5

Culture, or Accounting for the Merely Different

"Order," they knew, "is Nature's first law," and they made it their own, for they were in harmony with Nature. They organized, they systematized, they classified, they codified, and all Nature, the universe itself, fell into order at their bidding. . . .

—Henry Steele Commager, *The Empire of Reason*

There are no villains in the epic tale of capitalism, only accountants.[1] The division of material goods in a commonwealth, says Thomas Aquinas, "is not according to the natural law, but arose rather from human agreement which belongs to positive law. . . . The ownership of possessions is not contrary to the natural law, but an addition thereto devised by human reason."[2] Max Weber locates the wellspring of the forces that organize capitalist markets, not in some mysterious natural or historical necessity—class conflict, for example—but in bookkeeping, a contingent operation of human intellect. Capitalism only becomes a reality when procedures of accounting define capital as something distinct from income, thus making possible its distinctive regime of accumulation.[3] Capital is not a property that lay dormant in human nature for millennia,[4] but an artifact that, in coordination with other social technologies such as the state, orchestrates relationships between human beings, and also between human beings and

1. Boyle, *Who Are We Now?*, 66.
2. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 2a.2ae.66.2.
3. Weber, *Protestant Ethic*, 21–22, 67; cf. Boyle, *Who Are We Now?*, 66.
4. A position argued for by Ardrey, *Territorial Imperative*.

the earth itself, around the activities of production, consumption, accumulation, and exchange.

Though talk about accounting practices and the wellsprings of capital may seem an odd way to introduce the concept of culture in the context of a theological inquiry into the technological organization of a world come of age, there is a reason for it. Far from simply naming universal and timeless features of human existence, this concept represents a significant change in "bookkeeping procedures" that account for human difference in a world come of age. These procedures are part and parcel of the social regime that women and men have virtually no choice but to depend on to cope with the world they inhabit. "Culture" is a historically conditioned and transitory form of human expression that was first imagined at the dawn of the modern era in Europe to deal with a host of developments: the diversity of human life, revolution, and class struggle. It was also employed with increasing precision in connection with Europe's colonial enterprises, and it continues its operations with the spread of global capitalism. It helps push to the margins any and all activities, habits, and institutions that might impede "the otherwise free flow of the market and of government directions."[5]

How a world come of age accounts for difference is a crucial matter for study, for the ways human beings learn to see themselves in relation to the different peoples, places, and things they routinely encounter as they go about their daily lives determine to a significant extent the form of worldliness they perform. Indeed, men and women inhabit a world *as* world, that is, *as* some kind of ordered, intelligible whole, through the use of language. This work of description, which always presupposes some type of social lexicon and grammar, is as necessary for twenty-first-century urban commuters as it was for our hunting-and-gathering forebears. Dominant regimes in particular take upon themselves the task of constructing a world that purports to encompass all human beings, and invariably they do so in ways that make their forms of life normative. The ancient Greeks referred to non-Greek speakers as barbarians, as those who said nothing but "bar-bar-bar" (and thus obviously uncivilized). The poet Virgil in like fashion claimed that Rome's destiny was to "rule with all your power / the peoples of the earth—these will be your arts; / to put your stamp on the works and ways of peace, / to spare the defeated, break the proud in war."[6] A few centuries

5. Boyle, *Who Are We Now?*, 29.

6. Virgil, *Aeneid* VI.850–53. Augustine's contention that the earthly city is governed by the *libido dominandi*, the lust to mastery, thus applies with equal force to a world come of age. Augustine, *City of God* 1.Pref., 3.

later the emperor Marcus Aurelius envisioned the whole world as one city, a *cosmopolis*, with Rome of course as its organizing principle.[7]

The gospel reminds us that throughout history those who find themselves on the short end of history also formulate ways to account for the other, with their own rules of inclusion and exclusion. Jesus, in typical Jewish fashion, refers to non-Jews as Gentiles, telling his followers on the night before his crucifixion that Gentile rulers lord it over their subjects, and claim that they do so for their benefit (Luke 22:25). That someone and something should perform this work of describing and weighing differences within and between peoples should not be controversial, and a world come of age is no exception. What is significant in this otherwise mundane act is the particular way the modern world accounts for difference, and to what ends.

I should note at the outset that there is not a precise one-to-one correspondence between religion and culture as social technologies related to the ways the modern world positions difference in its proper place. It may not be particularly helpful to say that the church needs a noncultural interpretation of Christianity in exactly the same way it needs a nonreligious interpretation. It is relatively harmless, for example, to use "culture" to refer to the habits, practices, institutions, customs, rites, artifacts, and mores that comprise every society and that constitute the sense and coherence of its way of life and convey it to its members. As Bonhoeffer puts it in a working note for *Ethics*, culture (*Bildung*) is the working of reality as a whole into the mind and spirit.[8] Both a world come of age and the church, as distinct performances of worldly human existence, *have* a culture in the sense that each has a distinctive set of activities, structures, convictions, and dispositions that shapes the way it copes with the world.

The problems arise when one says that the church *is* a culture, or worse, that it *belongs* to culture. Such assertions only make sense when, within a world come of age, the habits, practices, institutions, customs, rites, artifacts, and mores of the church are displaced from the performative context where they originated and where they served as the basis for its worldly witness in word and deed, and relocated within the technological repertoire of the modern social regime, where they are used as instruments for classifying and ranking otherness to serve the world's organizing aims. The practices and institutions of the church are thereby domesticated to serve a form of worldliness in tension with the kind of worldliness envisioned by Bonhoeffer.

7. Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, 3.11, 4.3.

8. Bonhoeffer, *Zettelnotizen*, 76; cf. *DBWE* 6:217 n. 159.

Though Bonhoeffer's critique of religion offers us crucial insight into the social grammar of a world come of age, it needs not only to be developed further but supplemented as well by analyses of other social technologies by means of which modernity accounts for difference. In this regard the notion of culture has played a key role in a social project that has had as its goal for more than three centuries now the construction and reconstruction of a particular form of worldliness. In much the same way that the concept of society is implicitly identified with nation-states in the grammar of modernity, "culture" is implicated with the social regime of the state. Culture is "politics in non-political guise."[9]

The Road Not Taken: Bonhoeffer and "Culture"

Unlike Paul Tillich, who claims that religion "is the substance of culture, culture is the form of religion,"[10] Bonhoeffer does not as a rule invoke either *Bildung* or *Kultur* as a constructive theological concept, either by itself or in conjunction with religion, in his theological formulations. The one exception to this is when on occasion he uses *Kultur* as a synonym for the divine mandate of "work" (*Arbeit*) in connection with the notion of estates—economic, political, ecclesiastical—which of course is a holdover from feudalism, though he wants to move away from static conceptions of social being that prevailed in feudalism and toward the language of task.[11] He does not have a well-developed theory of the concept, and there is certainly little or nothing at stake theologically for him in it. Indeed, given the size of the corpus and the prevalence of the term in his historical and social context, it is intriguing to note how seldom the various cognates for culture in German actually appear in his writings.

This is not to say that he is unfamiliar with its multiple definitions, including its more aristocratic connotations, which at times he does espouse—for example, when he laments the fact that spiritual life (*geistige Existenz*) has become fragmented, a torso, that everyone is just a technician, even in music and the other arts.[12] According to Paul Lehmann, Bonhoeffer was thoroughly "German in his passion for perfection, whether of manners, or performance, or all that is connotated [*sic*] by the word *Kultur*. Here, in short, was an aristocracy of the spirit at its best."[13] Bonhoeffer can also

9. Eagleton, *Culture and the Death of God*, 123.
10. Tillich, *Theology of Culture*, 42.
11. *DBWE* 6:388 (*DBW* 6:392).
12. *DBWE* 8:306 (*DBW* 8:336).
13. Cited by Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 155.

be highly critical of these associations, stating that a culture (*Bildung*) that breaks down in the face of danger is no culture.[14] At other times he uses these terms in a generic sense, as seen in his discussion of the mandates, employing it as a synonym for labor, or in connection with the notions of reason, freedom, humanity, and tolerance.[15] He has nothing of significance invested in the term, and nothing is at stake theologically for him in it.

Nevertheless, there is something noteworthy in the road not taken, particularly when that highway is so heavily travelled by his fellow intellectuals in Germany. Though nothing conclusive can be reliably inferred from the fact that Bonhoeffer does not make extensive use of the concept, it does suggest that he is working, at least implicitly, at cross purposes with important segments of the German society of his time. Nobel Prize laureate Thomas Mann, speaking to a group of republican students in 1923, addresses what he sees as the reluctance of middle-class Germans to be involved in politics in relation to the notion of culture:

> The inwardness, the culture ["Bildung"] of a German implies introspectiveness; an individualistic cultural conscience; consideration for the careful tending, the shaping, deepening and perfecting of one's own personality or, in religious terms, for the salvation and justification of one's own life; subjectivism in the things of the mind, therefore, a type of culture that might be called pietistic, given to autobiographical confession and deeply personal, one in which the world of the *objective*, the political world, is felt to be profane and is thrust aside with indifference "because," as Luther says, "this external order is of no consequence." What I mean by all this is that the idea of a republic meets with resistance in Germany chiefly because the ordinary middle-class man here, if he ever thought about culture, never considered politics to be part of it, and still does not do so today. To ask him to transfer his allegiance from inwardness to the objective, to politics, to what the peoples of Europe call *freedom*, would seem to him to amount to a demand that he should do violence to his own nature, and in fact give up his sense of national identity.[16]

According to W. H. Bruford, Mann believes that middle-class Germans of the time were relatively indifferent to politics because they were devoted

14. *DBWE* 8:267–69 (*DBW* 8:290–92).

15. *DBWE* 6:388, 340–42.

16. Thomas Mann, "Von deutscher Republik," cited by Bruford, *German Tradition of Self-Cultivation*, vii.

to the inner cultivation of the mind, "and this devotion to culture is good because it tends to make [them] humane."[17]

This connection between, on the one hand, inwardness and introspectiveness, which as we have seen is at the forefront of the critique of liberal theology in the prison correspondence, and on the other the concepts of culture and religion in German society, is not lost on Bonhoeffer. In a sermon preached in Barcelona in 1928, he states that in its desire to chart its own path to the eternal, the soul in its restlessness, its grandiose and gentle efforts at self-transcendence, produces great works of philosophy and art: "The systems of Plato and Hegel, the Adam of Michelangelo, the quartets and symphonies of Beethoven, the cathedrals of the Gothic period, the paintings of Rembrandt, or the Faust and Prometheus of Goethe." In addition there are the great preachers of morality, including Plato and Kant. But these are to no avail, because "God is God, and grace is grace. Here is the source of the great disturbance of our illusions and of our confidence in culture, the great disruption, which God brings about and which the ancient myth of the Tower of Babel illustrates." In the end, he writes, "Culture and religion [*Kultur wie Religion*] both stand under divine judgment."[18] He returns to this theme in a sermon given later that year in Madrid: "Not a cultivation of the soul, not human culture [*Nicht Seelenbildung, nicht Menschenkultur*], not moral polishing, but surrender of the soul to an other; not the soul as the center of the world but rather that to which the soul sacrifices itself."[19]

By refusing to privilege the concept of culture in either a constructive or polemical manner in his theology, as Tillich does, Bonhoeffer departs from the path established by Friedrich Schleiermacher for German theology beginning in the nineteenth century and extending well into the twentieth. Schleiermacher extracts faith from scripture (which he describes in *On Religion* as a mausoleum for true piety) and the church (with its "caved-in walls of their Jewish Zion and its Gothic pillars"), and substitutes a prethematic form of awareness or feeling as the basis of religion. This feeling is a diamond, but it is encased in a shell of metaphysics and morals that must be cracked open.[20] Karl Barth observes that in "the very places where

17. Bruford, *German Tradition of Self-Cultivation*, 228. Richard Evans disputes the notion that Germans were indifferent to politics, noting that participation in political activities—voting, parties, heated discussion and debates in pubs and bars—in the early years of the twentieth century was very high. Nevertheless, as Evans himself observes, much of the political foment had to do with the German "'struggle for culture' in its ideological ferocity." Evans, *Coming of the Third Reich*, 16–19. See also Lepenies, *Seduction of Culture in German History*.

18. *DBWE* 10:482–83 (*DBW* 10:456–58).

19. *DBWE* 10:533 (*DBW* 10:519).

20. Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, 4, 50, 22.

the theology of the Reformation had said 'the Gospel' or 'the Word of God' or 'Christ' Schleiermacher, three hundred years after the Reformation, now says, religion or piety."[21]

Schleiermacher not only separates the essence of religion from any substantial connection to Christian convictions, practices, and institutions, says Jonathan Sheehan, he reassigns it to a new proper place, the realm of culture, a concept that in nineteenth-century Germany quickly subsumes humankind's "entire spiritual, political, artistic, historical, and scholarly heritage." Initially its range of reference extended to all humanity, but this cosmopolitan spirit was rather quickly translated into German particularity.[22] (The breakdown of cosmopolitan aspirations into some sort of particularity is inevitable in any case, since "humankind" as a single society does not exist. Appeals to the "human community" are either "a glorification and reification of what are our *existing* contingent social practices and forms of life *or* a pious and vacuous generality."[23]) What Schleiermacher ultimately invents, then, is a theological foundation for cultural Protestantism (*Kulturprotestantismus*), the reconfiguration of the sense of scripture and tradition to underwrite societal conditions that exist in a nation or people at a given time.[24]

Bonhoeffer reserves some of his harshest criticism for this phenomenon. In a series of lectures he gives at the University of Berlin during the winter semester of 1931–32 on the history of twentieth-century systematic theology, he calls into question the synthesis of Christianity and culture that was a given to many theologians in his day. He states that Wilhelm Hermann secures a synthesis with culture through a reappropriation of Kant's categorical imperative. The essential function of Christianity is said to be to provide the overarching framework (*die Klammer*, literally "the clamp") that holds together "the cultural function of the age" (*der geistigen Besitz der Zeit*). When this sort of synthesis is presupposed as the goal of theology, writes Bonhoeffer in connection to the culture of personality advanced by Adolf von Harnack and Ernst Troeltsch, "Jesus is only the deepening and the justification of the modern ideal."[25]

Though the phrase "cultural Protestantism" itself does not appear in "Thy Kingdom Come!," which he writes at approximately the same time he

21. Barth, *From Rousseau to Ritschl*, 339.

22. Sheehan, *Enlightenment Bible*, 223.

23. Bernstein, "What Is the Difference That Makes a Difference?," 80.

24. Sheehan, *Enlightenment Bible*, 228–29.

25. *DBWE* 11:223–24 (*DBW* 11:223); cf. *DBWE* 6:346 n. 30. Here is the premise and precursor to Charles Mathewes' contention that churches should formulate a comprehensive civic vision. Mathewes, *Theology of Public Life*, 203.

delivers these lectures, it finds a cognate in what he calls "pious, Christian secularism," where faith hardens "into religious convention and morality, and the church into an organization of action for religious-moral reconstruction." In our pride we place limits on God, stating that he cannot come to us, and thus we must create the kingdom of God "in the strengthening of the church, in the Christianizing of culture and politics and upbringing, and in a renewal of Christian moral convention." But it is not what we and God could do that forms the basis of our prayer that God's kingdom might come, but what God has in fact done for us, and what God continues to do for us time and again.[26]

Bonhoeffer's suspicions about the idea of culture resurface at Finkenwalde. In a lecture in which he discusses the contemporizing of New Testament texts, Bonhoeffer groups together several ideas that have "shaped theology all the way to the theology of the G[erman] C[hristians]." He begins with rationalism, "the emancipation of autonomous reason," which he describes as the eruption of the claim, latent in humankind since our expulsion from Eden, that women and men should shape their lives free from the forces of the given world. Those autonomous human beings who wish to retain a Christian confession therefore demand that the Christian message justify itself before the forum of their own authority: "If this succeeds, then they call themselves *Christians*; if it does not succeed, they call themselves *pagans*." He then links the concept of culture with this effort:

> It makes not the slightest difference whether the forum before which the biblical message is to justify itself is called "reason" in the eighteenth century, "culture" [*Kultur*] in the nineteenth century, or "*Volkstum*" in the twentieth century or in the year 1933, along with everything that entails; it is *exactly the same question*: Can Christianity become contemporary for us as we simply—thank God!—are now?[27]

Bonhoeffer picks up the critique of cultural Protestantism in *Ethics*, where he explicitly connects the modern division of life into two realms with the secular or profane world that ostensibly exists over against the sacred domain, represented by monasticism. Whereas monasticism fashioned a form of spiritual existence that came to take no part in worldly existence, cultural Protestantism makes this-worldliness independent of Christ. This division of reality loses touch with the original Reformation message, which is that the proper place of human holiness (*eine Heiligkeit des Menschen*) is neither the sacred nor the profane as such, but only in God's gracious,

26. *DBWE* 12:291.

27. *DBWE* 14:414 (*DBW* 14:400).

sin-forgiving word. The Reformation came to be celebrated as the liberation of human conscience, reason and culture (*Kultur*), culminating in the justification of the worldly as such, all the while laying the groundwork for the emergence of a rationalized and mechanized world. The "disastrous misunderstanding" of cultural Protestantism creates the impression that people fulfill the responsibility given to them by God by faithfully performing their earthly vocational obligations as citizens, workers, and parents instead of hearing the call of Jesus Christ. That call does in fact lead them into earthly obligations but is never synonymous with it, for that would entail a false sanctioning of the worldly orders as such.[28]

Perhaps the most intriguing reference to cultural Protestantism comes in a lecture Bonhoeffer gives at Finkenwalde on pastoral care. He describes three different sorts of people: (1) those who consider themselves Christian but are fully occupied with family, work, and children, and thus believe they do not need or have time for the church; (2) the cultured or educated (*die Gebildeten*), who see themselves at a distance from the church, and thus everything, including the pastor, has its proper place; (3) those who are obstinate, disappointed, enlightened, or hostile to the church. Bonhoeffer takes special care when talking about the best ways to approach the educated, cautioning against trying to engage them in a philosophical or quasi-religious conversation. He concludes by saying that the cultured, in their opposition to the church, are victims of cultural Protestantism, "perhaps not unlike the tax collectors and prostitutes in the New Testament."[29]

The Invention of "Culture" as an Accounting Instrument for Difference

The absence of culture as a constructive concept in Bonhoeffer's thought notwithstanding, a substantial connection currently exists between it and the concept of religion that demands closer scrutiny. Indeed, in recent decades culture has taken the lead over religion in the lexicon and grammar by which a world come of age accounts for difference. In George Lindbeck's influential book *The Nature of Doctrine*, for example, "religion" is functionally

28. *DBWE* 6:57–60, 114, 290–91 (*DBW* 6:104).

29. *DBWE* 14:582 (*DBW* 14:578). In the *Ethics* manuscript Bonhoeffer notes that the modern concepts of reason, culture, humanity, tolerance, and autonomy, "which until recently had served as battle cries against the church, against Christianity, even against Jesus Christ, now surprisingly found themselves in very close proximity to the Christian domain." As the editors to the volume note, this is an allusion to the Confessing Church and its confessional stance as expressed in the Barmen Declaration. *DBWE* 6:340 and n. 8.

defined in the context of what makes for a culture.[30] More recently, Kathryn Tanner takes up and reformulates Lindbeck's thesis in a book appropriately titled *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology*, in which she argues for a more fluid and dynamic conception of culture as the groundwork for faith, as opposed to revelation.[31]

Lindbeck and Tanner are heirs to the work of H. Richard Niebuhr in his influential work *Christ and Culture*. Niebuhr defines culture as "the 'artificial, secondary environment' which man superimposes on the natural."[32] Included in this abstract description of culture is a group of traits, some of which are rather mundane: culture is social and involves human achievement. Much more significant is his contention that culture has principally to do with "values," a neo-Kantian concept that designates all that which does not belong to the empirical world of "facts," which have to do with the perception of causal relations in the natural and social worlds. Values have instead to do with the feelings of pleasure and pain, moral approbation and disapproval felt by the buffered self, which are brought about by our sense impressions.[33]

Once again we see the technological reconfiguration of the world, both human and nonhuman, compelling everything it encounters to produce specific signs of its presence and behavior, and like the concept of religion, the proper place for these signs is the inner life of the individual. The neat division between facts and values delimits a sphere separate from the world of politics and economics, a domain that in a carefully regulated sense is "free." It is free precisely because, in the words of Herbert McCabe, it "is free from relevance, and because it is irrelevant is not worth controlling. Philosophers, scientists, novelists and theologians need feel no responsibility to the community in what they say because nobody takes them seriously." McCabe adds that the project of modernity breaks down from time to time, and thus "the liberal society becomes subject to fits of illiberalism."[34]

Niebuhr also identifies the sphere of culture as the realm of pluralism, such that the society that takes form around the nation-state is "always involved in a more or less laborious effort to hold together in tolerable conflict the many efforts of many men in many groups to achieve and conserve many goods," or as Raymond Williams puts it, "The working-out of the idea

30. Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*, 33.
31. Tanner, *Theories of Culture*.
32. Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 32.
33. See, for example, Ritschl, *Christian Doctrine of Justification*, 3:204–5.
34. McCabe, *Law, Love and Language*, 158.

of culture is a slow reach again for control."[35] Niebuhr classifies the kingdom of God, for example, as a human value, "though scarcely as the one pearl of great price. Jesus Christ and God the Father, the gospel, the church, and eternal life may find places in the cultural complex, but only as elements in the great pluralism."[36] Very much in the manner first posited by Schleiermacher, human differences for Niebuhr have their "proper place" within culture, that is, in the pluralistic and altogether private domain of values, for which there need be no binding social agreement.

That the concept of culture performs this vital social function is not surprising, says Bernard McGrane: "We think under the hegemony of the ethnological response to the alienness of the Other; we are, today, *contained* within an anthropological concept of the Other. Anthropology has become our modern way of seeing the Other as, fundamentally and merely, *culturally* different."[37] This response to the other can never really take seriously the particularity of difference, because it stipulates that their core convictions and practices be regarded *merely* "as icing on a basically homogeneous cake."[38]

The pivotal role played by the concept of culture in theology is not limited to Protestant theology. In his book *The Naked Public Square*, Catholic theologian Richard John Neuhaus makes common cause with Tillich, Niebuhr, and others, linking together the ideas of politics, religion, and culture with that of the nation-state. According to Neuhaus, at the heart of culture is religion, which is not limited to ideas, activities, and attitudes normally connected to this term, but includes "all the ways we think and act and interact with respect to what we believe is ultimately true and important." The state, with its coercive role, cannot be the source of the network of binding obligations (derived from the Latin *religare*) that constitute society. These obligations, as expressed in law, derive their legitimacy from "what people believe to be their collective destiny or ultimate meaning." The only enduring foundations are the operative values of the American people, which "are overwhelmingly grounded in religious belief."[39]

35. R. Williams, *Culture and Society*, 295.

36. Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 38–39.

37. McGrane, *Beyond Anthropology*, x, my emphases.

38. Fish, "Boutique Multiculturalism," 382, my emphasis.

39. Neuhaus, *Naked Public Square*, 27, 37; cf. Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination*, 58–59.

To justify their claim that religion is "the ground or the depth-level of culture,"[40] both Lindbeck[41] and Neuhaus defer to Clifford Geertz's sociological conception of culture as an interlocked system of signs forming a context within which people, events, institutions, behaviors, and processes can be intelligibly described.[42] Neuhaus, to his credit, acknowledges this level of dependence on sociology might be disconcerting for some, but quickly assures them that while Geertz's is "a very 'human' definition of religion,"[43] they should not be worried, for theological and sociological accounts are not mutually exclusive. Neuhaus is certainly correct in asserting that the two accounts may well be compatible, but it is also necessarily true that the grammar of one establishes the sense of the other, and it is Geertz's account, with the implicit assumption that the nation-state constitutes the normative paradigm for society, that is grammatically prior to theology.

Just as we did with the concept of religion, then, we need some sense of how we got to this point in the description and classification of the other by means of "culture." McGrane provides a point of departure for our inquiry when he states that "Westerners" have historically used four paradigms to describe and interpret non-European peoples. Up to the sixteenth century, the setting was Christianity, and the other was a pagan, a characterization that tended to demonize her or him, given that the only space of salvation was in the Christian church. During the Enlightenment, the medieval paradigm was superseded by a conception that envisioned otherness in epistemological terms, employing ideas such as ignorance, error, and superstition to mark the difference between Europeans (who were rational, civilized, *cultured*) and non-Europeans. The Enlightenment paradigm eventually gave way in the nineteenth century to an account of history that privileged the new technological organizing of time as the "proper" and "scientific" arbiter of difference, arranging the relationship between peoples in terms of stages of development: primitive and advanced.[44] Gotthold Ephraim Lessing inaugurated this new paradigm when in 1780 he published *Education of the Human Race,* in which he divides the history of the human race by comparing it to the maturation process of an individual, starting with childhood (exemplified by the Old Testament), progressing into adolescence (the New Testament), and culminating with the mature humanity of an enlightened

40. Neuhaus, *Naked Public Square*, 132.
41. Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*, 115.
42. Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*, 14, 17, 26.
43. Neuhaus, *Naked Public Square*, 132.
44. McGrane, *Beyond Anthropology*, ix–x.

age and its promise of "a new eternal gospel."[45] Bonhoeffer distances himself from stadial accounts of this sort when he rejects the widespread notion that the Old Testament represents an earlier, "preliminary" stage of religion.[46]

In our time, says McGrane, difference is typically no longer demonized as pagan, or described derisively as primitive and superstitious, or relegated to an earlier period in the process of social evolution, surviving into the present on false pretenses and ultimately doomed to extinction. The dominant paradigm is now the ethnological concept of culture,[47] and it continues to be one of the principal instruments for containment of difference in a world come of age. It "democratizes" difference, such that the other is no longer a relic of another time and place; she or he belongs, but precisely in "our" time and in her or his proper place. The radical democratization of difference by means of culture authorizes "us," that is, members of the dominant society, to insert the other into "our" present, to transform her or him into "our" contemporary, always of course on "our" terms. "The non-European 'other' is still 'different' of course," says Kenneth Surin, "but now (s)he is *merely* 'different.'"[48] To put the matter in terms developed in chapter 4, the European, the proper subject of choice and action, has located the non-European other in her or his "proper place."

As with many of the seminal ideas of the Renaissance and Enlightenment, the inspiration for the modern concept of culture originated in antiquity, where its etymological Latin forerunner, *cultura*, was used to refer to what people of the soil typically did—tend natural growth. Human beings cultivated crops and animals, but not themselves, though a few authors did compare the intellectual, moral, and spiritual formation of persons to what the farmer and herder did. In his *Tusculan Disputations*, for example, Cicero says that

> just as a field, however good, cannot be productive without cultivation, so the soul cannot be productive without teaching. So true it is that the one without the other is ineffective. Now the cultivation of the soul is philosophy [*cultura autem animi philosophia est*]; this pulls out vices by the roots and makes souls fit for the reception of seed, and commits to the soul and, as we may say, sows in it seed of a kind to bear the richest fruit when fully grown.[49]

45. Sheehan, *Enlightenment Bible*, 131.
46. *DBWE* 5:53; *DBWE* 8:214.
47. McGrane, *Beyond Anthropology*, x; cf. Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics*, 39.
48. Surin, "Certain 'Politics of Speech,'" 74, Surin's emphasis.
49. Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* II.v.13.

The ancients thus did not use this term as an independent noun or posit an aspect of life distinct from that of the *polis* as such, but as a way of describing the formative processes that would enable a genuine human life to flourish.

Beginning in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, writes Raymond Williams, "two crucial changes occurred: first, a degree of habituation to the metaphor, which made the sense of human tending direct; second, an extension of particular processes to a general process, which the word could abstractly carry." From this metaphorical habituation arose the first modern use of the abstract noun "culture" in both French and English to fashion, first, a process or program of intellectual, spiritual, and aesthetic development and refinement.[50] For example, Francis Bacon, with reference to Cicero, writes in 1605 that just as the proper cultivation of seeds and young plants is crucial to their thriving, "the culture and manurance of minds in Youth hath such a forcible (though vnseen) operacion, as hardly any length of time or contention of labour can counteruaile it afterwords."[51]

As one might expect, an aristocratic sense of what counts as the proper cultivation of the mind or soul attaches itself quite early to this concept, with unmistakable class and colonial connotations. The terms "colonize" and "culture" are both derived from the same Latin root, the implications of which are noted at the end of the eighteenth century by Johann Gottfried von Herder, who argues that "nothing is more indeterminate than this word [culture], and nothing more deceptive than its application to all nations and periods."[52] To be counted among the cultured, particularly in Britain and France (and extending eventually to America in the West and Russia in the East), came to be associated with conceptions of enlightened civilization, a sign that one had been formed in the manner of Europe's new social elites, who would efficiently and humanely manage society from a universal, "cosmopolitan" perspective. The man or woman of culture "possessed through habituation a refined, educated soul with a claim to distinctive social status by virtue of his intellectual training and aesthetic sensibilities."[53]

As Herder's comments suggest, the relationship between the ideas of culture and civilization was configured differently in Germany due to the influence of two different impulses. As noted above, there tended to be a more nationalistic character to the related notions of *Bildung* and *Kultur*, as German intellectuals resisted French and English claims to the universality

50. R. Williams, *Keywords*, 87.

51. Bacon, *Oxford Francis Bacon*, 4:132, original spelling.

52. Herder, *Ideas on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind*, cited by R. Williams, *Keywords*, 89.

53. Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 4; R. Williams, *Keywords*, 87–88.

of their notion of a movable Enlightenment. In *On Religion*, Schleiermacher wastes no time in distinguishing the spiritual accomplishments of the German people over against the vulgarities of the English and French. The former care for nothing other than profit and enjoyment of material goods; the latter are incapable of holy awe and true adoration.[54]

Figures such as Schleiermacher singled out intellectual, artistic, and spiritual endeavors as the nation's bulwark against French- and English-dominated internationalism, in part because they thought that these feats constituted a higher form of achievement than any set of practices imposed from outside, but especially because they manifested a spirit that was distinctively German. Herder objects in particular to the suggestion that there is a single and universal process of human development subsisting in Europe, and he insists instead that we speak instead of "cultures."[55] "The distinctively German character of its *Kultur*," writes Tanner, "interrupted the uniformity of Enlightenment civilization" as the cosmopolitan ideal for all peoples.[56]

The emerging concept of *Kultur* in nineteenth-century Germany embodies the Romantic critique of the notion of a single, enlightened rational order to which all peoples should be conformed.[57] The notion of "civilization" that was held in such esteem in Britain and France was frequently regarded in nineteenth-century Germany as artificial in comparison with "Nature." Natural human needs and impulses were seen as more basic to life and therefore to be elevated above the artificial manners of politeness and elegance. There developed an interest in folk cultures, which were held to be closer to nature and thus offered an alternative to civilization, which was regarded as mechanical, the product of an abstract rationalism and the inhumanity of the Industrial Revolution. The emphasis of the culture-concept thus shifted from the rational cultivation of an enlightened intellect to the activities and achievements of literary and artistic endeavor: literature, music, dance, food, clothing, and the like. The concept of civilization was reserved for political and economic practices and institutions, which

54. Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, 9–10.

55. R. Williams, *Keywords*, 89–90.

56. Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 9–10. Michael DeJonge notes that this distinction can be detected in Bonhoeffer's *Ethics*, where he uses the adjective *westlich* (western) to the exclusion of Germany: "Thus Bonhoeffer uses the term *westliche Völker* to refer to Germany's western neighbors, such as Holland, England, and especially France." When he wishes to refer to a European political-cultural unity that embraces both western people and Germany, he uses *Abendland*. DeJonge, "Bonhoeffer's Concept of the West," 40.

57. The preeminent forerunner of this position was Jean-Jacques Rousseau, articulated masterfully in his *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*.

were seen as human artifacts, whereas *Kultur* was reserved for referring to the highest intellectual and artistic achievements in German society.[58] The range of the culture-concept was therefore extended once again, this time to name that which stood between human beings and the machines that had been invented to dominate "Nature" but that increasingly had imprisoned men and women within the iron cage of instrumental rationality.[59]

As the nineteenth century progressed, the Romantic meaning of culture in German society, which in the meantime had migrated to England,[60] increasingly became intransitive and self-contained, much like Aristotle's concept of *praxis*. This had the effect of privatizing everything that was classified under the concept as a matter of personal taste instead of public fact. The aim of culture was no longer to accomplish some end but simply to do something well, namely, to cultivate certain standards of thought and feeling, or as Matthew Arnold puts it, "inward spiritual activity,"[61] emphasizing "levels of excellence in fine art, literature, music and individual personal perfection."[62] The homology with the concept of religion, and in particular its confinement to its own private realm, becomes more apparent than ever.

The plural "cultures" initially posited by Herder made possible the anthropological sense of the concept, specifying a particular way of life practiced by a nation or people. Taylor expresses this sense of the term when he says of these developments that "the people as 'nation' is often seen as the bearer of a certain language or culture. The world is lived and sung in a way which is special to our nation and its language."[63] It is in this use that the concept comes to play a central role in the ethnological discourses of a world come of age in response to the unparalleled social change brought about by a number of interrelated factors: the demise of Christendom, the advent of colonialism, the rise of modern science and technology, the emergence and expansion of the political institutions of the modern nation-state, and the development of capitalist modes of accumulation and consumption. All of these developments (and others could be specified) led to the widespread encounters between, and massive displacements of, whole populations.

In the face of such rapid and radical diversification in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, says Raymond Williams, the development of

58. The fluidity of language allowed some authors to reverse this relationship, "culture" being used to talk about material development and "civilization" the spiritual. R. Williams, *Keywords*, 89–90.

59. See Weber, *Protestant Ethic*, 181.

60. Sheehan, *Enlightenment Bible*, 220–21.

61. Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, 44.

62. Jenks, *Culture*, 9.

63. Taylor, *Secular Age*, 579.

the idea of culture in European countries such as Great Britain was a general reaction to a general and major change in the conditions of common life, the result of the Industrial Revolution and rise of democratic polities. The concept itself is both an abstraction and absolute that emerges in response to, first, a recognition that certain moral and intellectual activities had become separated from the impulses of a new kind of society, and second, the need to offer a mitigating and rallying alternative over against the processes of social practical judgment as a court of human appeal: "We can now see that a result of the changes in society at the time of the Industrial Revolution, cultivation could not be taken for granted as a process, but had to be stated as an absolute, an agreed centre for defence. Against mechanism, the amassing of fortunes and the proposition of utility as the source of value, it offered a different and a superior social idea."[64]

The basic element of this concept of culture was an effort at total qualitative assessment and social control. Unlike the particular changes that every society must deal with on a regular basis, changes that modify only specific habitual actions, the kind of radical change experienced by Great Britain in the nineteenth century drove this people back to look at general designs as a whole. Changes in the whole form of a common life of the nation necessarily focused attention on it, and thus there was a need to reconstruct it on what was considered to be a rational basis.[65] Though it was posited as an alternative to the mechanisms of the state and the imposition of wage labor, among other media, for the protection of what is truly human, the creation of culture is nonetheless co-constitutive of the technological organization of life in a world come of age.

Nowhere is this perceived need for discipline and control more explicit than in the writings of Arnold, who states that modern society, characterized by its industrialized, mechanical framework and fragmented nature, is threatened by anarchy and a pervasive sense of moral malaise. According to Arnold, "as feudalism, which with its ideas and habits of subordination was for many centuries silently behind the British Constitution, dies out, and we are left with nothing but our system of checks, and our notion of its being the great right and happiness of an Englishman to do as far as possible what he likes, we are in danger of drifting towards anarchy."[66] The loss of a sense of transcendence and the fact of social fragmentation, together with the growing value placed by modernity on the mechanical and the material, combined to create an atomistic and potentially barbarous society. The solution, writes Arnold, is "culture," by which he means

64. R. Williams, *Culture and Society*, xviii, 63.

65. Ibid., 295.

66. Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, 50.

> a pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know, on all the matters which most concern us, the best which has been thought and said in the world, and, through this knowledge, turning a stream of fresh and free thought upon our stock notions and habits, which we now follow staunchly but mechanically, vainly imagining that there is a virtue in following them staunchly which makes up for the mischief of following them mechanically.[67]

Culture, in this sense of the term, would replace religion as the spiritual and moral framework of modern civilization.

The technological innovation of culture plays a somewhat different role in the workings of the British Empire. Talal Asad notes that the "problem of culture" was applied strictly to the nonwhite populations of the empire, having to do with "practices of controlled reconstruction." When the social habits, political order and other customs of "a dominant stock" (the proper subject) come into contact with a "native culture" (assigned by colonialist rule to its proper place), the question of mixture and co-ordination arises, and thus everything depends on the rational coordination of the participants: "The fact of imperial rule thus renders 'the problem of culture' into the British obligation to identify, study, and normalize the culture of its subject peoples (whence the importance of the 'rise of sociology and anthropology')." The aim of these ethnological disciplines was to help integrate them into modern (i.e., Western) civilization by way of "amalgamation" and "persuasion." Imperial talk of "amalgam," says Asad, presupposes the idea of original, "pure" cultures coming into contact with each other, creating a new, emergent, and more progressive historical identity.[68]

The social grammar of the culture-concept also permeates recent discussions about pluralism and multiculturalism, writes Asad, concepts that have essentially to do with the proper theoretical and practical coordination of dominant (i.e., European and North American) and subaltern ("native") peoples. There is to be equal respect and tolerance for all, but the "realities" of political and economic power require the subordinate cultures, which are less "progressive," to accommodate themselves to the dominant and more progressive heritage and ethos.[69] Bronisław Malinowski thus states that "there are cultural elements which are not allowed to continue because they are repugnant to the Whites." He cites in particular cannibalism, intertribal warfare, mutilation, headhunting, witchcraft, and slavery as examples

67. Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, 5; cf. Taylor, *Secular Age*, 380–88, 402, 405.
68. Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, 249–51.
69. Ibid., 253.

of practices that are offensive to white sensibilities.[70] This indictment is revealing not only because he puts the conflict of cultures in racial terms but also because these "repugnant cultural elements" were previously cited as justification by the Spanish for the enslavement of the Andeans in South America and by the British of the Zulu in Natal.[71] (More recently the suggestion in both academia and the popular press that Islam needs its own "Renaissance"—European history once again implicitly serving as the norm for what constitutes genuinely civilized development—is only the latest example of how a world come of age accounts for difference.)

Once traditional activities and institutions are classified as cultural, and no longer part of the constitutive—which is to say, *political*—practice of a people or nation (hence the visceral reaction to Rowan Williams's proposal that *sharia* be allowed to have a role in the public square), then artistic expression and taste (broadly conceived as including literature, music, dance, food, and clothing) remain the only markers to identify the social way of life of the other. In particular, the significance of what is now labeled as "art" (a category, as Taylor points out, that also did not exist prior to the fifteenth century[72]) is safely privatized around the cultivation of individual sensibility (a form of "inward spiritual activity"), or contained within "cultural enclaves."[73] The ways of the other are assigned to their proper place, and those formed by them are rendered useful, reliable, productive, and consuming subjects, in both the political and economic sense of the term.[74] The same processes were employed by the colonial powers of Europe to prepare indigenous peoples to live and serve as proper colonial subjects: scrubbed and well-dressed, living in a square house, trained in the ethos of individualism, hard work, and the Bible, the man of the house at his cubicle or assembly line earning an honest living, the wife faithfully at home raising

70. Malinowski, "Introductory Essay," xxviii.

71. See Hanke, *All Mankind Is One*, cited by Jennings, *Christian Imagination*, 100; cf. 122–23.

72. The separation of "art" from the category of making, *technē* or *ars*, is traceable to the rise of the peculiarly modern sense of technology. Whereas music, poetry, mosaics, and the like were once understood ontically, as a kind of activity that allows women and men to participate in the overarching order of things (praying, praising heroes who established our way of life), now they are lumped together in "aesthetic" categories that emphasize the way our emotions are moved by them. Taylor, *Secular Age*, 354–55.

73. Clifford Geertz, for example, identifies religion as a cultural system, which assigns to it an essentially cognitive function, having to do with what he calls reality maintenance. Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*, 182.

74. Lentricchia, *Criticism and Social Change*, 1–2.

their children to reinforce and repeat the process, and above all spending their income in order to perpetuate the social order well into the future.[75]

The democratization of difference by way of the normalizing project of culture, particularly as it pertains to the sequestration of "art" as a separate activity, is a necessary condition for categorizing and commodifying the customs, convictions, rites, and habits of the world's peoples and traditions, turning them into raw materials for what Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer appropriately label the "culture industries": movies, television, and popular music, distribution systems (cable and satellite systems, telecommunications firms, and the Internet), data processing networks such as computer software and hardware interests, marketing and advertising firms, and educational institutions.[76] These means of mass communication account for the majority of the world's output of shared images, stories, information, news, entertainment, and the like, which are the stock-in-trade of the formative practices that constitute the ethos of every society. They exert an inordinate influence on the grammar of social interaction, that is, on the ways people relate not only to the processes and products of political and economic activity, but also to each other, both the neighbor with a face (increasingly unknown to many of us) and the anonymous producer of goods who lives quite literally on the other side of the globe.

Consider the way that, for example, television, with its titillating combination of sight and sound, its evocative appeals to the emotions rather than to the intellect, and its never-ending stream of images and ideas, dominates the social grammar of capitalism. As the cornerstone of the expansion of global culture industries (together with the Internet), it intrudes into nearly every space of everyday life, crowding out other formative influences in the lives of young people, including the practices of the church. Television has an unparalleled ability to captivate our attention for extended periods of time via powerful images and deceptively subtle messages that take very little effort to understand. Images, ideas, and personalities are extricated from their conventional referents in a process. These fragments are then recombined and reshuffled to confer novel meanings to products and consumption opportunities. Commercial television programming, which takes features of a past or contemporary "exotic" culture (music, dance, dress, language, stories, images) and recycles them with those extracted from other peoples to form disjointed images and impressions with no purpose other than to entice viewers and sell products, is so prevalent in our society

75. Jennings, *Christian Imagination*, 132; Guy, *Heretic*, 81.

76. Horkheimer and Adorno, "Culture Industry," 94–136. See also Budde, *(Magic) Kingdom of God*, 28–52, and Harvey, *Can These Bones Live?*, 149.

that our perceptions and dispositions have been profoundly affected. The dream of the Idealists and Romantics to gain sway over the imagination of the masses via mythology, writes Terry Eagleton, "was finally to arrive in the shape of cinema, television, advertising and the popular press."[77]

Slavoj Žižek points to a related use of the concept of culture, which is to name beliefs and practices that we have disowned, that is, "all those things we practice without really believing in them, without 'taking them seriously.'" In matters of religion, for example, most people no longer "really believe," though they may still follow (some) traditional rituals and mores to show respect for the "lifestyle" of the community to which they belong: "'I don't really believe in it, it's just part of my culture' effectively seems to be the predominant mode of the disavowed or displaced belief characteristic of our times." What *is* a "cultural lifestyle," writes Žižek, "if not the fact that, although we don't believe in Santa Claus, there is a Christmas tree in every house, and even in public places, every December?"[78]

If such claims seem overstated, Žižek asks, why then do most people not include science within the ambit of culture? Is it not because it is all too real, something we cannot hold at arm's length, and thus it is not "cultural"? Is this not why those of us who pride ourselves on being cultured derisively dismiss fundamentalist believers as barbarians, as anti-cultural, as a threat to culture, because "they dare to *take their beliefs seriously*?" Those who lack cognitive or interpretive distance from their beliefs, who live them immediately, we perceive as a threat to culture:

> Recall the outrage when . . . the Taliban forces in Afghanistan destroyed the ancient Buddhist statutes at Bamiyan: although none of us enlightened Westerners believe in the divinity of the Buddha, we were outraged because the Taliban Muslims did not show the appropriate respect for the "cultural heritage" of their own country and the entire world. Instead of believing through the other, like all people of culture, they really believed in their own religion, and thus had no great sensitivity toward the cultural value of the monuments of other religions—to them, the Buddha statues were just fake idols, not "cultural treasures."[79]

The risk that Žižek runs in making this point, of course, is that some might hear him trying to justify the actions of the Taliban, which is not his aim. He is attempting instead to bring to light the dilemmas that attend attempts to account for difference by means of the concept of culture.

77. Eagleton, *Culture and the Death of God*, 120; cf. 56.
78. Žižek, *Puppet and the Dwarf*, 7–8.
79. Ibid.

What we get are two versions of what is now called multiculturalism, the difference between which is only a matter of degree. I too risk being misunderstood at this point, for there are few concepts more widely celebrated or politically axiomatic in our time than those of pluralism and multiculturalism, particularly among intellectuals and in such culture industries as the mass media and entertainment providers. For one even to raise a question about them is to be regarded by some as *prima facie* evidence that he or she is prejudiced, biased, blind, and hateful, the enemy of difference and tolerance, of humanity itself. And yet it is a risk that I must make, precisely for the sake of advocating for a sense of difference that makes a difference.

According to Stanley Fish, one version is what one social critic calls boutique multiculturalism, which is the pluralism of ethnic restaurants, weekend festivals, and high-profile flirtations with the other that the novelist Tom Wolfe once satirized as "radical chic." Boutique multiculturalists, wed to an essentialist anthropology, see difference not as basic to who and what women and men are but as exotic cuisines to be sampled and colorful locales to be visited—in short, as accessories to a standard model of universal humanity as defined by the technological regime of a world come of age. Such pluralism rejects the force of actual diversity at precisely the point where it makes the strongest claim on its most committed members, and prescribes instead a rational essence for the other that enforces a superficial respect that so many in our shrinking world rightly find insulting.[80]

There is another type of multiculturalism that is more serious because it seeks to value difference in and for itself. This postmodern version recognizes that the politics of equal dignity advocated by boutique multiculturalism is just too easy, too facile. Ascribing to everyone the identical basket of immunities and entitlements on the premise that "deep down" all of us are essentially the same (autonomous maximizers of self-interest) utterly fails to account for the particular and substantial ways in which persons, groups, and traditions differ. For these strong multiculturalists, nurturing particularity and diversity through tolerance, not adherence to some purported universal quality such as our status as autonomous rational agents, is a first principle of both personal morality and public policy.[81]

Nevertheless, says Fish, the time will always come for a serious pluralist when the other will act in a way that resists her or his proper place, that is, incorporation into the larger whole ordered by the nation-state and the global market: "Confronted with a demand that it surrender its view point or enlarge it to include the practices of its natural enemies—other religions,

80. Fish, "Boutique Multiculturalism," 382.

81. Ibid., 383.

other races, other genders, other classes—a beleaguered culture will fight back with everything from discriminatory legislation to violence." In such situations the dilemma for serious multiculturalists quickly becomes evident. Either they must stretch their tolerance so that it includes the intolerance of a group that they personally abhor, thus rejecting tolerance as their first principle, or they condemn the intolerance, in which case they no longer advocate difference at the point where it is most obviously at stake.[82] Whereas the boutique pluralism of the modernist is explicitly imperialist, the strong form of pluralism shows itself to be implicitly so, in spite of its best intentions to affirm difference and tolerance. To recall Raymond Williams, it betrays a slow reach for control on the part of the social order that animates liberal capitalism.

Multiculturalism simply *is* the culture of liberal capitalism, and as such it seeks to define what counts as permissible worldliness. Far from providing a viable solution to reconciling profound differences and disagreements, it represents yet one more comprehensive doctrine added to the fragmented, contentious mix, and thus it does not even name our present predicament accurately. It creates a banal façade of diversity masking an underlying and judgmental uniformity that sets human life in a world come of age apart from previous forms of social life. In some ways multiculturalism is a sign of the impatience of a liberal society in the face of seemingly intractable difference, hoping desperately that formal principles of equality and inclusion can transform themselves (and us) into meaningful substance through some sort of procedural alchemy.[83] An illiberal spirit haunts the noble aspirations of liberalism.

When defined by means of the culture-concept, the other, who is "merely" different, no longer makes a difference. In this regard the multiple senses of the concept—a general process of intellectual, spiritual, and aesthetic development (exemplified by the ethos of a world come of age), the particular way of life of a people or nation (delimited as a species of the genus), and artistic activity and production—though seemingly disparate, actually work hand in glove to keep the practices, customs, habits, and rites of other peoples in their proper places, rendering them politically and economically inert. Individuals, peoples, and whole societies are made to conform to the contours of production and consumption privileged by the technological regime of modernity. The sequestering of artistic expression in particular is unfortunate but completely understandable, for the grammar

82. Ibid.

83. The metaphor of alchemy to describe the modern belief that form can turn itself into substance I take from Mensch and Freeman, *Politics of Virtue*, 5.

of a world come of age restricts what counts as politics to the practice of statecraft. The state is invested with virtually unlimited sovereignty over society, privileging it as the fulcrum of all social order and change. Underwriting the practice of modern statecraft is the absence of any substantive conception of the common good, which effectively reduces politics to a set of procedures for protecting and promoting the individual pursuit of self-interest in the marketplace of desire and consumption.

The process of accounting for difference by the technological apparatus of the modern age is not limited to the concepts of religion and culture, for it takes an additional and even more pernicious form: racial reasoning and imagination. Though it is not a biblical concept, as a theological concept race continues to be an obstacle to the genuine worldliness that Bonhoeffer sees at the heart of Christian faith.