ONE

EMERGENCE OF NATIONALISM

Sixteenth-century England—Wars of the Roses—why nationalism—dignity—democracy—Protestant Reformation—the Bible—competitiveness imported with the idea of the nation—capitalism—science

Everything new in history is a result of an accident. Nationalism is no exception; its existence could not have been predicted, and it might as well not have emerged. This does not mean that it cannot be explained. In retrospect, we can make perfect sense of it, considering the circumstances in which it appeared. We can see how and why, in these circumstances, it would make sense, alongside many other things that also might have made sense but did not happen. History—and therefore sociology, political science, and all the disciplines that rely on history for support—can go no further than this.

William Shakespeare's cycle of five historical plays, from *Richard II*, *Henry IV* (I and II), *Henry V*, *Henry VI* (I and II), through to *Richard III*, best describes the events that created the circum-

stances in which nationalism emerged. These plays, which should be required reading for all social scientists, analyze with remarkable perspicacity the elements that distinguish our *modern* world (in which Shakespeare already lived, though his protagonists yet had not) from the premodern one it replaced. In his brilliant analysis, Shakespeare projected onto the beginning of the fifteenth century the ideas of nation and equality that would distinguish modernity, even though these ideas would not appear until the turn of that century. But one can easily forgive this anachronism, which was required by the overarching plot and by the time in which Shakespeare himself lived. In light of how precocious his understanding was and how correctly he identified the features that separated modern society from its predecessor, any such problems are of comparatively little consequence.

The plays followed the development of the quarrel between the Lancaster and York branches of the English royal family of Plantagenets, which led to the protracted armed conflict over the crown known as the Wars of the Roses (1455–1487). The dispute, in fact, had begun half a century earlier during the Hundred Years' War between the Plantagenets and their royal cousins in the Valois family of France, fought for the control of the French crown, a conflict that had ended only in 1453. The quarreling royals were naturally supported in their exploits by groups of lesser nobles; as a result, the English upper order, which was small to begin with, spent decades engaged in self-destruction. By the last battle of the Wars of the Roses (described by Shakespeare in *Richard III*), this order was effectively wiped out. So were all direct Plantagenets. The new Tudor dynasty, indirectly related to the Lancaster line, assumed the crown; the first Tudor king, Henry VII, who diplomatically married a princess from the House of York, had to recruit his aristocracy from below. This remarkable, unpredictable chain of events set in motion an unprecedented and inconceivable (to the existing feudal consciousness) process of massive social mobility.

The *society of orders*, as mentioned, was based on the presupposition that the upper and lower orders were different species of humanity, utterly unlike each other even to the color of blood in their veins. They coexisted but were no more compatible than chickens and horses. Now that the blue-blooded order had been physically exterminated, the red-blooded sons of butchers (such as Cardinal Wolsey) and of smiths (such as Thomas Cromwell) ascended to positions and were treated in ways that were as difficult to justify as riding a chicken or expecting eggs from a horse. Yet the new Henrician aristocracy needed to justify these positions and treatment. Instead of claiming that all of the new aristocracy were lost children of dead princes, they declared that *the English people was a nation*. Not only did this make the bewildering situation of the new aristocracy understandable and legitimate, it also reinforced the originating trend from which it resulted, normalizing social mobility, and reconstructed the previously hierarchical society on the basis of equality. How could an equation of two terms, *people* and *nation*, a linguistic event, produce so powerful a social transformation?

A bit of semantic history, related to contingent changes in the meaning of "nation," will help answer this question. As mentioned earlier, the Latin word *natio*—something born, in the sense of a litter of animals—was a term of contempt applied to communities of foreigners, not Roman citizens, in Rome. Many centuries after Rome fell, far into the Middle Ages, universities, which essentially were Christian institutions, were formed in Western Europe. Wherever they were located, their students were foreigners in the university cities. By that time, the derogatory connotation of the term *natio* had been forgotten, as written documents could not convey the attitude of contempt that attached to the word, leaving to it only the neutral sense of a community of foreigners. The students of medieval universities were thus quartered together in groups called "nations." At the great center of theological learning,

the University of Paris, these small communities of foreigners were classified in accordance with their general geographic origins. The university had four such "nations": the nation from France, which included those from the greater part of France and from the lands that would become Italy, Spain, and Portugal; the nation from Germany, consisting of students from England and some western German principalities; the nation from Normandy, which united those from France's northwest coast; and the nation from Picardy, reserved for those from the Low Countries. Sharing common quarters and their studies, such university nations became bands of friends and developed common opinions, which they defended in scholastic disputations. Thus the word "*nation*" acquired an additional meaning—that of a community of opinion—which gradually eclipsed that of a community of foreigners.

From the Church Council of Lyon in 1274, this new concept—nation as a community of opinion—was applied to the parties at the Church Councils, discussing questions of grave ecclesiastical import. These conciliar nations, unlike the university ones, consisted of influential, high-placed men who represented the religious and secular powers of the time. Applied in this context, the meaning of "nation" changed again, becoming the term for *the decision-making elite*. This was the accepted meaning of "nation" in continental Europe until the mid-eighteenth century at least. When it was used, however infrequently, it applied only to the nobility. Some European territories—those of German principalities, according to Martin Luther, or France, according to Montesquieu—had such nations, in the sense of elites, under their princes. In others, such as Wallachia (in present-day Romania), it was said, "there was no nation, only a people."[1] The word "people," in this sense, referred to the lower social strata, the common order of *laboratores*; its synonyms were "rabble" and "plebs."

With this understanding, to declare that the English people were a nation was to stand the world on its head. Yet in the circum-

stances that England's new aristocracy faced, this idea sounded convincing. Their upward mobility was a good experience for them, and they needed to rationalize it, to make it both understandable and legitimate. In the framework of the hierarchical society of orders, which separated the red-blooded people from the blue-blooded "nation" of the nobility by an unbridgeable gap, it could not be either understandable or legitimate. So the English aristocracy chose to forge the two separate communities, each with its own exclusive identity, into one inclusive community of identity, and made members of the people and of the noble "nation" interchangeable, and thus fundamentally equal. Once the people and the elite shared a common identity, families were no longer bound to their current place in the social hierarchy, which appeared temporary and accidental. Social stratification became fluid: depending on will, ability, and chance, individuals could move up and down society as if on a ladder. This was a revolution in the imagination, in consciousness. But the institutions, which are none but ways of thinking and acting, could not tarry in their transformation: for all intents and purposes, the change was instantaneous. By the 1530s—within one generation of its emergence—the new image of reality had spread throughout the English society and affected behavior in every sphere of life.

The presupposition of fundamental equality in the inclusive community—of shared identity, implied in the definition of the people as a nation—had several vital implications. It is hard to rank them in order of significance. We may start with the one that was to shape the American experience: individual freedom. One was no longer born into a social position or personal identity but had the right to (in fact, *had* to) choose one for oneself. The decision no longer belonged to God; one became one's own maker. With this notion, appreciation for the individual human being, human creativity, increased tremendously. There was dignity in simply being human; one could take pride in one's humanity. The modern idea

of the individual as an autonomous agent emerged from this mindset. (Émile Durkheim, therefore, was right when he claimed that the individual was created by modern society, that, in other words, societies had existed for millennia without individuals.)[2] Simultaneously and necessarily, God became much less important, and the world of living experience came to occupy a far greater place in human concerns than ever before. The process of secularization was set in motion, reinforcing the appreciation for the individual and, specifically, greatly increasing the value of human life.

The authority of the nation, as an elite, to make decisions regarding the political and religious positions of the population for which it was responsible was now presumed to belong to the population in its entirety. As God gradually assumed less importance in people's lives, this authority soon was regarded as supreme authority, or sovereignty. Before, sovereignty had belonged to God exclusively, but the old ways of thinking were ceding ground to the idea of popular sovereignty. Fundamental equality in sharing popular sovereignty—that is, sharing in the self-government of the community—further added to the dignity of national membership (and national identity), beyond even the dignity of presumed equality. To be a member of the people was itself an honor. Until that point, the people had been a contemptible *plebeian* community, yet now it was an eminently respectable entity, an object of eager commitment and even worship. Such a society, whose institutions were organized on the basis of the equation of people and nation, on fundamental equality combined with popular sovereignty and reverence for the people as a whole, was by definition a democratic society, even if it was not described in those exact words. A democracy stressing individual freedom is liberal democracy. In sixteenth-century England, it was simply called "nation."

The consciousness of most English people at that time, the way they envisioned and experienced reality five hundred years ago, was national consciousness. This consciousness was democratic, specifi-

cally, liberal democratic; that is, *individualistic.* This in no way precluded them from being passionately devoted to their nation to the point of risking their lives for it. Their principled individualism was a product of their *nationalism*, not at all an expression of natural egoism or self-preoccupation. (In fact, self-preoccupation, so characteristic of societies such as ours, was an expression of nationalism, and not only where nationalism was individualistic.) National consciousness focused on this secular world to the near exclusion of all concern with the transcendental spheres. In this sense, it was essentially secular. It would be wrong, however, to interpret this secularism as lacking in spirituality or in any way "disenchanted." In the framework of nationalism, secular reality was the sphere of the sacred, the source of all meaning, and the inspiration for visionary ideals and ardent worship. Paradoxically, as secularization brought the sacred down to earth and made God irrelevant, English nationalism was greatly helped by a contemporary religious development: the Protestant Reformation.

A general European phenomenon, the Reformation was independent from the events that brought forth nationalism in England, but it coincided with and reinforced the dignity of national identity and national consciousness with its principles of popular sovereignty and fundamental equality of membership in the community. Its main contribution to national consciousness was the idea of the priesthood of all believers, which implied and resulted in the translation of the Hebrew Bible into the vernacular and encouraged literacy among the English population. The Bible placed before the eyes of its new readers—new, because the Bible was the first book they read and because they had never read it before—the model of God's people, which was a dignified community of equals, each man individually worthy of and bound in a covenant with the Maker of the Universe. God's people was evidently a nation, as the English then understood the term, which meant that it was God's will to organize things that way, however much the Roman

Catholic priests attempted to conceal this. Indeed, in the English translation, the Hebrew word for the people of Israel was rendered as "nation," as were the other words with which the original text described this people's territory and neighbors. The word "nation" obviously did not exist in the Bible, and even in the fourth-century Latin Vulgate translation, *natio* was used infrequently and often not in the context in which "nation" appeared in the English text. In this manner, the English translation presented the Bible through the lens of national consciousness. The King James version, which completed a century of translations, not only finally transmitted to Christian believers but strengthened the message of dignity, equality, and freedom within the ancient text of the Old Testament.

The reading itself of the Bible also reinforced the sense of dignity and equality inherent in nationalism, independent of the nature of the text. It was dignifying to have the word of God delivered to one directly in one's own tongue, without any specially appointed mediator (who was presumed to be worthier and smarter than oneself) and irrespective of one's social position. As a result, one's social position lost much of its identity-defining power. It was surely not what they did when otherwise engaged that defined God's interlocutors. And in their right to communicate with God directly, all Englishmen were now equal.

The Reformation also helped establish the principle of national sovereignty. It was asserted explicitly in the 1533 Parliamentary Act of Appeals, issued to help Henry VIII divorce his first wife, Catherine of Aragon—who happened to be aunt to the Holy Roman emperor Charles V and therefore on excellent terms with Pope Clement VII—and marry his lady love of the moment. This seemingly private affair was of great public significance. Queen Catherine was past her child-bearing years, during which she had managed to produce only one living child, of female sex, and a male heir was at stake. But the pope would not grant the divorce. The Act of Appeals declared that the pope had no right to meddle in

the business of the English king, because England (spelled *Englond* in the act, as the uncertain English orthography of the day had it) was a sovereign community that answered to no foreign power, or "empire" (spelled *Impire*, this being the first time the Latin word *imperium* was *Englished*). Declared an empire, England separated itself from Rome; in the circumstances, this meant joining the forces of the Reformation, even though the motive for this fateful step was entirely mundane. Without the Reformation, the English separation from Rome could not have happened, because it would have left the little kingdom isolated and surrounded by Catholic powers intent on tearing it apart under the pretext of teaching it the norms of religious correctness. With the Reformation engulfing all of Western Europe, the nation calling itself an "empire" faced Catholic powers too preoccupied with internal religious strife to pay attention to matters beyond their borders, and automatically acquired allies that were ready to help it should the need arise.

Thus, ironically, "empire" originally stood for national sovereignty—self-determination of a population, or freedom from foreign intervention. Used in the context of and as a justification for the separation from Rome, the term served to rearrange relations between European powers on the basis of this new principle. Perhaps even more ironically, as England and then Britain extended its "empire" in the centuries that followed, it likewise extended the sphere of national consciousness, spreading the liberating and empowering principles of fundamental equality of membership and popular sovereignty. The British Empire thus was itself the main inspiration for numerous national liberation movements, contributing to them in more ways than one. Had it not existed, there would be no nations to liberate.

The dignity implied in national membership, or nationality, as we would say today, made national populations deeply invested in the dignity of the nation as a whole. This national dignity was expressed, above all, in international prestige—the relative standing

of one's nation among other nations, and their regard for it—which made national consciousness (nationalism) inherently competitive. From their earliest days, nations have engaged in a never-ending race for respect. England was the first nation. In the sixteenth century, national consciousness existed nowhere else, no other society was a nation, and no other *people* cared how foreigners regarded the societies of orders in which the people were a despised, expendable rabble. But the English did not know that. Their conversion to nationalism was, like any inner conversion, a total replacement of one faith by another. They no longer could see and experience reality but through the lens of national consciousness, and therefore they imagined they were surrounded by other nations, and thus by competitors. The French and the Italians, they believed, regarded themselves as more cultured than the English; the Dutch and the Germans supposedly claimed to be more prosperous and astute in business; the Spanish appeared to tout their superiority as explorers and navigators. The English regarded these imagined pretenses as personal insults and were determined to prove them all wrong. England's touchiness, empirically unjustified but perfectly understandable in the framework of nationalism, changed the world.

To protect their national dignity, the English began to compete. They challenged their European neighbors to combat in every area in which comparisons were possible, and these neighbors, bewildered by the strange behavior of a kingdom that until recently had seemed to be a normal European feudal community, had to engage with them. But none of these neighbors had the competitive motivation that actuated the English. Instead of competing, they could only watch in amazement as the little England of 1500—a peripheral European principality, exhausted by internecine fighting, rough in manners, and as poor in natural resources as it was in learning, emerged as a great leading power, the center of attention and an object of emulation for other great powers, in the span of a century. The Puritan Rebellion of the mid-1600s, in itself an as-

sertion of nationalism against the spirit of divine right monarchy that informed the actions of the foreign (Scottish) kings who had inherited the English throne not knowing that they were invited to govern a nation, seemed to interrupt England's ascent, but only made it more assured. By 1700, in every respect, England had raced far ahead of the rest of Western Europe, pulling it behind to the position of hegemony that only today is coming to an end.

Among the by-products of this competition without competitors, this determined English national effort to win the admiration of the world, were two defining features of modernity: capitalism and science. "Capitalism" is a word of Dutch extraction: in the sixteenth century, during the Dutch fiscal revolution, "capitalist" meant a person taxable at the highest rate—one with a lot of money. In politics, "capitalism" throughout the twentieth century was used as an equivalent of ancient (Platonian/Aristotelian) oligarchy—the regime of the rich. In conditions of constant social mobility, implied in nationalism because of its core principle of fundamental equality of membership, this political interpretation made no sense. As an economic concept, however, capitalism is highly meaningful: it refers specifically to the modern economy, an economy of a distinct type characteristic only of the Age of Nationalism. In contrast to earlier economies, which, however different in other respects, had all been oriented to subsistence, capitalist economy is oriented to growth. The primary goal of economic activity, in the framework of capitalist economy, is the increase of wealth, not the comfort wealth can bring. In the framework of capitalism, one does not work to live; one lives to work. Max Weber, in his famous attempt to account for this momentous reorientation of economic activity (which is, of necessity, the activity of the majority of the population), pointed out the essential irrationality of the modern economic attitude.[3] Such an irrational attitude on the part of so many people at once could only persist, Weber thought, if something else provided for it a rationale higher than life itself.

Weber's hypothesis was that this higher rationale, which induced people to increase the profits of their labor without increasing their enjoyment of these profits, was the psychological need the Protestant (specifically, Calvinist) dogma of predestination created among the adherents of certain varieties of the reformed religion to convince oneself of the certainty of one's salvation. Constant profit was the proof of God's constant favor; it was for such proof, Weber's argument went, that millions worked tirelessly without stopping to savor the fruits of their labors. This ingenious hypothesis was contradicted by evidence. The rationale for the capitalist economy, instead, was provided by nationalism.

The crucial case, which allows us to adjudicate between Protestantism and nationalism as explanations for the rise of the distinctive modern economy, is that of the Dutch Republic. Constituted by the seven provinces in the Low Countries united to revolt against the Spanish crown, to which they belonged as a result of a complicated inheritance, the republic sided with the Reformation and, like England, embraced Calvinism. In the late sixteenth century, it experienced astonishing economic growth, emerging as the first world economic hegemon. This precocious development led some economic historians to consider it the first modern economy.[4] The Dutch Republic's very impressive growth, however, gave way to an equally protracted absolute decline some half a century later, just as usually happened to subsistence-oriented economies. In distinction to the English, who, as Weber stressed, institutionalized economic irrationality, the Dutch acted perfectly rationally. Having worked very hard for a time and accumulated a lot of wealth, they then stopped accumulating and spent it. For this reason, Weber did not include the Dutch Republic among the cases he discussed in *The Protestant Ethic,* and limited his discussion of Calvinism to England. Yet the logic of his argument that orientation to growth was the product of Calvinism, in particular, required that the Dutch Republic reorient itself to growth to the same extent as the English

did. In other words, Weber's argument was contradicted by the case of the Dutch Republic.

In terms of *conditions* for economic growth, the Dutch Republic of the 1500s was far better positioned than England was for the so-called economic "takeoff." It underwent the fiscal revolution earlier, it progressed further in its initial accumulation, it had higher labor productivity and wages and more advanced urbanization. But it lacked the *cause* for the reorientation to growth: without nationalism, it had no motivation to compete. Instead, the Dutch, astute businessmen that they were, remained believing Christians. They worried about the eternal salvation of their souls and could not understand what motivated the English, their fellow Calvinists and natural allies in the fight for the true faith, which was the only fight worth fighting, to be so hostile to them over trifling economic matters. What did it matter who was catching more herring or had more transportation business in such and such a year? At England's instigation, the Dutch Republic fought four Anglo-Dutch Trade Wars, and every time the Dutch thought that God was using England as a rod to punish them for being so rich.

That it was competition for international prestige that reoriented economic activity in England—and thus nationalism that produced the modern economy—is proven not only by the comparison between England and the Dutch Republic but by the history of the process of the reorientation to growth itself. The signs of such reorientation among England's economic actors appear as soon as nationalism does: the spirit driving economic activity becomes competitive, assertive, and clearly nationalistic early in the 1500s. The most dramatic example of this spirit is foreign trade. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, English foreign trade was dominated by the merchants of the (German) Hanseatic League. The Hanseatics had been granted special privileges by English kings from Richard II to Henry VIII, who turned to them in hours of financial need. Their *Kontor*, or main trading post, in London was

at the Steelyard, the site of London's standard weighing balance. Moreover, their centrality in the English economy was such that the name of the English currency, the pound sterling, may have been derived from the word "Easterlings"—the nickname given to German merchants in England. The privileges of the Hanseatics in England reflected their wealth and their capacity to finance the English crown, but these privileges also were the source of this capacity, which perpetuated the league's superiority over the native merchants. No group of English merchants could hope to compete with the league while these privileges lasted, and unless a community of interest was perceived to exist between the struggling English merchants and the crown, the Hanseatics' privileges would not be revoked. Once England was defined as a nation, both the merchants and the crown felt they had a community of interest—even though such a perception was not in the objective interests of either the merchants or of the crown.

In 1505, Henry VII granted an extensive charter of privileges to a fellowship of cloth merchants with chapters in several English port cities and incorporated them as the Company of Merchants Adventurers. The fellowship, which had existed since the thirteenth century as a loose organization similar to the Hanseatic League or the Dutch trading companies, became the first *national* trading company in the sense of being centralized in fact as well as in principle. From 1564, its members called themselves "Merchants Adventurers of England." Like the Hanseatic League and other organizations of the time, the Merchants Adventurers sought to monopolize the trade in which they were engaged. However, unlike other trading companies, which were satisfied with procuring privileges from the rulers of the countries in which they traded, England's Merchants Adventurers sought above all to secure the support of their own rulers. In addition, they accepted only native-born Englishmen as members, and insisted on their marrying English women.

The commercial policies of the English state were not consistent until the reign of Elizabeth I in the second half of the century. Henry VII favored the English merchants over foreigners and imposed a heavy penalty on the Hanseatic merchants for selling cloth in the traditional market of the Merchants Adventurers. Henry VIII, who was constantly in financial straits, might have been willing to help the Hanseatic League strengthen its position in England. By that time the Merchants Adventurers were exporting twice as much cloth (the main English manufacture) as the Hansa. English nationalists considered this unsatisfactory. They exaggerated the share of the Hanseatics and complained that the share of the English merchants was too small. Under Edward VI, Henry's successor, they set out to terminate the Hanseatic privileges.

The initiative came from Sir Thomas Gresham, who, for "the publique good oth'Nation,"[5] founded both London's Royal Exchange and Gresham College, which cradled English science, later leading to the creation of the Royal Society. As the financial agent of Edward VI in Antwerp, Gresham was entrusted with liquidating debts that Henry VIII had left to his minor son, and was determined to do so without further loans from foreigners. If the Merchants Adventurers, already a formidable economic organization, no longer had to compete with the Hanseatic League, they could be relied on for the necessary funds. In 1552 the crown revoked the special privileges of the league merchants, putting them under the heavy duties imposed on all other foreign merchants. The export trade of the Merchants Adventurers increased dramatically as a result, but its members' individual situations did not necessarily improve, because much of the company's profits from that point on went into financing the state. The arrangement clearly was in the interest of nationalists, but unless both the Merchants Adventurers and the crown also identified their interests with those of the nation—its dignity and financial independence—it could be argued that they acted against their interests.

Queen Mary Tudor, a fervent Catholic and thus not a nationalist, reinstated some of the privileges of the Hansa. But the accession of her sister Elizabeth four years later marked the beginning of England's uninterrupted economic ascendancy. Gresham was the queen's financial adviser, and she followed unswervingly his counsel "not to restore Steelyard [the Hansa] to their usurped privileges; to come in as small debt as you can beyond seas; to keep up your credit, and especially with your own merchants, for it is they must stand by you at all events in your necessity."[6] A nationalist educated and guided the state, and nationalism became an explicit foundation of the state economic policy.

By 1558 the Merchants Adventurers dominated the cloth export trade. When the revolt of the Netherlands destabilized their traditional market, they invaded the Hanseatics' traditional market. Unlike the English merchants, the Hansa towns were allied in name only, and, given an opportunity to advance their particular interests at the expense of the league, members would take it. In 1564 the Merchants Adventurers of England (flaunting their identity) were allowed to trade in Hamburg. Four years later, against the opposition of the league, Hamburg offered them a ten-year contract of privileges as extensive as those that the Hanseatic merchants had once held in England. In 1597 an imperial decree exiled the Merchants Adventurers from the territory of the Holy Roman (German) Empire as a monopoly. In response, Elizabeth exiled the Hanseatic merchants from England, giving English merchants complete control of the lucrative English cloth export trade. This was a victory for the nationalist principle in commerce. As the economic historian G. B. Hotchkiss wrote:

> It may truly be argued that this bold and brilliant period of English history . . . incubated great schemes that were later to enrich the nation. Out of it came the great East India Company . . . and the companies formed to colonize America. But these enterprises brought no dividends for a long time to come. . . . [These] were

> lean years for most of the people who lived through them. Prices were high and many workers were unemployed. The triumph of the principle of English trade by Englishmen was a fine thing for English patriotism, but it brought no immediate gains to English purses.[7]

Although purses suffered, plays of the period poked fun at foreign merchants, Germans in particular, and celebrated the English victory over the Hanseatics. Competitiveness was all. For the English, everything became relative: if they did better than their (significant) others, the price at which this relative advantage came mattered little. Because there was no finish line in this competition (since there was always a possibility that somebody else would do better), the English had to do better and better. They had to expand their markets and their industry. They could not stop. They had a rationale above economic rationality. In the process, they created the modern economy oriented to growth (nationalism would sustain it)—capitalism.

The same concern for national dignity that made the English nation economically competitive and produced the modern economy also made it culturally competitive. Among other extraordinary cultural achievements, this produced a new form of intellectual activity—modern science. Science can be defined as an activity oriented to understanding empirical reality; as such, it has existed for thousands of years in numerous societies. The distinguishing feature of modern science is that it is oriented to—and capable of—sustained growth of this understanding. It is the only activity, besides economic activity, known to be consistently progressive. The English chose the economy as an arena of competition for international prestige and respect because of the individualistic character of English nationalism. The centrality of the individual among national values made the activity of the vast majority of individuals a natural focus. Economic nationalism, therefore, emerged in England as early as nationalism; it was an obvious

refraction of the national consciousness in the consciousness of the economically active masses. The reason behind England's choice of science was different.

At the beginning of the sixteenth century, according to Erasmus, there were five or six erudite people in London; according to John Leland, there was one "slender" library.[8] A few decades later, England was emerging as a cultural powerhouse: it had a secular vernacular literature in a language that was created alongside it, and by the end of that same century it had produced William Shakespeare. After that, English literature was seen as one of the world's greatest literatures. An entirely new class emerged—the class of intellectuals, whose main preoccupation was to do research and write chronicles, treatises, poems, novels, and plays in English about England. This class of authors and scholars included Englishmen from every walk of life. They were fully aware that they were creating this magnificent new culture from scratch, that they were its "beginners" and had little to rely on in the manner of English letters. They also knew that in classical learning—which is what learning was at the time—England was no match for France and Italy. Therefore, in the quarrel between the ancients and the moderns, already in the sixteenth century the English identified with the moderns. To accept the authority of the ancients would mean admitting England's cultural inferiority. Unwilling to do so, the English espoused a primitive cultural relativism, arguing that what was good for one period and society was not necessarily good for another. The spirit, or genius, of the English nation required different intellectual fare from the one that satisfied "ruinous Athens or decayed Rome"[9]—as well as the contemporary imitators of these long-gone cultural centers—and thus there was no reason for England to compete in that antiquated arena.

In their choice of allegiance, some of the most respected French and Italian humanists of the period supported the English. These intellectuals also believed that three recent technological inven-

tions—the printing press, firearms, and the compass—immediately translated soft power into hard power and gave the moderns a decisive advantage over the ancients. But the English likely would have opted for science as the main area of cultural competition even without this support. Science was a modern, new, activity: apart from the few practicing scientists, it had not been of interest to anyone before. With so few achievements to date, a culturally backward England could compete in it effectively. Science's ability to contribute to the dignity of the nation—which none of England's neighbors at the time cared to consider—prompted England to throw behind it the might of general social approbation. Since the early seventeenth century, and throughout the turbulent years of the Puritan Rebellion, the English lay public celebrated both science and scientists. Immediately after the Restoration, the royalty did as well. Science became a magnet for talent, a direct road to status, attracting the best people. England's Royal Society of London for Improving Natural Knowledge—the first scientific institution in the world—was formed in 1660 to promote science and its contributors, and was admired and envied by every scientist in the world. Science began to develop steadily. Though it began as a sign of English cultural specificity, it soon became the proof of their superiority.

Before long, foreigners were singing dithyrambs to "the penetrating and truly unusual ability" of "the remarkable" Englishmen in science. A German correspondent of the Royal Society promised humbly: "[If] Germany can contribute nothing else of note to your British ocean, we offer unfailing memory of benefits received; and such as they are our writings when they appear in time to come shall testify to the English springs from which we drank our fill."[10] This attitude, obviously, changed when nationalism, and competition for dignity, spread to the continent (where it reached Germany in the early nineteenth century). The spectacular success of England/Britain in everything its nationalist motivation

propelled it to undertake and its momentous rise to superpower status naturally led other emerging nations to focus on the areas in which the first nation challenged them to compete. But while economic competition could be avoided—for instance, as in the case of Russia, if stupendous military strength offered an alternative—science became the measure of native intelligence, and it was impossible to claim national dignity without excelling in it. No one would willingly admit that one's nation was less intelligent than another. This consideration spurred the development of science in societies whose nationalism grew and remained strong. Of course, nationalism as such is also conducive to the development of science. Its focus on this world turns attention to empirical reality, and makes knowledge about it valuable in a sense that exceeds its instrumental importance. If the empirical reality is believed to be highly meaningful in its own right, or in fact the source of all meaning, then its exploration becomes the search for meaning par excellence, combining the roles of philosophy and theology. This conclusion would undoubtedly be reached at a certain point in the spread of nationalism over the last half millennium. Yet it is equally clear that science would not have developed as fast and would not have reached the awesome stage at which we find it today had it not been able to contribute to English national dignity.