the Mediterranean coast. By 1348, it had reached England, and by 1349 it extended as far as Scandinavia, bringing extraordinary devastation in its wake. Burgeoning cities were suddenly decimated, and the fabric of society began to unravel. Agriculture, manufacturing, and trade were disrupted and universities shut down. As the number of workers decreased, the value of their labor increased. The plague, in other words, created a labor shortage that contributed to the breakdown of feudalism. When manors started to compete for serfs, workers were able to sell their services to the highest bidder. Individuals were no longer members of a secure hierarchical structure but were thrown back on their own resources. Greater freedom and increased mobility brought more uncertainty and insecurity. By the middle of the fourteenth century, the world no longer seemed as rational and orderly as Aquinas had assumed, and people were searching for new ways to make sense of life.

Just when the church was needed most, it was embroiled in internal conflicts that diminished its authority. During the Great Schism (1378–1417), two and for a while three men claimed to be pope. Problems were compounded because the removal of the Holy See from Rome to Avignon created suspicions about the independence of the papacy. Though often

overlooked, these developments contributed to the rise of the nation-state. In many cases, secular rulers, who sought to wrest control from the church, favored national churches rather than the so-called church universal, over which they had no power. Rome could claim universal jurisdiction more easily than Avignon, which obviously meant French rule of the church. But the church's sojourn in Avignon broke the spell of its universal authority even after the pope returned to Rome. In addition to these political difficulties, financial pressures resulting from, *inter alia*, lavish spending during the church's "Babylonian Captivity" led to increased taxation and burdensome schemes designed to generate more revenue. As abuses became excessive, calls for reform first arose within monastic orders; Franciscans, who were devoted to poverty, and Augustinians, who counted Luther among their ranks, urged the church to mend its ways.¹⁷ John Wyclif in England and John Hus in Bohemia openly resisted the centralized authority of the pope and the onerous power of Rome. Calls for reform both contributed to and were fueled by nascent nationalism across the continent.

By the time Luther nailed his Ninety-five Theses, entitled "Disputation on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences," on the door of Castle Church in Wittenberg on October 31, 1517, there was a widespread recognition of the urgent need for reform.¹⁸ Luther's theses were not necessarily revolutionary and were not intended to promote a break with the church. But an unexpected development, whose far-reaching significance only became evident retrospectively, transformed a local dispute into a global event. Printed copies of the Ninety-five Theses in Latin and German quickly spread throughout Germany and triggered a pamphlet war between Dominican and Augustinian theologians. Pope Leo initially saw the dispute as a local matter and charged the parties to settle the issue at a meeting in Heidelberg in 1518. But efforts to find a solution failed and the conflict only deepened. While Luther was preoccupied with the issue of grace, his opponents shifted the debate to the question of papal authority. This was a fateful development that made Luther's conflict with Rome all but inevitable. A series of increasingly contentious encounters culminated at the University of Leipzig in 1519, when Luther debated Johann Eck, who was at the time the most important theologian in central Europe. Eck outmaneuvered his opponent by getting Luther to admit that many of the beliefs of Hus were "completely evangelical and Christian."¹⁹ Hus, who had been condemned as a heretic by the Council of Constance, was burned at the stake in 1415. One year after his debate with Eck, Luther himself was condemned for heresy by a papal bull,

which he defiantly burnt in front of the gates of Wittenberg. The longer the controversy about papal and ecclesiastical power continued, the firmer Luther's position became, until he declared that both popes and councils could err. When he refused to recant at the Diet of Worms in 1521, the break with Rome became irreversible.

If reform was in the air throughout Europe, why did Luther rather than one of his predecessors become a revolutionary figure? What made Luther so influential was his recognition that the critical issues were not merely ecclesiastical and political but, more importantly, doctrinal and theological. For Luther, theological doctrines were deeply existential rather than merely scholastic abstractions. The personal crisis out of which his theology grew was a direct reflection of the social crisis of the time. When Luther spoke, others heard their own anxieties expressed. His dark night of the soul articulated the pervasive sense that things were falling apart and apocalyptic change was imminent. In his effort to make sense of his own experience by refiguring Paul and Augustine, Luther created a new schema that allowed people to comprehend and negotiate a world that seemed to be slipping toward chaos. In the process he discovered or, more precisely, invented the modern subject.

In formulating a new theological anthropology, Luther brought together two apparently contradictory strands in medieval theology: mysticism and nominalism. Though both traditions insist on the direct (i.e., unmediated) relation between God and self, they differ on the role of the will in religious experience. While the mystics who interested Luther insisted on a radical passivity that tends toward a monistic identification of the human and divine, nominalists argued for a radical voluntarism that leads to the dualism between God and self/world. These two trajectories intersect to create the contradictions and paradoxes characteristic of what eventually becomes modern subjectivity.

The widespread influence of Thomistic rationalism should not obscure the importance of Christian mysticism during the Middle Ages. It is possible to identify three strands of mysticism, each of which is associated with the faculties of affection, cognition, or volition, respectively. For mystics like Bernard of Clairvaux and Saint Francis of Assisi, the relation to God was primarily a matter of sentiment or the heart. Pious feelings issue in devotional activity and practical service. The Victorites Hugh and Richard, by contrast, developed a speculative mysticism in which the ascent to God passes through three stages: purgation, illumination, and union. The classic work of speculative mysticism is Saint Bonaventure's *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*, in which the devotee

starts with an immediate awareness of God in the outer world and proceeds first to the innate knowledge of truth, beauty, and goodness and then beyond to the illumination of the intellect by God, who is Truth itself, Beauty itself, and Goodness itself. While Bonaventure's sensibility is obviously very different from that of Aquinas, his vision is, in the final analysis, reconcilable with Thomistic rationalism. For both, the goal of life is the *knowledge* of God. This is not the case for voluntaristic mystics, who emerged during the fourteenth century. In 1374, Gerhard Groote, the son of a prosperous merchant living in Deventer, Holland, underwent a conversion experience and began preaching throughout the Low Countries. His ministry eventually led to a movement known as the *Devotio Moderna*, which anticipated many of Luther's criticisms of the church. More important, Groote translated parts of the Bible into the vernacular and encouraged laypeople to read it. He also urged people to cultivate a more personal relationship to God by imitating Christ. Groote's followers formed the Brethren of the Common Life and carried his message throughout Germany and as far as Poland. Through practical activities of humble service to others, they sought personal union with God. Luther was aware of the work of the Brethren and was influenced by some of the ideas included in the most important work produced by this movement—*The Imitation of Christ*, traditionally attributed to Thomas à Kempis and first published anonymously in 1418.

Around the same time, a distinctive form of mysticism began to flourish in the Rhineland area of Germany. The most influential of these mystics were Meister Eckhart, Jan van Ruysbroeck, and John Tauler (to whom Luther was most attracted). Though differing in many ways, the Rhineland mystics shared the belief that human beings have an immediate relation to God that can be discovered only by renouncing one's will. This is an unusual kind of voluntarism in which the will is used to overcome the will through the deliberate cultivation of a radical passivity in which God and man finally become one. Eckhart and Tauler used the term *Gelassenheit*, which Heidegger later appropriated, to describe the letting go of the will necessary for (re)union with God.²⁰ Rather than knowledge, the goal of human striving is *theosis*, that is, the absorption of the subject into the groundless abyss of divine being. The use of the will to overcome the will is something like an existential enactment of negative theology in which God is affirmed through the process of negation or, in this case, self-negation. While always remaining a thoroughgoing dualist who rejected every form of monism, Luther accepted Tauler's insistence that God is all and man is nothing. In Luther's the-

ology, the *Abgrund* from which all emerges and to which all returns is refigured dualistically as God's omnipotent will. He develops his argument by drawing on the theological voluntarism of William of Ockham as elaborated by Gabriel Biel, whose students were Luther's teachers at the University of Erfurt.

In contrast to Aquinas, for whom God's will is always guided by his reason, Ockham argues that God's will is prior to and determinative of divine reason. With this seemingly simple reversal, Ockham brought about a theological revolution that simultaneously reflected and promoted the dissolution of the medieval synthesis, thereby preparing the way for both modernity and postmodernity. To understand the far-reaching implications of this often-overlooked figure, it is necessary to consider the interplay of the notions of God, self, and world in nominalist philosophy and theology.

For Ockham, God is above all else omnipotent will—he is absolutely free and as such is bound by nothing, not even divine reason. God, in other words, is free to act in ways that sometimes seem arbitrary and often remain incomprehensible. Within this theological schema, the ground of the universe is the productive will of God, and existence is his unfathomable gift. Not precisely irrational, the will of God is the condition of the possibility of reason as well as unreason and as such is finally unknowable. Faith, therefore, cannot be a matter of knowledge; indeed, one must believe *in spite of*, not *because of*, reason. If the universe (or the world) is the product of God's creative will, unguided by the divine Logos, the order of things is contingent or perhaps even arbitrary. Since the divine will is constantly active, there can be no certainty about the continuation or stability of the cosmic order. God can always undo what he has done, and thus, there can be no final certainty or security in the world. In an effort to avoid this frightful prospect without forsaking his radical voluntarism, Ockham distinguishes between God's *potentia absoluta* (absolute power) and *potentia ordinata* (ordained power). While God has the absolute power to do anything that is not self-contradictory, he freely chooses to limit himself by ordaining a particular order for the world. In different terms, divine will posits the codes by which the world is ordered and establishes the rules by which it operates; these codes and rules, however, are not themselves determined by any code or rule. Every worldly structure, therefore, presupposes something it can neither include nor exclude. It is important to note that this voluntaristic ontology leads to an empirical epistemology. Since whatever exists depends upon God's free will, knowledge must be a posteriori and inductive rather than

a priori and deductive. The only way to know anything about the world is to begin with sense experience. Such knowledge, however, always remains incomplete because it is ultimately “grounded” in the abyss of divine freedom.

Ockham’s anthropology is a mirror image of his theology and, accordingly, has two fundamental tenets: first, the anteriority and priority of the singular individual over the social group and, second, the freedom and responsibility of every individual subject. His position on these issues led to his most devastating critique of medieval theology and ecclesiology. The issue over which Ockham split with his predecessors is the seemingly inconsequential question of the status of universal terms. For scholastic theology, the universal idea or essence is ontologically more real than the individual and epistemologically truer than particular empirical experiences. According to this doctrine, which is known as realism, humanity, for example, is essential, and individual human beings exist only by virtue of their “participation” in the antecedent universal. Exercising his fabled razor, Ockham rejects realism and insists that universal terms are merely *names*, which are heuristic fictions useful for ordering the world and organizing experience, but which are not real in any ontological sense. This position eventually came to be known as nominalism (from Latin *nomen*, “name”). For nominalists, only individuals are real. In the case of human beings, individuals are not constituted by any universal idea or atemporal essence but form themselves historically through their own free decisions. The defining characteristics of human selfhood are individuality, freedom, and responsibility. According to nominalism, the whole, up to and including the human race, is nothing more than the sum of all the individuals that make it up.

Finally, Ockham’s nominalism entails a new understanding of language and, most important, of the relation between words and things. Insofar as language is general, if not universal, and subjects as well as objects are singular, existing entities as such cannot as such be represented linguistically. Words and things fall apart, leaving us caught in a linguistic labyrinth from which there is no exit. In semiotic terms, signifiers, which appear to point to independent signifieds, actually refer to other signifiers. As linguistic beings, we traffic in signs, which do not refer to things but are signs of other signs. While appearing to represent the world, language is a play of signs unanchored by knowable referents. This web is not, however, seamless, because it presupposes as a condition of its possibility something that cannot be represented (i.e., the originary will of God). The most philosophically astute interpretation of Ockham’s theology is a book entitled *Guillaume d’Ockham: Le sin-*

gulier, which was published by Jacques Derrida's son under the pseudonym Pierre Alféri. Ockham's analysis of language, he argues, exposes the "realities" of metaphysics to be phantoms. Since this argument is important not only for interpreting Ockham but also for understanding postmodernism, I quote at length.

So, what is the consistency of metaphysics? The thesis, which seems to be Ockham's and initially was very discretely publicized, is particularly remarkable. First of all, it must be noted that, if we consider the occurrences in the texts, metaphysics is like a ghost or phantom [*un fantôme*] in Ockham's work. . . . Indeed, what can be said about being? The transcendental extension of being merges with the uses of "is." If we disregard the differences between these uses, being is then univocal but undetermined; if we take them into account, it is then determined but equivocal. Among the numerous differences, the most striking is the one that runs between the use of "is" in which it is a question of the properties of *signs as signs* or the one in which it is a question of the properties of *things as things*. In the "Roses *are* red" and "The word 'rose' is universal," the verb "to be" does not mean the same thing. In the first case, one speaks in ordinary language, and what one says stems from empirical knowledge; while in the second case, one speaks in a metalanguage (indicated by the quotation marks [around 'rose']), and what is stated arises from a logical or a semiological knowledge. Yet, metaphysical discourse keeps on defying this opposition and tries to go beyond it. Thus, some sentences are typical of the discourse of metaphysics as for instance "White is an accident," "The animal is a genre/gender," "Being rational is man's difference," or, to quote Hegel, "The animal's death is the passage to genre/gender." These are propositions in which, to say it neutrally, beings are designated in their association with abstract terms. But more precisely, abstract terms such as "accident," "genre/gender," "species," or "difference" refer to the concepts' properties or to the signs as signs. They make it possible to define the referential play of the signs "white," "animal," "man," or "rational" in a metalanguage: this is the work of logic, which is above all a semiology. In this sense, *metaphysics is strictly and unilaterally subordinated to logic*. To talk about the use of "is" in such statements is equivalent to talking about the referential play of the signs and of its rules, in the metalanguage of logic.²¹

As this remarkable analysis suggests, Ockham's deconstruction of metaphysics leads to an understanding of language as an ungrounded play of signs. Words are traces of what can never be represented and, as such, re-

main ghosts or phantoms of a real that has always already slipped away and yet is not precisely absent.²²

Though the importance of his work is rarely acknowledged, many of the themes Ockham identified have been enormously influential throughout the Western tradition. In view of the lasting significance of his work, it is helpful to summarize the critical points in his schema.

1. Only individuals are real. God and self as well as all the entities in the world, therefore, must be individuals.
2. Groups and societies emerge from the interactions among separate individuals.
3. Reason and faith are not complementary but are opposites. God is a *deus absconditus*, who can never be fully fathomed. Since there can be no knowledge of God, faith and uncertainty are inseparable.
4. Knowledge is empirical and a posteriori, and reason, therefore, is inductive.
5. The order of the world as well as thought is contingent rather than necessary. The laws of nature and principles of thought are posited by a reality that can never be adequately comprehended.
6. Divine will is the groundless ground of all existence. This *Abgrund* is neither simply immanent nor transcendent and, thus, is neither exactly present nor absent.
7. Existence is an incomprehensible gift of an Other whose abiding distance is incalculable.

In the course of the following chapters, the far-reaching implications of these insights will become increasingly clear. The Reformation Luther initiated and Calvin extended would have been impossible without Ockham's account of the interrelation of God's omnipotent will and the freedom and responsibility of the individual person. Less obvious but no less important, Ockham's empiricism prepares the way for modern science; his voluntarism points toward nineteenth-century romanticism as well as Nietzsche's will to power and Freud's and Lacan's unconscious; and his linguistic theories anticipate both British analytic philosophy and recent Continental semiology and poststructuralism.

Though Ockham's philosophy as it was developed by his followers was not reassuring, Luther recognized that it effectively expressed the inescapable uncertainties and anxieties of life in the late Middle Ages. Faced by instability and dissolution without, Luther turned inward in search of certainty and security. But his inner world proved just as confusing as the outer world; as we have seen, Luther was wracked by

doubt and plagued by a profound sense of guilt. According to the medieval schema in which he had been schooled, reason and free will are necessary but insufficient for salvation. They could take a person so far but then had to be supplemented by revelation and faith, which were mediated by the church through the teaching of scripture by the magisterium of the church. In Luther's experience, however, the effort to fulfill the law only exposed the impossibility of a guilty sinner's ever doing so. Like a diseased tree that cannot bear healthy fruit, a corrupt individual cannot accomplish good deeds. Luther's personal experience drove him to distinguish between the civil and theological uses of the law. Since all human beings are sinners, the maintenance of social order requires civil law, which is universally binding. The theological use of the law, by contrast, involves the salvation of the individual rather than the management of life in this world. Though salvation is a free gift of God and as such cannot be earned through human striving, the will does have some role to play in the salvific process. The theological use of the law discloses the contradiction at the heart of human existence and thereby reveals the necessity of divine grace for redemption. Since the very effort to fulfill the law discloses the inability to do so, the law reveals that *I am not what I ought to be* and *I am what I ought not to be*. This experience is not merely negative, because it is the *praeparatio Evangelica* without which grace is impossible. Only when I realize that I can do nothing by myself do I become open to the possibility of grace. In this experience, the positive does not simply replace the negative but arises in and through the process of self-negation in which the subject apprehends itself as inwardly divided.²³

I have noted that the key to Reformation theology is Luther's reinterpretation of Paul's notion of justification presented in Romans 1:17. In later years, Luther commented on the implications of his insight: "At last, God being merciful, as I thought about it day and night, I noticed the context of the words [Romans 1:17], namely, 'The justice of God is revealed in it; as it is written, the just shall live by faith.' Then and there, I began to understand the justice of God as that by which the righteous man lives by the gift of God, namely, by faith, and this sentence 'The justice of God is revealed in the Gospel' to be the passive justice with which the merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written: 'The just lives by faith.'"²⁴ Luther's doctrine of salvation turns upon his distinction between active and passive righteousness. While active righteousness requires the fulfillment of the law, passive righteousness is a free gift from God. This interpretation of justification by faith alone brings together

the voluntary passivity of the Rhineland mystics with the theological voluntarism of nominalist theology. Bound by self-incurred sin, nothing we do merits justification; if redemption occurs, it is the result of God's grace, that is, his *free* activity.

But this most excellent righteousness, of faith I mean (which God through Christ, without works, imputeth unto us), is neither political nor ceremonial, nor the righteousness of God's law, nor consisteth in our works, but is clean contrary: that is to say, a mere passive righteousness, as the other above are active. For in this we work nothing, we render nothing unto God, but only we receive and suffer another to work in us, that is to say, God. Therefore it seemeth good unto me to call this righteousness of faith or Christian righteousness, the passive righteousness.²⁵

Human beings can receive such righteousness because the forgiveness of sins has been accomplished once and for all by the sufferings of Christ. Through Christ, God establishes a *personal* relationship with each individual in which sins are forgiven by *imputing* Christ's righteousness to the sinner. The notion of imputed righteousness lies at the heart of Luther's theology. A person never becomes righteous in himself or herself but can only hope to become a forgiven sinner. "Thus a Christian man," Luther concludes, "is both righteous and sinner, holy and profane, an enemy of God and yet a child of God."²⁶ The Christian, in other words, is *simul iustus et peccator*—at the same time justified and sinner. So understood, the justified sinner is, in James's terms, *homo duplex*. Within Luther's schema, this belief is utterly paradoxical, and as such it cannot be established by rational argument but must be held against reason's protest.

With this notion of the divided subject, Luther identifies what eventually becomes the modern self. To understand what makes Luther's theology so revolutionary, it is necessary to examine the far-reaching implications of his account of subjectivity. First and foremost, faith is a *personal* relationship between an *individual* self and the *individual* God (*ens singularissimum*). The relation to God, therefore, does not need to be mediated by the church hierarchy of pope, bishops, and priests but can be direct. In contemporary terms drawn from theories of business management, Luther's soteriology does away with the middleman, or *disintermediates* the church, thereby undercutting its power. Never subject to ecclesiastical rules and regulations, salvation is a function of the absolute will of God, which is grounded in nothing other than itself.²⁷ Rather than depending on the authority and rituals of the church, God

works through his Word, which is present in but not limited to scripture and sermon. In contrast to later Protestant scholastics and today's Fundamentalists, who tend to subscribe to biblical literalism, Luther never limits the freedom of God by restricting divine activity to the purportedly literal words of scripture. God acts whenever, wherever, and however he wills—where the Spirit is active, the Word is present. Bound by neither church nor book, God can act through anyone or anything. As a result of God's freedom, the priesthood is not limited to the ecclesiastical hierarchy but can extend to anyone. This belief is the basis of the Protestant doctrine of "the priesthood of all believers."

The relation to God is not only individual but also *private* or subjective. One of the distinguishing features of Luther's thought is its thoroughgoing dualism. The theological opposition between transcendence and immanence is reflected in the anthropological opposition between interiority and exteriority. The more deeply the self plumbs its inward depths, the more paradoxical subjectivity becomes. In contrast to Descartes's turn to the subject, which issues in the transparency of the ego and the lucidity of self-consciousness, Luther's inward turn leads to a contradictory subject that is irreducibly obscure. Far from calling faith into question, this obscurity makes it unavoidable. No one understood this aspect of Luther's theological anthropology better than Kierkegaard. The paradoxical subject of faith reflects the Absolute Paradox, which is its object: just as Jesus Christ is fully man and fully God, so the believer is simultaneously sinner and justified. In the moment of faith, the believer confesses: *I am what I am not*. This claim can be read in two ways: first, through my free actions, I have sinned, and therefore, I am not actually what I am essentially; and second, though I am a sinner, nevertheless I am justified. There are no outward signs or objective criteria by which to verify these beliefs.

While Kierkegaard captured the essence of Lutheran faith in his well-known dictum "truth is subjectivity," it was Luther's other major modern heir who first identified this critical principle in Lutheran theology. In his *Philosophy of History*, Hegel explains the importance of the Reformation for "the modern time":

While the individual knows that he is filled with the Divine Spirit, all the relations that sprang from that vitiating element of externality . . . are *ipso facto* abrogated: there is no longer a distinction between priests and laymen; we no longer find one class in possession of the substance of Truth, as of all spiritual and temporal treasures of the church; but the heart—the emotional part of man's Spiri-

tual nature—is recognized as that which can and ought to come into possession of the Truth; and this subjectivity is the common property of *all mankind*. Each has to accomplish the work of reconciliation in his own soul. Subjective Spirit has to receive the Spirit of Truth into itself, and give it a dwelling place there.²⁸

If truth is subjectivity, then subjectivity is truth. The insights of Hegel and Kierkegaard suggest that the reduction of truth to (self-)certainty does not begin with Cartesian rationalism as Heidegger insists. Rather, it was Luther who discovered the subjectivity of truth and truth of subjectivity in the inner paradoxes and contradictions of a self that is never simply itself but is always at the same time something other than what it is. This divided self becomes the infinitely restless subject of modernity. Even though Lutheran subjectivity is inseparable from divine “altarity”²⁹ and, therefore, remains inwardly heteronymous, this inward turn eventually leads to the self-legislating autonomous subject without which the political revolutions of the modern era would have been impossible.

A final aspect of Lutheran theology proved decisive for later developments. Luther’s insistent dualism leads to his doctrine of two kingdoms: the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the world. This polarity is closer to Augustine’s opposition between the City of God and the City of Man than it is to Joachim’s tripartite structure and its progressive interpretation of history. Since the world is created but fallen, human beings must live simultaneously *coram mundo* and *coram Deo*. At times this dualism approaches a Manichaean struggle between God and the devil, which Luther describes in graphic language calculated for its rhetorical effect: “Thanks be to the good God, who can so make use of the Devil and his wickedness, that it must all serve for our good; otherwise (were it up to his wicked will) he would quickly slaughter us with his knife, and stink us and stab us with his dung. But now God takes him into His hand and says: ‘Devil, you are indeed a murderer and a wicked spirit, but I will use you for my purpose, and all that depends on you, shall be my manure-dung for my beloved vineyard.’” Nowhere is the devil more cunning than in his use of money as a seductive lure for those whose faith is weak. “Money,” Luther preaches, “is the word of the Devil, through which he creates all things the way God created through the true word.” What most disturbed Luther about the church of his day was its acceptance of and accommodation with the corruption and materialism of nascent capitalism. He goes so far as to charge: “the God of the Papists is Mammon.”³⁰ If money is the instrument of the devil, the pope is an agent of Satan. The material excesses of the medieval papacy led to financial impropri-

eties that were indefensible in the eyes of the young Augustinian monk. Money was always a theological issue for Luther. His attack on the sale of indulgences involves an alternative interpretation of the economy of salvation. In the most memorable of the Ninety-five Theses, Luther declares: "There is no divine authority for preaching that the soul flies out of purgatory immediately the money clinks in the bottom of the chest."³¹ The unholy alliance between church and capital was a sign that the time for a radical transformation of both church and society had arrived.

Appearances to the contrary notwithstanding, Luther's relation to the world actually remained thoroughly ambivalent. No matter how powerful the forces of darkness become, he insists that Christians still bear responsibilities for life in the world. In some ways Luther's attitude toward the world was more positive than medieval Catholicism's subordination of the secular to the sacred.³² This can be seen in two of the most significant changes he introduced. First, as I have noted, Luther affirmed the priesthood of all believers. Since Spirit moves where it will, God can speak through anybody. This pivotal doctrine leads to what can best be described as the *deregulation* and *decentralization* first of religious and eventually of political authority. No longer trickling from the top down in a hierarchical structure, authority now is distributed laterally, as it were, and emerges from the bottom up. This structural transformation, as we will see below, is inseparable from the sixteenth-century information and communications revolution, which, in turn, prepared the way for the network revolution in the latter half of the twentieth century. Second, Luther did not accept the requirement of priestly celibacy. Citing Paul in Titus 1, he maintains that "a pastor shall not be compelled to live without a lawful wife."³³ The rejection of celibacy implies that monasticism is not a higher calling than the ordinary life of faith. To serve God one does not need to withdraw from the world but can become ever more deeply involved in the world. Luther expressed this conviction in his doctrine of calling or earthly vocation. John Dillenberger effectively summarizes this important point:

The ministry is functionally, not ontologically, distinct. It implies no special status. The higher and lower callings, as in the prior distinctions between monks and the laity, are abolished. Luther does not mean that all possible callings are equally honorable. But ministers, cobblers, or magistrates may equally serve God in the exercise of their responsibilities. We men all, whatever our calling or station, face with confidence the conflicts and ambiguities of life and hope to be used by God as vessels to redeem the time. This is possible because through

the gift of faith we have learned to trust not in our own virtue but in Him who rules over all and who alone can bring good out of evil.³⁴

Anticipating postmodern theologians and artists, Luther collapses high into low by associating the sacred with the profane in a way that transforms the value of worldly endeavor.

The opposition between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the world is isomorphic with the antithesis between interiority and exteriority. While the Christian has obligations and responsibilities in the outer world, faith remains a private affair.³⁵ To a world teetering on the edge of chaos, Luther's defiance of medieval authority and hierarchy proved to be the tipping point for the emergence of a new cultural, political, and economic order. The effects of Luther's writings and activities were disproportionate to anything he imagined or intended. In 1524–25, German peasants rebelled against princes and nobles under the banner of Luther's Christian freedom in what became the most important European uprising prior to the French Revolution. Frustrated by Luther's social and political conservatism, two of his erstwhile followers, Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt and Thomas Müntzer, fanned the flames of rebellion by providing theological justification for social and political revolt. The peasants' concerns were worldly rather than religious—they demanded the abolition of class privileges and the granting of voting rights. Before the struggle had ended, more than a hundred thousand people had died. Luther's response was to attack rather than defend the uprising. In his infamous treatise "Against the Robbing and Murdering Hordes of Peasants," he declared that Christian freedom is inward and, therefore, can never justify social rebellion. Citing Paul in Romans 13:1–2, he counseled submission to secular authority: "Every person must submit to the supreme authorities. There is no authority but by act of God and the existing authorities are instituted by him; consequently anyone who rebels against authority is resisting a divine institution, and those who so resist have themselves to thank for the punishment they will receive."³⁶ Lutheranism never recovered from this capitulation; Calvinism, however, is a different story. The revolution that Luther began in a remote corner of Germany became global in Calvinism.

THE INVISIBLE HAND

The relatively minor theological differences between Luther and Calvin prove less important for the emergence of modernity than their contrast-

ing interpretations of the social, political, and economic consequences of their respective religious visions. Calvin carefully and exhaustively worked out the implications of Luther's fundamental insight about justification by faith alone and by so doing systematized, institutionalized, and internationalized Protestantism. Without Luther, there would not have been a Reformation; without Calvin, Protestantism would not have changed the world.

The context that shaped Calvin's thought and the people to which it was addressed differed significantly from Luther's spiritual, intellectual, and social world. While Luther never lost his peasant roots, Calvin was raised in a commercial urban culture where increasing literacy led to growing cultural sophistication. Trained as a lawyer rather than a monk, he had greater appreciation for the law than Luther and, while at the University of Paris, studied classical languages as well as humanists from Virgil to Erasmus. His first published work was devoted to Seneca's treatise on clemency. Reflecting an appreciation for the classics that was completely alien to Luther, Calvin borrowed the famous opening lines of his summa, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, from Cicero: "Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves."³⁷ While Calvin's God is every bit as mysterious and at times even more terrifying than Luther's God, and his assessment of the human condition is, if anything, darker, his acceptance of humanism suggests a more positive view of the world than is characteristic of Lutheranism. Alister McGrath goes so far as to argue: "Calvinism proved capable of engaging with western culture to the point at which, perhaps more than any other modern version of Christianity, it was able to transform it from within. The Calvinist was encouraged to engage directly with the world, rather than retreat from it."³⁸

By the 1520s and 1530s, pressure for reform was building in France. Increasing literacy among the emerging urban bourgeoisie led to escalating anticlericalism and growing criticism of the church. The reform for which people were looking "must not, however, be thought of in purely spiritual terms. Social and economic factors conspired to point to the need for change, creating propitious circumstances for any revolutionary movement which appeared capable of offering social and economic, as much as religious, reform."³⁹ While Luther's words resonated with people suffering through the breakdown of the old order, Calvin's words found their audience among the rising middle class that was forging the new world order. As late as the 1540s, many in France still did not think

the acceptance of Lutheranism required the rejection of papal authority. This situation quickly changed, however, with the publication of the French edition of Calvin's *Institutes* in 1541. A year later Parisian authorities banned all of his works, and the persecution of Protestants broke out across France. Calvin, along with thousands of others, fled to Geneva, where he carried on his struggle.

William Bousma concludes his important biography by arguing that there are "two Calvins, coexisting uncomfortably within the same historical personage."

One of these Calvins was a philosopher, a rationalist and a schoolman in the high Scholastic tradition represented by Thomas Aquinas, a man of fixed principles, and a conservative. For this Calvin, Christianity tended toward static orthodoxy, a Christian was a person endowed with certain *status*. This philosophical Calvin, peculiarly sensitive to the two contradictions and dilemmas of an eclectic culture and singularly intolerant of what we now call "cognitive dissonance," craved desperately for intelligibility, order, certainty. . . . The other Calvin was a rhetorician and humanist, a skeptical fideist in the manner of the followers of William of Ockham, flexible to the point of opportunism, and a revolutionary in spite of himself. This Calvin did not seek, because he neither trusted nor needed, what passes on earth for intelligibility and order; instead, he was inclined to celebrate the paradoxes and mystery at the heart of existence.⁴⁰

In terms of the word/deed polarity, the former Calvin gives priority to word over deed and the latter privileges deed over word. These two alternatives correspond respectively to the structuring-stabilizing and destructuring-destabilizing moments of religion. The contrasting sides of Calvin's thought issue in two very different strands in the Reformed tradition: on the one hand, the scholasticism embodied in Protestant orthodoxy and Puritanism and, on the other hand, the spiritualism expressed in Anabaptism and Pietism.

While Luther once infamously declared reason "a whore," Calvin's legal and humanist training impressed upon him the importance of reason in managing and regulating human affairs. Though his methods were different, he shared the systematic urge with medieval scholastic theology. The trinitarian structure of the mature version of the *Institutes* provided the organizing schema for the systematic formulation of the foundational principles of Reformed Protestantism. This work had an unexpected and rarely noted impact on French language: Calvin's *Insti-*

tutes did for the French language what Luther's translation of the Bible did for German.⁴¹ Calvin's work, McGrath notes, is "widely regarded as the 'first monument of French eloquence.'" "It is often suggested that during the seventeenth century the French language developed abstract, denotational and analytic qualities (often described as *clarté* and *logique*)." But how, McGrath asks, "did *la clarté française*, so characteristic of writers of the French Classical period (such as Descartes and Pascal) develop?" His answer is as unlikely as it is insightful: "We would like to suggest that Calvin may be regarded as a precipitating factor in this important development, partly on account of his involvement in the general trend to popularize the highly intricate abstractions of Christian theology, and partly on account of his personal contribution to shaping the language."⁴² This process of popularization began with Luther's crucial decision to extend the Reformation beyond the confines of the church proper by switching from lecturing and debating in Latin to preaching and campaigning before a growing public in German. Later Reformers appropriated and expanded Luther's tactics. "The Reformation witnessed the laying down of a major challenge to existing understandings of the way that the Bible could and should be read, to the structures of the church, and to Christian doctrine. Time and time again, the reformers appealed over the heads of the clergy and theologians to the people. The people, they insisted, must decide. The Swiss Reformation, in which a public disputation between evangelicals and Catholics in the vernacular was followed by a plenary vote by the assembled body of citizens on whether to accept the Reformation, reflects this principle."⁴³

The contrasting ways in which Luther and Calvin interpreted Ockham's philosophy led in two different directions. Luther's exclusive emphasis on God's omnipotent will issued in an empirical epistemology, which still informs British political theory as well as analytic philosophy. Calvin, by contrast, did not ignore this arational voluntarism but placed much more emphasis on the rationality and lawfulness of God's *potentia ordinata*. This line of reasoning eventually led to Continental rationalism and political theory, which contributed significantly to the French Revolution.

The same principles that promoted philosophical rationalism also laid the groundwork for Protestant neoscholasticism. Borrowing the logical rules elaborated by the French logician Peter Ramus, theologians developed formulaic interpretations of scripture and rigid rules of conduct. Deepening conflicts between Catholics and Protestants as well as between Lutherans and Calvinists led to the proliferation of

creeds, which effectively reduced faith to belief in a series of propositions. As belief was rationalized, the role of human activity in the world changed. The heart of the Reformation, I have insisted, is the faith that salvation comes by grace rather than works. Unable to achieve salvation through one's own efforts, individuals anxiously sought signs of God's favor. Worldly success, Calvin told his followers, can provide assurance that we are saved but can never be the cause of salvation. This distinction is, however, subtle and in practice easily leads to the conviction that redemption can be earned through good works. When this belief is combined with Luther's doctrine of earthly vocation, the result is the discipline and "inner worldly" asceticism that Weber correctly argued are essential to the growth of capitalism. Combining rationalism and moralism, ambitious pastors spread the faith through self-help pamphlets designed to tell people how to win salvation. What is lost in all of this is, of course, the freedom of Spirit that was critical for both Luther and Calvin. Religion degenerates into religiosity and thereby provides stability at the price of vitality. In anticipation of issues to be considered later, it is important to note that one of the reasons Protestantism has remained so resilient in America is that rationalism and spiritualism have always remained in tension with each other. When the rigidities of Puritans of any stripe become overwhelming, the repressed returns in awakenings great and small.

For many people in northern Europe in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, Calvinism provided an effective schema for navigating the turbulent transition to nationalism and capitalism. Rational calculation was critical not only to the economy of salvation but also to the burgeoning capitalist economy. While Luther condemned mercantilism as the work of the devil, Calvin saw capitalism as part of God's providential plan. When extended beyond the religious life, rationalism and legalism created the conditions for the instrumental logic and disciplinary regime without which capitalism could not have flourished. By encouraging the spread of literacy, Protestantism helped people develop skills that would become increasingly useful in the early modern period. In addition to providing a schema for rationalizing and moralizing life, Calvin made a fateful decision about money that literally changed the face of the earth: he accepted the practice of usury. Prior to Calvin, both Catholics and Protestants condemned usury and insisted that the only legitimate way to make money was through human labor or the sale of things. This might have been adequate for an agrarian economy but proved restrictive for the growing international markets that were

emerging in the early modern period. There can be no capitalism unless the monetary sign is detached from physical stuff—be it the laboring body or the material object. By accepting usury, Calvin embraced the principle that money (i.e., signs) can make money (i.e., signs) and thereby prepared the way for new investment instruments and financial institutions. As we will see, eighteenth-century Scottish Calvinists appropriated the Protestant notions of subjectivity and providence to create the model of the market that continues to govern economic theory and financial practice. Though rarely noted, the ghost of religion haunts today's financial markets.

These revolutionary political and economic transformations would not have been possible without Calvin's elaboration and subtle revision of several of Luther's foundational principles. The issue over which Calvinism and Lutheranism split was the Eucharist. As we have seen, in medieval Catholic theology, the individual's salvation is mediated by the church universal through the rituals of Baptism and the Eucharist. According to the doctrine of transubstantiation, when the words of the priest are spoken in Holy Communion, the elements of bread and wine are actually transformed into the body and blood of Christ. This ritual involves the reenactment of the sacrifice through which Christ becomes *present* here and now. Since Luther believed that faith hinges on the subjective relation between God and self rather than the participation in an objective ritual, he could not accept the Catholic interpretation of the Last Supper. While rejecting the doctrine of transubstantiation, however, he continued to insist that Christ is somehow *really present* in the rite. For Calvin and the Reformed tradition, the Eucharist is not a ritual repetition of what occurred *in illo tempore* but is a commemorative event in which participants recall what took place at the death and resurrection of the historical figure of Jesus. Calvin rejected Luther's notion of real presence as an unjustified compromise with Catholicism.

To appreciate the implications of this seemingly arcane theological debate for later developments within as well as beyond ecclesiastical and theological circles, it is helpful to translate it into the semiotic terms implicit in nominalism's theory of language. According to the doctrine of transubstantiation, the signifier (bread and wine) and the signified (body and blood of Christ) are one and, thus, are indistinguishable. Luther denied the complete identity between signifier and signified but affirmed the real presence of Christ in the ritual. The signified, therefore, is still rendered present through the signifier. Calvin radicalized Luther's position by decisively breaking the bond between signifier and signified.

Table 2. Semiotics of the Eucharist

Catholicism	Lutheranism	Calvinism
Sign/thing identical	Sign/thing distinct but inherently related	Sign/thing separate

Christ is not present; rather, the ritual points beyond itself to a past historical event. In different terms, the referential structure of the sign presupposes that the signified “transcends” the signifier. From this point of view, to collapse the signifier into the signified is to commit the ultimate sin of idolatry. These three interpretations of the Eucharist entail alternative notions of the sign (table 2). The movement from Catholicism through Lutheranism to Calvinism, then, involves the drifting apart of signifier and signified, or word and thing. We will see in later chapters that at the end of a very long trajectory, this process culminates in the disappearance of the real referent in a play of floating signs mediated by the information and telematic networks of contemporary culture.

As these remarks suggest, Calvin’s theology is in some ways even more dualistic than Luther’s. God is radically transcendent and the world is sunk in an abyss of sin and corruption. Human beings, therefore, are *totally* dependent on God’s grace not only for salvation but for all aspects of life. In developing his theology, Calvin accepts Luther’s soteriology and systematically develops its implications. Belief in salvation by grace rather than works, Calvin argues, presupposes an all-powerful creator God who is radically free and completely unconstrained by external circumstances. Instead of a one-time event, creation is an ongoing process in which God constantly brings the universe into being and governs its course. The doctrine of creation, therefore, necessarily entails the doctrine of providence. “To make God a momentary Creator, who once for all finished his work,” Calvin explains, “would be cold and barren, and we must differ from profane men especially in that we see the presence of divine power shining as much in the continuing state of the universe as in its inception. . . . For unless we pass on to his providence—however we may seem both to comprehend with the mind and to confess with the tongue—we do not yet properly know what it means to say: ‘God is Creator.’”⁴⁴ Providence does not merely guide the general course of things but extends to each event and every individual. From the beginning of time, the direction of the world has been predestined in God’s omniscient gaze. Within this theological framework, there is no such thing as fortune or chance, because everything “is directed by God’s ever-present

hand.” God’s hand is not, of course, always visible; to the contrary, God’s plan is “secret” because “the true causes of events are hidden to us.”⁴⁵ The hand of providence, in other words, is *invisible*; though never properly present, God is never absent from creation.

Calvin’s elaboration of Luther’s divided subject pushes Protestantism to the point where it reverses itself and inadvertently prepares the way for the secularity of the modern world. As we will see in more detail in chapter 4, God can disappear in two ways: on the one hand, God can become so transcendent that he is functionally irrelevant, and on the other, the divine can become so immanent that God and world are one. By pushing God’s transcendence to the limit, Calvin unwittingly affirms divine immanence. If God is everything and I am nothing, then my deeds are never merely my own but are always also the expression of divine providence operating through me. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians proves decisive: “For through the law I died to the law—to live for God. I have been crucified with Christ: the life I now live is not my life, but the life which Christ lives in me” (2:20). In other words, when I act, Christ acts through me. The affirmation of human impotence and divine omnipotence leads to the unexpected identification of God with self and by extension world. At this point, the logic of opposition reverses itself in a logic of identity and creates the implosion of the sacred and the profane.

The collapse of transcendence into immanence leads to the second side of Calvin’s theology. Calvin, like Luther, became a revolutionary in spite of himself. Just as Luther’s notion of Christian freedom led to the Peasants’ Revolt, so Calvin’s doctrine of providence prepared the way for the transformative spiritualities of the radical Reformation. In contrast to Protestant neoscholasticism, which bound Spirit to literal scripture, formulaic creeds, and rational codes of conduct, radical Reformers ranging from Anabaptists, Moravians, and Pietists to Quakers, Methodists, and Baptists reaffirmed the freedom of Spirit and the unmediated relation between the individual self and God. At the end of the eighteenth century, these two strands of Reformed theology—rationalism and spiritualism—came together in the American and French Revolutions.

PRIVATIZATION, DECENTRALIZATION, DEREGULATION

The emergence of the new notion of subjectivity in Protestantism led to the privatization, decentralization, and deregulation of religion, which ran directly counter to the centralization and universalization of author-

ity that the church hierarchy had imposed during the High Middle Ages. These developments, in turn, contributed to the information and communications revolution that began with print and continues in today's network culture. As religion was privatized and every believer became a priest, the centralized hierarchical authority of the church broke down and authority was distributed among individual believers. Rules and regulations no longer were imposed from above but now emerged from the bottom up through individuals who were separate but equal. These changes were brought about by and promoted literacy and education. Literacy never would have developed so quickly and spread so widely in northern Europe and America without the Protestant principle of *sola scriptura*. During the early Middle Ages, literacy was confined almost exclusively to the clergy and the Bible was in Latin. While this situation began to change during the Renaissance, it was the coemergence of printing and the Reformation that transformed the way in which information was produced, distributed, and consumed in the early modern period. According to Myron Gilmore, "the invention and development of moveable type brought about the most radical transformation in the conditions of intellectual life in the history of western civilization. It opened new horizons in education and in the communication of ideas. Its effects were sooner or later felt in every department of human activity."⁴⁶ Paper and printing had been invented centuries earlier in China, but social and cultural events did not create the conditions favorable to their explosive growth until the sixteenth century in Europe. The Reformation played a decisive role in these developments. From the beginning, printing and Protestantism were bound in a mutually reinforcing relationship of supply and demand: printing supplied the materials for the spread of the Word, and the spread of the Word created the demand for more printed materials. Lutheranism, Arthur Dickens argues, "was from the first the child of the printed book, and through this vehicle Luther was able to make exact, standardized and ineradicable impressions on the mind of Europe. For the first time in history a great reading public judged the validity of revolutionary ideas through a mass-medium which used the vernacular languages together with the arts of the journalist and the cartoonist."⁴⁷ Luther's protest never would have become a world-historical event without the printing press. Indeed, Luther was the first best-selling author and arguably the first media celebrity in the West; between 1517 and 1520, thirty of his works sold an astonishing 300,000 copies.⁴⁸ In his informative book *Printing, Propaganda, and Martin Luther*, Mark Edwards calculates: "If we assume conservatively that each print-

ing of a work by Luther numbered one thousand copies, we are talking about an output for Luther alone of 3.1 million copies during the period 1515 to 1546.”⁴⁹

This scale of production and distribution required the creation of an unprecedented technological infrastructure. Though Marco Polo brought block-print technology to Europe from Asia in the thirteenth century, most religious manuscripts were produced and reproduced by hand in monastic scriptoria well into the fifteenth century. Gutenberg developed a punch-and-mold system in which replaceable letters were arranged in a type tray that could be used to mass-produce printed pages. In retrospect, it is clear that this printing press was the prototype for the method of mechanical reproduction, which eventually would create modern industrialism. Early printers were by necessity entrepreneurs eager to find profitable products and to create expanding markets where they could be sold. From their earliest days, Protestantism and capitalism have been inseparable. Bibles, religious pamphlets, prayer books, and self-help books were the most profitable printed works for much of the sixteenth century. To promote their products, printers developed novel advertising strategies ranging from handbills and book inserts to posters promoting popular trade and book fairs. As the Reformation spread to different cities and countries, entrepreneurs developed new trade routes and distribution networks. When markets grew and diversified throughout northern Europe, they opened lines of communication, which facilitated the relatively rapid dissemination of new ideas. As ideas spread in these emerging networks, their effects frequently were reinforced and amplified. This is what made Luther’s writings, and especially his translation of the Bible from the Vulgate into the vernacular, so explosive within and beyond the walls of the church.

Throughout the Middle Ages, Jerome’s fourth-century Latin translation from the Greek and Hebrew remained authoritative. The church’s justification for the use of the Vulgate was twofold: first, it honored traditional liturgy, and second, the Latin language protected esoteric mysteries and sacred truths from profanation. The actual reasons for this practice were much more worldly—restriction of scripture to Latin and limitation of its proper interpretation to the magisterium increased the power of the church and reinforced the hierarchy between clergy and laity. During the late fifteenth century, translations into the vernacular began to appear in Germany and elsewhere. Prior to the Reformation, the church discouraged but did not forbid translations. But concern about the implications of biblical translations grew and, in 1485, the

archbishop of Mainz, where Gutenberg had published his Bible in 1452, issued a warning alerting people to the dangers of rendering sacred texts in “incorrect and vulgar German.” To underscore this point, the ecclesiastical authorities began to require the licensing of all German vernacular translations.⁵⁰ Such efforts, however, were too little too late—the Word was out.

By the time Luther published the first edition of his translation of the Bible in 1534, there were already eighteen German editions—fourteen in High German and four in Low German. The extraordinary success of Luther’s translation was due to its style as well as the circumstances in which it appeared. Luther never lost touch with his peasant roots, and much of his political success can be attributed to his abiding bond with commoners, which is reflected in his language. As the writings collected in *Table Talk* make abundantly clear, Luther’s rhetoric is consistently earthy and often vulgar, if not obscene. While criticized by representatives of the church hierarchy, this style resonated with ordinary people and contributed to the popularity of his message. But Luther’s words would not have spread without print and the new networks it created. Eisenstein correctly argues that Protestantism was

the first movement of any kind, religious or secular, to use the new presses for overt propaganda and agitation against the established institution. By pamphleteering directed at arousing popular support and aimed at readers who were unversed in Latin, the reformers unwittingly pioneered as revolutionaries and rabble rousers. They also left “ineradicable impressions” in the form of broadsides and caricatures. Designed to catch the attention and arouse the passions of sixteenth-century readers, their anti-papists cartoons still have a strong impact when encountered in history books today.⁵¹

The rapid development of printing technology prepared the way for the swift spread of Luther’s gospel by creating a growing number of literate consumers. As if anticipating the principles of supply-side economics, the increase in the supply of printed material increased the demand for it, which, in turn, led to the further increase in supply.

The consequences of the coemergence of printing and the Reformation are still being felt today. The translation of the Bible into different languages facilitated the spread of Protestantism. William Tyndale, described by Jack Miles as “a linguistic genius who may be said to have seen the English language as a whole for the first time,” published his epoch-making English translation of the New Testament in 1526. At the time of

his execution in Belgium in 1536, Tyndale had completed his translation of about half of the Old Testament.⁵² Born into a prosperous family of merchants, Tyndale's translation of the Bible was inspired by his belief in the common man and democratic principles. This impulse lies at the foundation of English Puritanism and, through English Protestantism, has shaped American mass culture.⁵³ As Protestantism expanded from country to country in northern Europe and eventually to America, printers and publishing houses quickly followed. The acceptance of the religious significance of scripture led to reading instruction for both children and adults first in the home and church-related organizations and later in social institutions and public schools. In 1642 the Massachusetts Bay Colony passed a law requiring all children to be taught how to read; thirty-two years later the colony passed the first public-schooling law. By the second half of the eighteenth century, literacy rates in Massachusetts were as high as 90 percent. While Puritan New England was a particularly striking example of these trends, similar patterns can be discerned among Protestants elsewhere.⁵⁴ The growth of literacy encouraged the further privatization and decentralization of religion. The home hearth became the private altar around which the family gathered.

Breaking the church's monopoly on literacy had important consequences that extended far beyond religion. People who knew how to read were able to make the transition from agrarian to mercantile and later to industrial society much more effectively. Printed materials were not, of course, limited to religious texts but also included maps, calendars, schedules, business textbooks, and tables for weights, measures, and currency conversion, which all contributed to industrial development and economic expansion. By encouraging literacy and numeracy, Protestantism created the educated workforce early capitalism required.

The Catholic reaction to these developments proved decisive for generations to come. As the Reformation spread, uneasiness about the use of the vernacular and the growth of literacy deepened. In 1515, at the Lateran Council, Pope Leo X issued a censorship decree that "applied to all translations from Hebrew, Greek, Arabic and Chaldaic into Latin and from Latin into the vernacular."⁵⁵ Protestantism and literacy were so closely associated that the church felt that, to contain the former, it had to restrict the latter. Additional edicts directed against Bible printing were issued throughout the 1520s and were backed up by the Inquisition. In 1546, at the Council of Trent, the Catholic Church reaffirmed the primacy of the Vulgate, thereby ensuring lay ignorance and obedience rather than promoting literacy and education. In 1559 Pius IV's reaffir-

mation of the prohibition of Bible printing and reading in his first papal Index put an end to additional translations of the Bible and drastically limited the spread of literacy in Catholic countries for two centuries. One of the most important effects of these developments was to curtail the growth of industrialism and capitalism in Catholic countries. As mercantilism gave way to industrialism, capitalism became much stronger in northern than in southern Europe. The effects of the division between north and south that grew out of these religious doctrines and policies can still be seen in Europe, as well as North and South America today.

The advent of print compromised ecclesiastical authority in other unexpected ways. Though they disagreed on many issues, Erasmus and Luther were both convinced about the importance of translating and publishing the Bible into as many languages as possible. During the Renaissance, humanists rediscovered and reappropriated Greek and Hebrew. As interest in ancient languages increased, new research tools like dictionaries, grammars, and reference works began to appear. In 1516, Erasmus published what might well have been the most important book in the sixteenth century—*Novum Instrumentum*. In this bilingual work, Greek and Latin versions of the biblical text appeared in columns side by side. Luther and Tyndale both drew on Erasmus's work in their translations of the Bible. Though Erasmus never became a Reformer, it is no exaggeration to insist that *Novum Instrumentum* made the Reformation possible. As scholars honed their new linguistic skills by studying translations of the Bible, they discovered numerous problems with Jerome's Vulgate version of scripture. In this way, printing created the conditions for historical and critical biblical scholarship, which eventually would shake the foundation of faith. When the Catholic Church reaffirmed the Vulgate, they chose to ignore questions raised by serious students of the Bible. As we will see in chapter 5, by the nineteenth century, these problems became even more severe for Protestants whose faith was bound to the validity of the written Word.

While these developments proved decisive for later history, the implications of print are even more complicated than these remarks suggest. In ways that are not immediately obvious, print not only individualizes and deregulates but also standardizes and regulates scripture, creedal codes, and disciplinary practices. The contrasting tendencies to individualize and to standardize correspond to the voluntaristic destabilizing and rationalistic stabilizing sides of Calvinism. The propensity of print to standardize and regulate has economic, linguistic, and political

implications. The economic impact of print can be seen in the eventual development of new currencies and the formation of novel disciplinary techniques. Changes in currencies always presuppose new technologies: just as there could be no metal currencies without the requisite mining and metallurgy technologies and there can be no virtual currencies without information-processing machines and networks, so there could be no paper currencies apart from technologies for the production of paper and printing. Paper currency was first introduced in China in 910 CE and was used by Venetian goldsmiths during the Middle Ages, but the invention of printing allowed it to spread rapidly. Printing created the conditions for standardization and regulation of currencies and thereby facilitated the development of networks of exchange that made it possible for markets to expand beyond local and even national boundaries. But printing also introduced a subtle yet important change in the nature of money: with paper currency, the token of exchange shifts from valuable material to a sign with no intrinsic worth. Once the distinction between stuff and sign had been made, it was all but inevitable that the signified and the signifier would eventually drift apart and the economy would eventually become a play of signs.

The emergence of industrial capitalism presupposes not only the development of new technologies and educated workers but also the standardization and regulation of human behavior, which would not have been possible without printing. It is no accident that the famous Strasbourg clock was created in the city with a thriving printing industry to which Calvin fled from France to escape persecution. Before the widespread use of mechanical clocks, printed calendars and schedules had already begun the process of rationalizing human behavior in ways that would change work and transform the economy. Just as print had been the *preparatio Evangelica* for Luther, so the standardization and regulation of life prepared the way for industrialization.

In addition to changing the way people lived, print changed the way they thought and spoke. The paradoxical tendencies of print can be seen clearly in its impact on language. As Calvin's *Institutes* profoundly influenced the French language, so Luther's translation of the Bible transformed German. The propensity of print to cultivate individuality should not obscure the ways in which it standardizes language as well as personal habits and social customs. The standardization of language leads to the gradual eclipse of local dialects as well as the regulation of idiosyncratic usages. This development had serious political impli-

cations that extended far beyond the church. Throughout Europe, the standardization of language and its fixation in print created the conditions for the rise of nationalism.

Studies of dynastic consolidation and/or of nationalism might well devote more space to the advent of printing. Typography arrested linguistic drift, enriched as well as standardized vernaculars, and paved the way for the more deliberate purification and codification of all European languages. Randomly patterned sixteenth-century type-casting largely determined the subsequent elaboration of national mythologies on the part of certain separate groups within multi-lingual dynastic states. The duplication of vernacular primers and translations contributed in other ways to nationalism. A “mother’s tongue” learned “naturally” at home would be reinforced by inculcation of a homogenized print-made language mastered while still young, when learning to read. . . . Particularly after grammar schools gave primary instruction in reading by using vernacular instead of Latin readers, linguistic “roots” and rootedness in one’s homeland would be entangled.⁵⁶

The two most powerful agents of national identity are language and currency. As we saw in chapter 1, society and culture are codependent: society presupposes cultural ideals, and cultural schemata grow out of social relations. When local dialects give way to shared language, social relations are reconfigured. Patrick Collinson shrewdly observes: “Everywhere, the vernacular Bible was the most important vehicle for what we may call cultural nationalism.”⁵⁷ This transformation was not, of course, limited to culture; cultural nationalism inspired and informed other forms of nationalism. In later chapters I will explore the ways in which the extension of the sixteenth-century information and communications revolution in the digital and network revolutions of the late twentieth century leads to the acceleration of the process of globalization, which unravels and rewires the relations among language, currency, and the nation-state.

Technological innovations change not only natural, social, political, and economic systems and structures but also transform perceptual and cognitive schemata. The ways in which we apprehend the world are not hardwired in the brain but change with the modes of production and reproduction. The development of mechanical technologies deployed in print issued in new disciplinary regimes for sensation and thought. Though rarely noted, printing and linear point perspective emerged at approximately the same time. In his groundbreaking study of Renaissance

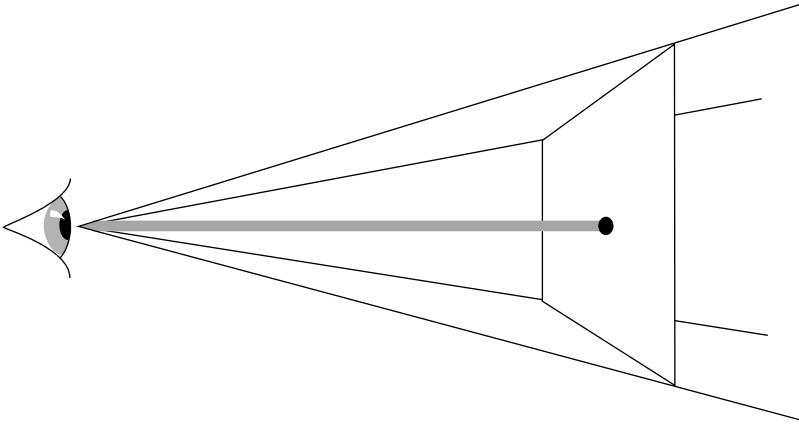


Figure 12. Visual Pyramid by Leon Battista Alberti, *Della pittura*, 1435–36.
 (http://www.cs.brown.edu/stc/summer/viewing_history/viewing_history_8.html)

art Samuel Edgerton first demonstrated that the key to the discovery of linear perspective was recognition of the vanishing point, which made it possible to construct a visual pyramid with its organizational grid. As early as 1425, Filippo Brunelleschi had discovered the vanishing point through a series of complicated experiments with mirrors designed for the Baptistery of Florence. Based on his results, he proceeded to develop techniques for painting realistic pictures and passed this information on to other artists. Leon Battista Alberti refined Brunelleschi's instructions in his highly influential *Della pittura* (1435–36) (fig. 12). During the Renaissance, questions about the eye and vision were more metaphysical than physical. The perspective rules formulated by Brunelleschi and Alberti were accepted by artists because they “gave their depicted scenes a sense of harmony with natural law, thereby underscoring man's moral responsibility within God's geometrically ordered universe.”⁵⁸ This new geometric space foreshadowed the modern Cartesian grid, which literally transformed the world. This grid became the structural foundation for administrative and cognitive regulation through the Enlightenment and down to the present day. But linear perspective also involves the countertendency of individualization, which we have discovered in both Reformation theology and print technology. In addition to establishing the similarity between the divine and the human eye, linear perspective

contributes to the constitution of a new subject, which is isomorphic with the individual self in Luther's theology. Perspective individualizes sight in idiosyncratic vision that informs the individual subject. Samuel Edgerton explains how print facilitated this epochal change:

It should not be overlooked that almost coincidental with the appearance and acceptance of linear perspective came Gutenberg's invention of moveable type. Together these two ideas, the one visual, the other literary, provided perhaps the most outstanding scientific achievement of the fifteenth century: the revolution in mass communication. Linear perspective pictures, by virtue of the power of the printing press, came to cover a wider range of subjects and to reach a larger audience than any other representational medium or convention in the entire history of art. It is fair to say that without this conjunction of perspective and printing in the Renaissance, the whole subsequent development of modern science and technology would have been unthinkable.⁵⁹

In this way, print actually contributed to the transformation of the way people see and, by extension, interpret the world.

In our investigation of the formation and operational logic of schemata, we discovered that perception and cognition are codependent and, therefore, mutually condition each other. The reconfiguration of the visual field recasts the structures of cognition and vice versa. On the one hand, the visual pyramid individualizes vision to create perspective, which, when translated into cognitive terms, eventually leads to Kierkegaard's subjectivism and Nietzsche's perspectivism. On the other hand, the visual pyramid and organizational grid create a taxonomic imperative, which leads to the comprehensive systematization of reality developed in different ways by the French Encyclopedists and Hegel's *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*. Extending the empiricism inherent in the voluntarism of nominalistic philosophy and Protestant theology, linear perspective reinforces the insistence on the collection of data by the investigation of individual phenomena, which are then arranged according to principles defined in various schemata. These organizational structures can range from the popular *Wunderkabinet*, museums, and textbooks to sophisticated scientific theories. Print once again plays a mediating role in these developments. "The decisions made by early printers," Elizabeth Eisenstein explains,

directly affected both tool-making and symbol-making. Their products reshaped the powers to manipulate objects, to perceive and think

about varied phenomena. Scholars concerned with “modernization” or “rationalization” might profitably think more about the new kind of brainwork fostered by the silent scanning of maps, tables, charts, diagrams, dictionaries and grammars. They also need to look much more closely at the routines pursued by those who compiled and produced such reference guides. These routines were conducive to a new *esprit de système*.⁶⁰

During the modern period, this *esprit de système* changes the world into its own image. The far-reaching implications of this new transformation did not become evident until the end of the eighteenth century.

This examination of the Reformation offers ample evidence for the ways in which natural, social, cultural, and technological systems and networks coemerge and coevolve. As its consequences spread through emerging information and communications networks, Luther’s personal crisis was amplified until it led to a revolution that ushered in the modern age. If, as Hegel argues, the essence of the Reformation is that man in his very nature is destined to be free, then what began in Wittenberg in the sixteenth century continued in Philadelphia and Paris in the eighteenth century.