SIDNEY W. MINTZ LECTURE FOR 1994

The Sadness of Sweetness

The Native Anthropology of Western Cosmology

by Marshall Sahlins

This paper attempts to lend a broad "archaeological" support to Sidney Mintz's *Sweetness and Power* by discussing certain major anthropological themes of the long term in the Judeo-Christian cosmology that seem particularly relevant to Western economic behavior—especially consumption issues—in the 18th century. The pleasure-pain principle of human action, the idea of an irresistible and egotistical human nature underlying social behavior, the sense of society as an order of power or coercion, and a confidence in the greater providential value of human suffering figure among these anthropological themes. It is also argued that they continue to inhabit mainstream Western social science—to the bedevilment of our understandings of other peoples.


*Sweetness and Power* [Mintz 1985] was for me a landmark book because it dared to take on capitalism as a cultural economy. In a double way it put anthropology at the center of history: not only as a cultural discipline, the academic anthropology we know and love, but in the form of what may be deemed the native anthropology of Western society, the indigenous conceptions of human existence that, at a particular historical juncture, gave sweetness its economic functionality. It is this native Western anthropology I would talk of here, both in relation to Sid Mintz's classic work and in relation to anthropology as a discipline. On the one hand, the aim will be to complement the arguments of *Sweetness and Power* by expanding on certain aspects of the indigenous anthropology. We shall see that it takes some singular ideas of humanity, society, and nature to come up with the *triste tropo* that what life is all about is the search for satisfaction, which is to say the melioration of our pains. On the other hand, I will try to make the point that these cosmic notions did not begin or end with the Enlightenment. They are native cultural structures of the long term that still inhabit academic anthropology—as well as other Western social sciences—and bedevil our understandings of other peoples.

Concerned with certain Judeo-Christian dogmas of human imperfection, my argument could be described as an "archaeology" of mainstream social science "discourse." It would be pleasing to think of it then as the owl of Minerva taking wing at the dusk of an intellectual era. It has an organization, however, more closely resembling the flight of the postmodernist wiffle bird, moving in ever-decreasing hermeneutic circles until . . .

Nor should the mention of Minerva be taken as a claim to profound knowledge. Although I flit over a vast continent of Western scholarship, it is only in the capacity of an anthropological tourist, collecting an intellectual genealogy here and a fragment of academic folklore there, while making a most superficial inspection of the great philosophical monuments. Like most tourists, I no doubt consistently make a fool of myself. Not only are the expositions of main ideas always schematic, usually idiosyncratic, and possibly wrong but also insufficient attention has been paid to alternative traditions—without which this paper could not have been written. The other necessary apologies are as follows: I do not consider all the premises of the native anthropology that are still in vogue as science, only the four or five that seem most relevant to *Sweetness and Power*. I do not provide an adequate economic and political history of the ideas and traditions I discuss, nor do I prove that they are inadequate—or, as I believe, disastrous—for the study of non-Western societies. Finally, I am speaking about male writers who themselves spoke mainly about men and to men. Given what they had to say about "mankind," you wouldn't want to substitute "her" for "him" or even speak about "he or she."

1. The 1994 Sidney W. Mintz Lecture was delivered at The Johns Hopkins University on April 12, 1995.

2. It is worth reiterating that I am discussing some common average mainstream Judeo-Christian ideas of the human condition, to the relative neglect of variant and conflicting positions. In this
Introduction: Flowers out of Evil

Paul Ricoeur singles out the biblical story of the Fall as "the anthropological myth par excellence, the only one, perhaps, that expressly makes man the origin (or the co-origin) of evil" (1967:281). A willful human act, Adam's sin opened the doleful abyss between "the absolute perfection of God and the radical wickedness of man." Apart from this unhappy consciousness, Ricoeur means to distinguish the Genesis tradition from cosmologies in which evil is primordial rather than historical, preceding or accompanying the creation rather than the effect of the creature. It is true that in a fair number of other mythologies the origin of death—and/or the origin of hunger and toil—is laid to the violation of a divine admonition by a legendary trickster or ancestral hero. Yet even if these faults were due to perversity rather than folly, they did not produce an inherently wicked humanity, banished from the presence of God to a purely natural and antithetical world of thorns and thistles. There is a difference between human evil and regrettable misfortune. And Adam (or "Man") was not only the original agent of evil, but thereby and thenceforth he was corporeally disposed to it. Man cannot not sin, as Augustine said. This kind of self-contempt does not appear to be a general preoccupation of humanity. What makes the Western mythology seem even more singular is the cosmological consequences of Adam's crime: "The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together" [Romans 8:22]. Bernard Mandeville voiced a common [Western] complaint when he observed that it was difficult to distinguish the obstacles to human endeavors that were due to man's body from those that came from the condition of the planet "since it has been curs'd." It is impossible to keep these tribulations asunder, he said; they "always interfere and mix with one another; and at last make up together a frightful Chaos of Evil" [Mandeville 1988, vol. 1:344]. In Adam's fall sinn'd we all: human life became penal and the world hostile.4 In John Donne's words, "The noblest part, man, felt it first; and then/Both beasts and plants, curst in the curse of man."

As for humanity, pain and death were not the only penalties of Adamic pride. There was also a certain stupidity, the effect of epistemological obstacles. Eating from the tree of knowledge, Adam plunged men into gross ignorance, simultaneously engendering unfortunate consequences for human social relationships. Before the sin, when called upon by God to name the animals Adam proved himself the world's first and greatest philosopher: he could distinguish the species as they really were, according to their true essences and differences [Aarsleff 1982:25, 59]. Adam had then an almost divine knowledge. From the correct names to the confusion of tongues, however, man experienced an all-round fall from intellectual grace. A veil was drawn between one person and another as well as between humanity and the world. Mankind was thus subject to a double dissimulation of reality, social as well as natural. Covering themselves in shame, men and women introduced deception into all communication. Relations between societies were marked by the incomprehension and strife of Babel—a fitting sequitur to this second attempt of men "to be as gods." And if within societies people concealed their true [internal] selves from one another, how could their association have been founded on anything but this dissimulation, given that mankind had been committed to self-love from the Fall? "It is impossible we could be sociable Creatures without Hypocrisy" [Mandeville 1988, vol. 1:349]. Nature too was hidden from us. In a neo-Platonic sense, the truth of the world disguised itself, since it could be known only as the inadequate sensory impressions of defective empirical things. The day was yet to come when Bacon would attempt to reverse the epistemological values by asserting that experiential wisdom was man's great hope for climbing out of the pit into which he had been digg'd by Original Sin. Even so, such empiricism turned out to be an ideological reconciliation with a permanent imperfection. Man had been condemned to an ignorance as profound as his wickedness, a "knowing ignorance," hopelessly separated from God's truth [Cassirer 1963].

Human finitude, the famous "metaphysical evil," was the defect that encompassed all the others. A line of argument running notably from Augustine through Leibniz repudiated the classical pantheistic notion that God made the universe from Himself, on the grounds that "from a god only a god can proceed" [Leibniz 1985:300; Augustine 1948; Hick 1966]. The world, including the creature, was created ex nihilo: nothing divine as such is in it. Not that God was responsible for evil, which, as the absence of good, He did not make. What He made was good. But as created out of nothing, and in contrast to the unchanging and perfect nature of God, man was corruptible [Augustine De civitate Dei 12.1]. Free will was the expression of this unfortunate keep bad conscience at a distance, in order to enjoy their inner freedom undisturbed; in other words, they made the opposite use of them that Christianity has made of its god" [Nietzsche 1956:227].
mutability and the Fall its catastrophic effect. Human finitude was the root of all evil. Both the cause and the crime consisted in the nature of man as an imperfect creature of lack and need. So did the punishment.

The Anthropology of Need

The punishment was the crime, as Augustine said. Man was destined to wear out his body in the vain attempt to satisfy it, because in obeying his own desires he had disobeyed God. By putting this love of self before the love of Him alone who could suffice, man became the slave of his own needs [De civitate Dei 13, 14]. Or should we not say, Western man, since not many other peoples—except successful Buddhists, perhaps—know “true rest” and “deliverance” as synonyms of death? But then, this life is a “hell on earth,” as Augustine said, no wonder babies come into it crying and screaming.

Still, God was merciful. He gave us Economics. By Adam Smith’s time, human misery had been transformed into the positive science of how we make the best of our eternal insufficiencies, the most possible satisfaction from means that are always less than our wants. It was the same miserable condition envisioned in Christian cosmology, only bourgeoisified, an elevation of free will into rational choice, which afforded a more cheerful view of the material opportunities afforded by human suffering. The genesis of Economics was the economics of Genesis. Lionel Robbins [1952:15] said as much in his famous determination of what economics is all about:

We have been turned out of Paradise. We have neither eternal life nor unlimited means of gratification. Everywhere we turn, if we choose one thing we must relinquish others which, in different circumstances, we would wish not to have relinquished. Scarcity of means to satisfy ends of varying importance is an almost ubiquitous condition of human behaviour. Here, then, is the unity of the subject of Economic Science, the forms assumed by human behaviour in disposing of scarce means.

For the moment we will follow Lord Robbins in skipping over much of what happened between the Fall and its Economic Science, such as the advent of capitalism—on the heels of the Renaissance change of heart about the blessings of poverty and the contemptibility of this world. If bourgeois society liberated egoistic man from the prison house of Christian morality and allowed desire to parade shamelessly in the light of day—finessing social justice by the claim that Private Vices were Publick Benefits—still there had been no fundamental change in the Western conception of human nature. Man was ever an imperfect and suffering being, with wants ever beyond his powers. The Economic Man of modern times was still Adam. Indeed, the same scarcity-driven creature of need survived long enough to become the main protagonist of all the human sciences.

I have already published this argument about “utilism” too many times, so I shall try to be brief.

First, regarding continuity and change in the Adamic concept of man: The change, as I have implied, was rather in the value of human imperfection than in the fact. Originally understood by the Church Fathers as a form of bondage, each man’s endless and hopeless attention to his own desires became, in the liberal-bourgeois ideology, the condition of freedom itself. Originally, need had distinguished mankind from God’s self-sufficient perfection. After the Fall, as St. Basil described it, “Nature became corrupted, just as men did, and failed to provide him with his needs” [Boas 1948:33]. The world “does not make good what it promises,” wrote Augustine, “it is a liar and deceitful.” So man is fated “to pursue one thing after another. . . his needs are so multiplied that he cannot find the one thing needful, a single and unchangeable nature” [in Deane 1963:45]. On becoming a scientific anthropology, how

5. Of course the true fault was Eve’s, who as woman represented the flesh, the senses, relative to Adam’s intellect [Philo 1929:225–26; Baer 1970; Twain 1904]. This proposition—men are to women as the mind is to the senses—has been a long-standing tenet of the native Western folklore [Lloyd 1984; Bordo 1987].

6. A disciple observed that “only pagans cannot understand why Christians delight in the chastisement and discipline which their loving Father justly sends as a necessary means to a blessed end” [ Löwith 1949:176, paraphrasing Orosius]. Augustine’s line about babes born crying into the world would be cheerfully repeated for centuries. “We are all born wailing,” wrote Pope Innocent III, “that we might express the misery of our nature” [Marchand 1966:8].

7. “Utilism” is a term coined by George Eliot to translate Feuerbach’s characterization of the pragmatic-cum-egoistic sense of God in the Judeo-Christian tradition: a God who will suspend the rules of the universe in man’s favor, a God whose love for me is thus my self-love deified [Feuerbach 1857, 1867]. I have adopted it here [in preference to “utilitarianism”] to refer to the need- and scarcity-driven behavior of the creatures who worship this sort of God.

8. “That which in a slave is effected by bonds and constraint in us is effected by passions, whose violence is sweet, but none the less pernicious” [Leibniz 1972:289].

9. “Thus it [the spiritual body] is a wholly miraculous body, the fulfillment of man’s supernatural wish to have a body that is free of sickness and suffering, invulnerable and immortal, and hence without needs. For the manifold needs of our body are the source of its manifold ailments. . . But the heavenly, spiritual body needs neither air, food or drink; it is a divine body without needs” [Feuerbach 1967:360–61].

10. Augustine had his predecessors, of course, such as Philo of Alexandria: “when. . . men have poured themselves out wildly into their passions and guilty yearnings of which it is not right to speak, fitting punishment is decreed, vengeance for impious practices. And the punishment is the difficulty of satisfying our needs” [Boas 1948:13]. And there were many medieval successors to the same philosophy, such as Pope Innocent III: “Desires are like a consuming fire which cannot be extinguished. . . Who was ever content after his desire has been fulfilled? When man achieves what he desired he wants more and never stops longing for something else” [Marchand 1966:35]. Another continuity from the Augustinian tradition seems so simple-minded and vertiginous that I am inclined to bury it here, in a footnote. It concerns the so-called triple libido that Augustine spoke about [after I John 2.16 and others]: the human lusts for temporal goods, for domination, and for carnal pleasures [see Deane 1963:chap. 2]. Is it too crude to point
ever, this self-love changed its moral sign [Dumont 1977, 1986; Hirschman 1977]. The original evil and source of vast sadness in Augustine, the needs of the body became simply “natural” in Hobbes or at least a “necessary evil” in Baron d’Holbach, to end in Adam Smith or Milton Friedman as the supreme source of social virtue. Following on Hobbes and Locke, the materialist philosophes—Messrs. d’Holbach, Helvétius, La Mettrie, Condillac & Co.—found that the rational response to bodily need could provide them with the human parallel to the Newtonian science after which they hankered. Here was a law of motion of human bodies as comprehensive as the law of gravitation.11 In Hobbes’s terms, men move towards those things that give them pleasure and from-wards those that cause them pain. In addition to universal motion, pleasure and pain for the philosophes became the general law of cognition. As in the formula made famous by Helvétius, corporeal pleasure and pain, by awakening need and interest, issue in the comparison and judgment of objects.12 Originally condemned as the author of sin, self-pleasing man turned out to be a good thing and in the end the best thing, since the greatest total good would come of each person’s total self-concern. Slavery was thus transformed into liberty, and the human lust that once foretold eternal perdition became the promise of temporal salvation. Over the long run, the native Western anthropology proved to be an extended exercise in the sublimation of evil. Yet through all these happy metamorphoses, the sad figure of needful man remained the invariant.13 Indeed, human needs came to be the reason for society itself: “Because man is sociable, people have concluded he is good. But they have deceived themselves. Wolves form societies, but they are not good. . . . All we learn from experience on this head is that in man, as in other animals, sociability is the effect of want” [Helvétius 1795, vol. 7:224–25].

The recurrent attempt to make individual need and greed the basis of sociability, as in this text of Helvétius, has been one of the more interesting projects of the traditional anthropology. Again a long line of academic ancestors—stretching back to Vico and Machiavelli through the Enlightenment philosophes to the English utilitarians and their latest incarnations in the Chicago School of the Economics (of Everything)—have all argued that individual self-interest is the fundamental bond of society.14 So, for d’Holbach, “A nation is nothing more than the union of a great number of individuals, connected to one another by the reciprocity of their wants, or by their mutual desire of pleasure” [1889:147]. Or Mandeville [1988, vol. 1:344; see also 4, 67, 369], who explicitly refers the possibility of society to the fall of man:

not the Good and Amiable, but the Bad and Hateful Qualities of Man, his Imperfections and the want of Excellencies which other Creatures are endued with, are the first Causes that made Man sociable beyond other Animals the Moment after he lost Paradise; and . . . if he had remain’d in his primitive Innocence, and continued to enjoy the Blessings that attended it, there is no Shadow of Probability that he ever would have become the sociable Creature he is now.

O felix culpa! Here was another redeeming paradox of the Fortunate Fault [Lovejoy 1948:chap. 14]. Out of the Sin came Society. Men congregate in groups and develop social relations either because it is to their respective advantage to do so or because they discover that other men can serve as means to their own ends. True, the last violates a famous categorical imperative, to which Helvétius countered in turn: “Every writer who, to give us a good opinion of his own heart, founds the sociability of man on any other principle than that of bodily and habitual wants, deceives weak minds and gives a false idea of morality” [1795, vol. 7:228–29]. “Aimer,” said Helvétius, “c’est avoir besoin,”15 Pope, in his Essay on Man, immortalized the theory: “Thus God and Nature linked the general frame/And bade Self-love and Social be the same.”16

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11. Not the syntheses that have been made of these, which is also to say the difficulties of keeping them apart.
12. “Par le seul mouvement il [Dieu] conduit la matièrè/Mais c’est par le plaisir qu’il conduit les humains” [Voltaire, in Hampson 1968:103].
13. In Helvétius’s words: “all judgments occasioned by the comparison of objects one with another suppose in us an interest in comparing them. And this interest, necessarily founded on our love of happiness, can only be the effect of physical sensibility, whence all our troubles and pleasures take their source. . . . I thus conclude that physical pleasure and pain is the unknown principle of all actions of men” [1795:304].
14. Nor should old Aquinas be forgot. The idea that society originates to meet individual needs of course goes behind early modern times. Schumpeter notes that for Aquinas, apart from the church society “was treated as a thoroughly human affair, and moreover, as a mere aggregation of individuals brought together by their mundane needs. Government, too, was thought of as arising from and existing for nothing but those utilitarian purposes that individuals cannot realize without such an organization” [Schumpeter 1954:91–92].
15. “Aimer” appears in Helvétius’s De l’esprit, of which work Hallévy points out, “However much this book may be forgotten today, it is impossible to exaggerate the extent of its influence throughout Europe at the time of its appearance” [1949:18]. The influence was especially marked in England. Among the first to submit to it was Jeremy Bentham.
16. “Self-love, which an earlier generation would have attributed to man’s turning away from the service of God, is treated by Pope as a necessary force of nature, without which reason would remain inactive” [Hampson 1968:101]. This is also the Hobbesian relation between self-love and reason. It seems to have become common in the 18th century, even in the perverse forms in which Rousseau cast it.
NEED AMONG THE INDIANS OF NEW FRANCE

According to the Jesuit Joseph Jouvency, one of the two main sources of disease among the Indians of New France was an insatiable desire for objects of a particular kind. Apparently suffering from some form of windigo, the patient, whose affliction was thought to be congenital, was treated by an equal and opposite display of generosity. Without stint or thought of any return, Jouvency reports, his “parents, friends and relatives . . . lavish upon him whatever it may be, however expensive.” The patient consumes some part of the gift, distributes some to the diviners, “and often on the next day departs from life” [Jouvency 1710:258]. This proves that one society’s Eonomics may be another’s madness. Or at least that the inevitable insufficiency of means relative to ends does not evoke an innate disposition to truck and barter. Far from such wants serving as the bond of society, the Indian who is beset by them will have a hard time living with others.

A certain anthropological functionalism was another legacy of the enlightened Adamic theory, especially as “function” was collapsed into “purpose” and the “purpose” was the satisfaction of need. In this respect, Malinowski’s reduction of culture to corporeal needs was a pedantic elaboration of Enlightenment social science. The main advance achieved by Radcliffe-Brown’s structural-functionalism was the transposition of the same paradigm to society as a whole, that is, by conceiving the social totality as an organism, a biological individual, whose institutions responded in effect [function] and form [structure] to its life needs. Herbert Spencer was the transitional figure. On the one hand, he adopted the going utilist principle that society was an arrangement that people entered into for the satisfaction of their personal interests. On the other hand, he maintained that society itself was a “life” or a superorganic entity, engaged with other such beings in a struggle for survival [sociological Hobbesianism]. Following the lead of Durkheim and Mauss, the British structural-functionalists would sublimate egotistical man in social institutions—which themselves, however, responded to social needs.

Digression: Renaissance Notes

A word might be said about some distinctive contributions of the European Renaissance to the moral promotion of need-driven, self-pleasing man—or to the spirit of capitalism in general—less celebrated perhaps than the Protestant ethic but apparently just as influential. I am not speaking simply of the well-known ideological movements of the 15th and 16th centuries: the self-affirmation of humanity, the liberation of human will and of the individual generally, the removal of the onus of sensuousness, an end to the contempt of this world, thus the reconciliation of the mind with nature and of the intelligible with the sensible. What gives a real feeling of intellectual vertigo is that certain Italians conceived capitalism as a total order of the universe well before it became a systematic economy. In 1440, Nicholas of Cusa, for example, argued that human will and judgment were God’s means of constituting the values of created things. Human preferences are the Deity’s way of organizing the world as a system of values—as opposed to mere substances, which in and of themselves are nothing [Cusanus, quoted in Cassirer 1963:43–44]:

For although the human intellect does not give being to the value [i.e., does not create the things valued], there would nevertheless be no distinctions in value without it. . . . Without the power of judgment and of comparison, every evaluation ceases to exist, and with it value would also cease. Wherewith we see how precious is the mind, for without it, everything in creation would be without value. When God wanted to give value to his work, he had to create, besides the other things, the intellectual nature.

Cusanus thus prefigures the self-regulating market in the form of a cosmological process. By virtue of human preferences, the universe was commoditized—before the commodity was universalized.

Indeed, Lorenzo Valla had already discovered the decisive principle of the economicist plenum: the search for pleasure. “Pleasure,” he wrote in 1431, “is not only the highest good, but the good pure and simple, the conserving principle of life, and therefore the basic principle of all value.” And insofar as for Valla pleasure was the aim of all sociability, he also anticipated the legion of Western scholars who went on to explicate all variety of sociable relations as personal advantages [1977:221, 223]:

And what is the aim of friendship? Has it been sought for and so greatly praised by all ages and nations for any other reasons than the satisfactions arising from the performance of mutual services such as giving and receiving whatever men commonly need? . . . As for masters and servants, there is no doubt their only aim is one of common advantage. What should I say about teachers and students? . . . What finally forms the link between parents and children if it is not advantage and pleasure?

It remained for capitalism, as the material development of this philosophy, to foreground scarcity, and thus privilege pain over pleasure as the prime motive of intellectual judgments, object values, and social relations.

These revolutionary ideas of value and society were the complements of a certain kind of individualism. The individual becomes conscious of himself as the free agent and ultimate end of his own project. As formulated in Giovanni Pico della Mirandola’s celebrated Oration on the Dignity of Man (1487), it is man’s unique privilege “to have what he chooses, to be what he wills to be.” Pico thus develops a certain permutation of the Chain of Being which cuts nature at humanity’s disposition. The last-created in a universe already replete with beings of every kind, man was left without a specific mode of existence or niche of his own. At the same time, unlike the other creatures, who were restricted by the laws of their respective natures, men were free to fashion themselves in whatsoever form they would. “I have placed you at the very center of the world,” Pico has God say to man, “so that from that vantage point you
may with greater ease glance round about you on all that the world contains” [1956:3]. [Speaking of vantage points, it seems relevant that the Oration was penned shortly after the development of perspective by Brunelleschi and Alberti, which is to say soon after the artistic technique of opening a window on an indefinitely expanding world from the viewpoint of the individual subject.] Pico’s concept of man as endowed with limitless possibilities of self-realization through the appropriation of nature’s diversity was destined to run through numerous reincarnations, from the philosophical guises it assumed in Herder or Marx to the crude consciousness of bourgeois consumerism.17

Bernardino Telesio’s description (1565) of the entire universe as organized by the self-interested actions of all creatures and things makes the vulgar fate of Renaissance philosophy seem inescapable [Van Deusen 1934]. Telesio’s cosmos was a veritable physics of pleasure and pain, these being the senses all objects possess of the things that respectively sustain and destroy them. As some specific compound of heat and cold in a substractum of matter, every object or creature acts to preserve its own nature—against perpetual opposition and potential destruction by objects of other natures [Fallico and Shapiro 1967:315]. Note that Hobbes had studied Telesio, and Sir Francis Bacon called him “the first of the new men” because of his insistence on the principle that human knowledge can come from observation only, limited as it then might be. More recently, Funkenstein sees in Telesio “one of the earliest occurrences of an antiteleological, political, ethical, as well as natural, principle of an ‘invisible hand of nature’” [Funkenstein 1968:67]. No doubt Funkenstein is referring to passages such as this: “It is quite evident that nature is propelled by self-interest. In fact, nature can tolerate neither a vacuum nor anything without purpose. All things enjoy touching one another, and maintain and conserve themselves by this mutual contact” [quoted in Fallico and Shapiro 1967:304].

May we not conclude that the universe had achieved an ideal state of economic development while Europe was still struggling with premodern relations of production? In one way or another, the philosophers already imagined the cosmos as a capitalist world order.

The Anthropology of Biology

The matter at issue here is the folk wisdom of “human nature.” I mean the settled disposition, academic as well as popular, to account for social practices and cultural forms by the innate constitution of Homo sapiens. The biological influences are commonly conceived as animal drives and inclinations, which lends them a certain “brute” power. Their supposed effects are expressed either directly in social practices—as, for example, male dominance—or by antithetical customs designed somehow to corral them—as, for example, norms of sexuality. One probably does not need much persuasion that our folk anthropology is disposed to these explanations of culture by nature. Ranging from racism in the streets to sociobiology in the universities and passing by way of numerous expressions of the common tongue, biological determinism is a recurrent ideology of Western society. Its ubiquity, I will argue, is a function of its transmission in anthropological traditions of cosmic dimensions: once again, the concept of man as a willful creature of need, especially as this notion has developed under the market economy, and, also, the theory of the human constitution inscribed in the Great Chain of Being, especially as linked to the antagonistic dualism of flesh and spirit of the Christian nightmare—the flesh as a brutish, self-regarding animal nature underlying and overcoming the better inclinations of the human soul.

Just as a developed capitalism and the industrial revolution were coming upon them, European philosophers consummated centuries of guilt by the discovery that the demands of the flesh increased with the “progress” of the society. Necessarily so, since progress was Reason in the service of needs. Not even Rousseau objected to the premise that desire and want moved the world; his concern was only that the ever-increasing wants of mankind were corrupt and the course of history therefore decadent. Pro or con, the philosophes could agree that they were living in an age marked by the unprecedented extent, diversity, and artificiality of human needs. Rousseau again excepted, none seems to have noticed the contradiction—which we are still living—between a “progress” that supposedly represented the triumph of the human spirit over the body, an escape from our animal nature, on the one hand, and, on the other, the dependence of this happy result on an increasing awareness of bodily affliction—more need.18

17. “In creating an objective world by his practical activity, in working-up inorganic nature, man proves himself a conscious species being.... Admittedly animals also produce. But an animal only produces what it immediately needs for itself or its young. It produces one-sidedly, while man produces universally. An animal produces only itself, whilst man reproduces the whole of nature. An animal forms things in accordance with the standard and the need of the species to which it belongs, whilst man knows how to produce in accordance with the standards of other species” [Marx 1961:75–76].

18. The notion that human progress was a movement from bodily to intellectual control, a liberation of humanity from the constraints of matter and animal nature, was very general through the middle 20th century in European anthropological thought. Condorcet, Comte, J. S. Mill, and E. B. Tylor might be cited as prominent exponents, as also Friedrich Engels: “Friedrich Engels calls the final victory of the socialist proletariat a stride by humankind from the animal kingdom to the kingdom of liberty” [Luxemburg 1970:168]. The notion in question, typically expressed as a threefold sequence of development from savagery through barbarism to civilization, has specific precedents in the Middle Ages, for example, in Joachim of Florus: “Now there was one period in which men lived according to the flesh, that is, up to the time of Christ. It was initiated by Adam. There was a second period in which men lived between the flesh and the spirit, which was initiated by Elisha, the prophet or by Uzziah, King of Judah. There is a third, in which men live according to the spirit, which will last until the end of the world. It was initiated by the blessed Benedict” (in Boas
Even as the philosophers, in speaking of the perfectibility of the species, were revealing new dimensions of human imperfection, the economy was producing unparalleled satisfactions by capitalizing on “the thousand shocks the flesh is heir to.” In this regard the Invisible Hand of the market might well have been the wrathful hand of God, as it would create the wealth of the nation out of the feeling of privation it visited on the person—the aforementioned scarcity of means relative to possible ends of personal gratification. This was the great industrial revelation: that in the world’s richest societies, the subjective experience of lack increases in proportion to the objective output of wealth.19 Encompassed in an international division of labor, individual needs were seemingly inexhaustible. Felt, moreover, as physiological pangs, as deprivations like hunger and thirst, these needs seek to come from within, as dispositions of the body. The bourgeois economy made a fetish of human needs in the sense that needs, which are always social in character and origin and in that way objective, had to be assumed as subjective experiences of pain. Precisely as the individual was taken as the author and the supreme value of his own activity and as the collective economy seemed to be constituted by and for personal satisfactions, so the urgings of the body would appear as the sources of the society.20

This peculiarly introverted perception of an enormous system of social values as emanating from individual-corpooreal feelings, this consciousness, I submit, helps account for the persistent popularity among us of biological explanations of culture. In our subjective experience, culture is an epiphenomenon of an economy of the relief of bodily aches. Biological determinism is a mystified perception of the cultural order, especially sustained by the market economy. The market economy makes it seem to the participants that their way of life is precipitated out of the stirrings of their flesh through the rational medium of their wills. Genesis redux.

Actually there is a double mystification at work in the bourgeois fascination with corporeal understandings of culture. The subsumption of use-value in and as exchange-value has something of the same effect. In Marx’s classic exposition, the commodity has a double nature: it is a use-value in virtue of the empirical properties of the object which make it suitable to some people’s “needs,” and it is an exchange-value or price, externally attached to the object by the market, which in the favorable case will put it in people’s grasp. In choosing between different goods, therefore, presumably in the interest of maximum satisfaction, one in fact foregoes specific satisfactions that in quality (or use-value) are incommensurable with those chosen, hence the mystification in the idea that economic activity is the rational maximization of satisfactions. It depends on the supposition that things unlike in their objective attributes and human virtues—their different meanings to us as use-values—are indeed comparable as exchange-values. So the economist is able to subtract apples from oranges and convince us that the remainder is all for the best. Yet it remains to haunt us that in choosing between (for example) taking the kids to see their grandparents in California or saving the money to send them to university, either kinship suffers or else education.

This is where biological determinism comes in, for, once again, in people’s existential awareness, cultural forms of every description are produced and reproduced as the objects or projects of their corporeal feelings. The system of the society is perceived as the ends of the individual. Not only kinship or college education but also Beethoven concerts or night baseball games, the taste of one Coke or another, McDonald’s, nouvelle cuisine, suburban homes and Picket Fences, multimillionaire left-handed starting pitchers and the number of children per family, all these and everything else produced by history and the collectivity appear in life as the preferential values of subjective economizing. Their distribution in and as society seems a function of what people want.

Our intuition of culture as dependent on biological nature is compounded by a certain received idea, much older than the capitalist corporeality proper, concerning the stratified architecture of the human body. I mean the body as made up of “higher” and “lower” parts, opposed in composition and function. Below is the material bodily lower stratum, as Bakhtin (1984) put it in reference to Rabelais’s grotesqueries: that which links man to the earth and to birth and death, expressing his basic bestiality and sexuality. Above is the spirit or soul affiliating man with the angels and heavens, thus expressing his rationality, his morality, and his immortality. One recognizes the legacy of the Great Chain of Being but in its specifically Christianized and tragic version [Lovejoy 1964; Formigari 1973; Augustine De civitate Dei 11.16, 12.21]. Half angel and half beast, man is

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1948:210). Alternatively, of course, the three stages were before Christ, when men lived in sin, from Christ to Judgment, when men lived in hope of redemption, and kingdom come. 19. Hume thus reflected on the tragic human condition: “Of all the animals, with which this globe is peopled, there is none towards whom nature seems, at first sight, to have exercis’d more cruelty than towards man, in the numberless wants and necesseties, with which she has load’d him, and in the slender means which she affords of relieving these necessities. In other creatures these two particulars generally compensate each other. . . . In man alone, this unnatural conjunction of infirmity, and of necessity, may be observed in its greatest perfection” [Treatise on Human Nature 3.2.1]. Indeed, since needs are endlessly expandable, the effective “unnatural conjunction” in the Western viewpoint is between infirmity and infinity, a fair definition of hopelessness. 20. This point has been excellently made for anthropologists by Louis Dumont: “In modern society . . . the Human Being is regarded as the indivisible, ‘elementary’ man, both a biological being and a thinking subject. Each particular man in a sense incarncates the whole of mankind. He is the measure of all things (in a full and novel sense). The kingdom of ends coincides with each man’s legitimate ends, and so the values are turned upside down. What is still called ‘society’ is the means, the life of each man is the end. Ontologically, the society no longer exists, it is no more than an irreducible datum, which must in no way thwart the demands of liberty and equality. Of course, the above is a description of values, a view of mind. . . . A society as conceived by individualism has never existed anywhere for the reason . . . that the individual lives on social ideas” (1970:9–10).
not simply a double and divided being, he is condemned to the perpetual internal warfare of spirit and flesh (a specifically Pauline permutation of classical dualisms). Moreover, the battle is likely to be unequal, given the ontological density of corporeal being and brute force, whose inclinations of avarice and concupiscence are not easily resisted by an intangible and ineffable spirit. 21

Durkheim, for one, was fully aware that he was drawing on a long philosophical-cum-theological tradition in making the argument that “man is double. There are two beings in him: an individual being which has its foundation in the organism . . . and a social being which represents the highest reality in the intellectual and moral order that we can know by observation—I mean society” (1947:16; cf. Lukes 1972:432–33). The human being is, on the one hand, a presocial and sensuous animal, egocentrically given to his own welfare, and, on the other hand, a social creature, able to submit his self-interest to the morality of the society. “As there is no one,” said Durkheim, “that does not concurrently lead this double existence, each of us is animated by a double movement. We are carried along in the direction of the social and we tend to follow the inclination of our nature” (1930:360). It deserves emphasis that “our nature”—having sensory appetites as its means and the self as its finality—is not only anterior to the social; it is likewise in the pre-Paleolithic of the conceptual. But in contrast to sensations, which we are unable to transmit as such from one person to another, concepts or symbols are preeminently social. They are collective representations, organizing our private sensory experiences, even doing violence to them, in the form of meaningful values of which we are not the authors (see especially Durkheim 1960:329).

Now Durkheim thought that the common reports of body-soul distinctions from all over the world confirmed his arguments about duplex man. Beliefs about a separate existence of these aspects of the human being represented the native apprehension of a universal antagonism between them. But he was mistaken. A difference is not yet a conflict. For all that the distinction between body and soul is universal, what has set the West apart is the notion of the civil war between them. The idea of a war between self and society within every human breast, the eternal conflict of flesh against spirit, is our peculiar Adamic inheritance. “Then began the flesh to lust against the Spirit, in which strife we are born, deriving from the first transgression a seed of death, and bearing in our members, and in our vitiated nature, the contest or even victory of the flesh” (Augustine De civitate Dei 13:13).

If Augustine thus quotes Paul rather one-sidedly—“For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit; and the Spirit against the flesh” (Galatians 5:17)—it is only symptomatic of the agonistic body-soul dualism developed in the Christianity of late antiquity. 22 Pacé Durkheim, this schizophrenic struggle of the animal and the social was not even proper to the classical Roman dualism. Peter Brown speaks rather of a “benevolent dualism” or an “unaffected symbiosis of body and soul,” which would “make late classical attitudes toward the body seem deeply alien to later, Christian eyes” (Brown 1988:27–29). Connected to the fertility and intractability of the wild, the body was inferior to the administering mind, but the Romans had neither anxiety about the city’s capacity to domesticate it nor the inclination to severely repress its natural exuberance. Brown quotes Cicero: “Nature itself develops a young man’s desire. If these desires break out in such a way that they disrupt no one’s life and undermine no household [by adultery], they are generally regarded as unproblematic: we tolerate them” (in Brown 1988:28). Nature spoke through the body “in an ancient, authoritative voice.” And if so in Rome, what are we to make of the Durkheimian antithesis between a natural animalism of the body and the morality of the soul in the numerous societies where “nature” itself speaks: that is, societies that know worlds of nonhuman persons, animals that also have souls, as well as mental and moral qualities as good as or better than people’s?

Of course the [Western] Middle Ages compounded the Pauline and Augustinian dualism into paroxysms of fear and hatred of the body. 23 Only death could cure a man of “the leprosy of the body” (Le Goff 1988a:354). The

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21 The same hierarchical structure is repeated in relation to the human brain itself, conceived in much biological literature as made up of “higher” and “lower” centers, the notion being that it was only our “higher” (and perhaps fragile) intellectual centers that held back the animal propensities of the “lower” (Sacks 1995:61).

22 Perhaps the most developed of Durkheim’s expositions of duplex man is his 1914 article “The Dualism of Human Nature and Its Social Conditions,” where it is said, “Our intelligence, like our activity, presents two very different forms: on the one hand, are sensations and sensory tendencies; on the other, conceptual thought and moral activity. Each of these two parts of ourselves represents a separate pole of our being, and these two poles are not only distinct from one another but are opposed to one another. Our sensory appetites are necessarily egotistic: they have our individuality and it alone as their object. When we satisfy our hunger, our thirst, and so on, without bringing any other tendency into play, it is ourselves, and ourselves alone, that we satisfy. [Conceptual thought and moral activity are, on the contrary, distinguished by the fact that the rules of conduct to which they conform can be universalized. Therefore, by definition, they pursue impersonal ends. Morality begins with disinterest, with attachment to something other than ourselves]” (Durkheim 1960:327).

23 Betz’s exegesis of Galatians 5:17 has a triadic form perhaps familiar to psychoanalysis: “In v. 17a the dualism is set up in a rather simple form: flesh and Spirit are named as opposite forces, both agitating against each other. The flesh and its ‘desiring’ . . . are human agents of evil, while the Spirit is the divine agent of the good. Verse 17b spells out the anthropological consequences of this dualism. . . . Man is the battlefield of these forces within him, preventing him from carrying out his will. The human ‘I’ wills, but it is prevented from carrying out its will . . . because it is paralyzed through these dualistic forces within. As a result, the human ‘I’ is no longer the subject in control of the body” (Betz 1979:279–80). As mediated by the Durkheimian opposition of ego-centric and social, “flesh,” “spirit,” and “human I” could easily pass for id, superego, and ego.

THE HUMAN NATURE OF ANIMALS

This is how Kaluli of the Southern Highlands of New Guinea speak about the beginning of things: There were no trees, animals, streams, or food when the land was first formed. The land was entirely and only covered with people. Having no shelter or food, the people soon began to suffer. But a man arose and commanded the others to gather round him. To one group of people he said, "You be trees," to another "You be fish"; another became bananas, and so on, until all the animals, plants, and natural features of the world were differentiated and established. The few people left over became the human beings. The name that Kaluli use to refer to this event indicates they conceive it on the model of the way people align themselves into the opposed groups that face each other in revenge battles, marriages, or other ceremonial events. Constituted as complementary and interdependent factions, these groups are eventually involved in reciprocal exchanges that resolve their opposition. In the same way, men and the beings of nature live in reciprocal social relationships: not only or simply in some economic sense but, considering their common origin, in an ontological sense as beings of equivalent natures. The creatures are also men [Schiefelin 1976:94–95].

In the forest one knows the animals by the sounds they make. Sounds are the salient percepts of "reality" rather than sight. "Day" begins when the first birds sing, not when the sun appears. Likewise, the forms of animals may be discounted, as they are really people, and their voices are communicated messages of human character and import [Schiefelin 1976:96]:

Out hunting with Wanalugo, we heard the plaintive "juu-juu-juu" of the kalo [a small pigeon]. Wanalugo turned to me with a wistful expression and said, "You hear that? It is a little child who is hungry and calling for its mother." . . . The everyday Kaluli world of gardens, rivers, and forests is coextensive with another, invisible side of reality. The remark that the voice of the kalo is a little child is not merely a metaphor. The kalo may actually be the soul of a child.

Accordingly, humans and other creatures live in reversed worlds, mirroring each other even in the ways they appear to each other [pp. 96–97]:

"Do you see that huge tree?" another man asked one day on the path. "In their [the birds'] world, that is a house. Do you see the birds? To each other, they appear as men." Similarly, houses in our world appear as exceptionally big trees or as river pools to them, and we as animals there. . . . When asked what the people of the unseen look like, Kaluli will point to a reflection in a pool or mirror and say, "They are not like you or me. They are like that." In the same way, our human appearance stands as a reflection to them. This is not a "supernatural" world, for to the Kaluli it is perfectly natural.

In the same general way, the indigenous peoples over a vast area of what is now Canada knew that men and animals were in the beginning the same kind of cultured beings. Animals were humanoid creatures. They are still in reciprocal life-giving relations with people, members of the same larger society. And although animals have since lost some of the external aspects of culture—songs, dances, and decorated artifacts are among the things men now provide them—nevertheless, their mental capacities, including speech, equal those of men, and in some regards they are intellectually superior [Hallowell 1955, 1960; Brightman 1993; Fienup-Riordan 1990; Black 1977].

For that matter, there was a strong tradition of the superiority of animals to men—including moral superiority—in the classical antiquity of the West [Lowejoy and Boas 1935:chap. 13]. Animal behavior served as a model for humans. Among the virtues of the animals commonly cited was their restraint in satisfying their needs: their only limited desires, including limited sexuality, without penchants for superfluities, etc.

Hierarchies of the Chain of Being were also socially manifest in periodic upsurgings of the material bodily lower stratum, as at carnival or in what was in some respects analogous, peasant unrest [Bakhtin 1984, Le Roy Ladurie 1979, Gurevich 1985, P. Sahlins 1994]. But then serfdom, Le Goff writes, "was believed in the Middle Ages to have been a consequence of original sin," and, as slaves of the flesh more than others were, serfs deserved to be enslaved themselves [1988b:101].

The flesh was always the formidable foe of the spirit if only because of its materiality. In contrast to the impalpability of spirit, bodies have solidity, mass, weight, and other intuitions of irresistibility. And when in the 19th century the Chain of Being was transformed into—or at least informed—evolutionary theory, the idea of the temporal precedence of our animal "inheritance" was calqued onto the older fears of its irresponsibility. 25 The combined effect was the current common wisdom of human nature as a set of deep-seated genetic compulsions with which human culture must come to terms. The same folk wisdom probably accounts for the relative neglect of the two brilliant pieces Clifford Geertz devoted to debunking the phantasm of a determinate and determining human nature [Geertz 1973:chaps. 2 and 3].

If anything, it is the other way round: human nature as we know it has been determined by culture. As Geertz observes, the supposed temporal precedence of human biology relative to culture is incorrect. On the contrary, culture antedates anatomically modern man [H. sapiens] by something like two million years or more. Culture was not simply added on to an already completed human nature; it was decisively involved in the constitution of the species, as the salient selective condition. The human body is a cultural body, which also means that the mind is a cultural mind. The great selective pressure in hominid evolution has been the necessity to organize somatic dispositions by symbolic means. 26 It is not that

25. Starobinski observes that the sentiment of an underlying savagery has repeatedly subverted Western notions of "civility" and "politesse" by making them mere outward forms rather than something inherent in the individual or society. "Reduced to mere appearances, politeness and civility give free reign, inwardly, in depth, to their opposites, malevolence and wickedness—in short, to violence, which was never truly forsaken" [Starobinski 1993:11].
Homo sapiens is without bodily “needs” and “drives,” but the critical discovery of anthropology has been that human needs and drives are indeterminate as regards their object because bodily satisfactions are specified in and through symbolic values—and variously so in different cultural-symbolic schemes.

Throughout the millions of years of human evolution, the whole emotional economy of survival and selection has been displaced onto a world of meaningful signs, as distinct from the direct reaction to sensory stimuli. Amity and enmity, pleasure and pain, desire and repulsion, security and fear: all these are experienced by humans according to the meanings of things, not simply by their perceptible properties. Otherwise, how could you know that fat is beautiful or that a cross-cousin is marriageable but a parallel cousin is not or tell the difference between holy water and distilled water (as Leslie White used to say)? In the event, the generic determinations of “human nature,” the drives and needs, are subject to the specific determinations of local culture. So even if man is inherently violent, still “he wars on the playing fields of Eton, dominates by being nicer to others than he is to himself, hunts with a paint brush” (Sahlins 1964:90).  

What happened in the Pleistocene, Geertz observes, was the substitution of a genetics of behavioral flexibility for one that controlled conduct in detail. Thenceforth, insofar as human behavior was to be patterned, the patterns would have to come from the symbolic tradition. These symbols by which people construct their lives “are thus not mere expressions, instrumentalities or correlates of our biological, psychological or social existence; they are prerequisites of it” (Geertz 1973:49). People are not effectively driven by their bodies to act in some given cultural way, for without culture they could not effectively act at all:

They would be unworkable monstrosities with very few useful instincts, fewer recognizable sentiments, and no intellect: mental basket cases. As our central nervous system—and most particularly its crowning curse and glory, the neocortex—grew up in great part in interaction with culture, it is incapable of directing our behavior or organizing our experience without the guidance provided by systems of significant symbols.  

The Anthropology of Power

Why, then, do we have this oppressive sentiment of society as a system of power and constraint, counterposed to our inner desires and secret thoughts? Given that biologically we are human beings only in potentia, indeterminate creatures whose inclinations remain to be culturally specified, society might be better conceived as a means of empowering people rather than subduing them. Socialization in a particular language and culture is the way people who “all begin with the natural equipment to live a thousand kinds of life . . . end having lived only one” (Geertz 1973:45). Recall the well-rehearsed parable of Helen Keller’s magic moment, when the “mystery of language” was suddenly revealed to her: “I knew then that w-a-t-e-r meant that wonderful cool something that was flowing over my hand. The living word awakened my soul, gave it light, hope, joy, set it free!” (Keller 1904:33). And yet in the gloomy fashions of the present day, the scholars speak of “the prison house of language”—such is indeed the current “hegemonic discourse.” Society, then, is something “versus the individual,” a great beast terrorizing him, whether this leviathan is conceived as a necessary constraint on the self-pleasing person, as in the perspective of Hobbes or Durkheim, or as an unwanted imposition on personal freedom, as in the complementary optics of Adam Smith and Michel Foucault. Either way, society is opposed to the individual as power to libido.

Otherwise there could be anarchy. This was a theory already known to the Church Fathers, who learned it from certain rabbis and perhaps some “antiprimivist” philosophers such as Cicero (Lovejoy and Boas 1935, Boas 1948, Pagels 1988, Markus 1970, Levenson 1988). Irenaeus put the matter succinctly: “Earthly rule has been appointed by God for the benefit of nations, so that, under the fear of human rule, men may not devour one another like fishes . . .” [in Pagels 1988:47]. The most famous exponents of the idea, however, were Augustine and Thomas Hobbes. The City of God (413–425) and Leviathan (1651) have virtually the same argument about the origin of society or state, based on the same premise of men made vicious and fearful of one another by a restless search for power after power. As Herbert Deane (1963) observed, the anthropology is remarkably similar, including the actual or potential war of each against all. In the scarcity that inevitably ensues from the relentless pursuit of self-interest, no one can be sure of securing his own good without subduing the persons and passions of the others. If for Hobbes man became a wolf to other men, for Augustine “not even lions or dragons have ever waged with their kind such wars as we have waged with one another” [De civitate Dei 12.22]. Or, in the venerable maritime metaphor Augustinie also adopted, “How they mutually oppress, and how they that are able do devour! And when one fish hath de-

27. For an example of this paradigm of the relation between culture and biological “human nature,” see Sahlins (1976).
28. One of the few fully to appreciate Geertz’s conceptions of “human nature” has been Sidney Mintz—specifically in relation to the question of the desire for sugar (1988). Commenting on the same passage from Geertz, Mintz notes that the usual attempts to define human nature “as some pre-cultural bill of particulars” are most likely to express the specific cultural premises of the interpreters. Human nature turns out to be “a distinctive but somewhat skewed projection of the values of the inventor’s society.” It is not such “human nature” that is universal, Mintz continues, “but our capacity to create cultural realities, and then to act in terms of them.” And precisely this capacity is involved in the ways we are pleased to describe ourselves “before culture,” that is, our cultural constructions of the so-called human nature [p. 14]. The conscious invention of human nature is its ultimate cultural specification.
29. Compare John Chrysostom: “If you deprive the city of its rulers, we would have to live a life less rational than that of the animals, biting and devouring one another” [Pagels 1988:101].
vourred, the greater the less, itself also is devoured by some greater’ ” [in Deane 1963:47]. For Augustine, the postlapsarian human condition was just as nasty and anguished as the life of man in the Hobbesian state of nature. In this earthly existence, the Saint lamented, “there is but false pleasure, no security of joy, a tormenting fear, a greedy covetousness, a withering sadness” [Deane 1963:61].

The remedy was the institution of state. Whether it came about through God’s providence (Augustine) or human reason (Hobbes), men were thus able to suppress their enmity—if not their avidity. The state, law, and morality, pale reflections though they are in Babylon of their perfection in Sion, were conditions of the possibility of human society, which otherwise, given the selfish and violent dispositions of fallen man, would dissolve again into anarchy. But the forms of human rule, to be remedial, had also to be punitive: imposed on naturally wicked men “to keep them all in awe.” The state then perpetuated the viciousness it suppressed, since it used men’s fear of losing their lives, their property, and their liberty as the legal sanctions of order. The complement of the Western anthropology of self-regarding man has been an equally tenacious notion of society as discipline, culture as coercion. Where self-interest is the nature of the individual, power is the essence of the social.

Motivated by the notion of the social as the control of the individual, Western philosophers have too often conflated the origin of society with the origin of state. Of course the supposition is ethnographically absurd. The great majority of societies known to anthropology, including those of the aeons of prehistory, survived without the benefit of state. Augustine had himself imagined how they managed, for he argued that God was pleased to derive humanity from one individual—as a single cognatic descent group, we could say—in order that “they might be bound together in harmony and peace by the ties of relationship” [De civitate Dei 14.1]. The Bishop of Hippo also anticipated E. B. Tylor’s famous incest theory, noting that the prohibition of sister marriage [in the generations succeeding Adam’s progeny] would have the effect of multiplying kinship relations and therewith social concord. Indeed, the social values of exogamy and endogamy are brilliantly expounded in The City of God [15.16]. The farther out the exogamic rule, Augustine observed, the greater and more differentiated will be the kindred group. The process, however, should know a limit and be counteracted by marriage among cousins or others of the same descent, lest distant kin escape and relationships cease. All the same, kinship among fallen man can be no guarantee of peace. Echoing Cicero and forestalling Rousseau, Augustine sadly concludes that even the bonds of family are broken by “secret treachery,” producing an “enmity as bitter as the amity was sweet, or seemed sweet by the most perfect dissimulation” [19.5].

The etymological relationships in Western languages between polis, political, and police and civility and civilization are best explained by the traditional tale of the bad men and the leviant. A large amount of scientific anthropology has likewise been constructed from this native ideology, beginning with Durkheim’s insistence on the coercive nature of the social fact—corollary to the underlying animal egoism of duplex man. Raymond Aron [1970:41–42] recognized the critical role of the specifically Hobbesian streak in Durkheim’s philosophy:

According to Durkheim, man when left to himself is motivated by unlimited desires. Individual man resembles the creature around whom Hobbes constructed his theory: he always wants more than he has, and he is always disappointed in the satisfactions he finds in a difficult existence. Since individual man is a man of desires, the first necessity of morality and society is discipline. Man needs to be disciplined by a superior force which must have two

30. The fish metaphor, which Irenaeus had taken from a rabbinical tradition, was repeated not only by Augustine but again throughout the Middle Ages. Huizinga says it was proverbial: “Les gras poissons mangent les plus petits” [Huizinga 1954:329]. And it still lives, interestingly enough, as a one-line definition of capitalism: big fish eating little fish.

31. Augustine on the functionalty of coercion: “Surely it is not without purpose that we have the institution of the power of kings, the death penalty of the judge, the barbed hooks of the executioner, the weapons of the soldier, the right of punishment of the overlord, even the severity of the good father. All those things have their methods, their causes, their reasons, their practical benefits. While these are feared, the wicked are kept within bounds and the good live more peacefully among the wicked” (in Deane 1963:138–39).

32. It is true that Augustine and Hobbes—as also Machiavelli and Edmund Burke—were apologists for the forms of absolutism of their day (see Pagels 1988 on Augustine). But they share the idea of state or society as counterposed to antisocial man with the likes of Vico, Hume, Freud, Durkheim, and Foucault, to name a few who cannot so easily be typed as ideological of the totalitarian state. Particular functional uses of the idea of society as power would seem to be situational versions of the same generic anthropology [cum-cosmology] rather than vice versa. Hume provides exemplary statements of the generic theory: “This avidity alone, of acquiring goods and possessions for ourselves and our nearest friends, is insatiable, perpetual, universal, and directly destructive of society. There is scarce any one, who is not actuated by it; and there is no one, who has not reason to fear from it, when it acts without any restraint, and gives way to its first and most natural movements, so that upon the whole, we are to esteem the difficulties in the establishment of society, to be greater or less, according to those we encounter in regulating and restraining this passion” [Treatise on Human Nature 3.2.2].
A SYMMETRICAL AND INVERSE LEVIATHAN

The particular structure by which Augustine represented a kinship order—and presumably, then, by which that order failed to secure human peace in comparison to the relative success of imperial Rome—almost perfectly describes the classic Hawaiian system, not only in the detail of generational or “Hawaiian” terminology but in the complementary workings of exogamy and endogamy in a field of bilateral kinship, the in-marriage among distant kin reversing the normal tendencies of kindred dissolution (Kirch and Sahlin 1992:196–208). What makes this convergence even more remarkable is the ideological conclusion, equal and opposite to the Christian-Hobbesian myth of society, that the Hawaiian intellectual David Malo drew from the structures in question. Written in the late 1830s or early 1840s as one of a series of specula-
tions on how Hawaiian chiefs (alii) came to be differentiated from the underlying common people (kānaka), Malo’s story could have been his own invention rather than a received tradition. Still, the difference may not be important, since in its naturalistic-scientific particulars, much the same can be said about Hobbes’s. Noting that it has never been explained why “in ancient times a certain class of people were ennobled and made into alii [‘chiefs’] and another into subjects [kā

aka],” Malo [1951:60] offers the following as a first possible explanation:

Perhaps in the earliest time all the people [kānaka] were alii and it was only after the lapse of several generations that a division was made into commoners and chiefs, the reason for this division being that men in pursuit of their own gratification and pleasure wandered off in one direction and another until they were lost sight of and forgotten.

characteristics: it must be commanding and it must be lovable. This force which at once compels and attracts, can, according to Durkheim, only be society itself.

The same theory underlines notable works of Durkheim’s successors. It is entailed in the necessity for reconciliation that Marcel Mauss discovered in the gift. The total prestation has been described as “a kind of social contract” whereby people reciprocally surrender everything to one another, in contrast to the classic contract in which they unilaterally surrender force to the One who will bear their person. Yet the Hobbesian alternative of isolation andWarre is as much the reason for the one as for the other [Mauss 1966:277]:

for a long period of time and in a considerable number of societies, men confront each in a curious frame of mind, involving an exaggerated fear and hostility and an equally exaggerated generosity. . . .

There is no middle ground: complete trust or complete mistrust; one lays down one’s arms and renounces magic or gives everything away from casual hospitality to one’s daughters and one’s goods. It is in conditions of this kind that men put aside their self concern and learned to engage in giving and returning.

They had no choice. Two groups of men that meet can only withdraw—or in case of mistrust or defiance, battle—or else come to terms.

And just why did Radcliffe-Brown take the promotion of sociability as the main function of institutions? Why did he describe the social arrangement of “primitive” people in juridical metaphors? What kind of disintegration did he fear if unilinear descent did not exist to allocate rights in persons? It is as if a pervasive intuition of an underlying chaos, a kind of Radcliffe-Brownian movement of self-interested human atoms, has weighed like a nightmare on the brain of the social anthropologist.

Perhaps French and British anthropology are specially disposed to the anxiety of anarchy and a corollary respect for order and power. A parallel singularity would be the development of the concept of “civilization” in these countries during the late 18th century, in contrast to the German [and Russian] concept of “culture” as a total way of life. “Civilization” again entailed the presupposition of an original, brutish creature whose anti-social dispositions are gradually brought under control through a process of domestication: “the civilizing process” [Elias 1978]. Imposed on the uncouth poor, the emergent bourgeoisie, or the colonized peoples—all of whom, like the medieval serfs before them, represented the bestial-cum-fallen side of humanity relative to the bons gens—this “civilization” was a government of the untamed body, an overlay of control on a basic savagery. But to the likes of Herder, it was a Gallic affectation (of the Prussian aristocracy) by comparison with the distinctive “culture” a people inherited from ancestral traditions. Unlike the superficial “civilization,” “culture”
inhabited one’s inner being: as a way of feeling and perceiving, hence as the modes of thought, particular to each people, by which experience was conceptually constructed and emotionally sustained. Developing from inside out, to behavior, “culture” in this Herderian-Boasian perspective was indeed empowering, whereas “civilization,” as the external discipline of inner disposition, was domination.  

Everything happens as if we had been waiting for Foucault. In his dark vision of society as a totalized system of coercive power, Foucault becomes the modern prophet of the Hobbesian-cum-Judeo-Christian anthropology. Such seems to be the archaeology at issue. Yet Foucault was “a man of a thousand masks,” as one of his biographers said, so it is arguable how seriously we should take the guise he assumed to say that power arises in struggle, in war, and such a war as is of every man against every man. “Who fights whom?” he asked. “We all fight each other” (Foucault 1980:208). Critics and exegetes hardly notice Foucault’s connection to Hobbes except to repeat his own disclaimer that the idea of power he advocated was “the exact opposite of Hobbes’ project in Leviathan” (p. 97). We are enjoined to give up our fascination with sovereignty, “cut off the king's head,” free ourselves from an obsession with the institutions of state. Power is everywhere in society. It is invested in the structures and cleavages of everyday life, omnipresent in quotidian regimes of knowledge and truth. If by the Hobbesian contract the subjects constitute an omnipresent power, in the Foucauldian view an omnipresent power constitutes the subjects. All the same, when Foucault speaks of an incessant war of each against all and in the next breath alludes to a Christian divided self—“and there is always within each of us something that fights something else” (Foucault 1980:208)—one is too tempted to believe that he and Hobbes have more in common than the fact that, with the exception of Hobbes, both were bald.

The Anthropology of Providence

Vous composerez dans ce chaos fatal
Des malheurs de chaque être un bonheur général.

VOLTAIRE

Pleased with the conceit that “this is the best of all possible worlds,” the famous optimism of the 18th century was nonetheless an unhappy philosophy. Its necessary complement was the received dogma of human suffering, to which it merely added some consolation. So if the shock waves of the great Lisbon earthquake of 1755 also tumbled the belief that nature had been designed for man’s benefit, it was because this pious notion of an overarching Providence had already supposed a depressing sense of the human condition. The “fundamental and characteristic premise of the usual proof of optimism,” wrote Lovejoy, “was the proposition that the perfection of the whole depends upon, indeed consists in, the existence of every possible degree of imperfection in the parts” (1964:211). Like a celebrated beehive of the time, “every Part was full of Vice, Yet the whole mass a Paradise.”

The project of deriving a greater beneficial order from the afflictions of the human lot was an 18th-century version of Augustinian theodicy. For Augustine evil was a privation rather than God’s creation. The many and subtle degrees of finitude in sublunary things determine in a contrastive way the perfect goodness of the world—in the well-worn aesthetic metaphor, like the shadows that give form and beauty to a painting. Hence “it is good that there be evil,” as a 12th-century text put it (Hick 1966:97). And it seems fitting that in Alexander Pope’s celebration of the optimist philosophy, the goodness of the providential order is achieved in spite of pride, the original sin. At the same time, looking forward to the coming Western sciences of society, this greater harmony is realized in spite of any human knowledge, will, or reason—but rather mysteriously and mechanically, as if by an Invisible Hand:

All Nature is but Art, unknown to thee:
All Chance, Direction, which thou canst not see;
All Discord, Harmony, not understood;
All partial Evil, universal Good:
And, spite of Pride, in erring Reason’s spite,
One truth is clear, ‘WHATEVER IS, IS RIGHT!’

Adam Smith’s invocation of the Invisible Hand is the best-known instance, but classical economics is hardly the only intellectual success that can be claimed by this metaphysics of the imagined totality. The same general sense of the structure of the world informed medieval and modern natural sciences. And, on the model of providential theories of the state, the ideology reappears in modern anthropological views of “society” or “culture” as a transcendent, functional and objective order. (You will recognize the “superorganic” of Kroeber, White, and Herbert Spencer.) All these cognate concepts have the double-level structure, the heavenly and earthly cities of the neo-Platonic, Christian cosmology. They all invoke an unseen, beneficent and encompassing system of the whole that mitigates the defects and tribulations to which empirical matter is subject (cf. Ehrard 1963, vol. 1:11–12), especially the travels to which man is sub-

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36. And before Augustine the tradition goes back to Plotinus especially, whose formulation of the Chain of Being as a hierarchy of perfection entails both the Augustinian theodicy and, with certain assumptions, the optimists’ notion of the best possible world (Lovejoy 1964:61–66; Hick 1966).

37. By “partial Evil” is meant the evil in or suffered by individuals (cf. Pope 1970:133n).

38. Berkeley’s particular version of the Invisible Hand theory (or theodicy) is particularly striking for the way it necessarily counterposes a systematic abstract whole to the pains of our finite and imperfect experiences: “As to the mixture of pain or uneasiness
ject: Providence is the positive complement of human evil. It turns out that God loves those who love themselves. Life might be unbearable were it not for the imagined totality that gives purpose and solace to individual suffering or, better, makes the partial evils of an alienated existence the means of universal welfare. Thus, each person maximizing his own scarce resources.

So the higher wisdom of Western society has often been just that—a higher wisdom implied in earthly things. It is often noted that the Christian Providence is a transformation of the Aristotelian teleology of nature. Just so, from Galileo and Kepler through Newton and Einstein, early modern physicists were convinced that God could not have made the universe as disorderly as it might seem in everyday experience. Indeed, Newton held that the fixed laws of nature were edicts promulgated by God. The kinship between natural law and which is in the World, pursuant to the general laws of Nature, and actions of finite imperfect spirits: this, in the state we are at present, is indispensably necessary to our well-being. But our prospects are too narrow: we take, for instance, the idea of some one particular pain into our thoughts, and account it evil; whereas if we enlarge our view, so as to comprehend the various ends, connections, and dependencies of things, on what occasions and in what proportions we are affected with pain and pleasure, the nature of human freedom, and the design with which we are put into the world; we shall be forced to acknowledge that those particular things, which considered in themselves appear to be evil, have the nature of good, when linked to the whole system of beings” (Treatise concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge 4.135). But then, the philosophy that requires God in order to guarantee the reality of things when we aren’t looking at them is about as good an expression of the providential theory as one might find.

Again, this Christian anthropology of Providence has classical antecedents, as in Stoic philosophy: “Those things which you call hardships, which you call adversities and accused, are, in the first place, for the good of the persons themselves to whom they come; in the second place . . . they are for the good of the whole human family, for which the gods have a greater concern than for single persons” (Seneca On Providence 3.1). But, on the other hand, “The Greeks did not see the Homeric gods above them as masters and themselves below them as servants, as did the Jews. They saw, as it were, only the reflection of the most successful specimens of their own caste, that is, an ideal, not a contrast to their own nature. They felt related to them, there was a reciprocal interest, a kind of symmachia [alliance]. Man thinks of himself as noble when he gives himself such gods, and puts himself into a relationship similar to that of the lesser nobility to the higher . . .”

Christianity, on the other hand, crushed and shattered man completely, and submerged him as if in deep mire. Then, all at once, into his feeling of deep confusion, it allowed the light of divine compassion to shine, so that the surprised man, stunned by mercy, let out a cry of rapture, and thought for a moment that he carried all of heaven within him” [Nietzsche 1984:85].

Obviously, the transformation of divine to natural law meant the end of transcendent being (Cassirer 1911:45), but for all that, and even beyond the theological dispositions of Newton, Galileo, et al. [p. 42], a certain transcendence of mean experience by higher (intellectual) order, the Christian edition of Platonism, inhabits the new natural science: “Thus the new conception of nature, seen in the perspective of the history of thought, owes its origin to a double motive and is shaped and determined by apparently opposing forces. It contains both the particular and the universal, the concrete, and the factual, and the impulse toward the absolutely universal, thus it harbors the elemental impulse to hold fast to the things of this world as well as the impulse to rise above them in order to see them in their proper perspective. The desire and joy of the senses unite here with the power of the intellect to break away from all the objects of concrete experience and to risk flight into the land of possibilities” [p. 38].

For Augustine, God’s Providence was the explicit guarantee of the absolute readings of earthly things. These allegorical interpretations could be likened to the “kneeling up truth” from certain mines of Divine Providence, which is everywhere infused” [Robertson 1958:xiv, cf. On Christian Doctrine 2.40.60]. Augustine’s methods of scriptural exegesis, moreover, proved to have a certain compatibility with medieval art as well as its symbolic science—all alike in their appeal to an abstract pattern beneath the surface of things. D. W. Robertson further notes the difference between this intellectual relation to objects, words, or images and what might be called the bourgeois mode of apprehension in and as personal-bodily feeling. Referring to the figurative disposition in medieval writing and much of the symbolism in medieval art, he writes, “The function of figurative expression was not to arouse spontaneous emotional attitudes based on the personal experience of the observer, but to encourage the observer to seek an abstract pattern of philosophical significance beneath the symbolic configuration. In this respect, as in other respects, medieval art is considerably more objective than modern art, even in those instances where it is least ‘realistic’” [p. xv].

Thus Foucault highlighted the Cartesian critique of what was a fading science of resemblances: “It is a frequent habit,” says Descartes in the first lines of his Regulae, “when we discover several resemblances between two things, to attribute to both equally, even on points in which they are in reality different, that which we have recognized to be true of only one of them” [Foucault 1973:51].

Divine Providence is part of the theological continuity initiated by the apparently radical changes spoken about as the “humanization” of the Renaissance and the “secularization” of the Enlightenment—ending in the transfer of the attributes of an omnipotent Deity to a Nature at least as worthy of reverence [Becker 1932; Funderstein 1986:357–58]. For a long time despised, Nature nonetheless manifested God’s handiwork, and now it appropriated His powers—in ways that are still with us, such as the virtues for human health of whatever can be called “natural.” But then, the great medieval symbols of nature and its providential sciences had been constructed from the same cosmic premises.

Back then, in the Middle Ages, the world was still deceptive, even as man was vile. But for those who knew how to discover them, the sensible traces of God’s handiwork could be found in the objects of nature and manipulated for human benefit. Nothing was exactly what—or as bad—as it seemed. In some regard or another, anything could be a sign of the Absolute. Eco cites the affirmation of Johannes Scoto Erigena: “In my judgment there is nothing among visible and corporeal things which does not signify something incorporeal and intelligible” [Eco 1986:56–57; cf. Glacken 1967:238]. Mediated by the greater Truth and Power that otherwise mendacious things could signify, a system of providential knowledge linked these worldly objects according to certain perceptible resemblances. The walnut looks like the brain, hence it is good for headaches. Yellow and green stones could cure jaundice and liver ailments, whereas red stones were for stopping fluxes and hemorrhages. Resemblances such as those between walnuts and brains now seem arbitrary to us, bringing together things “in reality” or “objectively” quite distinct.
JEUS AND COSMIC ENTROPY IN THE NEW GUINEA HIGHLANDS

According to Glasse [1965:30], "The Huli [of the Southern Highlands of New Guinea] have little personal interest in the fate of the soul. They have no belief in judgement in the after-life, and the destination of the soul in no way depends upon a person's character or behaviour prior to death. Their views about the destination or habitation of the soul are in fact hazy and uncertain; they are willing to speculate about the whereabouts of ghosts but the question has no great significance." [The fate of those slain in battle is an exception, as their ghosts go to a desirable resting place in the sky—"about which the Huli again have few concrete notions."] That the Huli seem not to be obsessed with what will happen to them after death has been baffling especially to Christian missionaries, who find themselves frustrated by this indeterminacy of "soul beliefs" in their attempts to peddle the Good News about salvation and a fortoni the meaning of Jesus's sacrifice. Of course, what they may be up against is this worldly religion concerned with people's existence here-and-now, thus not given to speculation about the after-life. Conversion to Christianity here requires conversion to a religion of death. In the Huli case, however, the missionaries at least had the advantage of dealing with a people whose ideas about the contempullity of this world could challenge those of medieval Christianity. The problem was that the indigenous Huli cosmology included nothing like the saving grace of Divine Providence. No higher order of good could be found in earthly circumstances, no greater purpose to human suffering. On the contrary, the world was heading toward chaos and death unless people could establish appropriate exchange relationships with the ever more numerous and vicious spiritual beings (dama) who were causing the decline. This confirmed pessimism makes it possible to understand the Huli's willingness to adopt Christianity—on the condition that they could take responsibility for Jesus's death. Like many of their own traditional damal, Jesus was not so much a savior as a source of misery. His death could not make the Huli free, since they had not yet paid the compensation for it [Glasse 1965; Biersack n.d.; Allen and Frankel 1991a, b; Frankel 1986, Goldman 1993; Ballard 1992a, b].

The Huli live in a dying world. Their Weltanschauung "contains a strong sense of decline, of the deterioration of the physical earth and the decay of their culture into anarchy and immorality" [Allen and Frankel 1991a:95]. Already realized in falling yields of crops, diminishing herds of pigs, epidemic diseases, and rebellious youth, the developing entropy is an all-round disaster, eventually threatening to dissolve society in incest, fratricide, and parricide. There is a sense, however, that the fall can be reversed, as has happened before, perhaps more than once—thus a sense of recurrent cycles of destruction and renewal. Apparently evoking the distant memories of a great 18th-century volcanic explosion on Long Island off northeastern New Guinea; the renewal entails the return, effaced by ritual means, of a time of darkness (mbingi) marked by the fall of ashlike material from the sky, after which gardens, pigs, and humans would enjoy a remarkable prosperity [cf. Blong 1982, Mai 1981]. [Note that such volcanic events are not sufficient in themselves to account for the Huli world view, since this apocalyptic philosophy is shared only by a few neighboring peoples of southern New Guinea, just a fraction of those affected by the Long Island eruption (Biersack n.d.).] The return of the time of darkness is not inevitable, however, nor are its effects necessarily benign. "Huli beliefs do not adequately explain it [mbingi] for them," and much as they desire it they also fear its potential destructiveness [Glasse 1965:46]. Everything depends on a potentially fallible human agency. If Huli are unable to accomplish the prescribed rituals or to placate the malicious dama, the result will be world disaster rather than world renewal [Ballard 1992b].

Memories remain of two such ritual miscarriages in the 20th century, one of which was the crucifixion of Jesus Christ about 1925 [Frankel 1986:23-34; Allen and Frankel 1991b:271-72; Glasse 1965:46; Biersack n.d.]. As Huli recount it, a "red-skinned" boy named Bayebaye [Perfect], whom they identify also as Jesus, was killed in the course of a ritual devoted to the return of darkness, upon which his body was dismembered and distributed in people's gardens. [Chris Ballard [1992b] reports that this was a normal ritual procedure, or a normal alternative to the sacrifice of a red-skinned pig, but other accounts either leave the event unexplained or attribute it to some sort of error, as only the blood from the boy's pricked finger should have been sacrificed [Glasse 1965, Frankel 1986]. "Red-skinned," it might be noted, is the way Huli characterize white people.] Frankel relates that the names of Bayebaye and Jesus "are frequently used interchangeably," and as many Huli feel responsible for the crucifixion, "a number of attempts to give compensation to missionaries have been made" [1986:23]. The boy's mother, a woman of the Duna people [to the west], is identified as the Virgin Mary. Nothing has been reported about her immaculate conception, however, nor has she been any maternal solace to the succeeding generations of suffering mankind. On the contrary, the curse she laid in response to her son's death has brought disaster in every shape and form.

Missionaries of four Christian sects appeared among the Huli in the early 1950s and experienced considerable success. It has been suggested that the parallel between the story of Bayebaye and the killing of Jesus "is a major strand in the explanation of the Huli's enthusiasm for Christianity" [Frankel 1986:23]. But one wonders if it is not the other way round, the enthusiasm for Christianity being the reason a certain parallel—with Huli playing the role of Pilate—was devised post factum between the two traditions. Here it is important that the destruction brought by colonization preceded the advent of white men in the Southern Highlands, in the form of epidemic diseases especially. From the turn of the 19th century, these misfortunes have also been accompanied by various natural afflications, such as the prolonged drought that began in the same year as "first contact" with Europeans, 1935. Huli have explained their tribulations as due to the unleashing of malicious dama spirits from the places they were previously confined and, accordingly, they perceived the first visits of whites—including the notorious Fox brothers, prospectors whose killings of Huli fully justified the perception—as appearances of evil dama. Only later could they conclude—without much alteration of their original interpretations—that the whites wreaked havoc among them because compensation for Jesus was still unpaid [Frankel 1986:23]. "This is the time for us to die," an old man told the anthropologist. "There is not much time left to us now. The world is dry... the earth is old and worn out" [p. 24].
it was just these obscure affinities that signified an invisible Providence and—by amulets or alchemy, just as in curing—synthesized the Adamic opposition of nature and humankind. “Objectionable in itself,” the world, Huizinga remarks, “became acceptable by its symbolic purport. For every object, each common trade had a mystical relation with the most holy, which ennobled it” (1954:206).

Edmund Burke could say something similar about the origins and holiness of the State: “He who gave our nature to be perfected by our virtue willed also the necessary means of perfection: he willed therefore the State” (Burke 1939:107). Augustine’s idea of the state (or society) as a providential organization of human evil seems to echo across the centuries. The sequitur appears in certain modern academic discourses on the functionality and objectivity of society. Anthropological schools such as structural-functionalism and cultural materialism manifest a kind of naive trust in a beneficial, self-regulating social order that determines some good or utility in each and every customary practice. It is as if in society and culture everything were for the best. For structural-functionalists, the society is designed in such a way that any particular custom or relationship, however baleful or conflictual, mysteriously promotes the general good, that is, maintains the social system as constituted. Explications by class, power, or hegemony are generally more cynical expressions of the same principle. On the other hand, the materialist schools that found that Aztec cannibalism supplied people with necessary proteins or that New Guinea pig feasts kept populations from exceeding their ecological carrying capacities returned to a cheerier, if equally credulous, respect for the Invisible Hand.

As Dumont again suggests, however, this greater social wisdom, by its metamorphosis of the grubby subjectivity of human actions into an abstract collective good, has become an academic object in and for itself. In a curious parallel to the development of natural science, the providential quality of society makes it a proper object of positive anthropology—and of postmodern scorn. In this connection Dumont refers to Mandeville’s “Private Vices, Publick Benefits” argument. Mandeville’s formula recognized something not yet explicit in Hobbes: something sui generis, outside and beyond particular human subjects, ordering their particular interests. “This something,” Dumont (1977:78) explains, is the mechanism by which particular interests harmonize: a mechanism (as in Hobbes, but on an interpersonal, not a personal, level), that is, not something willed or thought by men, but something that exists independently of them. Society is thus of the same nature as the world of natural objects, a nonhuman thing or, at the most, a thing that is human only insofar as human beings are part of the natural world.

And yet the apparent liberation from theology that could imagine society under the description of a world of natural objects owed a lot to the religion that invented such a world: of pure matter, distinct from God, created by Him out of nothing.

The success of the providential principle as a theory of society, however, was no simple Tylorian “survival.” It is true that as a structure of the langue durée, the idea managed to maintain itself despite the lapse of the Roman imperial authority to which it was initially

43. “To escape from this vain, deceiving and ungenerous world is, from the bottom to the top of medieval society, the incessant project. To find the other side of the mendacious terrestrial reality—intagumenta, veils, fill medieval literature and art, and the intellectual or aesthetic technique of the Middle Ages is above all an unveiling—to find the hidden truth ... that is the main preoccupation of men of the Middle Ages” [Le Goff 1964:420].

44. Chadwick writes of Augustine: “Government was for him an exemplification of the providential principle of order imposed on the disruptive forces let loose by the Fall. . . . The domination of one man over another may be abused, but it is the lesser of two evils where the alternative is anarchy and every man for himself” [Chadwick 1986:102].

45. Vico spoke of the “eternal property that when men fail to see reason in human institutions, and much more if they see it opposed, they take refuge in the inscrutable counsels hidden in the abyss of divine providence” [New Science 1998:498]. His own recurrent recourse to Providence to account for human institutions—notwithstanding the verum factum principle—seems itself a case in point.

46. An ethnographic confirmation of Dumont’s insight comes in a recent article by Katherine Verdery (1995), which capitalizes brilliantly [if one may say so] on recent economic events in Romania by documenting the developing consciousness of an abstract total order that accompanies a novel obsession with private interests. Here the sentiment of such an impersonal social object is heightened by the contrast between a modern, money-making pyramid scheme and the ideology of agency associated with the ancien régime.

47. Burke provides a characteristic example of the naturalization of the providential social process in speaking of the ancien régime as having “that variety of parts . . . all that combination, and all that opposition of interests . . . that action and counteraction which, in the natural and in the political world, from the reciprocal struggle of discordant powers, draws out the harmony of the universe” [1939-40, emphasis added].

48. Vico’s New Science repeatedly describes how private self-interested vices are turned into social virtues by the guidance of Divine Providence. For example, the military, merchant, and governing classes were created out of “the three vices which run throughout the human race,” ferocity, avarice, and ambition, from which have thus resulted “the strength, riches, and wisdom of commonwealths” [Vico 1984:62 [New Science ¶ 132–33]]. In the Conclusion, Vico summarizes the principle: “It is true that men have themselves made this world of nations . . . but this world without doubt has issued from a mind often diverse, at times quite contrary, and always superior to the particular ends that men had proposed to themselves, which narrow ends, made means to serve under ends, it has always employed to preserve the human race upon this earth. . . .”

“The evidence clearly confirms ... the position of the political philosophers, whose prince is the divine Plato, who shows that providence directs human institutions” [p. 435 [New Science ¶ 173–91]].

The whole cosmology of the Invisible Hand was announced in the first paragraph of the first edition of the New Science, where it is said, “We wish there to be a force superior to nature . . . which is to be found solely in a God who is not that very nature itself” [in Momigliano 1977:233–54].
adapted (Pagels 1988). Dumont’s discussion [1982] of the dialectics of hierarchy engaging the state and the church through the Middle Ages helps explain why. Briefly, the church had gambled its ideal superiority by entering into a contest for temporal rule. Therefore when the state emerged victorious from this conflict it was graced with the status and functions of its holy adversary, notably including the guardianship of morality. The earthly city absorbed significant aspects of the heavenly city. If Durkheim concluded that “God” was another name for society, was this not because it was already true—that is, of his particular society? It is not that God was society deified but that society was God socialized.

The Anthropology of Reality

The invention of a pure object world occurred long before Descartes distinguished thinking things from extended things. It was also well before the reign of capital in Europe, which Marx thought put an end to “nature idolatry” and for the first time made nature “purely an object for human kind, purely a matter of utility” [1973: 409–10]. [Note for future reference the conflation of utility with objectivity—or at least objectification—which is indeed the bourgeois ideology.] But it was Christianity and before that Judaism that first disenchanted nature, rendering it merely an object for human kind many centuries before its exploitation by capital—which religion had thus prepared. Insisting upon an absolute gap between God and His creation, between worldly things and divinity, the Judeo-Christian tradition thus distinguished itself from a “paganism” it understood precisely as nature idolatry. “The deification of nature was seen as the real essence of paganism by both Christians and Jews” [Funkenstein 1986:45; cf. Feuerbach 1967:91 et passim; Berman 1981]. The ancient Hebrew religion was absolutely unique, Henri Frankfort was wont to argue, in its insistence on the absolute transcendence of God: a god beyond ontological comparison to any worldly phenomenon. God was not in the sun or stars, the rain or wind—nowhere in nature. “In Hebrew religion—and in Hebrew religion alone—the ancient bond between man and nature was destroyed” [Frankfort 1948:343].

If anything the Christian religion went on to widen the rift between man and nature by its opposition to classical pantheisms—corollary to the contemptibility of the material world that followed upon original sin. Christians had serious doctrinal problems with a God who was everywhere, as this would undermine the whole Christology [Funkenstein 1986:45]. Hence the emphasis on a creation ex nihilo, which differentiated the Faith from the emanationist cosmogonies of classical antiquity. But then, in developing this difference, Augustine unwittingly reproaches just about all other religions—including the Polynesian, the basic concepts of which he inverts as the reductio ad absurdum of the “irreligious” idea that the world is the body of God. “And if this is so,” he says, “who cannot see what impious and irreligious ideas follow, such as that whatever one may trample, he must trample a part of God, and in slaying any living creature, a part of God must be slaughtered?” [De civitate Dei 4.12]. Perhaps not coincidentally, given the resemblances between the classical Greek and New Zealand Maori cosmogonies [Schrempp 1992], Augustine most accurately describes the ritual predicament of the Maori who tramples the Earth Mother Papa, attacks the god Tāne in cutting down trees or killing birds, and consumes Rongo when he eats sweet potatoes [e.g., Best 1924, vol. 1:128–29]. Western people have been spared such blasphemy because God made the world out of nothing. “But what is my God?” Augustine asked. “I put the question to the earth. It answered, ‘I am not God, and all things on earth declared the same’ ” [Confessions 10.6]. Nature is pure materiality, without redeeming spiritual value.

Dare one claim that the determination of nature as pure materiality—absent gods, incarnate spirits, or any such nonhuman persons—is a unique Western invention? True, worldly things could represent or be signs of God, but they are not God. Nor is this differentiation of “natural” from “supernatural” the same as the nature-culture distinctions widely practiced around the world. It is the further argument that nature is only res extensa, made of nothing, lacking subjectivity. The idea, moreover, becomes the ontological counterpart of an equally singular epistemology, insofar as knowledge of nature cannot be achieved by communication and the other ways subjects understand subjects. Mediated by Adam’s Fall, knowledge of natural things is reduced to sensory experience of the obdurate matter on which humanity was condemned to lay waste its powers. Here was a cer-

49. Glacken makes the general point in a discussion of Augustine: “In the Judeo-Christian doctrine, the distinction between the Creator and the created . . . is unequivocal, as it must be: there can never be any question of the inferiority of the natural order, lovely as it is, to God. It is a distinction that lies at the root of Christian belief and in the Christian attitude toward nature: one should never become so entranced with the beauties of nature that he mistakes them for anything other than creations like himself. . . . Augustine protests that the pagan ideas of the gods start with the conception of earth as mother of the gods. The earth is no mother; it itself is a work of God. Augustine expresses contempt of and disgust with the effeminate and emasculated men consecrated to the worship of the Great Mother Earth” [Glacken 1967:196–97; see also pp. 151, 160].

50. Frankfort and Frankfort express the point even more generally in another work:

“The dominant trend of Hebrew thought is the absolute transcendence of God. Yahweh is not in nature. Neither earth nor sun nor heaven is divine, even the most potent natural phenomena are but reflections of God’s greatness. . . .

“The God of the Hebrews is pure being, unqualified, ineffable. He is holy. This means he is sui generis. . . . It means that all values are ultimately attributes of God alone. Hence all concrete phenomena are devalued. . . .

“Nowhere else do we meet this fanatical devaluation of the phenomena of nature and the achievements of man: art, virtue, social order—in view of the unique significance of the divine” [1946:367, 369].
RELATIVITY OF SUBJECT-OBJECT DISTINCTIONS

To speak of the "humanized nature" of many other peoples—and also in certain respects of Western peoples—is not to adopt the language of "participation" in the Lévy-Bruhl sense, insofar as that notion involves some mechanism of "projection" of the subject onto the object. Among other prerequisites, "mind" has to be invented, something that seems to be far from universal. The epistemological dynamics may be better exemplified by Lienhardt's (1961:149) discussion of Dinka relations to external "Powers":

The Dinka have no conception which at all closely corresponds to our popular modern conception of the "mind" as mediating and, as it were, storing up experiences of the self. There is for them no such interior entity to appear, on reflection, to stand between the experiencing self at any given moment and what is or has been an exterior influence upon the self. So it seems that what we should call in some cases the "memories" of experiences, and regard therefore as in some way interior to the remembering person and modified in their effect upon him by that interiority, appear to Dinka as exteriorly acting upon him, as even the sources from which they derived.

From this it also seems to follow (pp. 155–56) that it is not a simple matter to divide the Dinka believer, for analytic purposes, from what he believes in, and to decribe the latter then in isolation from him as the "object" of his belief. The Dinka themselves imply this when they speak of the Powers as being "in men's bodies," but also "in the sky" or in other particular places. Their world is not for them an object of study, but an active subject.

Lienhardt's explication thus inverts the usual dogmas of participation—and thus offers a more interesting way of "saving the appearances" (pp. 161–62). Cf. Barfield: "To use our European type of distinction between nature and Mind, it is rather that some men on occasion incorporate in themselves the ultra-human forces of Nature, than that they endow Nature with qualities they recognize in themselves and in human kind." Without the mediation of mind, subjective experiences of empirical intuitions will appear as attributes or "powers" of the perceived objects. Hence for Dinka the disease catches the man. The philosophy is a kind of anti-Berkeleyism, the elimination of the sensing mind leaving the external object as the essence of all "ideas."

On the possibility of nonexperiential beings, entities, and powers, see also the next box, "The Reality of the Transcendent."

tain praxis theory of knowledge, appropriate to this-worldly things. "For the Christian theologians," Gurevich writes, "labour was above all educational" (1985:261). He quotes Origen: "'God created man as a being who needs work in order that he may fully exercise his cognitive powers' "' [cf. Glacken 1967:185]. For a long time, however, this was hardly the best way of knowing, and the things thus knowable were of no great value. "Scorn all that is visible" was the great medieval injunction. As compared with the experience of the contemptible objects of a contemptible world, the higher neo-Platonic contemplation of intelligible entities could be said to continue in such guises as revelation and the medieval symbology, together with the invidious contrasts of ideal form and empirical token. But even when the embedded empiricist philosophy came out from under in the 17th and 18th centuries, most of its practitioners still understood its limitations, which were the limitations of human finitude. Some, such as the Abbé de Condillac, still knew the terrible reasons why. Before the Fall, he said (1973:109–10),

The soul could absolutely, without the aid of the senses, acquire knowledge. Before the Sin, it was in a system altogether different from that in which it is found today. Free of ignorance and concupiscence, it commanded its senses, suspended their action and modified them at will. It had ideas anterior to the use of the senses. But things changed much by its disobedience. God took from it all that empire: it became as dependent on the senses as if these were the physical cause of that of which they did but occasion, and there were for it only the knowledges that the senses transmitted to it. . . . Thus when I shall say that we have no ideas that have not come to us through the senses, it must be remembered that I speak only of the state we are in since the Sin.

As if the senses were "the physical cause of that of which they did but occasion." Here was the famous metaphysical evil—in many respects the worst affliction of all. Hobbes, Locke, Hume, and the French _Lumières_ were fully aware that if knowledge came from

51. On the praxis theory, Boas also quotes Philo-Judaearus: "For, to tell the truth, God has appointed toil for men as the source of all good and all virtue, apart from which you will find nothing fair established for the human race. For just as without light it is impossible to see, since neither colors nor eyes are sufficient for visual perception—for nature created light as a link for the two by which the eye is connected and joined to color, but in darkness the power of each is useless—in the same way also the eye of the soul cannot apprehend virtuous practices unless it makes use of will, like light, as a co-worker" [Boas 1948:12].

52. In a compendium famous in its day on _The Fall of Man; or The Corruption of Nature_ (1616), Godfrey Goodman had already argued that "any skill that today requires study and labor to acquire, 'must' have been possessed by man, innately, before the Fall, and required no laborious process of learning. Goodman's instances range from abilities like swimming to intellectual activity and human communication in general. . . . Today 'we [that is, our souls] do not receive the things themselves, but the _species_ or images of things' [p. 46]. 'Were it not, that man is faile,' we should be able to reason infallibly, the soul dealing 'directly' with 'intelligible objects' themselves' [Hepburn 1973:307].
the senses alone, we could never know the true essences of things. “We see appearances only . . . we are in a dream” [Voltaire]. Some even tried to wake us from the dogmatic slumber during which we dreamed that in seeing the appearances we were looking into things-in-themselves. But most Western philosophers—including most of the academy—reconciled themselves to a concept of “reality” that remained burdened with the conjoined imperfections of the postlapsarian epistemology, ignorance and labor. “Reality” is the sensory impressions we could obtain from the world in the course of practical engagement with it. What there is is the metaphysical complement of our bodily pleasures and pains. Even Descartes, for all his distrust of experience, could be confident of judgments based on perceptions of pleasure and pain, for God would not have deceived us in this but on the contrary gave us a decent sensory grip on the world for the sake of our own preservation [Sixth Meditation]. “As to my self,” said Locke, “I think GOD has given me assurance enough of the Existence of Things without me; since by their different application, I can produce in my self both Pleasure and Pain, which is one great concernment of my present state” [Essay concerning Human Understanding 4.11.3]. And to the skeptics who would not trust their senses but affirmed that our whole existence is just the “deluding appearances of a long Dream,” Locke had this answer [4.11.8]:

That the certainty of Things existing in rerum Naturã, when we have the testimony of our Senses for it, is not only as great as our frame can attain to, but as our Condition needs. For our Faculties being suited not to the full extent of Being, nor to a perfect, clear, comprehensive Knowledge of things free of all doubt and scruple, but to the preservation of us, in whom they are, and accommodated to the use of Life; they serve to our purpose well enough, if they will but give us certain notice of those Things, which are convenient or inconvenient to us. For he that sees a Candle burning, and hath experienced the force of its Flame, by putting his Finger in it, will little doubt, that this is something existing without him. . . . So that this Evidence is as great, as we can desire, being as certain to us, as our Pleasure or Pain; i.e. Happiness or Misery, beyond which we have no concernment, either of Knowing or Being. Such an assurance of the Existence of Things without us, is sufficient to direct us in attaining the Good and avoiding the Evil, which is caused by them, which is the important concernment we have of being made acquainted with them.

Locke, it is said, repudiated the doctrine of Original Sin [Cranston 1986:389]. Yet his own sensationalist epistemology, yielding far from perfect knowledge and constituting judgments of things through the pleasures and pains they evoke—such being all that God intended for us in “the days of this our pilgrimage” [Essay 4.14.2]—this epistemological doctrine surely (pan-) glosses the Adamic condition as a positive philosophy of empiricism.

Hobbes and many others before Locke had the same theory of the mediation of objectivity by utility, as did the French philosophers and many others in Locke’s wake.53 But how many sages then or since have realized the cultural enormities of the proposition that we know the properties of the world in virtue of how they affect our satisfactions? “Juger est sentir,” Helvétius said. The arbiter of what there is, the determinant and value of significant empirical properties, is a solipsistic project of adaptation to nature.54 Hence the long-standing equation in the native Western wisdom between “objectiv—

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53. Funkenstein calls this an “ergetic sense of knowing.” Knowing by doing, and associates it with Vico, Descartes, and Hobbes, by contrast to the contemplative ideal of many medieval and ancient philosophers [1986:290–93]. For Berman, “the equation of truth with utility, the purposive manipulation of the environment, is the Cartesian or technological paradigm” [1981:46]. See also Schmidt [1971:110–11] and Lenin [1972].

54. Nidditch writes: “The empiricism of Hobbes [1688–1679], Locke [1632–1704], and Hume [1711–76] should be seen as a compound of several doctrines, not all of them exclusively epistemological. Among these are, as a first approximation: that our natural powers operate in a social and physical environment that we seek to adapt ourselves to, and that the variable functioning of these powers in that environment is the agency by which we get and retain all our ideas, knowledge, and habits of mind; that our capacities of conscious sense-experience and of feeling pleasure or discomfort are primary natural powers . . .” [1975:vIII].
When Jesuit missionaries installed themselves in southern China in 1583, they opened a cultural debate of cosmological proportions with the Confucian literati. As Jacques Gernet observes in his fascinating account of the confrontation, China and the Christian Impact (1985), the Western and Eastern intellectuals differed not just on particular points but fundamentally—ontologically. The missionaries “found themselves in the presence of a different kind of humanity” (1985:247). Common ground could perhaps be found in the relatively superficial resemblances between the Christian God and the Chinese concept of Heaven. But the resemblances would end abruptly with the further Western distinction between the Creator and the creature. Nor could the scholar-gentry recognize the whole suite of classical Western dualisms complementary to this basic ontological divide: between mind and body, self and world, spiritual and material, rational and sensible. “The mode of action [the Dao] of Heaven and Earth can be summed up in a word,” said Huang Zhou. “It is not double” (1985:205).

Mateo Ricci understood well that this Chinese sense of the unity—indeed, consubstantiality—of Heaven, Earth, and the 10,000 creatures rendered the doctrines of original sin and inherent evil impossible. In The True Meaning of the Master of Heaven, Ricci introduced a Chinese scholar who claimed that the Master of Heaven is “within every being and is one with it. This encourages men not to behave badly so as not to tarnish their basic goodness, . . . not to harm others so as not to insult the Sovereign on High, who is within them.” But this blasphemy infuriates the Western literatus, who declares it the worst mistake he ever heard. “To say that the creatures and their creator are identical is an arrogant declaration of the devil Lucifer” (Gernet 1985:154). From such Jesuit texts the Chinese concluded that the Westerners detested life, an attitude that had to be the very opposite of the true wisdom the missionaries claimed to be expounding. “The Barbarians say: ‘I believe in eternal life.’ . . . It is easy to see from this that they have understood absolutely nothing about the meaning of the word ‘life’” (p. 208, citing Xu Dashou).

What Ricci did understand about human life appears in a long disquisition in The True Meaning of the Master of Heaven on the pains of earthly existence. Such profound misery was proof that man was an exile in this world. “Who is ever contented with what he has and does not seek outside for more? If men were given all the riches and all the peoples of the world, they would still not be satisfied. The fools!” (Gernet 1985:170). Tongrong, a Buddhist monk, observed that the Jesuits had no right to thus censure men for being discontent with their lot, since according to the missionaries such was their God’s will. And of course various Chinese scholars came up with numerous permutations on the question—long rehearsed in the West as well—how a God so good could have let Adam and Eve fall into sin. He should have made the ancestors of humanity “supremely wise and quite exceptional,” wrote the author of A pithy Remark on the Distinction between the Doctrines. “Why were the individuals called Yadang and Ewa such bad people?” (p. 232). Xu Dashou asked, if the Master of Heaven went to so much trouble to produce his first heirs and then incited them to become the first criminals, “is that behaviour worthy of a being so divine and holy?” (p. 236). And among the many who commented on the disproportion between the first crime and the punishment, Fabian Fucan wrote in 1620 from Japan (p. 236):

A holy law forbade Adam and Eve to eat the macan [a Portuguese term used in Japan to denote a kind of persimmon]. It is really the height of absurdity! It is like setting out to fool an old woman or gull a child. A persimmon could not possibly be a direct or indirect cause in an affair as important as attaining the highest Heaven or else falling into hell. In all the five prohibitions and ten laws of Buddha and in all the Buddhist codes of discipline, I have never found any precept that warned against persimmons.

But it was not the Buddhist classics so much as the continuing Chinese tradition of the substantial identity of Heaven and Earth that moved the literati to reject the Christian pessimism. This identity was the basis of the contrastive Confucian optimism to the effect that the seed of good is in every man, so that with the proper nurture—as by the mediation of the imperial virtue or the example of the sage—people could reproduce in their own being the beneficent and peaceful order of Heaven. Tranquility and goodness being the objective of earthly life, even as souls were annihilated after death, the doctrine was doubly opposed to the Christian dogma: life as becoming good rather than bound to evil. So, as Gernet recounts (p. 146), it was indispensable for the Jesuits to get the Chinese to understand that the rational soul was of a substance radically different from that of the body and inanimate things, and that this soul was the exclusive privilege of mankind. Such ideas were in contradiction with their entire philosophy. For the Chinese, the universe was composed of one single substance, so everything in it was a matter of combinations and degrees, the realities of the world being—to use our terminology—all more or less spiritual or material. The spirit of man was held to be more subtle and sharp than that of animals but not different in substance. Ricci had poured scorn on such a mad idea. He writes: “If I were to tell foreign kingdoms that in China there are educated men who say that animals, plants, metals and stones are all intelligent and of the same kind as man, they would be dumfounded.”

In the end, the Jesuits concluded that the Chinese were materialists, since they considered “brute matter” and Heaven to be all of the same substance. The Chinese literati for their part concluded that the Jesuits were materialists, “since they deprived the universe of its invisible forms, turning it into brute matter directed from outside and lacking the spontaneous intelligence that all creatures display” (p. 203).

ity” and “rationality” [or, it may be, “practical rationality”]. The objectivity of objects—their relevant perceptible features—is factored by corporeal well-being. It is an objectivity for us, an objectivity of our happiness.

Just so, the initial stages of the Freudian “reality principle,” involving the separation of ego from external objects [as from the mother’s breast] by differentiated sensations of pleasure and pain, make up a psychoanalytic version of the Hobbesian epistemology. Displacing the sensory economics of objectivity from the state of nature to the state of infancy, certain passages of Civilizatio n and Its Discontents seem to rehearse the opening chapters of Leviathan—leading up to the same antithe-
sis between this species of individual rationality and the cultural order. Taking the same psychoanalytic premises to a providential anthropological conclusion, Geza Roheim came up with what seems in many respects the quintessential Western characterization of culture: “the sum total of efforts which we make to avoid being unhappy” [Kroeber and Kluckhohn n.d. [1952]:209].

In sum, the historical-cum-logical presupposition of empirical understanding is the lapsed Adam, the limited and suffering individual in need of the object, who thus comes to know it sensually, by the obstacles or advantages it offers to his happiness. Perception and satisfaction are recurrent aspects of an embodied theory of knowledge that seems the appropriate philosophical corollary of the transfer of enchantment from nature to capital.

The Sadness of Sweetness

Man harbors too much horror; the earth has been a lunatic asylum for too long.

NIETZSCHE, The Genealogy of Morals

The body, then, has had to bear the structures of society in a particularly intense and notably painful way. This is the point I wanted to make about the archaeology of Sweetness and Power. At a certain period in Western history all of human society and behavior came to be perceived, popularly as well as philosophically, through the master trope of individual pleasures and pains. Again as in Leviathan, everything came down to the simple and sad idea of life as movement towards those things that made one feel good and away from those things that hurt. I say “sad” because anyone who defines life as the pursuit of happiness has to be chronically unhappy. For too long now this has been the prevailing sentiment—that “tis uneasiness which is the chief if not the only spur to Humane Industry and Action,” precisely not the pleasure we take in things but the pain we feel in their absence [Locke Essay 2.20.6].

In a recent book called Sin and Fear, Jean Delumeau provides an extensive historical catalogue of the miseries of the human condition in which European authors have wallowed, especially since the 13th century. The dolors Delumeau recounts are too many and varied to repeat here. But somehow the observation of an obscure 17th-century moralist, Pierre Nicole, seems best to sum up this history of sadness: “Jesus,” he said, “never laughed” [Delumeau 1990:296]. Jesus never laughed. Soon enough proving that everyone was unhappy would become one of the major satisfactions of French philosophy. Pain, said d’Alembert [1963:10–11], is “our most lively sentiment; pleasure hardly ever suffices to make up to us for it”:

In vain did some philosophers assert, while suppressing their groans in the midst of sufferings, that pain was not an evil at all. . . . All of them would have known our nature better if they had been content to limit their definition of the sovereign good of the present life to the exemption from pain, and to agree that, without hoping to arrive at this sovereign good, we are allowed only to approach it more or less, in proportion to our vigilance and the precautions we take.

This sad thought was penned about the time when, as Sid Mintz has taught, Western people were learning to make the Industrial Revolution tolerable by getting hooked on the “soft drugs” of sugar and tea, coffee, chocolate, and tobacco [Mintz 1985]. None of the beverages in this list were sweetened in their countries of origin. All, however, were taken with sugar in Europe from the time of their introduction. It is as if the sweetened bitterness of the tea could produce in the register of the senses the kind of moral change people wished for in their earthly existence—“the days of this our pilgrimage.”

Yet as Mintz [1993:269] has remarked of the meliorative consumption that continues into modern times—“retail therapy,” as it is sometimes called—all this does not entirely dispel our guilt [or should we not say our original sin?]:

It is not difficult to contend that contemporary American society, even while consuming material goods at an unprecedented pace, remains noticeably preoccupied by the moral arena in which sin and virtue are inseparable, each finding its reality in the presence of the other. We consume, but we are not, all of us and always, by any means altogether happy about it. . . . The feeling that in self-denial lies virtue, and in consumption sin, is still powerfully present.

Perhaps we can understand now why Mintz’s work on sweetness has produced such a concentrated rush of intellectual energy, especially among anthropologists. At the same time that it epitomizes and synthesizes fundamental cultural themes in Western history, it reveals the historical relativity of our native anthropology.
Western science is Western science, imbued with native Western ideas which can hamper the understanding of its object. In a book on the concept of nature and its history, the German philosopher Georg Picht [1989] shows, for example, that natural science is founded upon three basic premises: the idea of the absolute epistemological priority of the subject [Descartes], the idea of motionless identity or being [Parmenides], and the idea of the indispensability of conceptual thinking [Aristotle]. According to Immanuel Kant, these principles are absolute and timeless. Picht, however, shows that they are a product of European history. Should we decide to call them into question, modern science would lose the ground under its feet [Bargatzky 1993].

Picht draws our attention to the ontological premises on which Western science in general has been founded. In the same vein, Sahlins points to certain Judeo-Christian premises which inspire “native Western anthropology” and bedevil our understanding of other peoples. He deserves praise for his courage in reminding us that anthropology, too, is first and foremost a Western enterprise—a fact which tends to be repressed today, when the political-correctness craze is paralyzing a discipline which has not yet recovered from the vertigo of postmodern Dadaism.

As Sahlins shows, the human sciences since the Age of Enlightenment have tried in vain to exorcise theology. Our “native Western anthropology” is so imbued with basic Western Judeo-Christian ideas that the attempt to rid it of them is tantamount to abolishing anthropology itself. Nevertheless, the practitioners of a discipline most of whom are said to be either atheists or agnostics need not despair. As the saying goes, ‘If you can’t fight them, join them.’ The fact that Judeo-Christian notions inhabit academic anthropology or the social sciences in general does not in itself render invalid everything that has been built upon that foundation, as Sahlins himself seems to suggest in the section titled “The Anthropology of Power”: “Why, then, do we have this oppressive sentiment of society as a system of power and constraint, counterposed to our inner desires and secret thoughts? Given that biologically we are human beings only in potentia...society might be better conceived as a means of empowering people rather than subduing them.”

This is exactly the point of view elaborated by the German sociologist Arnold Gehlen [1940, 1956, 1957] since the 1940s in a series of influential books. Gehlen proceeds from the biological fact that we are humans only in potentia and creates an affirmative theory of institutions which conceives the family, society, the state, and religion as institutions empowering people, giving them dignity, rather than subduing them. Paradoxically, the impact of Gehlen’s “enormously important” theory of institutions has been confined to the German-speaking countries, probably because it is closely linked with an attack on the “Enlightenment” thinking which has dominated social thought in much of the English-speaking world [Dunlop 1994:367]. Since the 1970s, for example, the North American intelligentsia has adopted Gehlen’s antagonist, Jürgen Habermas, as one of its heroes—the proponent of a philosophy of emancipation from “oppressive” traditional institutions! This circumstance is related to the state of affairs that Sahlins deals with, and I will return to it later.

Sahlins shows how the Judeo-Christian tradition of the absolute perfection of God and the radical wickedness of man became transmuted, via St. Augustine and Adam Smith, into the modern “anthropology of Providence” which professes faith in a beneficial, self-regulating social order that mitigates the defects of human finitude, thus realizing a “greater harmony” in spite of any human knowledge, will, or reason. I would like to add only that in what Roger Kessing [1974] has labeled “cultural adaptationism” culture theories Sahlins’s “Invisible Hand” appears disguised as an all-embracing ecosystem [Bargatzky 1984].

A scholar who dares to deal with important topics of such dimensions within the space assigned to an article should not be subjected to pedantic criticism for having failed to be more comprehensive here or there. Sahlins himself admits to having given insufficient attention to alternative traditions of the general Judeo-Christian worldview. Alas, because of this neglect, his argument falls short on one crucial point. Like many before him, Sahlins retells the tale that the Judeo-Christian tradition, insisting upon an absolute gap between God and His creation, is responsible for the desecration of nature, rendering it merely an object for human exploitation which reached its climax under capitalism. This academically fashionable theory is, however, at best a historical half-truth [Dubois 1974].

Erosion, the destruction of plant and animal species, excessive exploitation of natural resources, deforestation, and man-made ecological disasters have occurred at all times and all over the world and are not peculiar to the Judeo-Christian tradition [cf. Bargatzky 1986:56-57, 139-40; Bennett 1976:78 n. 11, 134]. In addition, the Judeo-Christian idea of man as an imperfect creature does not necessarily lead to the disenchantment of nature and the devaluation of the body, which is, after all, God’s temple. There is a long tradition of love for life and nature, ranging from Psalm 104 to the Franciscan reverence for and the Benedictine stewardship of nature. What is more, the love between God and His human creatures has been expressed in erotic imagery from the Song of Solomon through Alanus ab Insulis to Hildegard of Bingen and Donatello, to list but a few examples. St. Augustine’s teachings represent but one of the many variant ideas created during the more than 3,000 years of a multiculturaly impregnated Judeo-Christian history. The question we have to face up to is this: Why has this particular strand of theological thought gained such prominence?
in the past 500 years? Lack of space prevents me from being more explicit, but I suggest that capitalism has created the intellectual environment suitable for the efflorescence of a doctrine which celebrated individual need and greed as the ultimate sources of social virtue. Christianity, then, did not create capitalism, but capitalism has promoted a version of Christianity adapted to its needs.

At present, however, capitalism has no more use for Christianity. It is much better served by enlightened and well-meaning intellectuals who are devoted to undermining, through permanent "cultural critique," the very institutions in our societies which stand in the way of the final expansion of an unrestrained capitalism. Our consumption of sugar will increase in the future, I dare say.

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Too humbly, Sahlins introduces his excellent paper as the work of a tourist, but it provides an orientation map for all of us wishing to tour that little-visited land, Western cosmology. Since anthropological accounts of other cultures have been so influenced by this cosmology, students embarking on any anthropological program would do well to familiarize themselves with it first.

This "map," however, leaves out an important detail: the unusual alterity of the Western world [see Fabian 1983]. Sahlins touches on this issue in his section on "the anthropology of reality," but it would have needed to be further elaborated to make the point. It is too simplistic—and itself typical of Western alterity—to characterize indigenous "reality" as simply the reversal of our own: a world not of "objects" but "subjects" [be these gods, incarnate spirits, or nonhuman persons]. Such a characterization universalizes our own conceptual opposition—in "finding" it reversed in other cultures—rather than pinpointing its uniqueness.

Sahlins does not trace the history of Western alterity back to the mythical, biblical roots of the Judeo-Christian tradition as he acutely does for other Western cosmological "monuments," though it can be suggested that Western alterity is authorized by Genesis. Genesis provides two versions of man's creation. In the first one (Genesis 1), God created man and woman, together with other animals, on the last day of Creation. In the second version (Genesis 2), the basis of the Fall's story, however, God created Adam [man], planted for him a garden, and, for Adam not to be alone [18], created, further, birds and animals [19]. Adam, however, named the latter; he classified rather than socialized with them, separating them from himself and from each other [20]. God then created Eve from Adam's own flesh and bones—that is, from Adam's own essence. Adam knew [yadaa] her, which in the biblical sense of the word means that he sexually related to her, through the body. This is about separating beings into essential categories rather than socially relating to them. This motif reappears in further biblical stories, notably the Tower of Babel. Thus, as Sahlins points out, Adam "proved himself the world's first . . . philosopher" but a philosopher of a particular kind: the first one to deny what Johannes Fabian has called "coevalness." In many other cosmologies, if not in all, the accent is put, rather, on social relationships [cf. Strathern 1988].

This missing detail supports the centerpiece of Sahlins's thesis: a Western-specific epistemology according to which knowledge is best gained through sensations of pleasure and pain. In a world seen as made of separated, disconnected members, one learns about the other not through communication but rather through impressions on one's own disconnected self, one's own mind and body. An "anthropology of alterity" would add to but not alter the gist of Sahlins's thesis.

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A number of factors have brought about something of a deepening crisis in anthropology, and, interestingly, these factors are not at all the same ones that exercised us a generation ago: the disappearance of traditional "tribal" societies, debates about the relationship of anthropology to sociology and, indeed, to other disciplines such as linguistics [which, at a time when Lévi-Strauss was considered a force to be reckoned with, was still seen as having made theoretical advances well ahead of those achieved by anthropology], and the feeling of a distinct lack of welcome on the part of the governments of developing countries which once provided the environment for most anthropological fieldwork. New challenges have arisen, largely unforeseen at that time: feminism and its sometimes radical challenges to the epistemology of traditional anthropology, postcolonial discourses, deepening ecological and economic crises in many parts of the world, and the rise of non-Western forms of religious fundamentalism, which, whatever their political implications, pose substantial ontological alternatives to the hegemony of Western scientism.

The last time I heard Sahlins speak was at the decennial conference of the Association of Social Anthropologists at Oxford in 1993. That conference was interesting to me because of the pervasive air of uncertainty in the plenary sessions where issues of the nature and future of the discipline were debated combined with a dogged adherence to tradition in many of the working sessions. This was an interesting contradiction in itself and one made more fascinating by the fact that the solutions proffered in the plenaries were mostly of the order of encouraging an interest in cybernetics, in postmodernism, or in the expression of traditional questions in hyper-politically-correct language. What was not then and is still rarely addressed systematically from within the discipline is the epistemology and ontology of
“Western” social thought, which I assume in this context means mainstream academic anthropology especially as taught and practised in the main university departments of North America and Europe. It is precisely this problem that Sahlins refreshingly addresses in this essay, and while I have doubts about subsuming so much under “Western” (a good deal of French anthropology, for instance, takes a somewhat different epistemological tack from that of much North American or British anthropology, which is presumably why much of it is not read or taken seriously in those places), it is a very useful, indeed, essential exercise to stand back and examine the deep-level assumptions which have formed at least major parts of the contemporary discipline.

While sociologists have experienced the emergence of the “sociology of sociology,” anthropologists have but rarely applied their own techniques of cultural analysis to themselves. Furthermore, they have rarely [with some major exceptions, such as Louis Dumont] seen as significant in their own societies those features of life which they view as fundamentally influencing social organization and ontological conceptions in others, in this case specifically religion, which Sahlins places at the center of his analysis. The deep influence of Christianity not only in creating social institutions which have dominated historical life in the West but, even more significant, in creating cosmological conceptions including images of the self, a model of the relationship between self and nature, and a theory of the inevitability of miscommunication in human interactions and of the nonperfectability of human institutions has profoundly influenced the Western psyche. The holistic, one can hardly imagine Freud, for instance, despite his own Jewishness, appearing in a non-Christian milieu. Indeed, his ideas have proved singularly unattractive in cultural environments of a totally different kind—in Japan, for instance, where although his work is perfectly well known it is neither practiced nor taken seriously except by a tiny minority, usually those who have been exposed to a Western/Christian environment.

Sahlins’s essay seems to me to stand at an especially interesting historical juncture the full implications of which he does not seem to have worked out in this enormously rich and delightfully entertaining paper. As an anthropologist of Western anthropology but someone who has never actually worked systematically on the West, in many ways Sahlins situates himself within the very discourse that he is examining. But whereas Dumont envisions, at least implicitly, an alternative anthropology deriving from his reading of Indian society, Sahlins is not willing here to take that step as some have, deriving from his reading of Indian society, Sahlins is not willing here to take that next step as even Marx, with his own distinctive theory of the relationship between ideology and economics, was. While this is a paper far too rich in detail to be adequately debated in one brief comment by a single commentator, this is ultimately the question that Sahlins raises for me. Insofar as this critique of Western cosmology can be taken as valid, where do we go from here? Is anthropology (and presumably with it a lot of the rest of the Western intellectual legacy) to be abandoned, or can these questions be asked in new ways? The real issue in this essay is the possibility of transcending the Enlightenment. The classical Western response to this is to start to talk about postmodernism. Epistemologically, however, most postmodernist thinking is simply an extension of modernist thinking. Are we trapped in language and in power [common views which, I am delighted to see, Sahlins criticizes]?

The answer, I believe, lies in the very central explanatory element in Sahlins’s model—religion. If it is the religious cosmology of Christianity that has formed the epistemologies of the West, then one would reasonably suppose that even the most radical-seeming Western alternatives [postmodernism, poststructuralism, and their immediate predecessors modernism, Marxism, structuralism, and psychoanalysis] derive from this basic source and thence from one another: Althusser [remember him!] from Marx via structuralism, Lacan from Freud, and so on. Reading this paper in Japan, however, makes me think that the next step is the comparative development of Sahlins’s model. Christianity and to a great extent Judaism and Islam share a cosmology. Any anthropology based on these will likewise have much in common philosophically, and so too will economic systems deriving from them. Buddhism and Shinto, however, have radically different worldviews. While Shinto is a form of vitalism—an approach which contains views quite antithetical to Western science in its older positivist guise, among them the permeability of the boundary between human and animal and the animate nature of all the manifestations of nature including such entities as rocks. Buddhism is even more radical in its epistemological consequences. Fundamental questions such as the identity of the self, the relationship of the body to the mind, the place of nature in the constitution of human individuals and of society, and the nature of logic and of science are there addressed in a way that allows the formulation of an alternative cosmology. These statements should not, of course, be taken as a call to religious conversion! Rather, they are intended to suggest that the way out is not to enlarge the prison house but to build a more spacious mansion next door, once having seen that the prison walls are an illusion. I hope I am not misrepresenting him, but this, given the thrust of Sahlins’s argument and the central place of religion within the argument, seems to be the most outstanding implication of his provocative piece.

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“Is anthropology indissolubly linked to the West, its birthplace?” asks the French anthropologist Godelier [1995]. Continuing in this vein, Sahlins shows how anthropology goes back to the cosmology constructed on the basis of the sin committed by Adam when he agreed to bite into the apple proffered by Eve. Man has ever since had to atone for his Fall if he is deservedly to experience satisfaction. This atonement to which human be-
ings are henceforth constrained determines their action on their environment—nature, their fellow human beings, and themselves—in the form of a cosmology with a strong focus on the utilitarian, a cosmology that has become characteristic of Western societies.

In an exceptionally brilliant interpretation, Sahlins shows the development of such a cosmology in Judeo-Christian religions, philosophy, and, in many respects, anthropology. As a sociologist, I leave it to the professional anthropologists, philosophers, and historians of ideas to assess the meaning and rigour of this interpretation. In the following I instead offer some comments on the lessons I have drawn from this exegesis of utilitarianism, of which capitalism is the most current expression. The capitalist economy in fact subscribes to this utilitarianism to the point that it has proved to be the culture par excellence of such a worldview.

In this neoliberal era for Western societies it is first of all interesting to note that the economy is also a culture—it is grounded in a cosmology structured in relation to the “environment” and, thus, being. We might even speak of an ontology of the economy. Such considerations conjure up an entirely different meaning for economic constraints—market “necessities” which today appear in these societies in forms which are supposedly objective but nevertheless prove to have an appearance necessary to the functioning of capitalism. Lukacs suggests in this regard that “these objective forms, which sprout just as inevitably from the soil of capitalism, all be seen as ideas necessarily held by the agents of the capitalist system of production” [Lukacs 1971:13–14]. In other words, these objective forms appear as a common meaning for people belonging to these societies. They are a product, in Sahlins’s expression, of their “native anthropology.”

Anthropology emerged in the wake of this culture, and the way in which its goal and objective were defined was marked by this culture. Sahlins’s exposition leaves no doubt in this regard. But the history of anthropology attests in a more general sense to methods capable of creating a distance with respect to this culture and, indeed, this utilitarian cosmology. In fact, although the goal of studying other cultures is specifically linked to Western culture, anthropology has nonetheless attempted to distance itself from this culture by implementing methods designed for this purpose. These methods have enabled anthropologists to conduct field studies from which they have learned a great deal; they have enabled them to recognize the relativity of their culture and thus to consider it, in light of this distance, as an object from which they could remain detached.

Its methodology has therefore helped anthropology define its goal and its objective on another level than that of the appearance which society immediately presents to its actors in the form of a utilitarian cosmology. Anthropology can thus clearly show how society, nature, and, in short, the environment exist for their actors only when linked to a culture and, more broadly, to a cosmology through which it is given a common meaning. This common meaning is in fact the native anthropology mentioned by Sahlins. It is, in short, a sum of knowledge, the practical knowledge that actors call upon in their immediate actions on their environment, their society. According to Giddens, this knowledge produces ontological security. This refers to most human beings’ confidence in “the continuity of their self-identity and in the constancy of the surrounding social and material environments of action” [Giddens 1990:92]. We might go even farther and posit that this knowledge constitutes a “theory,” a practical theory in the sense that it is on the basis of this theory that all human beings control their actions on the environment, society, and, indirectly, themselves.

Anthropology, like sociology, moreover, is also a sum of knowledge but of another type. By definition, it has no practical goal: its ultimate aim is to show how this “practical theory” comprises human beings’ actions on their environment in order to explain the latter. To do so, anthropology is compelled to take note of this “practical theory.” It is in fact by assessing its relativity that action can be explained in terms of anthropological knowledge, which maintains that in Western societies this action is closely linked to a utilitarian culture or cosmology.

This practical theory or knowledge is displayed through language, the “mystery” of which anthropologists must penetrate, as Sahlins notes. It is by clarifying the content of the language through which meaning is commonly assigned to action that the action can be explained by knowledge which does not present itself in the form of obvious fact.

By showing today, in this neoliberal era, that the capitalist economy has been structured by an entirely relative culture, anthropology has proven its great usefulness or utility—utility that in many ways runs counter to the cosmology of Western societies.

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Mintz [1985] mainly explored the Western side of the story in modern world history, that produced by the West in relation to the rest of the world. Though his approach is similar to that of the Annales school as a history of totality, the difference is that Mintz seemed to place the conjunction of the West and the rest in the center of his analysis. Unlike the world-system theorists, however, in the course of his analysis of the importance of sugar, tea, and coffee, the Western delicacies in developing capitalism in modern world history, he did not deal with these things simply as objects of an enforced worldwide division of labor. Instead, he “dared to take on capitalism as a cultural economy.”

Sahlins’s exploration amounts to a “reverse anthropology,” an effort which Roy Wagner (1975:31), who originally used such terms as “invention,” “convention,” and “objectification” in the analysis of culture (though some of the recent “objectificationists” have tended to “appropriate” its meanings to imply the “operation” of culture), referred to as “literalizing the metaphors
of modern industrial civilization from the standpoint of tribal history." His academic commitment has been to describe the other side of the story, that produced by the rest of the world in response to the appearance and encroachment of the West in modern world history.

What is common to the two is that both pay considerable attention to the formation of the meanings of things and events—in the processes of "intensification" and "extensification" in the case of Mintz and in the process of continuity and change (or, rather, continuity in change) in the case of Sahlins. Both go beyond culture as an encompassing entity with "a transcendent, functional and objective order" [in contrast to modern anthropological approaches such as evolutionism, functionalism, and structural-functionalism] to consider the important roles which actors in each society play in the transformation of meanings.

In addition to reverse anthropology, Sahlins's attention is here directed to Mintz's side of the story but in the context of a search for the origin and history of Western cosmology. He raises this issue not just as an object of self-reflection but as "the native anthropology of Western cosmology." Focusing on the analysis of mainstream scholarly "discourse," his "archaeological" exploration, which is a metascience, extends not just to the origin of the modern world system or even to the Enlightenment but as far back as to the Fall. In the cosmology of the West, with God being absolutely transcendent and nature being pure materiality, reality for mankind is achieved through sensory impressions. Needs deriving from eternal human insufficiencies are subjectively experienced as pain, but Providence, "the imagined totality, gives purpose and solace to individual suffering." From Providence, human misery is recontextualized into the "positive science of making the best of eternal insufficiencies": Economics based on an "invisible hand of God," which is later "mystified" in the idea of "rational choice," making the cosmos a capitalist world order. In addition, modern anthropology projects the Western notion of a self-regulating social order onto non-Western others. In fact, however, even "bodily satisfactions are specified in and through cultural-symbolic values."

Texts from Sahlins's base, Oceania, and from China are occasionally inserted into the flow of the analysis of native Western discourse which delineates its cosmology, contrasting these others' views on the cultural construction of need, the nature of human beings and animals, the principle of social structure based on the primordial human condition, the world after death and the relationship between the natural and the supernatural, the subject-object relationship, the relationship between nature and mind, the reality or importance of transcendent objects, and the evaluation of humanity. Ontological divisions based on the distinction between the Creator and the creature in the West, such as mind and body, self and world, spiritual and material, rational and sensual, are explicated and contrasted with their fundamental unity in the other worldviews. Sahlins, however, clarifies not only the cultural differences between the West and the others but also the cultural continuity of the West.

Starting from the position of the "transcendent" West, Sahlins explores the non-West's interpretation and accommodation of the West in terms of non-Western cosmology (such as Hawaiian priests' of Captain Cook) and arrives at a relativization of the West, including its interpretation of the non-West in terms of Western cosmology [modern anthropology]. This relativization emerges not simply from comparison [from a "transcendent" position] but from hermeneutic reflection on the historical process of development of the "transcendent" West.

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Sahlins's tour de force invites a minor act of resistance—asking for a cup of coffee with "no sugar—salt, please." For one who comes from a society in which sugar in the form of sticky buns and doughnut icing is the cultural glue tying the society together, Sahlins's "native anthropology" is at once illuminating and provoking. On the one hand, it illuminates from the point of view of comparative ethnography the relativity and pervasiveness of our notions of man, nature, and society. The lines of thought ascribed in social theory to Adam Smith or his "fabulous" predecessor Bernard Mandeville can in fact be traced to the basic mythical texts of Judeo-Christian culture. Theory thus seems to be very much based on folk models of the longue durée. This is the way I have had to read Sahlins's article: not as an ideal-historical analysis of the Western social and philosophical tradition but as a piece of thematically oriented historical ethnography.

As for the need for salt instead of sugar, my comments mainly concern a sidetrack of Sahlins's article: the conception and consequences of his interpretation of the concept of culture underlying much of the folk model described and anthropology in general. Sahlins has several uses for the concept of culture. In its Herderian sense, culture sets Helen Keller free, enabling her to express herself through language, and becomes lived, inner reality. In the modern anthropological sense, it is a "symbolic tradition" which at worst takes the form of a superorganic, a place outside and above the individual. Emancipation and agency in this kind of culture would require the ability "to shed shackles of the past, thereby permitting a transformative attitude towards the future" [Giddens 1991:211].

Is the difference between these extremes really so great? In his discussion of "The General Society of the Human Race" Jean-Jacques Rousseau takes up the question, claiming that "if the general society existed...it would...be a corporate being [personne morale] with its own qualities distinct from those of the particular beings who constitute it" (Rousseau 1993:172). The
character of this moral person would, however, be not
that of the monstrous Leviathan but more reminiscent
of life before the Fall: “And the whole earth was of one
language, and of one speech . . . And the Lord said,
Behold, the people is one, and they have all one lan-
guage” (Genesis 11:1, 6). This is exactly what Rousseau
supposed, too: “There would be universal language
which nature would teach to all men.” Happiness would
not be the transformation of private vices into public
benefits, but “public felicity, far from being established
on the happiness of the individuals, would itself be the
source of that happiness” [Rousseau 1993:171].

Now, where do we find these kinds of “general societ-
ies”? Rousseau claims that we find them only in the
minds of philosophers, and Sahlin adds to the group a
few anthropologists and other social theorists. Rous-
seau’s general society foreshadows Victor Turner’s commu-
nitases, in which “society is seen as a seamless and
structureless whole, rejecting alike status and contract
. . . eschewing private property . . . and relying on na-
ture’s bounty to supply all needs” [Turner 1969:135].
The subsumption of individuality into the communitas
is in fact an escape from and experience of Providence,
be it the Invisible Hand of the capitalistic economy or
the “modern anthropological view . . . of ‘society’ or ‘cul-
ture’ as transcendent, fundamental and objective or-
der.”

The experience of communitas and thus the deriv-
a of happiness from “public felicity” (or social soli-
darity—God socialized) can be found in the transcen-
dent objective order of the anthropological notion of
“sharedness” of culture but also in its predecessor, the
Herderian Kultur. For Herder [1964], Droysen [1937],
List [1910], and von Ranke [n.d.] German culture was
above all a Geist specific to a certain nation. Thus the
nation was a Seelische Gemeinschaft the “sharing” of
which was the basis of the happiness of its members.
The primacy of this spiritual community was, of course,
the basis of the emancipatory role of German Kultur
during the last century, but the very same culture con-
cept, transferred into American anthropology by Franz
Boas, led him to ask about the relationship between an
individual and his culture and the ability of “the strong
individual” to “free himself from the fetters of conven-
tion” [Boas 1982:638]. So even behind Herder there is a
Leviathan which imposes upon all of us the role of Ahah,
the captain of the Pequod, and his mission of killing the
monstrous whale [Melville 1994]. This mission of
emancipating the individual continues in the social sci-
ences today [see Giddens 1991:210].

Attempts to free oneself from the inhibitions imposed
by convention—attempts to escape Providence—and
their theoretical formulations are very much seen in cul-
tural terms. Sahlin himself speaks in other contexts of
the importance of “culturalism” as one of the most
significant phenomena of modern world history [1993a;
1995:112]. But when he rejects the widespread disease of
culture addiction which ascribes agency to “culture of
addiction” and the most varied kinds of social groups or
phenomena exactly through their unique culture, “the
panic about the [culture] concept itself” [p. 13] begins
to come to mind. The standard social science practice
of reducing culture to similarities, Rousseau’s universal
languages, and the consequent shared understanding
within a “culture” or the tendency of communitas to
reduce “seeming” to “being” deprives the anthropologi-
cultural concept of its dynamics. The implementa-
tion of cultural order in a world of complete fit between
functional parts of society would not be a creative act,
and the same can be said of the stale individuality in a
culture of “shared values and meanings,” that is, simi-

Therefore, I would like to add salt to my coffee just
to demonstrate the importance of mutually significant
differences instead of shared and similar meanings. Sah-
lins’s historical ethnography of Western notions of man
beginning with pre-Fall Adam deserves a sequel: a his-
torical ethnography of the concept of culture beginning
with the pre-Babelian “culture” lacking differences. But
that project should take seriously the Polynesian notion
of man, who from the very beginning was different even
from himself: “He was Ti’i [the first man], clothed in
sand, Ti’i the propagator inland, Ti’i the propagator sea-
ward, Ti’i, secret destroyer, Ti’i the axe sharpener”
[Henry 1928:402]. In Western anthropogony man was
first, and only then it “became the interest of men to
appear what they really were not. To be and to seem
became two totally different things” (Rousseau 1993:95).
In Polynesia being and seeming began at the same time
[Siikala 1992].

Reply

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I am grateful for these considered [and considerate] com-
ments from my colleagues. Broadly speaking, they raise
two critical issues: the tendency in my lecture to over-
generalize—or, in the current language, essentialize—
the long-playing ideas of the native Western anthropol-
ogy and the failure to specify alternative anthropologies,
as by way of comparative cosmologies. Some of the com-
ments, such as Siikala’s piquant remarks on salt, seem
to address both issues at once. Bargatzky and Bird-David,
especially Clammer, take up the question of alternative
paradigms in the Western tradition. Clammer, Hamel,
and Maegawa, especially Clammer, pose the problem of
how one transcends this tradition in order to achieve an
alternative anthropology. I will try to reflect on these
well-taken comments.

With regard to alternative concepts of humanity, soci-
ety, and nature over 3,000 years [plus] of Western
thought, I would not simply repeat the disclaimers about
the simple-mindedness and single-mindedness of the
attempt to determine the mainstream ideology, to
the neglect of all kinds of conflicting ideas. What does
seem worth defending is the minimal structural sense that there are dominant and subdominant ideas in play, even over the long run. Bargatzky's remarks on the Augustinian tradition provide an opportunity to consider this question.

Bargatzky argues that the Judeo-Christian view of human imperfection does not necessarily lead to a disenchantment and desecration of nature or to a devaluation of the body, "which is, after all, God's temple." He gives counterexamples ranging from Psalm 104 to positive Benedictine and Franciscan perspectives on nature. With regard to such matters, then, Augustine's teachings represent "but one of the many variant ideas" created during this long multicultural history. So for Bargatzky the question is, "Why has this particular strand of theological thought [i.e., the Augustinian] gained such prominence in the past 500 years?" His suggested answer, necessarily compressed for lack of space, is that "capitalism has created the intellectual environment suitable for the efflorescence of a doctrine which celebrated need and greed as the ultimate source of social virtue. Christianity, then, did not create capitalism, but capitalism has promoted a version of Christianity adapted to its needs."

I will discuss the three or four issues raised by this argument in what may be considered an order of increasing significance.

First, Bargatzky seems to have misread my text in supposing it asserts that the Western tradition is uniquely given to ecological desecration—a matter that is, in fact, nowhere discussed as such. I do argue that the Judeo-Christian cosmology is distinctive in rendering nature pure materiality, thus opposed ontologically to human subjectivity and pragmatically to human productivity. "Thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to thee." This *contemptus mundi*, moreover, was a dominant ideology until the Renaissance, a movement that was in critical respects its antithesis. But the desecration of nature is not a necessary sequitur to its disenchantment. On the one hand, Christianity itself included the mitigating thesis that the world was designed by a Providential Divinity, so that, as in the medieval symbology, some greater value, or even love, could be accorded to otherwise useless things as the signs of a benevolent Author. *Augustine's Confessions* are marked by the apparent contradiction between the appreciation of nature's beauty and the condemnation of knowledge by the senses along with other "lusts of the eye" [*Conf. 10.6.*.] On the other hand, as Bargatzky points out, the existence in many societies of a subjective relation to and ritual respect for certain natural species is no guarantee against their extinction. To the contrary, the ritual assurance of northern Algonkians that the more game they took the more they would have probably contributed, at a certain historical moment, to the massive destruction of the caribou [Brightman 1993].

Secondly, it is possibly the lack of space that leads Bargatzky to assert that capitalism, by providing a suitable environment for a doctrine "which celebrated individual need and greed as the ultimate sources of social virtue," thus led to a marked development of Augustine's influence over the past 500 years. Augustinian doctrine is, of course, precisely the opposite: the moral castigation of self-pleasing as the condition of human bondage and the cause of anarchy and strife. Augustine is a classical locus of the doctrine that need and greed are the sources of individual ruin and social disaster. Instead of saying that capitalism found in Augustine "a version of Christianity adapted to its needs," Bargatzky might have made a better argument for Augustine as capitalism's bad conscience. (It could have been one of the more interesting demonstrations of the marxian principle of superstructure as a dialectic inversion of the infrastructure.) There is, however, a larger historical problem with the notion that the Augustinian doctrine of human imperfection was just one strand of Christian theology among many, one which then happened to gain prominence in early modern times. This hardly seems a fair assessment of Augustine's influence in particular or the role of human evil in the Christian cosmology more generally.

It is difficult to understand why Bargatzky denies the common average received wisdom that St. Augustine was the predominant theologian of Western Christendom from late antiquity to the High Middle Ages—a history that was critical for his great popularity from the 15th through the 17th centuries. The Bishop of Hippo was not just one Church Father among many, as Bargatzky claims. "St. Augustine, it would be generally agreed, has had a greater influence upon the history of dogma and upon religious thought and sentiment in Western Christendom than any other writer outside the canon of Scripture" [Knowles 1988:20]. He was, as Knowles put it, "a second Bible to the dark and middle ages" [p. 30]. Isidore of Seville elevated him above any other Church Father; the Venerable Bede ranked him "just after the apostles" [Delumeau 1990:262]. Nor was this influence simply doctrinal or textual. The favored author of Charlemagne, Augustine continued to have a political influence throughout the Carolingian dynasty. Indeed, both sides of the controversy between the empire and the papacy in the late 11th century relied upon Augustinian arguments [Warfield 1910]. Speaking of *On Christian Doctrine*, D. W. Robertson extends the Augustinian contribution from the theological to the anthropological: the book provides "abundant evidence of the intellectual acumen which had a large share in creating the pattern of culture which endured throughout the thousand years we unjustly call 'The Middle Ages'"

1. There is another, more involved argument that could be made for Augustine's positive effect on the development of capitalism, but it would have to pass by way of Weber's *Protestant Ethic* and the influence of the Augustinian salvation by grace, as well as Augustinianism in general, on the Reformation.

2. Warfield writes of Augustine: "The entire political development of the Middle Ages was dominated by him; and he was in a true sense the creator of the Holy Roman Empire. It was no accident that De Civitate Dei was the favourite reading of Charlemagne" [1910:22]. Warfield also added his voice to the chorus of those who considered that "to no other doctor of the Church has anything like the same authority been accorded" [p. 20].
Delumeau remarks on three main aspects of the Western self-contempt: “hatred of the body and the world, the perversiveness of sin, and an acute consciousness of fleeting time.” But finally, as Ricoeur has it, “every dimension of man—language, work, institutions, sexuality—is stamped with the twofold mark of being destined for the good and inclined toward evil. . . . Thus the whole condition of man appears subject to the rule of hardship” (1967:246-49).

Here was a whole “pattern of culture” based on the tragic notion of man as a suffering creature of insatiable bodily needs. Augustine’s theory of original sin, Elaine Pagels wrote, “offered an analysis of human nature that became for better and worse, the heritage of all subsequent generations of Western Christians and a major influence on their psychological and political thinking” (1988: xxxvi). In a later paper, Pagels (1994:102) told a large international conference entitled “Augustine: His Influence on the Church and the World,”

From the fifth century on, Augustine’s pessimistic views of sexuality, politics, and human nature would become the dominant influence on Western Christianity, both Catholic and Protestant, and color all Western culture, Christian or not, ever since. Thus Adam, Eve, and the serpent—our ancestral story—would continue, often in some version of its Augustinian form, to affect our lives to the present day.

The commentators correctly remind us that Western history has known other, conflicting views of the human situation. Yet something needs to be said, first, for the social order in and of these ideological differences and, secondly, about their relative staying power in the Western scheme of things. Of course, if the differences are socially and historically random, not much can be said. One would be reduced to the plight of the Heraclitean philosopher who in the end could do nothing but point. However, even the apostles of postmodernist, poststructuralist, and other “afterological studies”6 have perceived such conflicting voices as an order of differences: at the minimum, as a hierarchical relationship between authoritative and subaltern discourses. This is the explicit intention of Bakhtin’s heteroglossia, which describes “a complex system” of differences, as it is also entailed in Gramscian hegemony or the dominant epistemes of Foucauldian archaeology. However often these concepts have been used in writing against cultural co-

3. “Augustine,” said Luther, “is entirely with me” (Delumeau 1990:265).

4. Bargatzky cites Franciscan alternatives to the darker Christian view of the human fate. But, of course, there were also differences here, as witness this poem from the pen of a Franciscan, written in the 13th century and worthy of the misogynous sentiments of Pope Innocent III’s Contemplus Mundi, which it seems to echo (Delumeau 1990:17):

   In a very dirty and vile workroom
   You were made out of slime,
   So foul and so wretched
   That my lips cannot bring themselves to tell you about it.
   But if you have a bit of sense, you will know,

That the fragile body in which you lived,
Where you were tormented eight months and more,
Was made of rotting and corrupt excrement . . .
You came out through a foul passage
And you fell into the world, poor and naked . . .
   . . . Other creatures have some use . . .
But you, stinking man, you are worse than dung . . .
You are a sly and evil traitor.

5. Jacqueline Mraz coined the term “afterological studies” to cover the various current positions, including, besides those mentioned, “post-Marxism,” “post-colonialism,” “post-postmodernism,” etc. I first saw it in an unpublished paper of hers.
herence or adapted to current purposes of anthropological deconstruction, one and all they imply a systematic understanding of given historical orders by determining the social and political subject positions of the contending discourses. In contrast, when confronted by a structure of the *longue durée* such as the tragic view of human imperfection, we are dealing with a kind of ideological dominance that no contingent functional value or political motivation will account for.6

Rather, it seems that the continuity of the ideology of human evil comes from its positional value in a cultural scheme of universal dimensions. It historical dominance is the temporal expression of a pivotal structural role. The fall of man has been the condition of possibility of a great complex of interrelated theological dogmas. The whole redemptive Christology depends on the inherent wickedness of humanity. “The incarnation of God was his humiliation” [LeGoff 1985:124]. The sacrifice of Jesus and the possibility of salvation, the associated notions of Divine Providence and the Trinity, the ontological distinctions of Heaven and Earth, body and soul, humanity, nature, and divinity, all are motivated in the Adamic narrative. In the long course of Christianity there have been many variations on those dogmas, it is true. But the impulses of totalization are such that relatively minor differences have been able to set off radical sectarian schisms. And very few of the sects have been able to forgo the dogma of human wickedness. To awake from such dogmatic slumbers would seem to require a cultural revolution on a Copernican-ontological scale. Perhaps Augustine was right in more ways than one when he said that man cannot not sin.

Bird-David and Siikala are in different ways concerned with dialectical negations of dominant Western ideologies—thus with changes that remain in the same structural scheme, still culturally relevant as well as historically relative. Bird-David properly claims that I oversimplify other views of nature by treating them as inversions of the Christian opposition between Creator and creature. [I had hoped that the ethnographic examples would give a richer view.] Argument could be given, however, against her analysis of the naming scene of Genesis as signifying the Western antithesis of humanity and material nature, for Adam’s knowledge of the essences and differences of the creatures by more than sensory means implies a relationship—a merging of human thought and its object—quite different from the separations of the postlapsarian state. Everything happens as if the Fall were the defining moment: an event that cut like a sword through the universe, cleaving man from God, from paradise, from nature, and from his better self.

Siikala’s challenging comments are also concerned with binarism, although once again in the context of authoritative and dissenting discourses. In an appropriately idiosyncratic—if apparently self-contradictory—fashion, he reopens famously vexed questions about the powers of historical agency relative to structural orders. Siikala objects to the oppressive sentiment of an encompassing and determining order that seems to haunt the culture concept in practically all its varieties, especially those that suppose some notion of shared behavior. No space is left for creative human acts of cultural transformation, most particularly for the heroic acts that defy prevailing norms and schemes. Yet the metaphoric example he proposes suggests that defiance will be no easy escape from systematicity. Referring to Mintz’s work, Siikala says that he would rather season his cup of coffee with salt than sugar: something of “a minor act of resistance” that could “demonstrate the importance of mutually significant differences instead of shared and similar meanings.” The problem is that it would be the differences that were thus shared, and in the highly structural form of dialectical negation. Siikala does not dissent by adding cow dung to his coffee, or kava, pesto, rose pollen, or any number of other substances that might have had the demonstrative virtue of not being negations [in this society] of sugar. A long time ago Floyd Lounsbury taught me something about logical contrasts that I have never forgotten: opposites, he said, are things alike in all significant respects but one. Perhaps few substantial oppositions fit this definition so well as sugar and salt, which are (to us) alike in nearly all intents, purposes, and properties. [Probably few among us have not at some time mistaken the one for the other.] But if even denials of a given cultural order take their logic and meaning from this order, does this mean that there is no place for the historical agency of the subject? Is all our “resistance” destined to be swallowed up in this systematic and dialectical Leviathan?

On the contrary, it does not follow that because the change initiated by someone is in the line of a given cultural order, the order must be responsible for the change—any more than if one says something logical it was the logic that determined what was said [not to mention where, when, and if it was said]. A couple of general circumstances of such innovative events should be noted. First, insofar as acts and transformations of meaning are concerned, we are not dealing with a total ontological opposition between the “individual” and the “culture” but rather with the symbolic traffic between them. To a greater or lesser extent, the semiological resources of the society have been put at the intellectual dispositions and capacities of its subjects. But then, secondly, the cultural creations of these subjects have to be intelligible and communicable in the society if they are to take historic effect. The innovations must be meaningfully receivable—that is, in terms of a pertinent cultural order. Yet again, if the change is thus culturally relative, if it follows on a given cultural logic, it does not mean that it was the only change possible or that it could not consist of something never seen before. To say that an event is culturally described is not to say it was

6. In a well-regarded analysis of the initial Augustinian movement, Pagels [1988] points out the complementary political values of human depravity for the Christianized Roman imperium and a North African church beset by contending doctrines. But, as she reflects in another context, “the requirements of an authoritarian state alone cannot account for the durability of such teaching throughout the centuries” [1994:97].
culturally prescribed. Precisely because the historical change is mediated through an individual biography, it cannot be structurally prescribed—any more than is the individuality of the biography [cf. Sartre 1966].

We are already into the second major theme posed by the commentators: the question of the transcendence of Judeo-Christian traditions or, what is the same, the possibility of an alternative anthropology. Here Clammer on the one side and Hamel and Maegawa on the other put me into something of a dilemma, since Clammer finds my lecture wanting for not presenting an alternative to the native tradition, while Hamel and Maegawa too generously suggest that I have managed to do so. Perhaps the best way to respond is to reflect on, if not reconcile, these contradictory readings. They may bring out something in the lecture worth making more explicit.

I do tend to believe, with Hamel and Maegawa, that the metadiscourse which is the Mintz lecture itself is already something of an alternative anthropology. There is some critical distance taken from the native folklore it describes. Analytic and at least crypto-sensitive to other possibilities, the perspective is not the same as the conceptions of humanity, divinity, society, and the universe that it intends to understand. There is no need to suppose we are the prisoners of received categories, whether in some pseudo-Whorfian sense of linguistic relativity or because of the alleged source of anthropological ideas in colonial projects of dominating and "incarcerating" the Others. Will anthropology never escape from original sins? Or is it that anthropologists, so unlike the peoples they study, are the mindless victims and last witnesses of "culture" as an essentialized and deterministic system? It is as if they could do nothing but repeat a monological cultural discourse. Still, Clammer writes from Japan and finds it conceivable that Buddhism or Shintoism could serve as cosmological grounds of a new anthropology.

As Clammer makes clear, it would be of no purpose to exchange our indigenous anthropology for another that is equally relative and particular. Rather, as I understand it, he is arguing that anthropology as a discipline needs to return to its comparative traditions—although not for traditional projects of comparative generalization. What is needed is a methodological cosmopolitanism: the situation of anthropology in and as the series of cultural-ontological variations, which would allow the construction of more adequate ethnographic and interpretive schemata (if these are different). I have to believe that an unsystematic and inexplicit perspective of this sort lay behind the Mintz lecture. Of course, there are the ethnographic hypertexts. Besides that, I am sure that how I perceived the Western image of suffering mankind was informed by common disciplinary knowledge of other native cosmologies: the synonymy of the human and the beautiful in the Amazon; evil as external to the self (and community) rather than internal in eastern and southern Africa; man as good if nurtured (rather than beaten) in the Confucian tradition; Polynesians for whom evil of any sort is not an obsessive existential predicament, leading 19th-century missionaries to endlessly complain that the "natives" could not muster sufficient guilt to become good Christians. Since Clammer refers to the after-dinner speech I gave at the ASA Meetings in 1993, perhaps I can borrow a little from the immortality that Keith Hart conferred on that piece by publishing it in Prickly Pear Press to help make clear these remarks on anthropological method. The section of the speech is entitled "Ethics and Emics" (Sahlins 1993b:9):

All etics or languages of objective scientific description (so-called) are based on a grid of meaningful or emic distinctions. Take the international phonetic alphabet, by means of which the significant sounds of any language can be "objectively" recorded and reproduced. The phonetic alphabet is made up of all known phonemic distinctions: of all differences in sound-segments known to signify differences in meaning in the natural languages of the world. So in principle the objective description of any language consists of its comparison with the meaningful order of all other languages.

The same for ethnography. No good ethnography is self-contained. Implicitly or explicitly ethnography is an act of comparison. By virtue of comparison ethnographic description becomes objective. Not in the naive positivist sense of an unmediated perception—just the opposite: it becomes a universal understanding to the extent it brings to bear on the perception of any society the conceptions of all the others. Some Cultural Studies types seem to think that anthropology is nothing but ethnography. Better the other way around: ethnography is anthropology, or it is nothing.

References Cited


7. Here is another interesting missionary example. A Botswana replies to Robert Moffat's question of whether, when he was a pagan, he had no fears that he would pay for his crimes. "'No,' said he. 'How could we feel, how could we fear? We had no idea that an unseen eye saw us, or that an unseen ear heard us'"' (Moffat 1960:268). It makes one appreciate better the Western sentiments of an imagined governing totality. Perhaps it also helps one understand better where Foucault's panopticon—or Panoptician—is coming from.