



PREFACE TO THE U.S. EDITION

ALL HUMAN LIFE and endeavor aims at some form of human flourishing, welfare, or wealth. A distinctive feature of religious life is that flourishing is normally attained by means of a renunciation: time spent on productive activity or enjoyment is interrupted by ritual or sacred activity. Spiritual bonds and goals take precedence over worldly bonds and goals. Duty takes precedence over desire, or love of God takes precedence over love of self and others. Indeed, in religious life it is believed that flourishing does not lie within human power alone. It is achieved through the aid of some special divine grace, ancestral blessing, or sacred power. This detour in the path toward wealth opens up a realm for the transcendent, conceived perhaps in terms of grace, mystery, the sacred, special insight, authority, spiritual presence, or another world. Flourishing has a transcendent source that is activated only through a prior renunciation.

The distinctive feature of a secular age, as Charles Taylor has recently pointed out (in *A Secular Age*), would appear to be the removal of any collectively agreed on goals beyond human flourishing. Enlightenment would appear to be the liberation of human activity from superstitious observances and regulations. There is only work, enjoyment, and recuperation, all in the service of flourishing. What most concerns humanity are the conditions under which flourishing may take place, and if there is any postponement of pleasure, this is merely to ensure that these conditions can be preserved and enhanced. The religious detour is replaced by an economic detour. Attention is turned from the divine to the mundane. Human fulfillment, moral practice, and social cohesion are no longer founded on

divine authority and grace. They are founded on human endeavor and agreement.

This is a familiar story. Whether religious or not, we now all live in a secular age insofar as the practical conditions for our wealth are purely mundane. This story can be explained in terms of a series of contrasts: between spiritual authority and natural law, between transcendent order and immanent system, between duty and freedom, between hierarchy and democracy, between faith and science, between spiritual and material progress. Historical progress from the first term of the contrast to the second may be narrated in two ways: either as the removal of old illusions or as the construction of new knowledge and institutions. In either case, it is a story of the self-liberation of humanity.

There is something unconvincing about these narratives of emancipation. Most lives remain preoccupied with material needs and social obligations. Perhaps these are obligations to clients, employers, landlords, or creditors. Emancipation is not yet complete in practice, and it never will be in a society of mutual dependence. Moreover, emancipation itself requires faith. The self-liberation of humanity presupposes that the natural order behaves in a stable way, that human decision has the power to manipulate this order to its will, and that the authority ensuring social cohesion and cooperation can be decided by human contract. In premodern society, there was insufficient evidence for such faith: the stability of nature, the power to shape the world, and confidence in human cooperation were all too fragile, subject to the dangers of accident, disease, aggression, or curse. Only religious faith provided the hope of security. Whence, then, came the confidence for humanity to venture out of the protective order of religious faith that was the only source of stability and authority? Was it merely a matter of sifting, through experience, the true conditions of stability and prosperity from the false? Was it purely a matter of turning attention from ideas to real interactions within the world? Or was the rise of modernity a transformation rather than a rejection of faith? If there is no purely immanent system, then are the dichotomies that structure narratives of progress and emancipation anything more than illusory?

One may question the dichotomy between the religious and the economic. Of course, the great preoccupation of human life and endeavor has been with procuring its own survival and flourishing, and the basic cate-

gories through which the world is experienced are furnished daily by these habits and practices. Yet this preoccupation cannot simply be contrasted with religious preoccupations. When the greatest contributor as well as the greatest threat to human welfare is humanity itself, then the conditions that enable collective welfare must include those observances which regulate human conduct. An economy that ensures effective distribution is the source of human flourishing, and a religious life that authorizes the obligations and regulations through which this distribution occurs is the guarantor of economic life. Religious preoccupations have been, in past societies, a major part of the conservation of economic life and practice, for human flourishing is not obtained simply by material means. Human welfare is dependent on cooperation and material distribution, and in most societies the authority that lends credit to such practices has ultimately been religious. Those who renounce the world in favor of the transcendent are in practice just as concerned with the source of material welfare as those who labor in the fields, for they are concerned with the conditions of trust and authority. A religious age is no less concerned with the conditions of its existence than a secular age.

The great transformation of modernity, then, involves a change that is at once both religious and economic and should be conceived under both registers simultaneously. The effective basis for trust and authority that daily ensures material and economic cooperation is no longer local custom or authoritative religious prescription. Distribution has to be effected by its own immanent, independent, or self-regulating order—the market. The story of modernity has been narrated by the economic historian Karl Polanyi (in *The Great Transformation*) as the reorganization of society according to the ideal of the self-regulating market. Indeed, the separation of the economic sphere of life from the political and religious spheres is what the notion of a self-regulating market means. Just as the independent order of nature is the basis for science separate from faith, and so the theoretical condition for atheism, the independent sphere of the market is the practical condition for atheism. While it is possible to imagine a godless universe in theory, it is impossible to live without effective distribution. Therefore, it is only when a self-ordering system of distribution is achieved that atheism becomes a live option. Only under these conditions are religious observances made redundant in economic life.

Several historical impulses came together to create the conditions for a secular age. One impulse was the industrial development of mechanical inventions and the use of fossil fuels. This increased the productive power of humanity so that it could make the natural order stable and manipulable. Yet the motive for increasing production was not for the individual producer's use but, rather, for exchange: industrialization could not have occurred without a commercial society organized for trade. A second impulse, then, was the promotion of market relations, developed primarily for long-distance trade, as the principal means of distribution within a society. This was achieved by deregulation—the active intervention of sovereign authority against prior customs and observances. Yet the question remains as to whether a market, once liberated and promoted by state power, will itself grow to infiltrate and regulate the other spheres of social interaction. While there may be no limits to the desire for gain and pleasure that drives growth, production and consumption remain restricted by effective demand. Desire has no economic power in a market without money or credit. Indeed, a market that regulates production and distribution through prices exists only on the basis of money as the common commodity against which values are compared and through which exchanges are enacted.

There is, therefore, a third impulse alongside production and consumption that drives the transformation of economic life: the authority of money. Nevertheless, a market is not simply grown by more money, since demand becomes less effective resulting in inflation. Similarly, a society as a whole cannot increase in wealth through increased production if there is insufficient demand, expressed in the form of money, for additional products. The third impulse is the invention of a new kind of money, one that is created as a debt. A debt is an obligation, a commitment to economic activity, and a commitment to repay in money. It is a promise, and money holds its value as long as this promise is trusted. Once debt becomes a medium of exchange, a widely circulating form of money, then the entire nature of the market changes with it. A market based on debt money is an immanent system of credits and liabilities, of debts and obligations, and it is capable of unlimited growth. It ensures participation and cohesion, with promises of wealth and threats of exclusion, through a system of social obligations. Debt takes over the role of religion in economic life.

Money is the condition for liberty and prosperity. Without money, one

is dependent on others; with money, one can demand their service. Money calls forth increased production by opening the possibility of unlimited accumulation, by enabling investment in the means of production, and by giving an effective authority to demand. Yet money does not provide a source for social cohesion until it brings with it an obligation: the obligation of debt. If in religious life people renounce enjoyment to achieve spiritual goals, then in modern economic life people renounce their property, labor, and time in the pursuit of money. Modern secular life is ascetic like religious life, even if it has its moments of hedonism. Human flourishing is still ensured by a detour. A preoccupation with the conditions of one's life is now a preoccupation with money. Through its use in structuring everyday life and practice, money lends its shape to the categories of modern life and thought.

Local cult, transcendent God, or mobile debt: each may function as the basis of authority and the source of sustenance in daily life. There is, however, a decisive difference between traditional religions and the use of money. While the transcendent remains shrouded in mystery, a source of power and authority that is not subject to human manipulation, money remains rather mundane. If one thinks of money at all, it is as an object of human control, a tool expressing human will. One does not consider the nature of its power. While the goal of spiritual life is to attain consciousness of the divine order and meaning of things, the goal of economic life is merely wealth and enjoyment. Money is regarded as the means, human flourishing as the end. It is in modern life that alienation is complete and the consciousness of humanity departs entirely from the conditions of its existence. It is in modern life, rather than religious life, where ideology is most fully instantiated. If modern economic life differs essentially from religious life, it does so not because it possesses a truer understanding of its conditions of existence or of practical efficacy. The essential difference lies in its lack of consciousness. There is no need to venerate or even consider money, the source of the modern age. There is merely a practical need to make money. The economic detour is seen as purely a detour. At the same time, the quest for profit and the growth of debt are unlimited. The only end for human life, which in practice is the making of money, is misperceived as human flourishing.

This book, on the theology of money, is therefore an anachronism: it

is written to bring our collective faith back to consciousness. This is not a task for economists, for there is no practical economic need for it. Such an understanding is itself an interruption of practical life, for it is not the case that by raising our consciousness we can simply choose to be different. We are dependent on a complex web of needs and obligations, mediated by money, over which no one is master — evident from the numerous financial crises that afflict us all. Instead, the quest to understand the power of the beliefs enshrined in money is an attempt to pursue a traditional theological quest, to understand the conditions of existence within our contemporary age. In so doing, the aim is to show how human life and endeavor are shaped by practices of contracting, accounting, and evaluating. The purpose is to expose such practices in all their contingency, irrationality, arbitrariness, and violence; to enable us to ridicule their pretensions, marvel over their powers, and weep over their ultimate consequences. For the dangers of chaos, instability, and possessive spectral forces have not departed from the modern world. The aim is to show what devotions, sacrifices, and convictions lie at the basis of contemporary existence, and to call for a new effort of devotion, sacrifice, and conviction that may evoke another social order.

The global order of credit capitalism found its birthplace in England and this book has been written within the economic context of a contemporary English university. Among other things this has necessitated an early publication in England to meet the requirements of the national Research Assessment Exercise, and so to contribute to the economic viability of my institution, department, and position. In the contemporary English university, thought is regulated by its price in the form of the funding it can attract. Yet the global order of credit capitalism has been propagated most forthrightly by the United States, and I am therefore delighted to commend the book's publication and distribution to a global audience through Duke University Press. My thanks are due to the conscientious readers for the Press, to Reynolds Smith and his editorial team, and to all who have shown and will show patience with this book and with the future of its ideas.

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