

## The Birth of Modern Values: Reformed Christianity

現代の価値の誕生：改革されたキリスト教

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**Abstract:** Today, what we think of as the modern, globalized world can be reduced to a few foundational elements: Free Market Capitalism, the Empirical Method, and Representative Democracy. What were their origins? While these systems arose in pockets long before the Reformation, the Reformation brought them together and caused them to flourish. Considering this pivotal moment helps to see the modern world in context. Since the Reformation was a religious movement, people tend to shy away from it and not give it the attention it deserves. In this article I will outline a few key points with regards to the value system the Reformation put into play and in the end to speculate a bit on where it may be taking us.

**Keywords:** The Reformation, Protestant Movements, Lutheranism, Calvinism, The Puritans, Universalism, Modern values, End of History

**要約:** 今日、私たちが現代的なものと考えているグローバル化した世界は、自由市場資本主義、経験的方法、代表制民主主義といったいくつかの基本要素に還元することができる。この起源はどこにあるのだろうか。これらのシステムは宗教改革よりずっと前に始まっているのだが、宗教改革はそのすべてをまとめ、そして発展させるきっかけとなった。この重要な時期を考察することは、現代社会の背景を考えるのに重要である。しかしながら、宗教改革の役割についてはこれまでほとんど検討されてきていない。それは宗教運動であるために避けられ、それに触れようとする人がいなかったためである。本論文では、宗教改革が持ち込んだ価値システムの主要なポイントを描き出し、それが今後どこへ導いていくのかについて、考察してみたい。

**キーワード:** 宗教改革、プロテスタント運動、ルター主義、カルヴィニズム、ピューリタン、ユニバーサリズム、現代的価値、歴史の終わり

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## 1. Introduction

*Verily, men gave themselves their good and evil. Verily, they did not take it, they did not find it, nor did it come to them as a voice from heaven. This sign I give you: every nation speaks its language of good and evil, which the neighbor does not understand. It has invented its own language of customs and rights.*  
--Friedrich Nietzsche

Shared values are at the border of consciousness, the place that the American poet Wallace Stevens (1879-1955) called “a palm at the end of the mind.” Most of us take them for granted, like the sky and plant life, and go through life without thinking very much about them. That the Puritans--Presbyterian, Congregational, Quaker movements, among many others--internalized certain values that have become normative internationally is surprising for most. These small groups gave birth to a vision so pervasive, so accepted a part of modern life, that it is difficult to find a point from which to consider it.<sup>i</sup>

Reformation values saturate modern life. Though originally articulated in the sixteenth-century by an urban, merchant class in rebellion against the Roman Catholic Church, these value clusters were transformed into humanistic ideals during the Enlightenment, made into law in the American and French revolutions, imposed on indigenous cultures in the colonization of vast parts of the world, reinvented in the twentieth century with its monumental horrors, becoming in the twenty-first century a remarkably homogenous value system, universally understood, though perhaps more honored in the breach. What began as a humble desire of a small, embattled community to rediscover original Christianity metamorphosed into a secular set of values that, arguably, forms in some sense the basis for international understanding. This is one of the great stories of human history (see note on cultural imperialism).<sup>ii</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) said that we gave ourselves our “good and evil.” When did we receive this gift? Or has the gift been forced on us? I will discuss a little of how it all began and will conclude with the competing visions of Giambattista Vico (1668-1744) and Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) as a way to consider the direction these values may be taking all of us. I should caution, though, that anyone considering the origins of values (including this short article) is merely examining one small piece of a huge puzzle. T. S. Elliot said of William Shakespeare: “We can only be wrong about him in new ways.” I can only echo Elliot’s sentiments with regards to the scope of Puritan Reformation values in modern life.

## 2. The search for origins

The connection between the Reformation and social values had been taken for granted in North America and Northern Europe for centuries. It was not until the late nineteenth-century, when religion began to weaken, that some recognized that society continued to internalize clusters of religious values, separated as they were from their origins. Perhaps only the most sensitive recognized that something new was happening: societies could truly be based on secular values alone. Leaders of the American and French revolutions based their revolutions on just that, secular values as a basis for social cohesion, but most did not really accept it until the twentieth-century. Max Weber (1864-1920) and R. H. Tawney (1880-1962) began the recent debate about their incredible force when they began to expound upon how certain social values either encouraged or inhibited economic growth.<sup>iii</sup> Weber (*The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 1904), believing that all values ultimately came from religions, published his still relevant thesis of why capitalism and empirical science arose or were perfected in Protestant Europe rather than in such traditional cultures as China and India (See Appendix 1 for critiques of Weber's thesis).<sup>iv</sup> Tawney (*Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, 1926) built on Weber's work, but stated that Puritan Calvinism, more than any other teachings from the Reformation, fertilized the soil that brought free market capitalism and empirical science to maturity.

Apart from Weber and Tawney, though, few major European thinkers of that era referred to the influence of religious values on social life, and probably for good reason. The God-intoxicated centuries after the Reformation produced a decidedly secular intellectual climate as a reaction, and "modern" thinkers wanted to give the secular equal time. Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951) also gave a plausible reason why commentary on this theme was muted: "Values can be identified but not expounded upon."<sup>v</sup> In other words, values are not that stimulating intellectually. "Ideas" became foundational in intellectual life, and these were endlessly expounded on. The Reformation as a source of anything important seemed naïve--even simple-minded--among intellectual circles of the early twentieth-century. From mid-century, however, a host of writers has rediscovered Weber and Tawney. Most have come from America where the connection of social values with derivative Puritan Christianity and its numerous stepchildren--Methodism, Baptism, Pentecostalism and Mormonism--is clearer and remains potent. Yet, in other parts of the West these

values remain as “the ghost of dead religious beliefs,” to use Weber’s expression, not as visible but a reality nonetheless.<sup>vi</sup>

David Riesman’s *The Lonely Crowd* (1950) and William Whyte’s *Organizational Man* (1956) also helped resurrect the discussion on values. After these classic works the Reformation’s great impact began to be discussed more seriously once again. Christopher Lasch (1932-1994), using the debate framed by Riesman and Whyte, wrote a great deal about the Protestant Work Ethic in *The Culture of Narcissism* (1979), his scathing critique of American culture as a society of conformists, fallen away from the intrinsic Reformation values. Jacques Barzun, Allan Bloom, Francis Fukuyama, Joel Kotkin, and David Landes are just a few of the many popular--mostly conservative leaning--writers who have discussed how the evolution of values from the Reformation permeate modern life (“values” have been the realm of conservative thinkers).

But why were the Puritans a source of universalism? The Reformation was, after all, a religious movement, and therefore exclusive of those who do not believe in Christian doctrines. It is not exactly a prescription for universalism. We see here, nevertheless, the beginning of a major shift in Western consciousness through the formation of a value cluster with the potential to flourish in other contexts (See Appendix 2). Because the Protestant Reformation spawned hundreds of small semi-autonomous groups that constantly reinterpreted and reapplied essential teachings generation after generation, it caused secularized values coming from it to emerge as the most palatable across vast parts of the globe for living life and doing business.

Of course, it did not have to happen this way. The early Puritan community was only one among many movements with the potential to germinate internationally. These values were not necessarily the best possible for society to internalize, especially considering their harsh individualistic and competitive edge, but they endured simply because they were easily secularized and more useful for the largest numbers of people.

### **3. The strangeness of the Reformation**

*Beneath the rule of men entirely great  
The pen is mightier than the sword.  
--Richelieu*

*Oh Luther, Luther, your responsibility is great indeed, for the closer I look the more clearly I see that you overthrew the Pope, and set the public on the throne.  
--Søren Kierkegaard*

The Reformation, as all religious movements, began with one person, a person who stumbled into a role he seemed well suited for. On the evening of October 31, 1517, Martin Luther (1483-1546) nailed his Ninety-five Theses to the door of the Wittenberg Church, mildly criticizing the Church of Rome for selling the forgiveness of sins, known as “indulgences,” and for other teachings (Luther was careful not to criticize the Pope himself). This seemingly modest act of protest, of debate really, eventually swept most of Europe out from under the umbrella of the Roman Catholic Church that had regulated feudal life for over a thousand years. It is remarkable that a disagreement over biblical teachings would have such far-reaching consequences, accomplished not by war but by the internalization of different value system (see Appendix 2 for a list of changes the Reformation brought about).<sup>vii</sup>

“Here I stand. Here I remain. Here I glory. Here I triumph,” Luther’s appropriation of Julius Caesar, showed he was a different kind of conqueror, one who fought with a pen instead of a sword. The printing press, invented some sixty-years before the Wittenberg incident, made it possible for most educated Germans to read Luther’s Ninety-five Theses within a few weeks after he published it. Within eight years over 1,300 editions of Luther’s Theses had appeared.<sup>viii</sup> Luther was fearlessly stouthearted, with an extraordinary courage and boldness. Few in history have been as stalwart. After Luther called King Henry VIII “a dolt, a pig, and a liar” for writing a book against him, even monarchs learned they should not tangle with him.<sup>ix</sup>

History has inertia, giving us a sense that things in the past happened the way they did because they were meant to be. But the Reformation did not have to be this far-reaching. It certainly was not planned and today no one today fully understands why it happened.<sup>x</sup> Does history have its own force or do individuals force history? Luther, whatever one believes, was one agent in the unleashing of these forces that eventually created the modern world. No doubt these forces were waiting to bubble over, but Luther guided them with his conservative bent. Though he never strayed very far from creedal Christianity, Luther was unrelenting in his emphasis that the individual could have direct communion with the divine outside religious institutions. Thus began a domino effect--this questioning the status quo--that caused ancient and venerable mass beliefs to come tumbling down.

Luther’s conversion is a key to understanding his theology. It seems not have taken place until some two years after he posted his Ninety-Five Thesis. Even though he had lived a devoted life as a monk, Luther still felt guilty before God. Full of self-loathing, he confessed that in fact he hated God. Yet, at the rather mature age of

thirty-six, and tormented by a hopelessly guilty conscience, Luther began to meditate on Saint Paul's letter to the Romans day and night--often all night. Finally, dawn broke in his soul with the words from Romans 1:17 "The righteous shall live by faith." It was not "by works," all of the rituals, prayers, and duties that a person performs to become righteous, but "faith" alone. This experience, of wallowing in guilt until enlightenment hit him, colored all his theology. For Luther, salvation—and life itself—was part of a grim journey in which one should not think too much about changing this world, cursed as it is. Believing that one has righteousness through Christ and preparing the soul for the next world was project enough.

Luther's legacy in world culture is the modern sense of self, the inward evolution of consciousness and its tormented personal autonomy. Kierkegaard lamented that Luther put us (the public) on the throne. Indeed, Luther helped rip off the lid of what stifled human potential, for good and ill. J. H. Van den Berg, the Dutch psychiatrist, believed Luther "discovered" the growing inner self, which altered the way individuals see themselves.<sup>xi</sup> Luther was brutally honest about himself in his books and pamphlets, and this helped free the Western psyche from sterile conformity and repression. Later, Michel de Montaigne's (1533-92) *Of Experience* and William Shakespeare's (1564-1616) *Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* would more fully develop this vision of human personality, one that continues to inform the modern psyche. Luther, however, was unable to "internationalize" his teachings, which remain rooted in northern European ethnicity even today. Another pen was needed to propel the Reformation to greater horizons.

John Calvin (1509-64) built on what Luther had inaugurated with a vision that society could become Christianized. After studying law at the University Orleans, France, Calvin heard of Martin Luther's teachings and became active in Protestant groups around Paris. Calvin created such a stir that the French government offered a reward for his capture, dead or alive. Forced to flee for his life, Calvin found refuge in Geneva, Switzerland where in 1536 he published his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, which he had written two years earlier at the age of twenty-six. Though *Institutes* is one of the most important books in history, it has a dry, legal tone, and is not very mystical at all, yet Calvin succeeded in exalting certain social values to the level of religious devotion, launching a tidal wave that swept over the entire world. Unlike Luther, Calvin never bore his soul in his writings, though he did make note of a religious experience that he had in 1533 that offers an insight into his theology:

At last God turned my course in a different direction by the hidden bridle of his providence.... By a sudden conversion of docility, he tamed a mind too stubborn for its years.<sup>xii</sup>

Calvin felt that God had “turned” him; it was not something that he had done himself. He also felt a sense of purpose for his life, what he would identify as his “calling.” Calvin’s conversion, that of being called and showing his calling with his more docile mind, reflects the two of the main points in his *Institutes*:

1. God had foreordained certain people to salvation (not everyone was so destined). Further, once called, it was forever, a gift no one could lose.
2. Yet, the rub: People showed their calling by the way they lived.<sup>xiii</sup> Calvin’s focus was on a disciplined life, a lifestyle that revealed one’s calling. Though he agreed absolutely with Luther that “justification” was by faith alone, Calvin placed greater priority on the visible fruits of salvation.

Calvin, an organizational genius, also developed a system for establishing churches that was easy to implement. Students from all over Europe, flocking to Geneva to study under Calvin, became the standard bearers of Protestant movements in Switzerland, France, Scotland, Hungary, Poland, Germany, Holland, England, and North America, eventually shaping these cultures, governments, and economies.<sup>xiv</sup> As with Luther, the printing press enabled Calvin to quickly internationalize ideas.<sup>xv</sup> Calvin asked a very important question, one that Luther dared not ask: “What is a Christian society supposed to be like?” Calvin and his followers then committed themselves to bringing social realities into harmony with Christian ideals.

### **3. Trust, diligence in social and economic life**

*And yet labor is a thing so good and godlike...that makes the body hale and strong and cures the sickness produced by idleness. In the things of this life, the laborer is most like God.*

--John Calvin

*John Calvin was the virtual founder of America.*

--Leopold von Ranke

Framing John Calvin's profound influence is nigh to impossible, but perhaps one way is to consider the cluster of values that grew out of his teachings. H. Richard Niebuhr (1894-1962), the American Protestant theologian, believed that Calvin was a twilight formulator of modern liberalism because he set in motion a world-view that shifted mass outlook. Niebuhr confined his thesis to Christian liberalism and socialism, but its connection with political liberalism is palpable (remember, Weber believed that all values came from religions). Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (1951), called this world-view "the Transformer," one of five fundamental world-views that grew out of Christian movements over the centuries.

Karl Barth (1886-1968), *The Theology of John Calvin* (1995), disagreed however, writing that Calvin could not be claimed by the either left or the right exclusively, since Calvin was also a bit reactionary.<sup>xvi</sup> Barth, I believe, was offering a more narrow interpretation, viewing Calvin's teachings through the lenses of today's liberalism. Calvin, we should remember, was a leftist radical for his time, as were all Protestants in sixteenth-century Europe. Since liberal values have become normative we see Calvin in a different light. If the Reformation had failed, however, Calvin might seem as radical to us as he was in his own day.

Calvin, though a sixteenth-century person, gave voice to a practical set of values broad enough for later humanistic writers to build on. Reformed Churches--Quakers, Presbyterians, Congregationalists--in North America, Great Britain, and northern Europe led the struggles to end slavery, gain women's suffrage, close the gap between rich and poor, and abolish legal segregation. Wilber Wilberforce (1759-1833), William Lloyd Garrison (1805-79), Susan B. Anthony (1820-1906), Emmeline Pankhurst (1858-1928), and Martin Luther King, Jr. (1926-68) are only a few noteworthy leaders whose visions were nurtured in the Calvinist tradition. What, exactly, gave Calvinism the edge over Lutheranism?

Calvinism was more positive toward humanity. In the Calvinist cosmos, human beings, though fallen, retained something of their original grandeur and were more ignorant than depraved. "Man's good nature," Niebuhr wrote in defining Calvinism, "has become corrupted; it is not bad, as something that ought not to exist, but warped, twisted, and misdirected."<sup>xvii</sup> If "man's good nature" is merely corrupted, why did some do bad things? Voltaire, Rousseau, and other humanistic writers would later define what remains a fundamental tenet of liberalism: Social systems cripple and need amendment to better suit the needs of people. Further, if people were simply "misdirected" they could be redirected by learning, creating a priority for literacy.



Girls and boys from all social classes began going to school together to learn to read the Bible; learning for self-improvement and for vocational skills became standard. A value for learning had been a part of European life for ages of course, but the difference after Calvin was that it became the social expectation for everyone.

Calvin also overturned a deep-seated value-system of European aristocratic culture, one that Luther also left untouched: It was best to inherit wealth and earn your livelihood by renting your land than by earning it through business. Calvin asked, "What is the reason why income from business should not be larger than that from landowning? Where do the merchant profits come, except from his own diligence and industry?"<sup>xviii</sup> Calvin swept the reticence regarding the rough and tumble of business aside in favor of individual "diligence and industry." Character, based on the good works from one's calling, also superseded heredity. After Calvin it became sinful to live a leisurely life just renting your land. With the belief that the "laborer is most like God," people began to apply themselves diligently in their work, as a spiritual end toward growth and maturity. The early Calvinists, we should remember, were urban and mercantile, so Calvin sanctioned values that affirmed them and their way of life. As R. H. Tawney wrote: "Baptized in the icy water of Calvinist theology, the business of life, once regarded as perilous to the soul, acquired a new sanctity."<sup>xix</sup>

Further, Calvinism created a community of shared values that offered a common "language of good and evil," to use Nietzsche's phrase.<sup>xx</sup> Most agree that modern capitalism began in fourteenth-century Europe, in guild organizations, mostly textiles and metal industries. It was one of the first times that labor was organized in ways that are normative today; these guilds were outside of family ties, on a large scale, with wages tied to production.<sup>xxi</sup> It also helped that the Reformation had thrown off the Roman Catholic Church's control of economic life, with its laws that fixed prices and that forbade the charging of interest on borrowed money. This alone would have released economic potential. But more importantly, Calvinist Christianity gave the general population a bond of shared values, apart from ethnicity or nationhood, based on clear behavioral norms, outside any mediating authority. These shared values across social classes were potent forces for social cohesion:

The need for a form of enterprise which could command trust and loyalty on some basis other than kinship was only one facet of a broader need: the rising world of trade needed a moral system. It needed a morality to support reliance on its complex apparatus of representation and promise: credit, representations as to quality, promises to deliver goods, or to buy goods in the future, and agreements to share in the proceeds of voyages.... It was out of the

turbulence of the Protestant Reformation that (there) developed a morality and patterns of religious belief compatible with the needs and values of capitalism.<sup>xxii</sup>

This “moral system” became foundational in countries where Calvinist Christianity reigned, spreading everywhere merchants under Calvinism’s influence went. Max Weber recognized this during a trip to America, where one worker told him:

Sir, for my part everybody may believe or not believe as he pleases; but if I saw a farmer or a businessman not belonging to any church at all, I wouldn’t trust him with fifty cents. Why pay me, if he doesn’t believe in anything?<sup>xxiii</sup>

“Trust,” fragile and ephemeral, was the key for both Weber and Tawney. Calvinism indeed created a highly disciplined people who really trusted each other. Trustworthy and disciplined people had always existed, but Calvinism increased the numbers of “rational, diligent, orderly, productive, clean, and humorless [people...and] this type created a new economy that we know as capitalism.”<sup>xxiv</sup> To be prosperous, and only prosperous, was never the goal: It was a way of life, motivated by a desire to honor God with “good health, good temper, wisdom, usefulness, and the satisfaction of knowing that you had earned the good opinion of others.”<sup>xxv</sup> A social transformation came about even in Calvin’s time, as one ambassador from Venice wrote of Geneva:

Your Serenity will hardly believe the influence and power which the principal minister of Geneva, by name Calvin...possesses in this kingdom. He is a man of extraordinary authority, who by his mode of life, his doctrines, and his writings rises superior to all the rest.... Cursing and swearing, un-chastity, sacrilege, adultery, and impure living, such as in many places where I have lived, are here unknown. There are no pimps and harlots. The people do not know what a rogue is, and they are all clad in seemly fashion.... Benevolence is so great that the poor need not beg. The people admonish one another in brotherly fashion, as Christ proscribes. Lawsuits are banished from the city....<sup>xxvi</sup>

Next, Calvinism set the course for a “this worldly” outlook by tying the state and the church more closely together, with the state becoming an extension of the people collectively. The citizens of Geneva already had a sense of themselves as a collective whole, yet Calvin anchored and expanded this connection. In Calvinist theologies, again in contrast to Lutheran, God is closer to the things of this life and concerned about the welfare of both the individual and the state. This small change in orientation was another major shift. Geneva, where Calvin’s social goals first prevailed, implemented plans for full-employment, medical care access, regular garbage collection, penalties for

the sale of unhealthy foods, and a system of public education. As the quality of life became important across Europe, people looked to government as responsible for its maintenance. R. H. Tawney described this dynamic:

Where Lutheranism had been socially conservative, deferential to established political authorities... Calvinism was an active and radical force. It was a creed (which) sought, not merely to purify the individual, but to reconstruct Church and State, and to renew society by penetrating every department of life, public as well as private, with the influence of religion.<sup>xxvii</sup>

#### 4. Even democracy and science?

Calvin's teachings stressed that all people—the peasant and the prince—were equal before God in their respective callings. After toppling the “divine right of kings,” what could authority be based on? Democratic choice. As Calvin's students/disciples returned home under Calvin's spell to spread the good news of his gospel, they took the concept of democratic choice with them (church leadership had only been by appointment). John Knox (1513-1572), formerly a Scottish Roman Catholic priest, is one example. In 1560 he founded the Church of Scotland, the forerunner of the Presbyterian Church (“Presbyterian” in Greek, *presbyterios*, means “elders,” ruling elders who represent the congregation). Sam Rutherford (1600-1661), a Scottish Presbyterian who internalized these democratic ideals, wrote *Lex Rex—Law is King* (1644), arguing for a civil government based on law with the consent of the majority. This civil government would have separate but equal governing bodies, just as the Presbyterian church: “A basic principle of Presbyterian government is that authority is lodged in ordered groups not in individuals.”<sup>xxviii</sup> The American government was created in part from a Presbyterian model, with its checks and balances. Hegel, who called Christianity (Calvinism?) the “Absolute Religion,” believed this stress on equality, lifestyle, and work fostered a personal dignity that ultimately gave rise to demands for equal political recognition. The American and French revolutions were the fruits of this.<sup>xxix</sup>

Modern science, of course, began before the Reformation, in fits and starts, with religious orthodoxy stifling it every step of the way. Nicolas Copernicus (1473-1543), the Polish astronomer and monk, was first to offer an alternative view of the earth's rotation. Though he finished his book in 1530, Copernicus was afraid to publish it because he anticipated a hostile response. He finally published his theories in 1543, the year of his death. Why was he afraid? Since ancient times, the Church held that

the sun, planets, and stars revolved around the earth, based on the ideas of Ptolemy (127-145) and some poetic verses in the Hebrew Bible. Though Copernicus dedicated his book, *Revolutions of Heavenly Bodies*, to Pope Paul III, the Church formally condemned it in 1616. Yet, to be fair, this ban was lifted in 1620 after minor revisions.

Galileo (1564-1642) claimed in 1610 that Copernicus' theories were true. For this and other theories, Galileo was brought before the Inquisition where he repented. On March 5, 1616, the Inquisition issued this statement:

The view that the sun stands motionless at the center of the universe is foolish, philosophically false, and utterly heretical, because contrary to Holy Scripture. The view that the earth is not the center of the universe and even has a daily rotation is philosophically false, and at least an erroneous belief.<sup>xxx</sup>

Galileo was under house arrest for many years, and though blind, he continued his research. Some blame Galileo himself for this censure; his theories may have gained wider acceptance had he been more diplomatic (In 1993 the Roman Catholic Church formally recognized the merits of Galileo's contribution to science). In a letter to the Grand Duchess Christina of Tuscany in 1615, Galileo expressed what would become the battle cry of scientists for generations: The removal of science from the control of religious dogmas.

[I think] that in the discussion of natural problems, we ought not to begin at the authority of places of scripture, but at the sensible experiments and necessary demonstrations... Nature, being inexorable and immutable, and never passing the bounds of laws assigned to her... I conceive that, concerning natural effects, that which either sensible experience sets before our eyes, or necessary demonstrations do prove unto us, ought not, upon any account, to be called into question, much less condemned upon the testimony of scripture.<sup>xxxii</sup>

In a climate where science had not been exactly welcomed, Calvinist Protestants began to carry the torch of scientific inquiry and I will cite just one example: From 1666-1866, ninety-two foreign members were elected to the French Academy of the Sciences. Of these, seventy-one were Protestant and sixteen were Catholic (the five others were either Jewish or another affiliation). This is from an estimate of 107 million Catholics and 68 million Protestants during this time.<sup>xxxiii</sup> Was it from their tradition of protest that motivated Protestants to reach to new vistas? Isaac Newton (1642-1727), writing a little over a generation after Galileo, published *The Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy* (1687), developing his ideas of "three

laws of motion” based on Galileo’s theories. Newton’s ideas were immediately accepted, given the openness of England and Northern Europe after the Reformation. Newton saw no conflict between religion and science. As Galileo, he believed he was discovering the laws that God created. Beginning with Newton a harmony between some elements of Protestant Christianity and science arose, with scientific discoveries influencing some Protestant Christian teachings.

Of course, this harmony could not continue forever. Charles Darwin (1808-1882), himself a devoted Protestant Christian, finally challenged the central myths of Christianity. With *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* (1859) Darwin gave an alternative account of life’s origins. Protestant denominations of the late nineteenth century responded in one of two ways: Some incorporated Darwin’s theories into their teachings while others vehemently rejected them entirely.<sup>xxxiii</sup> The final break between Protestant Christian orthodoxy and science came in 1871 when Darwin published *Descent of Man*, asserting that humanity developed from the ape family and suggested that it differed only in degree from other animals.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

Yet, it was the climate of openness that enabled Darwin to do his research and publish his work. Calvinism had long before Darwin made one of its greatest contribution to modern life: separating freedom of inquiry from religion.

## 5. Concluding discussion

Granted, it is a giant leap from the small, embattled religious communities of sixteenth-century Europe to modern life today, but the connection is recognizable. Unlike archeologists, we have no fossils to prove an evolutionary origin, perhaps because the traces are too obvious, living in and around us as they do. Early reformers, were they to leap five hundred years to our time, might recognize what they had set in motion in our modern sense of human dignity: self-autonomy, the right to interpret the meaning of life on our own, the right to privacy, protection of property—and from government—the right to enjoy the fruits of one’s labor, the importance of a disciplined life, basic equality among people, each with an honorable calling, the right to choose leaders, the importance of continual self-improvement, of universal education. Once these sacred values were given voice, the philosophies and theories that strove to make them a reality were eventually articulated.

The reformers ennobled values that harmonized with older ideals, and as the Reformation snowballed, these, too, became part of the cluster. The scientific method

originated in Roman Catholic, not Protestant, Europe; democratic ideals first arose in ancient Greece; a free market has been part of human life since the dawning of civilization, more recently from the guild associations of central Europe. Calvinism tilled the soil that caused them to flourish together in a new context. The time was ripe, and Calvin shaped it with a comprehensive moral system, framing the boundaries, setting the goals for living. It was a magic moment, and once set in motion, it was carried by a force as seemingly stable as the very laws of nature. The question is: How stable? Will it all collapse or will it continue to bring us to new heights?

Stephen Jay Gould (1941-2002), in *Time's Arrow, Time's Cycle* (1987), outlined the two competing visions in geology, the cyclical versus the linear. The linear vision, of course, has taken precedence in all fields of study after Darwin's *Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* (1859). The slow cooling of the earth, needless to say, propels the largely linear "deep time" of geology. Yet, the cyclical is also a reality of nature, with Gould making the case that everyone should appreciate the aesthetic beauty of geological cycles, even though this is in a linear context. Philosophy follows science for legitimacy, but many things remain beyond the empirical reach. With regards to the sweep of civilizations, no one knows which philosophical vision, cyclical or linear, will be humankind's destiny. That history has a pattern has been discredited, now that Karl Marx's (1818-83) "dialectical materialism," with its dogmatic inevitability of history, has fallen out of favor. But everyone sees historical patterns on some level and can identify what certainly seems like progress, in terms of human achievement.

Giambattista Vico (1668-1744), using Greek and Roman civilizations as models in his *New Science* (1725), wrote of the rising and falling of cultures in a cyclical process. A civilization at certain stages is only capable of certain things; one stage of development necessarily comes before another, as steps up a ladder. Without the primitive stages, no advanced stage is possible, as Vico declared: "magic must come before rational thought."<sup>xxxv</sup> Archeologists and historians universally apply Vico's theories to determine the period for a civilization's capacity for art, architecture, poetry, or philosophy. An age of magic has little capacity for abstract thinking, but can develop to that height, if the conditions are right. The Mediterranean of Homer (c. 9<sup>th</sup>-c BCE), for example, was not yet ready for philosophy or a consistent moral system. That world lived by a warrior code, and so *The Iliad* can only portray, albeit in language that has echoed through the centuries, the barbarism and violence of battle, with the stronger crushing the weaker; it cannot offer a moral judgment for the sacking of Troy

by the cunning and treacherous Achaean mercenaries. Though *The Iliad* was depicting an earlier time, the Trojan Wars of around 1200 BCE, the poetry reflected the values of the time in which it was written. Several hundred years would pass before rational thought became possible in Greek culture.

At the pinnacle of development, according to Vico, moral decay sooner or later sets in, with the values the civilization is based on rotting its very foundations. Today's conservative critics, whether they know it or not, have absorbed Vico's paradigm in their attempt to reassert traditional values for civilization's salvation. Vico made no such moral judgments; this was the way things happened, given the realities of human civilization. It simply falls apart out of its own exhaustion and the world returns to a more primitive state once again, only to begin the long climb upward in a cycle that will never end.

Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831), on the other hand, believed that history had a linear trajectory, propelled forward by enmity between opposing ideas. The concept that conflict produces progress is not original with Hegel, but in fact dates back to the Greek philosopher Heraclitus (c. 535-c. 475 BCE), who insisted on the absoluteness of change: "No man ever steps in the same river twice." In *Phenomenology of the Mind* (1807), however, Hegel created a paradigm of how progress comes about: One dominant belief (a thesis) clashes with a competing, minority belief (an antithesis) in which both are destroyed. This gives birth to a new value system or philosophy with characteristics of both (a synthesis). This, then, becomes the new dominant view until the cycle is repeated. The top, however, does not just spin, but has a direction. The pendulum swings until an answer is found. Conflicts arise from attempts to solve the important challenges of civilization. Hegel called a solution to the great dilemmas "the end of history." Hegel did not mean that events end. History, in the sense of experience, continues, but after an important question has been answered, the lesson is learned, so the book is shut. The end of history generates a great leap forward, since people, and therefore civilizations, thrive when the social environment is most advantageous, where human potential can reach ever higher. Hegel's view helps to see the modern world and its values in a different light. Other nations did not have to go through the struggles and revolutions, the clashing of the thesis and antithesis, to arrive at a democratic ideal. The empirical method took centuries to perfect; cultures world wide benefitted from this "end of history," for gratis.

When is Hegel's end of history reached? If no other forces challenge the internal contradictions of normative practice, we have arrived. The scientific method is secure,

in the Hegelian end of history. Empiricism, as long as history in our current tradition continues, is enshrined as the universal method for inquiry. Since the fall of the Soviet Union (1991), the consensus also favors representative governments. Hegel, as mentioned, said that the American and French revolutions answered the question of how civilizations should rule themselves. Though easily challenged by the right (fascism) and the left (one party control), the democratic ideal has become an almost universal aspiration. Aung San Suu Kyi said that, “[t]he institutions and practices of democracy provide ways and means by which such changes could be effected without recourse to violence...”<sup>xxxvi</sup> The world has grown weary of violence, and like the scientific method democratic practices can pollinate in any culture, but liberal democracy is more closely tied to the value system it grew out of. Democracy flourishes with a stable middle-class (such as in Calvin’s Geneva) that has internalized these more bourgeois values, so scorned by Marx, we have been discussing.<sup>xxxvii</sup> Lacking this, democracy does not advance very far from paper to practice. Free market capitalism, however, has yet to prove it is an historical end; it has been vehemently challenged for its cruelty to too many in its creation of wealth for the few. “Can the inequities be wrung out? Can it improve?” These are questions future generations will grapple with.

Vico’s vision rather than Hegel’s may be our future. Civilization today encompasses the entire globe, but if either the United States or Europe implodes, would the modern world tumble into a less sophisticated state? Though many worry about the corruption of values as a possible cataclysmic cause, a more pressing concern is the environment: The consumerism the world economy is based on is destroying the earth. If societies can no longer produce economic growth, foundational for globalization, then international cooperation could fail too. The depletion of natural resources, then, could very well precipitate a collapse, since it is free-market capitalism’s most obvious internal contradiction.

The traditions set in motion by the Reformation seem linear and progressive, with science, democracy, and the economy delivering the modern miracles. Very few would willingly turn back the clock. Will these aid civilization in solving the many challenges that remain? Whether the truth is in the cyclical or linear or somewhere in between, both Vico and Hegel believed that humanity would endure. Both visions are remarkably positive, and perhaps this optimism is their greatest legacy.



### Appendix 1: Critiques of Weber & Tawney's Thesis

1. Northern Italy, Flanders, and Florence, despite being Roman Catholic, have had thriving economies.<sup>xxxviii</sup> Here Protestant teachings had little influence.
2. The Dutch who settled South Africa, though Protestant, were not able to produce economic prosperity.
3. Various religious or ethnic groups outside the mainstream culture produced values compatible with capitalism. Minorities or persecuted groups had to work harder in private businesses for economic success. The Puritans in England, the Parsees in India, the overseas Chinese, and the Jews in various countries are used as examples.
4. Changes in society made both the Reformation and capitalism possible. H. M. Robertson, in *Aspects of the Rise of Economic Individualism* (1935), wrote it was urban life and the new possibilities for trade that produced modern capitalism. Robertson said that the Puritans and other Calvinists had only come to terms with the changes in society. Instead of leading the way because work was a religious duty, as Tawney had said, Puritans were only catching up.
5. Luther and Calvin were somewhat hostile toward the accumulation of wealth. This discouraged rather than encouraged capitalism.<sup>xxxix</sup>

### Appendix 2: Changes In Religious Life

1. Protestants were ardent supporters of scientific inquiry.
2. A disciplined life became very important. Getting up early, working all day, living a moral life, reading books with moral lessons, showed a "calling."
3. People became thrifty and serious-minded, saving their money and shunning all extravagance.
4. Religion became a personal conviction. A person's primary duty was to God and how he or she lived life, not necessarily to a church organization.
5. People began to believe that every vocation was equal in the eyes of God, who did not favor any one person above another. People took more pride in their jobs. Aristocratic rank no longer meant as much, or was even looked down on. George Herrick, a Puritan poet, wrote "Hence...will arise peculiar consolation, since there will be no employment so mean and sordid...as not to appear truly respectable, and be deemed highly important in the sight of God."<sup>xi</sup>
6. People saw work as a "good" in itself, and earning money as spiritual activity. Christians could reflect godly values in their work.<sup>xii</sup>
7. Church members suddenly had authority to choose their own church leaders, fostering a democratic ideal.

8. It motivated the colonization of North America by British Puritans.<sup>xlii</sup>

### **Appendix 3: General Changes in European Society**

1. It promoted personal, economic, and political individualism. Also, because it was important to be able to read the Bible, a new emphasis on public education arose, an educational system that treated children from different social classes equally.
2. It promoted self-government. Church groups that chose their own church leaders soon wanted to choose their own political leaders as well. Hegel spoke of (Protestant) Christianity as the absolute religion.<sup>xliii</sup> By “absolute,” he meant that the idea of equality in Christianity could meet a person’s basic need for recognition. Hegel also believed that “liberal democracy” was the Christian ideal of equality put into practice in the French and American Revolutions. When Christianity was secularized, people received recognition of their innate dignity by becoming legally and socially equal.<sup>xliv</sup>
3. It opened new opportunities for free market capitalism. R. H. Tawney wrote that Calvin’s teachings “broke with the tradition which, regarding a preoccupation with economic interests, had stigmatized the middle men as parasites and the usurer as a thief.”<sup>xlv</sup>
4. It promoted secular societies. With Calvinism, people could take the values of the religion without actually practicing the religion.<sup>xlvi</sup>
5. It created a preoccupation with the here and now, motivating a desire to improve social conditions.<sup>xlvii</sup>
6. It changed the power structure of Europe, from the hierarchy of the church and a feudal society that emphasized submission to a more egalitarian one, where personal initiative and innovation became important. It also changed Europe’s borders to what it generally is today.
7. It gave people a sense of shared values that furthered trade and led to modern capitalism.<sup>xlviii</sup>

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### Footnotes

- <sup>i</sup> Some of the ideas in this article are from an article I wrote The Reformation: One Source of Modern Internationalism. *Journal of Policy Studies*, No. 13, pp. 1-12.
- <sup>ii</sup> Here, I would agree with anyone who says that a discussion such as this smacks of Western imperialism, that internationalism has destroyed indigenous cultures worldwide. This, indeed, is the great tragedy of the modern world. Southern Europe and Latin America have been left behind until recently. Other nations struggle to keep pace, while most developing countries seem resigned to languish far behind. The cultures of East Asia, those with a Buddhist/Confucian heritage, had indigenous values that easily merged with internationalism, and so some have prosperous economies and successful democracies. These are the ones benefitting the most. We are more enlightened today, but this does not change the aftermath of crippled cultures. I am concerned here with internationalism's inception, but understand the crimes committed in the process darken any discussion on this theme.
- <sup>iii</sup> Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*, p. 208.
- <sup>iv</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *Trust*, pp. 349-50.
- <sup>v</sup> David Edmonds & John Eidinow, *Wittgenstein's Poker: The Story of a Ten-Minute Argument Between Two Great Philosophers*, p. 70.
- <sup>vi</sup> Max Weber, in *The End of History and The Last Man* by Francis Fukuyama, p. 227.
- <sup>vii</sup> Will Durant, *The Reformation*, p. 451.
- <sup>viii</sup> Page Smith, *Rediscovering Christianity*, p. 51.
- <sup>ix</sup> Peter Ackroyd, *The Life of Thomas More*, p. 223.
- <sup>x</sup> Karen Armstrong, *A History of God*, p. 276.
- <sup>xi</sup> Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon*, p. 179.
- <sup>xii</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *A Life of John Calvin*, p. 90, quoted in *A History of God* by Karen Armstrong, p. 281.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, p. 227.
- <sup>xiv</sup> Will Durant, *The Reformation*, p. 488.
- <sup>xv</sup> Page Smith, *Rediscovering Christianity*, p. 54.
- <sup>xvi</sup> Karl Barth, *The Theology of John Calvin*, p. 226.
- <sup>xvii</sup> H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, p. 194.
- <sup>xviii</sup> John Calvin, in *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* by R.H. Tawney, p. 105.
- <sup>xix</sup> R.H. Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, p. 110.
- <sup>xx</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, p. 30.

- xxi Will Durant, *The Reformation*, p. 59.
- xxii Nathan Rosenberg and L.E. Birdzell, Jr., *How the West Grew Rich: The Economic Transformation of the Industrial World* (New York: Basic Books, 1986), p. 114 quoted in *Trust* by Francis Fukuyama, p. 154.
- xxiii Max Weber, *Churches and Sects in North America* (1906), in *The Protestant Work Ethic and Other Writings*, p. 205.
- xxiv David S. Landes, *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations*, p.178.
- xxv Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism*, pp. 109-10.
- xxvi Philip Schaff, *The Swiss Reformation*, 2v. Edinburgh, 1893, p. 644 quoted in *The Reformation* by Will Durant, p. 476.
- xxvii R. H. Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, p. 102.
- xxviii Quote from Eugene Carson Blake (1906-1985), a minister of the Presbyterian Church.
- xxix Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, pp. 194-95.
- xxx Quoted in *The Reformation* by Will Durant, p. 608.
- xxxi Quoted in *The Western Intellectual Tradition*, p. 125.
- xxxii Please see J. Bronowski and Bruce Mazlish, *The Western Intellectual Tradition*, pp. 85, 86 and David S. Landes, *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations*, p. 176.
- xxxiii Mortimer J. Adler, *Ten Philosophical Mistakes*, p. 50.
- xxxv Isaiah Berlin, *The Power of Ideas*, p. 64.
- xxxvi Aung San Suu Kyi, *Freedom From Fear and Other Writings*, pp. 176-7.
- xxxvii Charles Van Doren, *A History of Knowledge*, p. 259-60.
- xxxviii Will Durant, *The Reformation*, p. 475.
- xxxix Page Smith, *Rediscovering Christianity*, p. 5.
- xl *ibid.* p. 58.
- xli Cotton Mather, *A Christian and His Calling* (1701), quoted in *The Culture of Narcissism* by Christopher Lasch, p. 108.
- xlj J. Bronowski and Bruce Mazlish, *The Western Intellectual Tradition*, p. 76.
- xljii Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, pp. 194-96.
- xliv *ibid.* p. 198.
- xlvi R.H. Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, Penguin Books ed. (New York, 1947), p. 93.  
in *The Western Intellectual Tradition* by J. Bronowski and Bruce Mazlish, p. 96.
- xlvi Karen Armstrong, *A History of God*, p. 279.
- xlvi Francis Fukuyama, *Trust*, p. 45.
- xlvi *ibid.* p. 154.