Hierarchy, Equality, and the Sublimation of Anarchy

The Western Illusion of Human Nature

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(*Preface:* Over the past decade or two, courses on "Western Civilization" have been occupying a progressively smaller place in the curricula of American colleges. Here I attempt to accelerate the trend by reducing "Western Civ" to approximately one hour. My justification is the Nietzschean principle that big issues are like cold baths: one should get into and out of them as quickly as possible.)

Over and again for more than two millennia the peoples we call "Western" have been haunted by the specter of their own inner being: an apparition of human nature so avaricious and contentious that, unless it is somehow governed, it will reduce society to anarchy. The political science of the unruly animal has come for the most part in two contrasting and alternating forms: either hierarchy or equality, monarchial authority or republican equilibrium; either a system of domination that (ideally) restrains people's natural self-interest by an external power or a self-organizing system of free and equal powers whose opposition (ideally) reconciles their particular interests in the common interest. Beyond politics, this is a totalized metaphysics of order, for the same generic structure of an elemental anarchy resolved by hierarchy or equality is found in the organization of the universe as well as the city, and again in therapeutic concepts of the human body. I claim it is a specifically Western metaphysics, for it supposes an opposition between nature and culture that is distinctive to the West—and notably contrastive to the many other peoples who think beasts are basically human rather than humans are basically beasts: for them there is no "nature," let alone one that has to be overcome.

First, some necessary caveats: I do not say that ideas of human nature like the Western ones are entirely unknown elsewhere; they could be appealing especially to state organizations with similar interests in controlling their underlying populations. Even Confucian philosophy, for all its suppositions that men are inherently good (Mencius) or inherently capable of the good (Confucius), can come up with occasional aberrant views of their natural wickedness (Hsün-tzu). I do believe that neither the Chinese nor any other cultural tradition can match the sustained Western contempt for humanity—this persistent scandal of man's viciousness and cupidity—together with the antithesis of culture and nature that informs it.

Still, were there time enough, I would offer so many qualifications of these essentialisms that I might seem to be suffering from the postmodern syndrome of epistemological hypochondria, with its telltale symptom of wallowing in indeterminacy. As it is I am rather in the position of J. S. Mill's one-eyed philosopher, thinking to derive some universal truths from an obsession with a particular point of view. To call this "intellectual history" or even "archaeology" would be as disingenuous as it is pretentious. All I do is selectively single out a few examples of our long-standing tradition of human nature, and suggest it is delusional. Although I offer no sustained narrative of this lugubrious sense of what we are, I put in evidence of its duration the fact that intellectual ancestors from Thucydides through St. Augustine, Machiavelli, and the authors of the *Federalist Papers,* not to forget contemporaries such as the social scientists of "economic man" and the sociobiologists of "the selfish gene," have all been accorded the scholarly label of "Hobbesian." Some of them were monarchists, others partisans of democratic republics, yet all nevertheless shared that same sinister view of human nature.[1]

I begin, however, with the much more robust connection between the political philosophies of Hobbes, Thucydides, and John Adams. The curious interrelations of this triad of authors will allow us to sketch the main coordinates of the Metaphysical Triangle of anarchy, hierarchy, and equality. For as different as were their solutions to the fundamental problem of human evil, both Hobbes and Adams found in Thucydides' text on the Peloponnesian War, notably his gory account of the revolution at Corcyra, the model of their own ideas of the horrors society would suffer if mankind's natural desires of power and gain were not checked—by sovereign imposition said Hobbes, by democratic balance said Adams.

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1. It will be evident I have learned much on these matters from Albert O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism before Its Triumph* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977). Equally evident will be the departures here from Hirschman's thesis: notably that I do not see the opposition of material interests as succeeding and neutralizing political passions, since both have a long and largely parallel history in Western ideology, and I do not treat monarchy as a relatively ineffective mode of controlling the passions by comparison to the opposition of interests, as coercive princely rule has had the longer history of doing that. Also, the distinction I draw between hierarchy and equality is eccentric to that of Louis Dumont, as here "hierarchy" refers to a structure of power and domination in which the principle of authority is often external to rather than inclusive of others' being, and "equality" is not necessarily individualistic and without integration of the person in the whole (for example, nationalism). See Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970) and *Essays on Individualism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

Adams and Hobbes as Thucydideans

In 1763, young John Adams wrote a brief essay titled "All men would be tyrants if they could." Adams never published the essay, but he revisited it in 1807 to endorse its conclusion that all "simple" (unmixed) forms of government, including pure democracy, as well as all moral virtues, all intellectual abilities, and all powers of wealth, beauty, art, and science are no proof against the selfish desires that rage in the hearts of men and issue in cruel and tyrannical government. As he explained the essay's title, "It means, in my opinion, no more than this plain simple observation upon human nature which every Man, who has ever read a treatise upon Morality, or conversed with the World . . . must have often made, vis., that the selfish Passions are stronger than the Social, and that the former would always prevail over the latter in any Man, left to the natural Emotions of his own Mind, unrestrained and unchecked by other Power extrinsic to himself."[2]

Adams knew the dim views of Hobbes, Mandeville, Machiavelli, and their like on human nature, but for historical evidence he gave special credence to Thucydides. In the context of the partisan conflicts attending the birth of the American Republic, including class conflicts something like those of fifth-century Greece, Thucydides was for Adams the star witness of the havoc that can be caused by out-of-control desires and factional interests. Thus the ancient historian's place front and center in the preface to Adams's *Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States,* where he writes: "It is impossible to read in Thucydides, *lib. iii,* his account of the factions and confusions throughout all Greece, which were introduced by this want of equilibrium, without horror."[3] He then proceeds to give close paraphrase of Thucydides' narrative (3.70–3.85) of the civil strife *(stasis)* at Corcyra.

I radically abbreviate Thucydides' account. It concerns an uprising of the few against the many in Corcyra, a rebellion of the privileged class against the democratic rule of the people, with the aim of severing the city's allegiance to Athens by establishing an oligarchic regime allied instead with Sparta. In a series of violent clashes, involving also sacrilege against law and religion, each party was victorious in turn, inflicting casualties that mounted progressively when the Spartans intervened on behalf

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2. Adams, *Papers of John Adams,* vol. 1, *September 1755–October 1773,* edited by Robert J. Taylor (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, Belknap Press, 1977), 82.

3. Adams, *Defence of the Constitutions* (London, 1787–1788), 1:iv.

of the oligarchs and the Athenians on the side of the people. In the end, an Athenian fleet cordoned off the city, whereupon the oligarchic faction suffered bloody massacre at the hands of an out-of-control democratic mob: "Death raged in every shape; and, as usually happens at such times, there was no length to which violence did not go; some were killed by their fathers, and suppliants dragged from the altar or slain upon it; while some were even walled up in the temple of Dionysus, and died there" (Thuc. 3.81.4–5).

Apparently more violent than any previous *stasis,* the civil war at Corcyra was only the first of the draconian kind that developed during the Peloponnesian War, as the Spartans and the Athenians became engaged in local conflicts on the side of the oligarchs and the people, respectively. Thucydides conveys the sense of an epidemic diffusion of these political "convulsions," becoming ever more malignant as they spread from city to city. For the plague here unleashed was human nature: "Human nature, always rebelling against the law and now its master, gladly showed itself ungoverned in passion, above respect for justice, and the enemy of all superiority" (3.84.2). "The cause of all these evils," he said, "was the lust for power arising from greed and ambition, and from these passions proceeded the violence of the parties engaged in contention" (3.82.8). But when Thucydides asserted that such suffering would ever be repeated "so long as human nature remained the same" (3.82.8), John Adams broke off his own exposition of the text to say, "If this nervous historian had known a balance of three powers, he would not have pronounced the distemper so incurable, but would have added—so long as parties in the cities remained unbalanced."

Yet as Thucydides' description of the "distemper" proceeds, not only did the main institutions of society succumb to human nature, but language itself suffered a similar corruption. Moral iniquity was coupled to self-serving hypocrisy to the extent that "words had to change their meaning and take that which was now given to them" (3.82.4). Thomas Gustafson speaks of an archetypal "Thucydidean Moment" when the corruptions of people and language became one.[4] (For a contemporary example, think of the so-called compassionate conservatism of the current American administration, which gives tax cuts to the rich at the expense of society in the name of "fairness," or to the same effect dubs the inheritance tax the "death tax.") Just so in Corcyra, as words and oaths were traduced

4. Gustafson, *Representative Words: Politics, Literature and the American Language, 1776–1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 124.

in the all-out struggle for power, foul became fair, and fair foul. Cautious plotting masqueraded as "self-defense"; prudent hesitation was castigated as "spurious cowardice"; frantic violence was "manliness," and moderation was the lack of it. Oaths were no proof against the advantages of breaking them. The only principle left standing, observes the classicist W. Robert Connor, was "the calculation of self interest. Now all the conventions of Greek life—promises, oaths, supplications, obligations to kin and benefactors and even the ultimate convention, language itself—give way. It is Hobbes' *bellum omnium contra omnes*."[5]

It is indeed—inasmuch as Hobbes was the first to translate Thucydides directly into English. If Thucydides seems Hobbesian, it is because Hobbes was a Thucydidean. As Hobbes put it in his verse autobiography:

> *Homer* and *Virgil, Horace, Sophocles,*
> *Plautus, Euripides, Aristophanes,*
> I understood, nay more; but of all these,
> There's none that pleas'd me like *Thucydides.*
> He says Democracy's a Foolish Thing,
> Than a Republick Wiser is one King.[6]

Classical and Hobbesian scholars alike have seen in Thucydides' narrative of the *stasis* at Corcyra a fundamental source of Hobbes's conception of the state of nature. "Point for point," writes Terence Bell, "feature for feature, Hobbes' state of nature parallels Thucydides' account of the Corcyrean revolution."[7] But where John Adams held that the escape from the natural anarchy described by Thucydides consisted in a self-organizing system of balanced powers, Hobbes's solution was the imposition of a sovereign power that would "keep them all in awe." As sometimes remarked, Hobbes's narrative of the development from the natural to the political state in *Leviathan* is just as much a myth of capitalist mentality.[8] From a common starting point in each man's endless desire to secure his own good, there inevitably follows a general scarcity of means, hence mutual incursions in which "the power of one man resisteth and hindereth the effects of the power of another"—precisely what Adams considered a good

5. Connor, *Thucydides* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 89.

6. Hobbes, *The Elements of Law Natural and Politic, with Three Lives,* edited by J. C. A. Gaskin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 256.

7. Bell, "Hobbes' Linguistic Turn," *Polity* 17 (1985): 749.

8. Hobbes, *Leviathan,* edited by Michael Oakeshott (New York: Collier Books, 1962). Cf. C. B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962).

thing and Hobbes the source of worse to come. Worse was the ensuing evolution of the natural state from petty bourgeois competition to full capitalist exploitation, as each man finds he can ensure his own good only by subduing others and harnessing their powers to his ends. Driven by this fierce competition and fears of a violent death, men finally agree to surrender their private right to use force in favor of a sovereign power who will bear their person and exercise their strength in the interest of collective peace and defense. Thus, from the same basis of inherent human savagery, Hobbes and Adams devised radically different prescriptions for governing it: by external domination or self-organization, hierarchy or equality, authority or reciprocity, monarchy or republic.

Contraries are sources of their contraries, as Aristotle put it—precisely in a political context (*Pol.* 1307b). The opposition of monarchy and republic is itself dialectical, each being defined against the other in practical politics as well as ideological debate. Hobbes and Adams take their place in a centuries-long dispute between monarchial and popular rule, engaging the arguments of distant philosophical adversaries and bygone political constitutions. Adams took Hobbes, his absolutism notwithstanding, as a respected interlocutor: "Hobbes, a man however unhappy in his temper or detestable for his principles, equal in genius and learning to any of his contemporaries."[9] For his part, Hobbes's absolutism responded intertextually to republican doctrines of seemingly ancient memory: to Roman and Renaissance theories of civic life, with their emphasis on the citizens' equal voice in government. "One of Hobbes' aspirations in *Leviathan,*" writes Quentin Skinner, "is to demolish this entire structure of [republican] thought, and with it the theory of equality and citizenship on which humanist civil science had been raised."[10] Especially would Hobbes condemn the acrimonious conflicts of interests that troubled the ancient democracies—for which Thucydides again provided prime evidence—although for Adams and other republicans such oppositions were precisely the great virtues of the self-regulating system. Yet the debates did not merely concern remote political forms. Hobbes's absolutism was predicated on parliamentary arrogations of royal power and the regicide of 1649, whereas Adams, of course, was inveighing against the contemporary British monarchy. And beyond issues of the day, it only stands to (Hegelian) reason that each of the contraries preserves and encompasses the other in its negation, equality in hierarchy and vice versa. The way

9. Adams, *Defence of the Constitutions,* 3:211.

10. Skinner, *Visions of Politics,* vol. 3, *Hobbes and Civil Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 15.

that Hobbes initiates the state of nature with each man's equal right to everything—which, as leading to continual war, is the trouble with it; even as Adams foresees an end to the war of nature in tyranny—which is the trouble with it. This "entire structure of thought" includes Hobbes's royalism as the systemic complement of the republicanism he wanted to demolish. It is a diachronic, synchronic, and in some respects panchronic structure of interdependent opposites: two contrasting modes of cultural order evoking each other at the same time and over a long time.

But again, as regimes for restraining the unruly human animal, sovereign domination and egalitarian balance stand together on the cultural side of a basic nature-culture dualism that grounds the "entire structure." Human nature is the necessity: that with which culture must cope—or to which it must succumb, as at Corcyra. And this antagonistic dualism of nature and culture is older than Thucydides. Hesiod's description of the oncoming human condition of his own time (the eighth century B.C.) could well have been the model for Thucydides' text on Corcyra. In the Age of Iron of *Works and Days:*

> Father will have no common bond with son,
> Neither will guest with host, nor friend with friend;
> The brother-love of past days will be gone.
> Men will dishonour parents....
> Men will destroy the towns of other men.
> … Men will do injury
> To better men by speaking crooked words
> And adding lying oaths…
>
> (lines 180–94)

Comments the classicist Gerard Naddaf: "Without justice, Hesiod believes that people will devour themselves like animals, that there will be a sort of Hobbesian state of nature—not unlike what preceded the reign of Zeus."[11]

ANCIENT GREECE

"Not unlike what preceded the reign of Zeus"—we are into ancient cosmology. In their dazzling commentary on Hesiod's *Theogony,* Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant indeed make a succinct Hobbesian (or more

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11. Naddaf, "Anthropogony and Politogony in Anaximander of Miletus," in *Anaximander in Context: New Studies in the Origins of Greek Philosophy,* edited by Dirk L. Couprie, Robert Hahn, and Naddaf (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 19. Another interesting reprise of this description of civil strife is a passage in Sallust's narrative of the Catiline conspiracy in Rome, which seems to have been directly inspired by Thucydides (*War Cat.* 38.3–4).

precisely Nietzschean) summary of it: "There is no cosmic order without differentiation, hierarchy and supremacy. But by the same token, there is no supremacy without conflict, injustice towards others and constraint imposed by treachery and violence."[12] Beginning in universal violence and disorder and ending in a stable cosmos under the sovereignty of Zeus, with its differentiated realms of heaven, earth, and underworld, the narrative is paradigmatic of the metaphysics of hierarchy. The primordial violence was the relentless battle of the younger generation of gods led by Zeus against his father, Cronus, and the Titans of the older generation. Victorious, Zeus then apportions the "honors and privileges" of the gods, their statuses and functions. This divine order is now and forever stable, for henceforth quarrels among the immortals are settled by compelling oaths. By contrast, if humans notoriously break their oaths—in this lamentable Hesiodic age, or as at Corcyra—it is precisely because strife and misery have been banished to the earthly plane. Myths tell that humans are descendants of the unruly Titans. "The Titan," observes Paul Ricoeur, "is the figure through which human evil is rooted in pre-human evil."[13]

Indeed, everything suggests that the sovereignty of Zeus was once the model of and for earthly kingship. By the time of Hesiod, however, anything like it had disappeared from Greece with the destruction of the Mycenaean kingdoms four centuries earlier. The kings of Hesiod's poetry were much reduced in power in comparison with their long-gone but not forgotten Mycenaean predecessors. Their authority was now contested and divided by a rivalrous elite.[14] Indeed, an agonistic spirit was largely abroad in society. Quoting Hesiod, "Potter hates potter, carpenters compete, / And beggar strives with beggar, bard with bard," Vernant draws the compelling inference that the competition necessarily engages equals even as it aims at superiority—thus, hierarchy and equality are mutually grounded in anarchy.[15] Or in another reading, the emergent antithesis, hierarchy, encompasses its surpassed negation, equality. Something like that, though

12. Detienne and Vernant, *Cunning Intelligence in Greek Culture and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 88. On Nietzsche's scornful rejection of the Hobbesian establishment of the commonwealth by contract in favor of "the fitting of a hitherto unrestrained and shapeless populace into a tight mold" that begins in "an act of violence… [and is] brought to conclusion by a series of violent acts," see Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and the Genealogy of Morals* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1956), 219.

13. Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), 293.

14. See Ian Morris, *Archaeology as Cultural History: Words and Things in Iron Age Greece* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2000); and A. M. Snodgrass, *The Dark Age of Greece* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

15. Vernant, *The Origins of Greek Thought* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 47.

the other way 'round, happened in subsequent Greek history. Well before it was achieved in the Athenian democracy of the fifth century, the demand for political equality was raised by the aristocrats of certain late-archaic city-states—who were losing out in their chronic competition for superiority. Classicists tell that *isonomia,* "equality," was the reclamation of certain oligarchs protesting their disfranchisement by tyrants.[16]

Isonomia, "the fairest of names" Herodotus (3.80) called it, although in his *History* the contrast with hierarchy was more contemporary than archaeological, appearing primarily in the differences between the Athenians and their Persian adversaries. Herodotus offers a "picture of the Athenians as a people for whom authority ascends upwards from the people, and where discord and dispute are the rule; and of the Persians as a people for whom authority descends from the Great King and descends predictably and uniformly."[17] In principle, the equality of which Athens was the model entailed equal participation of the citizens in a government they held in common—and from which women, slaves, and resident foreigners were excluded. For the citizens it meant equality before the law; equality of voice and vote in the Assembly, the sovereign body of the state; and a rotational equality of selection by lot for the Council of Five Hundred that set the agenda for the Assembly. In contrast to the earlier kingdoms ruled privately, coercively, and mystically from the palace above, here the powers of government devolved publicly, collectively, and equally on the citizens assembled in the center of the city to determine the common policies that would also, it was hoped, accommodate their individual and factional interests:

> The human group thus sees itself in the following way: alongside the private, individual houses there is a centre where public matters are debated, and this center represents all that is "common," the collectivity as such. In this centre every man is the equal of his fellow, no man is subject to another.... This is the birth of a society where one man's relationship to another is conceived in terms of identity, symmetry, reversibility. Human society no longer forms, as it did within mythical space, a world on different levels with the king at the top and beneath

16. Kurt A. Rauaflaub can even speak of *isonomia* as an "aristocratic concept" or one of the "aristocratic values" in his "Equalities and Inequalities in Athenian Democracy," in *Demokratia: A Conversation on Democracies Ancient and Modern,* edited by Josiah Ober and Charles Hedrick (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 145, 153.

17. Norma Thompson, *Herodotus and the Origins of the Political Community: Arion's Leap* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 40.

him a whole social hierarchy where status is defined in terms of domination and submission.[18]

Absent the coercive sovereign, the problem of order in the democratic regime is, as it was put by Glaucon in *The Republic* (2.359c), "the self-advantage which every creature by its nature pursues as a good, while by convention of law it is forcibly diverted to paying honor to equality." Hence Pericles' injunction regarding the necessary civic virtue of the democratic polity, destined to be repeated in republics ever after: the citizens should know that their private interest lies in the common interest (Thuc. 2.43.1, 2.60.2).[19] By Pericles' time, *isonomia* was everywhere; the sense of a self-constituting system of equal and opposite forces was taking over cosmologies as well as polities, and working its way down into physiologies and ontologies.

In the sixth-century cosmology of the pre-Socratic philosopher Anaximander, monarchy was replaced by the rule of equality in nature, in a way analogous to the historical transformation of the city. Anaximander's alternative to the stratified universe of Hesiod and Homer, ordered and dominated by the sovereign god, was a self-organized world that achieved stability through conflicts between the equal elements of which it was composed.[20] Invading one another and making "reparations" for such "injustice," the opposed qualities of heat and cold, moist and dry create the substance of things. At the level of the cosmos they make a kind of celestial city-state. Just as the order of the polis is negotiated in the Assembly of equal citizens met in the center *(agora),* so in Anaximander's universe the earth is held stable at the center by its equidistance from the fiery bodies of the heavenly sphere. Later commentaries imply that the equipoise is a result of counteracting forces as well as equal distances.[21] The celestial geopolitics is not only analogous to the earthly city, with its many households

18. Vernant, *Myth and Thought among the Greeks* (London: Routledge, Kegan, and Paul 1983), 185. See also his work *Origins of Greek Thought;* and Gregory Vlastos, "Isonomia," *American Journal of Philology* 74 (1953): 337–66.

19. On the conflict of private and public interest as a basis of civil strife *(stasis)* in Greece, see P. A. Brunt, *The Fall of the Roman Republic and Related Essays* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 299–300.

20. Charles H. Kahn, *Anaximander and the Origins of Greek Cosmology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960); G. S. Kirk, J. E. Raven, and M. Scofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers,* 2d ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 100–142. See also Couprie, Hahn, and Naddaf, *Anaximander in Context;* Vernant, *Myth and Thought;* and Vlastos, "Isonomia."

21. Commentaries by Aristotle and Hippolytus in Kahn, *Anaximander,* 76ff.

surrounding the *agora* where their particularities are integrated; it more specifically corresponds to the multiple domestic hearths surrounding the common ritual hearth of the *agora*—the fires of all adding a sacrificial and metonymic link to the metaphorical parallels of the terrestrial and celestial regimes.

Within the healthy bodies of the denizens of these houses, *isonomia* also reigns. According to the sixth-century physician Alcmaeon, health consists of a balance among the equal and opposed elements of which the body is composed, the binary pairs of moist and dry, heat and cold, bitter and sweet.[22] Sickness is caused by the domination or "monarchy" of any one element. Repeated in texts of the Hippocratic doctors, this theory of a balanced "cosmos of health" was destined to last into the Middle Ages. Indeed, more than two thousand years after Alcmaeon, John Adams reproduced it, complete with political allusions. "Some physicians," Adams wrote, "have thought that if it were practicable to keep the several humours of the body in exact balance, it might be immortal; and so perhaps would a political body, if the balance of power could always be exactly even."[23] The Hippocratic doctors had likewise conceived the relations between different factors in the body "with the help of political metaphors or images, especially that of the balance of powers."[24] As for the play of elementary humors or forces in the medical and cosmological treatises, the lasting formulation of this isonomic ontology was Empodocles' famous doctrine of the four roots: the equal and opposite pairs of Fire and Water, Earth and Air, moved together and apart by the equal forces of Love and Strife.

As a metaphysics of order, *isonomia* was hegemonic in fifth-century Athens, although for all that it did not eliminate hierarchical thinking either then or thereafter. To take a broad example of the persisting sense of hierarchical order: the argument of the anonymous visitor in Plato's *Statesman* (273c–d) that matter has a natural tendency to fall into disorder, as do all created things insofar as they contain an admixture of matter, unless or until they are taken in hand by a higher, supernatural power. Aristotle's famous cosmology, although purged of mythological elements, retained divine domination in the form of the Unmoved Mover: the godly source of the eternal motion of the highest celestial sphere, which in turn gave impetus to the lower spheres. Suitably Christianized, the system would

22. Kirk, Raven, and Scofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers,* 260 and passim.

23. Adams, *Defence of the Constitutions,* 99.

24. G. E. R. Lloyd, introduction to *Hippocratic Writings,* edited by Lloyd (London: Penguin, 1978), 29. See the texts in this collection and Kahn, *Anaximander,* 179 and passim.

become popular in the Aristotelian revival of the thirteenth century.[25] Also destined to be reproduced by the likes of St. Thomas Aquinas and Dante was a golden passage of the *Metaphysics* (1075a.11ff) in which Aristotle seems to confront the opposition between reciprocal and hierarchical systems of solidarity directly—giving decisive preference to the latter. At issue are two different modes of ordering the good, which is also to say of good order, one being the order established by the reciprocal relations of the parts within a whole, as between soldiers in an army, the other the good emanating from the purpose and plan of an external authority, the way a general is responsible for the army's order. At the close of this book of the *Metaphysics,* Aristotle says that "things do not wish to be governed badly," in apposition to which he appends a reference to *The Iliad:* "The rule of many is not good, let one the ruler be."[26]

Still, in the fifth century *isonomia* was the ruling principle—and not only in the ideological superstructures. Inscribed in cosmology as well as polity, physiology as well as ontology, *isonomia* was in all the structures. It was in the cultural basis. In the common opinion of classicists, however, the naturalistic forms of *isonomia* are ideal reflections of the political form. Working from Durkheimian or Marxist principles of theory arising out of social practice, they hold that the concepts of cosmological and corporeal balance are modeled on the egalitarian city-state—the way Anaximander's universe, for example, appears to mirror the earthly polis. Many objections might be raised to this view, beginning with the observation that *isonomia* as a value was as much a precondition of the democratic polis as it was a reflection. But the critical point—as argued by Charles Kahn—is that for the ancient Greeks the boundaries between society and nature were not as rigidly determined or analytically policed as they are in the modern scholarly imagination. If Alcmaeon could describe bodily disease in political terms, Thucydides could speak of civil strife in terms of disease. Such assimilation of society and nature was normal, observed Kahn; what certain fifth-century philosophers were moved to establish was their separation. More precisely, society and nature were defined "by

25. Indeed, the Aristotelian cosmology, again with political import, was alive and well in the reign of Elizabeth I. Writes E. M. W. Tillyard, "It was a serious matter not a mere fancy if an Elizabethan writer compared Elizabeth to the *primum mobile,* the master sphere of the physical universe, and every activity within the realm to the varied motions of the other spheres governed to the last fraction by the influence of their container" (*The Elizabethan World Picture* [Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963], 16).

26. Besides the hierarchical cosmologies, ranked views of the body and bodily health (as well as isonomic ones) can be found in the philosophic masters. Most elaborate is the stratified system of body and soul, largely organized by verticality, in Plato's *Timaeus* (69b ff).

mutual contrast as a result of fifth-century controversies regarding *physis* [nature] and *nomos* [convention, custom]"—in other words, what we now know as the fateful binary opposition of nature and culture.[27] Here was the dualism that established the natural ground of our Metaphysical Triangle: the antisocial human nature that equality and hierarchy themselves contend to control.

The sophists are the usual suspects.[28] Although they could generally agree that nature and culture were antithetical, they were all over the map on which was a good thing and which bad, which of the two dominated the other and in what way. Of the several variants, two had the longest legs, motivating one another as logical contraries through a history that reaches into the present. On the one hand, the idea of nature as pure and beneficent, but held in thrall by the tyranny of custom: think Rousseau, natural human rights, natural equality of mankind, universal morality—on to perverse commodity forms such as bottled water from pure springs in "primitive" Fiji that in its plastic containers indeed makes a certain culture (for bacteria). On the other hand, there is the human nature I am tracing here in critical periods of its dominance: the idea of a presocial, antisocial human animal with which culture must contend—often unsuccessfully.[29]

For what chance could culture have if it were just local and changeable matters of belief in comparison to behavioral dispositions that are hardwired in the species and imperatives of each individual? "Fire burns here and in Persia," said Aristotle. "Human institutions change under our eyes" (*Nich. Eth.* 1134b25). Manmade and variable from one group to another, human customs would have all the character of secondary qualities of per-

27. Kahn, *Anaximander,* 192–93.

28. As a categorical distinction, however, as opposed to an explicit ideological antithesis, the nature-culture contrast is much older than the sophists. See James Redfield, *Nature and Culture in "The Iliad": The Tragedy of Hector* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1975). Mention should also be made of the use of this contrast by fifth-century poets, notably Euripides and Sophocles. On the *nomos-physis* controversies of the sophists, see Sir Ernest Barker, *Greek Political Theory: Plato and His Predecessors* (London: Methuen, 1961); John Dillon and Tanya Gergel, eds., *The Greek Sophists* (London: Penguin, 2003); W. K. C. Guthrie, *The Sophists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971); G. B. Kerferd, *The Sophistic Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Arthur O. Lovejoy, *Reflections on Human Nature* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Prss, 1961); and Arthur O. Lovejoy and George Boas, *Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1935).

29. Giorgio Agamben speaks of the "tenacious lineage" of the sophistic polemic against *nomos* in the political culture of the West, noting it is the necessary premise of Hobbes's opposition of the state of nature and the commonwealth (*Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998], 35). Indeed, Hobbes writes in the introduction to *Leviathan* that by contrast to man's natural condition, "by Art is created that great LEVIATHAN called a COMMONWEALTH, in Latin CIVITAS, which is but an Artificial Man."

ception, like hot and cold or sweet and bitter. Culture was artificial, super-ficial, and subjective compared to the reality of natural things. From this, as Arthur O. Lovejoy and George Boas remark, it was easy to conclude it was wrong.[30] What was worst of all for the subsequent career of the cul-ture concept in our native Western anthropology was that *nomos* acquired the sense of something false in comparison with the truth of nature.

(In a recent work commenting on the popular romance of a univer-sal natural reason underlying superficial cultural differences—*War of the Worlds: What about Peace?*—Bruno Latour proves again that we are not really modern.[31] Indeed, the American imperialist project of neoliberal democratization has the same ancient premise. It assumes that the innate practical rationality common to mankind, if it can be relieved of local cul-ture idiosyncrasies, as by employing the kind of force anyone would natu-rally understand, will make other peoples happy and good, just like us.)[32]

From the supposition that nature is truth came various sophistic argu-ments about its necessary realization in and against culture. In the sim-plest version, culture is just nature, and more particularly self-interest, in another form. Thus the assertion by Lycias, for example, that "no man is by nature either an oligarch or a democrat, but each strives to set up the kind of constitution that would be to his own advantage"; or Thrasymachus's eruption in *The Republic* (336b): "The just is nothing else than the advan-tage of the strongest." More cynical (and more up to date sociobiologi-cally speaking) is Callicas's complex argument in the *Gorgias* (482c–484a, 492a–c) that such good order and noble sentiments are merely mystifi-cations of an irrepressible self-interest: merely public right thinking by which the weak vainly attempt to suppress the gainful inclinations of the strong. But as an auditor and admirer of sophists, Thucydides offers some of the most powerful permutations of the sinister nature–fragile culture dualism. "It is impossible to prevent," argued one Diodotus in the Athe-nian debate over the rebellious city of Mytilene, "and only great simplicity

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30. Lovejoy and Boas, *Primitivism and Related Ideas,* 106.

31. Latour, *War of the Worlds* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2002).

32. After I had written these lines, I came across George Packer's observations on the fa-mous response of the U.S. secretary of defense to the postconquest looting of Iraq by local people: "Stuff happens." "Rumsfeld's words, which soon became notorious, implied a whole political philosophy. The defense secretary looked upon anarchy and saw the early stages of democracy. In his view and that of others in the administration, freedom was the absence of constraint. Freedom existed in divinely endowed human nature, not in man-made institutions and laws. Remove a thirty-five-year-old tyranny and democracy will grow in its place, because people everywhere want to be free" (Packer, *The Assassins' Gate: America in Iraq* [New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2005], 135–36).

can hope to prevent, human nature doing what it has once set its mind upon, by force of law or any other deterrent force whatsoever" (3.45.7). Indeed, by having it that nature is both the breaker and the maker of culture, Thucydides' own argument on this score becomes altogether unassailable. So the lust for power and gain is responsible both for the creation of the Athenian empire *and* for the self-destruction of the Corcyrean state (1.13.1, 1.75.3). The Athenians told the hapless Melians they were besieging that ruling wherever one can is a "necessary law of nature" (5.105.2), yet as we have seen, the human nature that broke out in Corcyra was "the enemy to all superiority." This is the best of all possible worlds of historical theorizing, where it is only human nature to act contrary to human nature, in which case human nature becomes the unbeatable world champion of historiography.

Alternative Orders

Beyond the ancient arguments about whether human nature was good or bad and the cultural constructions that could be made of it, the Western tradition has long harbored an alternative conception of order, of the kind anthropologists traditionally studied: kinship community. It is true that in the West this is generally the unremarked human condition, despite that—or perhaps because—family and kindred relations are sources of our deepest sentiments and attachments. Ignoring these, our philosophies of human nature generally come from the larger society, organized on radically different principles. In the occurrence, "human nature" almost always consists of the imagined dispositions of active adult males, to the exclusion of women, children, and old folks and the neglect of the one universal principle of human sociality, kinship.

The lurking contradiction may help account for some remarkable recommendations of kinship community and subjectivity on the part of the ancients. Plato and Augustine both formulated what amounted to a broad system of Hawaiian kinship as a mode of sociability appropriate to mankind, Augustine seeing it as the original human condition, Plato as the ideal civil society among the enlightened classes of his utopian Republic. Here everyone is related to everyone in the community by the primary familial ties of brother and sister, mother and father, son and daughter. (It was not for nothing, Augustine opined, that God made us the descendants of one ancestor, thus all humanity but one kindred.) In effect, the Bishop of Hippo went on to forestall E. B. Tylor's famous theory of the incest taboo—"marry out or die out"—by fifteen hundred years, noting

likewise that the prohibition of marriage within the family would usefully multiply its kindred relationships.[33] Citing Plato and the Stoics, Cicero developed an idea of the species being that resonates strongly with kinship community and reciprocity. "As men are born for the sake of men in order to be able to help each other," he wrote, "in this we ought to follow Nature as our guide, to constitute the general good by an interchange of acts of kindness, by giving and receiving and thus … cement human society more closely together, man to man" (*De Off.* 1.7.22).

But above all it was Aristotle who formulated the essential principle of kinship, namely, mutuality of being, a definition as good as anthropologists have come up with since. Although Aristotle spoke of kinsmen as being the same entity in different subjects solely on the basis of shared descent, without notice of other modes of common being (see below), he made the critical observation that they thus belong to one another, in varying ways and degrees:

> Parents then love children as being themselves (for those sprung from them are as it were other selves of theirs, resulting from the separation), children parents as being what they have grown from, and brothers each other by virtue of their having grown from the same sources: for the self-sameness of their relation to *those* produces the same with each other (hence people say "same blood," "same root," and things like that). They are, then, the same entity in a way, even though in different subjects…. The belonging to each other of cousins and other relatives derives from these, since it exists by virtue of their being from the same origins, but some of these belong more closely while others are more distant, depending on whether the ancestral common sources are near or far off. (*Nich. Eth.* 1162a)

Pauline doctrine Christianized and universalized the idea: insofar as we are all members of the body of Christ, "we are members of each other." An echo appears in John of Salisbury, enjoining general practice of mutual aid on grounds that in society as in the universe, "each individual part is a member of the other individual parts."[34]

People are members of one another; they exist not in themselves or for themselves but in relationships of reciprocal being—one could be reading Marilyn Strathern on the New Guinea Highlands. Here one realizes

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33. See Augustine's kinship observations in *The City of God,* 14.1, 15.16.

34. Cary J. Nederman and Kate Forhan, eds., *Medieval Political Theory—a Reader: The Quest for the Body Politic, 1100–1400* (London: Routledge, 1993), 28.

oneself in these relationships, the way "mother" and "child" or "father" and "child" become such through the enactment of the bond that at once unites and differentiates them.[35] And as the mother and father work on the child's behalf, or as "wife" and "husband" in consideration of one another, the kinship other is internally present as a cause of one's own intentionality. In this condition of mutuality of being, interests are no more confined to the satisfactions of the individual body than selves are to its boundaries. Ethnographic notices tell rather of "the transpersonal self" (Native Americans), of the self as "a locus of shared social relations or shared biographies" (Caroline Islands), of the person as "the plural and composite site of the relationships that produced them" (New Guinea Highlands).[36] Observations of this kind are easily multiplied, and what they all indicate is a certain disconformity between the self as being and the person as singular agent. On the one hand, the self transcends the person and is present in other persons. People enter into mutual relationships of being by virtue of birth, residence, marriage, common descent, gift exchange, dependence on the same land, feeding and nurturing, or other such means by which kinship is locally established. On the other hand, then, the single person includes the multiple selves with whom he or she is in such communion. Through various kin relationships, others become predicates of one's own existence.[37] I do not mean the interchange of standpoints that is a feature of all direct social relationships according to the phenomenologists. I mean the integration of certain relationships, hence of certain others, in one's

35. For a fine ethnographic example from Highland New Guinea of how such identity and differentiation are accomplished by taboo and ritual, see Sandra Bamford, "To Eat for Another: Taboo and the Elicitation of Bodily Form among the Kamea of Papua New Guinea," in *Bodies and Persons: Comparative Perspectives from Africa and Melanesia,* edited by Michael Lambek and Andrew Strathern (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

36. William Bevis, "Native American Novels: Honing In," in *Recovering the Word: Essays on Native American Literature,* edited by Brian Swann and Arnold Krupat (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987), 590; Michael D. Lieber, "Lamarkian Definitions of Identity on Kapingamarangi and Pohnpei," in *Cultural Identity and Ethnicity in the Pacific,* edited by Jocelyn Linnekin and Lin Poyer (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990), 74; Marilyn Strathern, *The Gender of the Gift: Problems with Women and Problems with Society in Melanesia* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), 13, 159.

37. This double disconformity of person and self—the person including other selves, the self included in other persons—was described in the original formulation of the phenomenon for South Asian castes by McKim Marriott and is a sociocentric view of the matter, though attention since has focused on the divisible/composite actor or "dividual" ("Hindu Transactions: Diversity without Dualism," in *Transactions and Meaning: Directions in the Anthropology of Exchange and Symbolic Behavior,* edited by Bruce Kapferer [Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1976], 348 and passim). For another early account of the divisible/composite person in African societies, see Roger Bastide, "Le principe d'indivuation (contribution à une philosophie africaine)," in *La notion de personne en Afrique noire,* no. 544 (Paris: Colloques Internationaux du C.N.R.S., 1973).

own being. We have not to do here with the self-contained, self-loving individuals of the native Western folklore. Indeed, for them, not even *experience,* that ultimate individual function, is in fact individual.

Insofar as people are members of one another, so may significant experiences be shared among them—not at the level of sensation, of course, but at the level of meaning: of what it is that happens, which is the human cum communicable quality of experience. "Experience was diffused among persons," Maurice Leenhardt told of New Caledonians. "It was not considered specific to the individual."[38] Thus, people suffered illnesses as a result of the moral or religious transgressions of their relatives—a common enough ethnographic report. Many also are the societies where kinsmen must be compensated for one's death, the injuries one receives, or even for having one's hair cut. Here is the very opposite of bourgeois possessive individualism: in a community of reciprocal being, not even a person's body is his or her own; it is a social body, the subject of the empathy, concern, and responsibility of others. "Thus the Fijian body reflects the achievement of its caretakers.... An essential corollary of the notion that the personal body is the community's province is that [the body's] shape encodes one's capacity and propensity to serve the community.... [I]t also reveals the community's investment in and ability to care for its members."[39] Natural self-interest? For the greater part of humankind, self-interest as we know it has been madness, witchcraft, or some such grounds for ostracism, execution, or at least therapy.

And what if the status of human persons, even including kin persons, extended widely into what we call "nature," encompassing all kinds of animals, plants, and inanimate things? New Zealand Maori are related genealogically to everything in the universe. "When the Maori walked abroad, he was among his own kindred. The trees around him were, like himself, the offspring of [the god] Tane."[40] And what shall we make of man's "animal nature" if, as is reported widely for Native Americans, animals are known to have a human nature? (And what then if it were true, as Locke said, that "in the beginning all the world was America, and more so than it is now; for no such thing as money was anywhere known"?) Like many plants—not to mention stars, mountains, or thunder—many animals have

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38. Leenhardt, *Do Kamo: Person and Myth in the Melanesian World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 153.

39. Anne E. Becker, *Body, Self and Society: The View from Fiji* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 57–58.

40. Elsdon Best, *The Maori* (Wellington, N.Z.: Polynesian Society, 1924), 1:128.

consciousness, will, intentionality, soul; in short, they are persons like our-
selves. Again, the Nuer of the Sudan take names from their cattle's names,
and their cattle have names taken from wild beasts. Not that humans are
basically wild animals; more pertinently, all three—humans, cattle, and
wild beasts—live in segmentary lineage societies. The Nuer speak of ani-
mal communities in the same terms as they speak of their own.[41] Similarly,
Eduardo Viveiros de Castro and others tell of Amazonia that animals have
culture: chiefs, clans, ceremonial houses, same as people. They are persons
under their fur and feathers, same as different groups of people under their
dress and adornment. Indeed, animals were originally human rather than
the other way 'round. "While our folk anthropology," observes Viveiros
de Castro, "holds that humans have an original animal nature which must
be coped with by culture—having been animals at bottom—Amerindian
thought holds that, having been human in origin, animals must still be
human albeit in a non-evident way."[42]

It is not that these peoples draw the line between nature and culture
further out into the world than we do. On the contrary, they are more
likely to draw a defining line closer in, marking the distinction between
their own communal or tribal space and an uncontrolled "wild" beyond
—which is not, however, the domain of subjectless things and beings. The
distinction may be in part invidious, privileging the group who makes it
over other human communities of the undomesticated regions. For an-
other part, however, certain animals and other beings of the wild have
capacities (including customs) equal to the people's own, and still other
personages of the beyond, spirits and gods, have powers greater than theirs.
For the rest, what is not significant to them is a matter not of "nature" but
of indifference. There is no such "nature" as we know it, and a fortiori no
dualism of nature and culture.

I repeat: no nature, no antithesis of nature and culture. "A meaning-
ful concept of nature appears not to be constructed," says Signe Howell
of the Malaysian Chewong people.[43] A. Irving Hallowell objected that
the term *supernatural* is misleading in regard to Ojibwa people because it

41. E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1940) and *Nuer Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956).

42. Viveiros de Castro, "The Forest of Mirrors," lecture at the University of Chicago, May 27, 2004. See also Viveiros de Castro's "Cosmological Deixis and Amerindian Perspectivism," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute,* n.s., 4 (1998).

43. Howell, "Nature in Culture or Culture in Nature? Chewong Ideas of 'Humans' and Other Species," in *Nature and Society: Anthropological Perspectives,* edited by Philippe Descola and Gisli Palsson (London: Routledge, 1996), 130.

"presupposes a concept of the natural. The latter is not present in Ojibwa thought."[44] "There is no reason to suggest," Marilyn Strathern writes of New Guinea, "that any more than in Hagen, Eastern Highlands people imagine a 'nature' upon which society and culture impose their rules and classifications." It follows that their view of the person "does not require that a child be trained into social adulthood from some pre-social state nor postulate that each of us repeats the original domestication of humanity in the need to deal with elements of a pre-cultural nature. Society is not a set of controls over and against the individual."[45] A complementary report by Kenneth Read of another Eastern Highlands people affirms that there could be no such individual in need of societal control, since there is no essential human species-being—"man," apart from any social definition—to whom inherent moral or dispositional qualities can be attributed.[46]

It is probably safe to conclude that for the greater part of humanity over the greater part of human history, the Western concept of "man's animal nature" would make no sense. Of course, these peoples do not have the benefit of knowing Darwinian evolution. But neither did the Western ancients know Darwin when they drew the conclusion that men were fundamentally beasts, which on the evidence of resemblance seems no more necessary than the other way 'round. Indeed, as I hope to show in the end, if one seriously considers the cultural organization of biological evolution over the past two million years, one might have a decent respect for the more common opinion of mankind that we are not the social creatures of animal dispositions.

The Middle Ages and Renaissance: Monarchy and Republic

Here is a corollary distinction in Western concepts of human nature: that the wickedness of it is our own doing. Paul Ricoeur makes a sustained point of the singularity of the Western cosmogony in which evil was neither a primordial condition nor a divinely orchestrated tragedy but uniquely the responsibility of man—the fault of Adam, who disobeyed God to please himself.[47] Since, as St. Augustine put it, "we are all in that one man,"

44. Hallowell, "Ojibwa Ontology, Behavior and World View," in *Culture in History: Essays in Honor of Paul Radin,* edited by Stanley Diamond (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), 28.

45. Strathern, *Gender of the Gift,* 92, 89.

46. Read, "Morality and the Concept of the Person among the Gahuku-Gama," *Oceania* 24 (1955).

47. Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil.*

whatever the differences among the older philosophers about man's innate character, Original Sin pretty much sealed the deal for Christendom through the Middle Ages. Augustine's influential notion of Original Sin, observed Elaine Pagels, "offered an analysis of human nature that became, for better and worse, the heritage of all subsequent generations of Christians and a major influence on their psychological and political thinking."[48] The big effect on their political thinking was the broad consensus that developed on the necessity of coercive, monarchial government. For endless desires of the flesh would lead to endless and ubiquitous war: within men, between men, and with nature. "How they mutually oppress," said Augustine, "and how they that are able do devour, and when one fish hath devoured, the greater the less, itself also is devoured by another."[49] Irenaeus's version of the fish story was already derived from an older rabbinical tradition: "Earthly rule has been appointed by God for the benefit of nations, so that under the fear of human rule, men may not devour each other like fishes."[50] As a totemic model of human nature, *les grands poissons mangent les plus petits* remained proverbial through the Middle Ages, and it is still alive as a trenchant description of neoliberal capitalism. (It is a stricture of the *longue durée*.) The companion idea that men are even worse to each other than beasts—in Augustine's words, "not even lions or tigers have ever waged war with their kind as men have waged war with one another" (*City of God,* 12.22)—has also done service as the moral to fables about the necessity of hierarchy. For example, by John Chrysostom: "If you deprive the city of its rulers, we would have to live a life less rational than animals, biting and devouring each other."[51] Yes, the city: "Abel lived a simple life," Thomas Gilby remarked; "Cain built the first city."[52]

Given this viciousness of fallen humanity, coercive government in general and monarchy in particular had redeeming political value. The powers of kings, judges, and executioners, even the severity of the father, had their good reasons, said Augustine, for while they are feared, the wicked are kept within bounds and the good live peacefully among the wicked. "Political Augustinianism" this politics of Original Sin has been called. Rule from above and beyond, over and against the sinfully inclined underlying

48. Pagels, *Adam, Eve and the Serpent* (New York: Random House, 1988), 47.

49. Cited in Herbert A. Deane, *The Political and Social Ideas of St. Augustine* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), 47.

50. Pagels, *Adam, Eve and the Serpent,* 47.

51. Ibid., 101.

52. Gilby, *The Political Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 8.

population, was the general principle, applicable to the feudal lord as well as the emperor or king, to bishop as well as pope. Henry Chadwick is particularly worth citing here, for he speaks not only of the redemptive role of monarchial power in relation to fallen man but also of the latter again in relation to Thucydides' description of "the hell of anarchy"—which could only be the *stasis* at Corcyra:

> It is certain from St. Paul's words that "the magistrate does not bear the sword to no purpose," that because of the cupidity and pride in the heart of fallen man, a power of coercion is an indispensable restraint. The magistrate will get no one to heaven, but he may yet do something to fence the broad road to the hell of anarchy which, as Thucydides first observed with disturbing eloquence, brings out the full human capacity for depravity.[53]

Made necessary by human cupidity and contentiousness, monarchy on earth was modeled on God's rule of the cosmos in the view of Dante, Giles of Rome, John of Salisbury, John of Paris, and many other worthies. The emperor or king had a special affinity with divinity, inasmuch as his powers derived from God—however much the popes disputed his temporal supremacy. Salisbury spoke of the ruling prince as "a certain image on earth of the divine majesty."[54] Characterized as God's vice-regent, vicar, or earthly successor, the medieval monarch was also, as Ernest H. Kantorowicz famously documented, *christomimétés,* the "actor" or "impersonator" of Christ.[55] Kantorowicz tells of Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II (1411–1464), also known as Frederick the Mild, "who like every Medieval ruler claimed to be the vice-regent of God," that he comforted himself with the thought that rulers such as he, in being the arbiters of the life and death of their peoples and deciding their fortune and lot, were in some ways the executors of Divine Providence.[56]

Monarchy was a whole cosmology. Adapting the Aristotelian view of the universe to Christian doctrine, Dante in his treatise on world monarchy argued that "since the whole sphere of heaven is guided by a single movement (i.e., that of the Primum Mobile), and by a single source of

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53. Chadwick, "Christian Doctrine," in *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought, c. 350–c. 1450,* edited by J. H. Burns (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 12–13.

54. John of Salisbury, *Policraticus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 28.

55. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 47.

56. Ibid., 115–16.

motion (who is God), in all its parts, movements and causes of movements, as human understanding perceives quite clearly through philosophical reasoning, then . . . mankind is in its ideal state when it is guided by a single ruler (as by a single source of motion) and in accordance with a single law."[57] Nor should old Aquinas be forgot: in his own text on kingship he deduced the presence of monarchy in the microcosm as well as the macrocosm, in man as well as the heavens, from the abstract proposition that whenever things are organized in a unity there is always something that rules the rest. So are all bodies in the material cosmos ruled by one primary celestial body, and all earthly bodies are ruled by rational creatures, and in man the body is ruled by the soul, and in the soul the irascible and concupiscible appetites are ruled by reason, and within the body its members are ruled by the head or the heart—hence it is fitting that "in every multitude there should be a ruling principle." And having noted a few paragraphs further on that even bees have a king [*sic*], St. Thomas concluded that all multiplicity is derived from unity.[58]

There was a prince in everything. The monarchial cosmology of the Middle Ages was probably more totalizing than any doctrine of sovereign domination since the Mycenaean. The dependence of the Many on the One ran from the whole animated by God through the earthly lordships to the smallest things, in a series of increasing particularity and decreasing virtue, each part being in its own organization a replication of the hierarchical entity that included it. Otto Gierke remarks that "in every human group, a monarchial [regime] appeared to the Middle Ages the normal form of government." And as it was in the human group or the human body, so "in the whole of inanimate nature . . . we shall find no compound substance in which there is not one element which determines the nature of the whole."[59] Moreover, this monarchial chain of being comprised a matrix of reciprocal analogies, available for the many routine descriptions of the kingdom as a human body and the body as a kingdom. John Wycliffe added an Aristotelian formulation: "In polity, the people are the

57. Dante, *Monarchy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 13. Again, from a text of c. 1400 by Conversino of Padua: "The more similar the creature's condition is to that of its creator, the more beautiful, orderly and perfect the creature is in life. Consequently, since the creator and the ruler of all things is one, government by one man is in my opinion preferable because of its greater conformity to the universe than any other form of government" (Hans Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance: Liberty in the Age of Classicism and Tyranny* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966], 144).

58. Aquinas, *Political Writings,* edited by R. W. Dyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 7–8.

59. Gierke, *Political Theories of the Middle Ages* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), 32.

matter and the king is the form"—an apt analogy, although it drew on the non-Aristotelian tradition that both people and matter were disorderly by nature.[60]

Aristotle held that by nature people lived in political societies, an idea that from the thirteenth century Aquinas and followers proceeded to develop against the grain of the going Augustinianism. If mankind were naturally social, it would relieve the stigma of Original Sin, making its antidote of coercive rule unnecessary, and even offer some hope of felicity in an earthly life that for Augustine was only a vale of tears. Yet there was a perverse contradiction in Aristotle's natural sociality, a persistent *nomos-physis* opposition that tended to undermine it—and that Aquinas's exegesis made worse. On the one hand, Aristotle held that man is naturally suited for the polis (and the good) by the possession of a rational soul that is able to control his appetitive soul. But on the other hand, these two parts of the soul are in an asymmetric relation of potentiality, since the base appetites are insatiable by nature, whereas reason must be trained up to its governing function by education and legislation. Hence *physis* versus *nomos,* with the former quite likely to prevail. "The baseness of human beings is a thing insatiable," Aristotle wrote in the *Politics.* "They always want more … for appetite is by nature unlimited, and the majority of mankind live for the satisfaction of appetite" (1267a–b). Again he says as much in opposition to those who would have men rule instead of laws: that would introduce into government "a wild animal," since "appetite is a wild animal, and passion also warps the rule of the best of men" (1279b). One could well conclude that men are inherently inclined to the bad; they must be habituated to the good. Or at least, if men are naturally social, they are not normally sociable—for both the most and the best of them are corrupted by their natural appetites.[61]

St. Thomas elaborated the Aristotelian dictum that man is a political animal by functionalizing it, by stressing that men's association in the polis was the necessary means of their material existence. Aristotle in fact had denied that the polis was instituted for any particular or immediate advantage, but only for the all-around good and sufficient life (*Nich. Eth.* 1160a). However, for Aquinas (and many others to this day), society was natu-

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60. L. J. Daly, *The Political Theory of John Wycliffe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 99.

61. Janet Coleman writes of the *Politics* and *Nicomachean Ethics:* "*The primary fact is that naturally, and without law, human desires are unlimited*" (*A History of Political Thought,* vol. 1, *From Ancient Greece to Early Christianity* [Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2000], 224; emphasis in the original).

ral inasmuch as it was instrumental. Neither alone nor in families could people fend for themselves. Only the polis can provide the requisite population and division of labor. Paradoxically, St. Thomas would thus achieve an Aristotelian condition of the good, that is, self-sufficiency, by installing need, desire, and interest in the foundation of society—which is to say, by original sin more or less naturalized. The collectivity is composed of independent producers each looking out for their own good. And since a king would then be necessary to ensure the general welfare, the outcome would be a more or less benign Augustinianism. Following Aristotle, St. Thomas laid out that "the desire to seek their own good is present in the souls of all men," and further that "those who have riches will desire to have more," and no earthly thing will pacify them.[62] Hence the need of a ruler whose virtue would transcend the self-concern of his subjects and reconcile their conflicts in the common interest. "If many men were to live together with each providing only what is convenient for himself, the community would break up into its various parts unless one of them had the responsibility for the good of the community as a whole."[63]

St. Thomas was known to meliorate his support of kingship by advocating some distribution of its powers among the grandees and the people, as in Aristotelian mixed government. But the monarchial order had its own ongoing contradictions. Liberty, contract, representation, and consent of the governed were known in some form in feudalism itself. Increasingly subject to law, kingship became an instrument of society rather than a power above it. There was also the growing autonomy of cities, guilds, and peasant communes. All such compromises of lordship, moreover, could find support and encouragement from the critical negation lurking in medieval Christendom from the beginning—from the Garden of Eden and the Gospels.[64] It was only after the Fall that mankind was forced to submit to kingship and law, private property and inequality: all devised to control human evil. Here was another transposed form of the old *physis-nomos* dualism: an opposition between a first nature, that of innocence and a blessed life with God, and a second nature of sin that required the

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62. Aquinas, *Political Writings,* 22, 26.

63. Ibid., 7. Marsilius of Padua developed the Aristotelian dictum of the naturalness of the polity in much the same way of material necessity and to the same effect of monarchy. See the introduction by Alan Gewirth and the text of Marsilius in *Defensor Pacis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

64. See R. A. Markus, "The Latin Fathers," in *Cambridge History,* edited by Burns; Michael Wilks, *The Problem of Sovereignty in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 58-59 and passim; Gilby, *Political Thought of Thomas Aquinas,* 8.

human institutions of repression. Yet these punitive institutions were not what God originally intended for humanity. Originally, men were free and equal in God's sight. Which suggests that all along, inside the medieval regime of hierarchy, there was a free, egalitarian republic waiting to come out.

Beginning late in the eleventh century it got out in Pisa, Milan, Genoa, Florence, and other cities of Lombardy and Tuscany. Whether persuaded that they were naturally good as the Bible said or as capable of civic virtue as Cicero said, they no longer needed to think that God had sanctioned their subjection to princes in order to repress their wickedness. Men (only men) became active citizens prescribing laws for themselves rather than passive subjects suffering the authority imposed upon them. Many of the "prehumanists" who philosophized their states "treat it as a distinctive virtue of elective systems that they guarantee the equality of all citizens before the law. No one's interests are excluded, no one is unfairly subordinated to anyone else."[65] When Aristotle's *Politics* became available, the cities might boast of following his ideal of a government where men rule and are ruled in turn, insofar as their magistrates were salaried officials elected only for short terms. By a Florentine law of 1328, they were selected from the citizen body by lot, literally out of a bag. In the early republics the Aristotelian formula of mixed government—the combined rule of the one, the few, and the many—was not usually regarded as a set of checks and balances but merely as creating class harmony on the Milo Minderbinder principle (in *Catch-22*) that "everyone has a share." Civic peace was an obsession, if only because it was constantly threatened. As against partisan interests, the interests of the city were largely confined to preaching professors of the civic virtues of the old Roman Republic. Yet as Cicero had lamented of his own time, "Some belong to a democratic party, others to an aristocratic party, but few to a national party" (*De Off.* 1.25.85). Quentin Skinner repeatedly asks how, in this situation, public welfare could be reconciled with self-aggrandizement. If the answer be, by the mythical gifts of Orpheus taming the savage beasts by the sound of his voice and his lyre, the question remains, how indeed?[66] Fallen into factional discord, most of the

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65. Skinner, *Visions of Politics,* vol. 2, *Renaissance Virtues* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 28–29. I am much indebted to this work and Skinner's *Foundations of Modern Political Thought,* vol. 1, *The Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

66. See Gustafson, *Representative Words,* 80, 120ff, and passim, on the Orphic politics of oratory and its recurrent importance in the Renaissance and American revolutionary periods.

cities that had become republics by the mid-twelfth century lapsed and again put their trust in princes by the end of the thirteenth.

The Florentine republic managed to survive (fitfully) into the sixteenth century, not by avoiding the clash of interests but by institutionalizing it, in the aim of preventing the domination of any one faction or class by the counterweight of others. A corollary was the brilliant and self-congratulatory political science celebrating the Florentine virtues of liberty and equality—as by Leonardi Bruno—and making a virtue of self-seeking strife as a constitutional means of transforming partisan factionalism into the freedom and prosperity of the city—as by Machiavelli.

It was up to Machiavelli to "get real" about civic virtue. I use the expression because so many describe Machiavelli's discourse as "realism," that is, in reference to his sophistic imagery that, at least in crisis, man's darker *physis* should prevail over justice and morality.[67] Not only in *The Prince* but also in his republican persona in *The Discourses on Livy,* Machiavelli radically subverted the earlier faith in civic peace as the necessary condition of civic greatness. The heading of chapter 4, book 1, of *The Discourses* reads: "The Discord between the Plebs and the Senate of Rome made this Republic both Free and Powerful."[68] People who cavil at these conflicts, he said, are paying too much attention to the tumults and not enough to the liberty they produced. Republics everywhere, he said, are beset with the opposition between the popular and privileged classes, "and all legislation favorable to liberty is brought about by the clash between them."[69] Although the "Machiavellian moment," as J. G. A. Pocock famously set forth, introduced a new temporality of contingency and change in human affairs, upsetting the eternal, divinely ordered universe of the received Christian wisdom, there remained an essential continuity: that eternal figure of self-pleasing man—whom Machiavelli regarded as an inevitable political condition.[70] Even in *The Prince,* the basic motivation of the shifty morality Machiavelli recommends for rulers is the yet more consistent

67. By contrast, Felix Gilbert says of Italian humanist writing in the main that whatever the practical problems of their cities, "there is no manifestation of a thoroughgoing realism, no appreciation of the power-factor and the egoistic purposes that dominate political life" ("The Humanist Conception of the Prince and *The Prince* of Machiavelli," in *The Prince,* by Niccolo Machiavelli, edited by Robert M. Adams [New York: W. W. Norton, 1977], 160).

68. Machiavelli, *The Discourses on Livy,* edited by Bernard Crick (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), 113.

69. Ibid.

70. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975).

immorality of their subjects. Only by their own duplicity can princes contend with men of whom one can take it as a general rule that "they are ungrateful, fickle, liars and deceivers, fearful of danger and greedy for gain."[71] Again in *The Discourses,* Machiavelli says, "All writers on politics have pointed out, and throughout history there are plenty of examples which indicate, that in constituting and legislating for a commonwealth, it must needs be taken for granted that all men are wicked, and that they will always give vent to the malignity that is in their minds when the opportunity offers."[72] But in this republican context such malignant self-concern can have positive functions. Machiavelli claimed that allowing the free play of factional interests could even answer the ancient question of how then to establish the common interest—though his answer rather begged the question. Good examples of civic virtue will come from good education, he said, good education from good laws, "and good laws from those very tumults which so many condemn." Yes, but how do good laws come from tumults of self-interest—most of which, as Pocock points out, have merely the negative character of plebs putting down the patricians' attempts at domination?

Still, the coherence of the whole that self-regulating contentiousness could not achieve in the Renaissance republic it managed to produce in the large scale of the cosmos. In a work titled *The Nature of Things according to Their Own Proper Principles* (1565), Bernardino Telesio of Cosenza generalizes self-interest into a universal empirical principle of nature. "It is quite evident," he wrote, "that nature is propelled by self-interest."[73] Telesio proves that if Anaximander hadn't lived, the Renaissance would have had to invent him. As in Anaximander's cosmos, in Telesio's all things are produced through the opposition of elementary qualities, here Heat and Cold emanating from the Sun and the Earth, and the bodies thus composed invade one another in their self-interested attempts to realize their own being. All entities, animate and inanimate, are endowed with sensory capacities, and they react to other things in terms of pleasure and pain in order to grow themselves. "It is not blind and senseless chance, then, that brings active natures into perpetual conflict. They all desire in the highest

71. Machiavelli, *The Prince,* 48. Machiavelli's compatriot Guicciardini offered similar advice on the same basis: "The wickedness of man is such that you cannot govern without severity. But you must be clever about it" (*Maxims and Reflections of a Renaissance Statesman* [New York: Harper and Row, 1965], 116).

72. Machiavelli, *The Discourses on Livy,* 111–12.

73. Telesio, *Nature of Things,* in *Renaissance Philosophy,* vol. 1, *The Italian Philosophers,* edited by Arturo B. Fallico and Herman Shapiro (New York: Modern Library, 1967), 304.

degree to preserve themselves; they strive, furthermore, to grow and reproduce their individual subjects."[74] Unlike Anaximander, Telesio sees no reconciliation of these conflicts by a sense of justice. Virtue comes down to the bedrock self-aggrandizement that makes a self-organized world. If the world is then organized, it is as if by an Invisible Hand—of which concept Telesio was one of the first to give a political, ethical, and natural expression, according to Amos Funkenstein.[75] But aside from the fact that Anaximander beat him to it by two thousand years (plus), it is perhaps evident by now that Invisible Hand doctrines are intrinsic to regimes of any kind—economic, political, cosmological, or physiological—that are founded on the oppositions of self-interested parts. Failing some civic concern for the common welfare, and it generally does fail, the only hope is that, in the appropriately cosmological trope of Alexander Pope:

> On their own Axis the Planets run,
> Yet make at once their circle round the Sun:
> So two consistent motions act the Soul;
> And one regards Itself, and one the Whole.
> Thus God and Nature link'd the gen'ral frame
> And bade Self-love and Social be the same.
>
> (*Essay on Man* 3.313–18)

To close this particular circle, Hobbes had read Telesio, and himself once said, "Nature does all things by conflict of bodies pressing each other mutually with their motions."[76]

American Founding Fathers

On March 6, 1775, at the fifth anniversary commemoration of the Boston Tea Party in the city's Old South Church, the orator of the day, Dr. Joseph Warren, took the podium wearing a Roman toga—a multivalent sign that his audience knew how to understand.[77] Indeed, in their political writings

74. Ibid., 319.

75. Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 67.

76. In his discussion of the Elizabethan conception of world order, Tillyard, in *The Elizabethan World Picture,* provides clear poetic examples of both the hierarchical and the egalitarian-oppositional schemes. Spenser's *Hymn of Love* reproduced the Empodoclean system of the four roots, as in such lines as "Air hated earth and water hated fire, / Till Love relented their rebellious ire." The hierarchical scheme is well illustrated by the famous speech of Ulysses in *Troilus and Cressida,* including, "Take but degree away, untune that string, / And hark, what discord follows. Each thing meets / In mere oppugnancy."

77. James McLachlan, "Classical Names, American Institutions," in *Classical Traditions in Early America* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1976), 83.

the Founding Fathers often took on classical identities, the way that Alexander Hamilton (to mention one of countless examples), when urging an attack on the French at New Orleans, signed himself "Pericles" in an allusion to the Athenian statesman's speech calling for war with Sparta. "The history of Greece," wrote John Adams, "should be to our countrymen what is called by many families on the continent a boudoir; an octagonal apartment in a house with a full-length mirror on every side, and another in the ceiling."[78] Standing there, Thomas Jefferson would have seen not only an all-around image of his American self but also his vision of the ancient class struggle besetting the new American Republic: "The same political parties which now agitate the U.S. have existed through all time," he said. "Whether the power of the people or that of the *aristoi* should prevail kept Greece and Rome in eternal convulsions."[79] *Convulsions* was Thucydides' own term for it. *Faction* was Aristotle's. When James Madison in *Federalist no. 10* spoke of the "latent causes of faction" as "sown in the nature of man," and of the unequal distribution of property as the principal overt cause, he was clearly emulating the *Politics,* book 5, on civil strife—which has its own allusion to the civil strife at Corcyra.[80]

In *Federalist no. 51,* Madison comes back to factions with an implicit nod to Hobbes: "In a society under the forms of which the stronger faction can readily unite and oppress the weaker, anarchy may as truly be said to reign as in a state of nature when the weaker individual is not secured against the stronger." Madison's resolution is also broadly Hobbesian, "a government that will protect all parties," but of course not an absolute sovereign. Rather, a balance of opposed powers—as might supply "the defect of better motives." Here Madison penned what was destined to became the most famous passage of the *Federalist Papers:* "Ambition must be made to counteract ambition.... It may be a reflection on human nature that such devices should be necessary to control the abuses of government. But what is government itself but the greatest of all reflections on human nature? If men were angels, no government would be necessary."[81]

According to a distinguished and popular historiographic tradition, the American Republic was founded on the dark concept of human nature that is variously described as "pessimistic," "realistic," "jaundiced,"

78. Carl Richard, *The Founders and the Classics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 135.

79. Ibid., 83.

80. Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and John Jay, *The Federalist Papers,* edited by Isaac Kramnick (London: Penguin, 1987), 124.

81. Ibid., 319.

or "Hobbesian." Still another common description is "Calvinist." Yet although the Reformation's profound sense of human depravity was certainly part of the American colonial tradition, the associated emphases on faith and redemption by grace may have allowed human self-interest a certain freedom of political expression—including *(O Felix Culpa!)* its constitutional inscription as a self-regulating system of offsetting evils. In any case, the developing capitalism and individualism—effects of the same Protestant theology, according to Weber—could only deepen the conviction that in "contriving any system of government, man ought to be supposed a knave."[82] There were numerous important disagreements among the framers of the Constitution, but almost a consensus on the necessity to control human avarice, ambition, and viciousness—which, moreover, many could specifically locate in the human breast.[83] In *The Federalist*, Hamilton took it as a constitutional premise that "the fiery and destructive passions of war reign in the human breast." Said William Lenoir in the North Carolina debates: "We ought to consider the depravity of human nature, the predominant thirst for power which is in the breast of everyone."[84] (Hey, dude, what happened to the milk of human kindness?)

A lot of this so-called realism was directed against the unruly masses by members of the possessing classes, who could agree with Madison (and John Locke) that the preservation of property was the first object of government. They had a healthy fear of what one called "the fury of democracy," meaning agitations such as the Shays Rebellion and the demands for the cancellation of debts and the redistribution of property that the poor were making in the name of liberty and equality. "Dread of the propertyless masses was all but universal."[85] Hence the sense even of Jefferson and others who opposed strong federal government that they were afflicted by the perennial struggle of the *aristoi* and the people, from which same basis Hamilton among others drew the conclusion that they needed some principle in government "capable of resisting the popular current."[86]

In Hamilton's idea of a mixed Aristotelian constitution, something

82. Edward McNall Burns, "The Philosophy of History of the Founding Fathers," *Historian* 16 (1954): 156 (Hamilton quoting Hume).

83. Ibid., 228.

84. John Elliott, ed., *The Debates of the Several State Conventions on the Adoption of the Federal Constitution* (New York, 1888), 4:204.

85. Richard Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition and the Men Who Made It* (New York: Vintage, 1973), 14. See also Charles A. Beard's well-known article "Framing the Constitution," in his *The Economic Basis of Politics and Related Writings* (New York: Vintage, 1957).

86. Max Farrand, ed., *The Records of the Federal Convention of 1787* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1937), 3:310.

like that of John Adams, the "many" represented in a lower house would be counterpoised by a "natural aristocracy" of the few in the Senate, the legislature in turn balanced by the one executive. But since the proposed constitution had all three powers elected directly or indirectly by the people, many participants in the ratification debates already saw that the correspondence between class and governing bodies wasn't happening. Hence Patrick Henry's outburst in the Virginia convention against a document that lacked the restraint that even the British government relied upon—self-love:

> Tell me not of checks on paper; but tell me of checks founded on self-love. This powerful irresistible stimulus of self-love has saved that Government.... Where is the rock of your salvation? The real rock of political salvation is self-love, perpetuated from age to age in every human breast and manifested in every action.... If you have a good President, Senators and Representatives, there is no danger. But can this be expected from human nature? Without real checks it will not suffice. Virtue will slumber. The wicked will be continually watching: Consequently you will be undone.[87]

Still, the belief of the founders in the efficacy of the balance of powers—of letting ambition fight ambition and interest, interest—was well-nigh unconditional. Which is perhaps why its actual inscription in government was ever in contention, often indeterminate, and sometimes illusory. In 1814, John Adams thought he found eight such checks in the Constitution, including the states against the national government, the people against their representatives, and the classic balance of Montesquieu among legislative, executive, and judicial branches. Madison advocated an extensive representative government that could counter "the spirit of faction" by a combination of size and diversity, hoping thus to neutralize regional and economic differences. Here was one good reason for imperialism. Another was that the agrarian frontier could create a large cadre of middling farmers to offset the power of the commercial rich and the resentments of the urban poor. The idea was already abroad that Americans were by and large equally fixed, just as today everyone is "middle class"—except the 19 percent who think they are in the upper 1 percent of income. Besides, imperialism and war are conditions of fortune that can compensate for the

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87. Elliott, *Debates of the State Conventions,* 3:164.

civic virtue lacking in the Constitution, being circumstances in which the common good of victory is in everyone's private interest.

In respect of civic virtue, the new American Republic was in a more interesting position than its historical predecessors, insofar as self-interest was emerging from the theological shadow of sin and becoming a natural human thing. In effect, who needed virtue when vice could be controlled by vice? Certainly, there were voices in the constitutional debates that raised the perennial question, as one posed it: "If the administrators of every government are activated by views of private interest and ambition, how is the welfare and happiness of the community to be the result of such jarring interests?"[88] But had not the gentleman (subconsciously) answered the question himself by a reference to the lines of Alexander Pope: "Till jarring interests of themselves create / The according music of a well-mix'd State"?

Again, the Invisible Hand. So far as the welfare of the nation was concerned, America was on its way to transforming the Ciceronian doctrine that we all have self-interest in the common interest into the neoliberal converse that the common interest is self-interest. And more than civic virtue, the values called up from the beginning of the Republic to resolve the contradictions of a collectivity based on self-interest were nationalism and patriotism—which, again, thrive in war and imperial expansion.

When Alexander Hamilton repeatedly insisted in the *Federalist Papers* that there should be no intermediate bodies between the federal government and individual persons, he was not merely putting down arguments for states' rights. There was something radically new, nationalism, in his demand that the federal government "must carry its agency to the persons of the citizens," that it "must be able to address itself immediately to the hopes and fears of the individual; and to attract to its support those passions which have the strongest influence on the human heart."[89] In other words, the nation must insinuate itself into people's everyday lives as an object of their fondest sentiments, so that having thus incorporated the nation in themselves they find themselves incorporated in the nation. The more the citizens are accustomed to meet with the national authority in the common occurrences of the political life, said Hamilton,

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88. Herbert J. Storing, *The Complete Anti-Federalist* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 1:56.

89. Madison, Hamilton, and Jay, *The Federalist Papers,* 154.

the more it is familiarized to their sight and to their feelings, the further it enters those objects which touch the most sensible chords and put in motion the most active springs of the human heart, the greater will be the probability that it will conciliate the respect and attachment of the community.... The inference is that the authority of the Union and the affections of the citizens towards it will be strengthened, rather than weakened, by an extension to what are called matters of internal concern.... The more it circulates through those channels and currents in which the passions of mankind naturally flow, the less it will require the aid of the violent and perilous expedients of compulsion.[90]

No longer is passion fighting passion. The nation is to be the passion. Now there's nationalism for ya. Also naturalism: a renewed body politics of the body politic.

Hence there's modernism as well, or the world reenchanted by a certain materialism. The founders were disposed to justify every possible constitutional arrangement by appeals to natural order. Richard Hofstadter observed that the science boom of the eighteenth century, riding on the rational cosmos of Newton, provided them with a heavenly model of balanced and stable forces in support of the idea that government could be established on the same basis. Cosmology was still in play: "Men had found a rational order in the universe and they hoped it could be transferred to politics; or, as John Adams put it, that governments could be 'created on the simple principles of nature.'"[91] Underlying that, of course, were the drumbeats of war and self-love pounding naturally in every human breast. This sort of naturalism came to be celebrated as the "disenchantment of the world," although what it really meant was the enchantment of society by the world—by body and matter instead of spirit. (I have said it elsewhere: materialism must be a form of idealism, because it's wrong—too.) Not only was society understood as the collective outcome of natural wants and dispositions—as in current sciences such as evolutionary psychology and economics or the average common American folklore—but also the world was enchanted by culturally relative "material" utilities, as of gold, oil, pinot noir grapes, and pure Fiji waters. Here is a construction of nature by particular cultural values, whose symbolic qualities are understood, however, as purely material qualities, whose social sources are attributed

90. Ibid., 203.
91. Hofstadter, *American Political Tradition,* 8.

rather to bodily desires, and whose arbitrary satisfactions are mystified as universally rational choices.

The Illusion of Human Nature

The problem is not whether human nature is good or bad. The many "anti-Hobbists" of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries who attacked innate egoism on the grounds of natural goodness or natural sociability remained within the same sclerotic framework of a corporeal determination of cultural forms. But beginning in the Enlightenment, the idea of the human condition as a culturalized nature appeared within the Western tradition. Thus Adam Ferguson's observation that individuals do not exist before or apart from society but are constituted therein. In society they are born, and there they remain—capable of all the sentiments on which diverse peoples construct their existence, amity prominent among them and enmity as well.[92] For Marx similarly, the "human essence" exists in and as social relationships, not in some poor bugger squatting outside the universe. Men individualize themselves only in the context of society, as notably in the European society of the eighteenth century, which thus gave rise to the economists' fantasies ("Robinsonades") of constructing their science from the supposed dispositions of a single isolated adult male. Nor did Marx indulge in reading from social formations to innate dispositions, although again one could certainly read from bourgeois society to the mythical Hobbesian war of each against all. Born neither good nor bad, human beings form themselves for better or worse in social activity (praxis) as it unfolds in given historical circumstances. One might suppose that some knowledge of colonized others contributed to this anthropology.[93] In any case, with the important proviso that "given cultural orders" replace "given historical circumstances" in the Marxist formulation, in other words that the praxis by which people make themselves is itself culturally informed, this notion of the human condition is an ethnographic commonplace.

No ape can tell the difference between holy water and distilled water,

92. Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society,* edited by Fania Oz-Salzberger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). "If both the latest and earliest accounts collected from every quarter of the earth, represent mankind as assembled in troops and companies; and the individual always joined by affection to one party, while he is possibly opposed to another; employed in the exercise of recollection and foresight; inclined to communicate his own sentiments, and to be acquainted with those of others; these facts must be admitted as the foundation of all our reasoning relative to man" (9).

93. See Lawrence Krader, "Karl Marx as Ethnologist, *Transactions of the New York Academy of Sciences,* ser. 2, 35, no. 4 (1973); and his "Critique dialectique de la nature humaine," *L'Homme et al Société,* no. 10 (1968).

Leslie White used to say, because there is no difference chemically—although the meaningful difference makes all the difference for how people value the water, even as, unlike apes, whether or not they are thirsty makes no difference in this regard. That was my brief lesson on what means "symbol" and what means "culture." Regarding the implications for human nature, leading a life according to culture means having the ability and knowing the necessity of achieving our natural inclinations symbolically, according to meaningful determinations of ourselves and the objects of our existence. Human culture, it needs be considered, is much older than human nature: culture has been in existence for two million years or more, ten or fifteen times longer than the modern human species, *Homo sapiens.* Respectable biological opinion has come around to seeing the human brain as a social organ, evolving in the Pleistocene under the "pressure" of maintaining a relatively extended, complex, and solidary set of social relationships.[94] This is to say that culture, which is the condition of the possibility of this successful social organization, thereby conditioned the possibilities of the human organism, body and soul. The "pressure" was to become a cultural animal, or, more precisely, to culturalize our animality. For two million years, we have evolved biologically under cultural selection. Not that we are or were "blank slates," lacking any inherent biological imperatives, only that what was uniquely selected for in the genus *Homo* was the ability to realize these imperatives in the untold different ways that archaeology, history, and anthropology have demonstrated. Biology became a determined determinant, inasmuch as its necessities were mediated and organized symbolically. We have the equipment to live a thousand different lives, as Clifford Geertz says, although we end up living only one.[95] But this is possible only on the condition that biological imperatives do not specify the objects or modes of their realization.

So who are the realists? Fijians say that young children have "watery souls," meaning they are indeterminate until they demonstrate their social being by the practice of Fijian relationships. As in many kinship-dominated communities, humanity is defined by reciprocity. "The mind (will, awareness)," Strathern was told in Hagen, "first becomes visible when a child shows feeling for those related to it, and comes to appreciate the interdependence or reciprocity that characterizes social relationships."[96]

94. Bernard G. Campbell, James D. Loy, and Kathryn Cruz-Uribe, *Humankind Emerging,* 9th ed. (Boston: Pearson, Allyn, and Bacon, 2006), 257 and passim.

95. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 45.

96. Strathern, *Gender of the Gift,* 90.

Although from Augustine to Freud the needs and dependencies of infants have been taken as evidence of their egoism—consider how we gratuitously speak of the child's needs as "demands"—the prevalent interpretation among the anthropological others is simply that the child is incomplete, not yet defined as human by engagement in the cultural praxis of relationships. Human nature then becomes a specific cultural kind. So when in Java "the people quite frankly say, 'To be human is to be Javanese,'" Geertz, who reports it, says they are right—in the sense that "there is no such thing as human nature independent of culture."[97] Again, not that there is no such nature, but that its mode of existence and social efficacy depends on the culture concerned—a mediated and thus determined determinant.[98]

What is most pertinent to the relations between *physis* and *nomos* is not (for example) that all cultures have sex but that all sex has culture. Sexual drives are variously expressed and repressed according to local determinations of appropriate partners, occasions, times, places, and bodily practices. We sublimate our generic sexuality in all kinds of ways—including its transcendence in favor of the higher values of celibacy, which also proves that in symbolic regimes there are more compelling ways of achieving immortality than the inscrutable mystique of the "selfish gene." After all, immortality is a thoroughly symbolic phenomenon—what else could it be? (In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments,* Adam Smith observes that men have been known to voluntarily throw away lives to acquire after death a renown that they could no longer enjoy, being content to anticipate in the imagination the fame it would bring them.) Likewise, sexuality is realized in various meaningfully ordered forms. Some even do it by telephone. Or for another example of conceptual manipulation (pun intended), there is Bill Clinton's "I did not have sex with that woman."

As it is for sex, so for other inherent needs, drives, or dispositions: nutritional, aggressive, egoistic, sociable, compassionate—whatever they are, they come under symbolic definition and thus cultural order. In the occurrence, aggression or domination may take the behavioral form of,

97. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures,* 52–53, 49.

98. We would know more of the variety of cultural conceptions of human nature if anthropologists had bothered to investigate them. Curiously, inquiry into peoples' ideas of human nature is not in the standard protocols of ethnographic fieldwork. There is no such category in the hallowed fieldwork manual *Notes and Queries in Anthropology.* In the Human Relations Area Files, it is a minor subcategory, rarely reported on. Is this neglect because we already know what human nature is? Because we think it is a scientific category, thus the intellectual concern of the anthropologists rather than their interlocutors? Or maybe because the other peoples have no such concept and the question would be meaningless? Probably all of the above.

say, the New Yorker's response to "Have a nice day"—"DON'T TELL ME WHAT TO DO!" We war on the playing fields of Eton, give battle with swear words and insults, dominate with gifts that cannot be reciprocated, or write scathing book reviews of academic adversaries. Eskimos say gifts make slaves, as whips make dogs. But to think that, or to think our proverbial opposite, that gifts make friends—a saying that like the Eskimos' goes against the grain of the prevailing economy—requires that we are born with "watery souls," waiting to manifest our humanity for better or worse in the meaningful experiences of a particular way of life. Not, however, as in our ancient philosophies and modern sciences, that we are condemned by an irresistible human nature to look to our own advantage at the cost of whomever it may concern and thus become menaces to our own social existence.

It's all been a huge mistake. My modest conclusion is that Western civilization has been largely constructed on a mistaken idea of "human nature." (Sorry, beg your pardon; it was all a mistake.) It is probably true, however, that this mistaken idea of human nature endangers our existence.