

Chapter 1

Capitalism, Abandonment, and Modernity

The cultural significance of abandonment in modern life is rooted in the disruptive historical forces generated by market capitalism. By spawning a system of social destabilization capitalism invents a form of modernity characterized by perpetual insecurity, alienation, and dread. The culture of modern capitalism is conveyed through abandonment motifs in a vast assortment of intellectual and artistic narratives. These motifs are repeated in modern literature, art, philosophy, and the social sciences. Through an examination of some of these narratives a clearer understanding of abandonment's role in modern life is gained.

CAPITALISM AND ITS DISCONTENTS

As social discourse, capitalism's history is relatively short. We are told that the word "capitalism" did not appear in print until 1854.¹ Used neither by Adam Smith nor Karl Marx, capitalism and all that it has come to mean as an ideology and method of production, is still a relatively recent signifier and very much in the process of evolving.

Adam Smith is recognized as having formalized a narrative of what we now regard as the early modern capitalistic economy, even though he did not use the term "capitalism." For him economy was a subject of moral, social, and intellectual inquiry. As he saw it, the moral imperative

of capitalism was free markets, unbridled access to them, and the free flow of resources (supply and demand) guided by an “invisible hand.” The social manifestation of capitalism was heightened individualism. As an Enlightenment thinker his intellectual agenda was to discover the natural laws that kept the machinery of the marketplace operating with efficiency and effectiveness. His economic paradigm comprised moral and natural processes, which ultimately would result in the advancement of societies and the material well-being of people everywhere. He understood, as did other eighteenth-century commentators, that he was looking at a newly emerging world market system. His credentials in moral philosophy and his ability to describe capitalism in positivistic terms drew considerable attention to this work. Thus, Smith can be credited with the reification of what we now term “modern capitalism”—giving it both an internal and eternal life.

Adam Smith provides not only a particular representational image of the capitalistic system wherein the employer and employee engage in a highly rational exchange of specialized labor for money, but he also depicts a system of markets characterized by a human propensity to “barter, truck and exchange” goods and services. This is a pattern in which all supply and demand perfectly intersect and determine a fair price. The individual participant is central to Smith’s work. Given that *The Wealth of Nations* was produced at the very beginning of the industrial revolution, his industrial landscape is almost pastoral—void of smoking factories, violent labor movements, and corrupt corporate ventures. It all seemed to be running smoothly as the last quarter of the eighteenth century drew to a close. Still, in his description of economic life we cannot find reference to one labor abuse—none in the mines of Durham, not one in the pin factory, none in the workshops of Glasgow. He sees little of the excesses, such as the exploitation of children for cheap labor, and he praises the benefits of the factory system without much concern for its destabilizing influences on social life.

Smith sees a society driven by market demand, competition, and acquisitiveness. His work predicts a modern bourgeois liberalism that raises capitalism to the position of secular veneration, imbuing it with naturalistic powers while ignoring many of its abuses. In that he posits capitalism, like nature, to be inherently rational, he establishes a strong intellectual link between Enlightenment thought and capitalistic enterprise. Therefore, he presents capitalism within a specific ideological context.

Bourgeois freedom from avarice is seen as essential to capitalism’s success and to the social progress that is dependent on it. Smith embraces the *laissez-faire* proposed by François Quesnay and the French Physiocrats. For Smith the unregulated market, guided by com-

petition and profit, produces the most benefit for the whole of society. Civil society and economy must be segregated from the state. It is the free market, not the state, that creates wealth and civility. Accordingly, the state needs to be kept clear of the natural ebb and flow of the market. Trade barriers must necessarily come down, except in cases where this flow is restrained by monopolistic practices. More than merely possible, capitalistic expansion on a global scale is desirable.

Accepting Hobbes' assumption that greed and sloth are qualities inherent in the very nature of people, Smith firmly believed that individual self-interests can produce an overall social good.² He postulates that many of the more brutish, egoistic drives could be put to a nobler purpose. While this idea of harnessing the vile, egocentric, and lustful nature of people and putting it into the service of the general public good dates back at least to St. Augustine, it was popularized by Bernard Mandeville in his classic text *The Fable of the Bees* in 1714. Smith refines it and advances this idea in *The Wealth of Nations* by integrating it into the narrative of modern capitalism. Although Mandeville had used the terms "vice" and "passion" in his book, Smith neutralizes these problematic signifiers and converts them into pleasure-seeking drives—"interests" and "advantages." Economist Albert O. Hirschman proposes that there was a "semantic drift" in the seventeenth century wherein highly charged terms such as greed, lust, ambition and avarice were converted into more neutral words such as "interests." And Smith, in the late eighteenth century, contributes to the shift in semantics by making material self-interest—at the expense of other destructive passions—a respectable part of capitalism.³

Hirschman contends that a principle of countervailing passion had a long tradition in western social thought, but it was most notably adopted by Enlightenment thinkers such as Montesquieu, Vico, Smith, and other moralists. In developing this idea they proposed that highly destructive and dangerous human desires could be restrained and less dangerous interests unleashed in their place, acting as surrogate passions.⁴ These interests could be let loose in the marketplace and, hopefully, might be used to quell the festering indeterminate pool of more dangerous human desires, including drives for power, sex and destruction. In fact, these deleterious passions could be submerged, and perhaps subsumed, by the desire for material things. Thus, at the base of Smith's capitalistic narrative is a process similar to sublimation to be identified by Freud more than a century later.

While conservatives expressed concern that these innate drives of the rabble could be dangerous if released, Smith pronounced that the primary purpose of civil government was to keep the wealthy safe from the

poor. Still, many saw a significant danger in the lack of formal constraints on market appetites. Edmund Burke, a strong supporter of private property and the market economy, was quite skeptical of freedom without some form of centralized control. For him and for others the unleashing of avarice could become a nightmare leading to further cravings. The Marquis de Condorcet in France and William Godwin of Britain, both liberals, opposed the abuses they saw connected to unbridled capitalistic ventures for other reasons. Like Smith, they supported the Enlightenment's precept that reason and market could be used to address social concerns. Unlike Smith, Condorcet saw problems stemming from unbridled capitalism that encouraged asymmetrical concentrations of wealth.⁵ Smith was more concerned with the consequences of damming-up of avidity.

Although Smith's work was produced at the beginning of the industrial revolution, he clearly understood the social importance of the newly emerging market system. The division of labor and the emergence of monetary and credit systems were changing not only the enterprise of business, but the nature of human relationships. For Smith, individualism and human acquisitiveness were emerging as central features of modern egoistic culture. This could produce positive consequences since the masses would be forced to resort to rational, self-serving calculation. Unrestrained passions associated with the poor would be put into the service of building a civil society. While the division of labor made people narrow and dull, the money economy made people cold and calculating.

In *The Wealth of Nations*, men and women are Hobbesian pleasure-seeking machines, lazy and unreflective. There is no hint of utopianism here, no glimmer of human compassion, no allusion to personal loyalty, or to bonds of community. There is no meaningful communal life in the capitalism he describes. There is only increasing human atomization resulting from the intensification of the division of labor and an ever-expanding pecuniary network of interests. As specialization intensifies, the work itself becomes increasingly meaningless. Capitalism, as he envisions it, sets into motion the commodification of all factors of production. He clearly recognizes that the laborer is but one more commodity. A life under capitalism is one of getting and spending. The future is to be judged primarily by economic growth and the accumulation of wealth.

The Wealth of Nations is an exemplary modernistic narrative. It helps to establish our essential understanding of an abstract system we now refer to as capitalism. It is both a powerful political and philosophical tract without ever identifying itself as such. While its underlying values are not obtrusive, it nevertheless is openly supportive of an ever-

emerging bourgeois system of human greed and exploitation. It celebrates the power of capital accumulation to uproot the past while generating conditions of poverty and promoting an expansion of wealth. Still, as a living system guided by sacred natural laws, Smith views it as remaining outside of our sphere of control and guided by a Calvinistic predestination. People need only surrender to the prerogative of the invisible hand.

For laborers, the landscape of capitalism presented by Smith in this work is frequently bleak. Smith knows this system is based on the workers' fears of losing their means of providing the necessities of life for themselves and their families. This should force the laborer to redirect negative drives into constructive, productive outlets. He acknowledges that as the world shifts to dependencies on capital production, the continual fear of starvation and homelessness drives labor to become more mobile and productive, frequently bidding down its own wages in the process. The volatility of the marketplace, the depressions, recessions and collapses, further promote worker perturbation and docility. He proposes that there can be no escaping the inevitable dependence on the market mechanism for one's very survival. He shows clearly that mortality rates are fixed to wages, which are frequently determined by colluding employers who prefer healthier profits to salutary working conditions. While Smith asserts that greater profits would eventually result in higher salaries for workers (something he supported), he is not very confident of this occurring.

Smith makes no conscious connection between capitalism and abandonment. Still he does suggest that capitalism disrupts the traditional social order. In his emphasis on the importance of the division of labor, he seems to indicate some of its inherent problems such as the dumbing-down of labor and overall worker desensitization;⁶ his focus on the factory or central workshop as the nexus of commerce speaks of the collapse of a home-based familial life associated with more agrarian societies. Throughout Smith's discourse there are indeed signs of humanistic sensibility. Among these is his recognition of a drive that unites all: the desire on the part of everyone, rich and poor alike, to be connected to others, to be respected, to be desired and loved. In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Smith asks:

For what purpose is all the toil and bustle of this world? What is the end of avarice and ambition, of the pursuit of wealth, of power, and pre-eminence? . . . From whence . . . arises the emulation which runs through all the different ranks of men and what are the advantages which we propose by that great purpose of human life which we call bettering our condition? To be observed, to be attended to, to be taken notice of with sympathy,

complacency and appreciation are all the advantages which we can propose to derive from it.⁷

The desire to be wanted and respected by others, in a Hegelian sense the desire to be desired, seems to be the overriding force at work here. Capitalism is viewed as repressing the more base human drives and converting them into pecuniary interests through a simple process of coercion. But the trade-off for work is not merely material reward. For Smith, the quest for human acceptance is the compensation for all this bartering, trucking and exchanging. And behind this rests the fear of destitution, disconnection, and aloneness, which is the essence of capitalism itself.

Following Smith were others who contributed to the conceptual landscape of this developing system. Numerous historical narratives compete for dominance in explaining capitalism's emergence. Smith did not venture to elaborate a detailed account of capitalism's development in *The Wealth of Nations*, since he viewed capitalism as inherent in nature. Nevertheless, Karl Marx and Max Weber both followed with socially grounded historiographies. Both traced the origin of modern capitalism to feudalism and its eventual demise. Political and ideological lines were drawn whereby the more ardent defenders of capitalism viewed it as a natural evolutionary force, which had no particular origin in time; others saw it as having distinctive social institutional beginnings.⁸ While there are still controversies raging over what exactly constitutes capitalism and when specifically the modern European version began, it is clear that this system holds an important place as both an object of discourse and as a perceived generator of modern life.

The conceptualization of capitalism as a harbinger of modernity was not the sole purview of social critics and historians. Beginning in the late eighteenth century, romantic artists and poets contributed greatly to the overall imagery that would become embedded in western visions of capitalism. Thus Blake's "dark satanic mills" found a place deep in the hearts of even the most conservative thinkers.⁹ The disquieting effects of the new social order became the raw material of literary and poetic narratives, which were to have a far greater influence than Smith's market ideology. Literary critic H. G. Schenk notes: "No one, not even Marx himself, could expose the hollowness of economic liberalism better than these thinkers have done. Sismondi and Baader, Coleridge and Adam Müller, were well aware of the fact that the proletarian in the newly arisen industrial society had only seemingly gained liberty, but had most certainly lost whatever security he had previously possessed."¹⁰ The literary attacks on capitalism carried great currency because they resonated as truth. Artists, writers, poets, and painters contributed significantly to

the modern imagery of capitalistic exploitation and dehumanization of workers. But the story of capitalism's evolution as generator of intense social forces was left chiefly to historians and sociologists.

The Marxian discourse on capitalism is sociologically compelling. Unlike Smith, Marx reveals the underbelly of capitalism as a force of social upheaval. Of course the differences in western capitalism between 1776 and 1844 were tremendous. Now there were smoking stacks, polluted rivers, armies of drone-like workers in the service of their own exploitation. These were hard to ignore. There is no invisible hand here, only the imposition of might against the weak. Thus, the capitalistic tableau resonates with human drama and dread. It depicts armies of the poor struggling against oppression and celebrates the coming proletarian revolution. Marx, and to an even larger extent Engels, adds the human face to capitalism. It is Marx who puts capitalism into the context of class and social history. His imagery of capitalism is well known to most of us; it is the version we tend to associate with dark cities, urban hunger, and abusive child labor practices. Marx, not Smith, would inspire the intense scholarship of Max Weber on capitalism and established for succeeding generations of scholars and thinkers a new challenge to classical liberal thought.

TRANSFORMATION NARRATIVES

While Marx and his image of capitalism will be more closely examined throughout this work, it is important to introduce other, more sociologically oriented models of capitalistic development that address its modernistic dimensions. Among these was a model proposed by Karl Polanyi in his 1944 work, *The Great Transformation*.¹¹ While Polanyi's classic interpretation of history remains a controversial one, it is useful as a frame of reference here. One hundred years after Marx, he connects the development of capitalism to key social institutional changes that we associate with modernization. According to Polanyi, capitalism set into motion what he referred to as the "great transformation" in western Europe between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries. The uprooting of traditional social arrangements (including methods of exchange) and the imposition of radically new forms of human relationships based upon market principles drastically altered the course of social history.

Polanyi asserts that prior to the coming of industrialization in Europe, the market played a minimal role in economic life. Wherever it could be said to have existed, the market was not central to the primary form of economic organization. Drawing on the work of anthropologists, Polanyi suggests that preindustrial economic behavior was determined

by societal needs, not market demands. He introduces the concepts of reciprocity and redistribution, and he posits the notion that people historically produced goods and services for which they were best suited and shared them with those around them. This sharing he calls “reciprocity.” Underlying this process was always an unstated agreement that everyone produced what he or she could do best. This did not emerge from the drive to profit, but out of the need to be attached to others, the fear of social ostracism, and the desire for social prestige. In this regard, Polanyi’s suggested reasons for the exchange of goods and services are similar to those Adam Smith identified—the need to be desired, loved, connected, and respected. In differing from Smith he sees social relations, not the market, as the central force behind the division of labor. Instead of depicting capitalism as an avenue to individual freedom, Polanyi portrays it as the road to human alienation and social devastation.

Redistribution was the second element in Polanyi’s analytic schema. Contrary to Smith, he asserts that historically the redistribution of goods and services was never the product of invisible market forces. Redistribution frequently involved a leader or chief who collected the surplus, maintained it, and redistributed it to members of his group through holding communal feasts, festivals or fairs. These functions served as a means of equitably reallocating resources and reinforcing the social structure. They celebrated one’s place in the community and promoted group solidarity. Community festivals were used to forge or to reinforce relationships with neighboring tribes. Thus, the exchange of goods and services had more to do with the promotion of social linkages than meeting egoistic needs. While markets did exist simultaneously with reciprocity and redistribution, they were peripheral to social life. Capitalism, he asserts, did not naturally evolve from such associations; rather, members of the newly emerging bourgeoisie forced their will upon mercantilist states to provide protections for their businesses and, in essence, created capitalism. Thus, Smith’s market capitalism is viewed as state intervention—evolving from policies developed by nation states to protect the wealthy. They were not a product of nature.

Finally, Polanyi’s central argument is that market economies are relatively new and never accounted for more than a fraction of the systems of exchange that existed in the world at the end of the eighteenth century. These arrangements emerged only with the advent of European modernization and colonial expansion. Traditionally, all economic arrangements and patterns of stratification were determined by the social values inherent in kinship, religion, politics, and community. In modern, capitalistic societies, however, the opposite is true. Here economic arrangements dictate social values.

An excellent counter interpretation of the development of capitalism in the west is presented by Alan MacFarlane who contends that Polanyi's theory is incorrect; the notion that capitalism developed in England between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries from nonmarket peasant society is wrong. MacFarlane insists that evidence indicates that English individualism was not at all a product of post-sixteenth century capitalistic development and that market society was not something new that transformed society.¹² Many disagree.

Fredric Jameson asserts that there is a vital connection between modernity and capitalism.¹³ Jameson, who has gained a considerable reputation in America and Europe as an innovative literary and cultural critic, has been able to synthesize disparate elements of Marxism, post-modernism, and Lacanian analysis into his own hermeneutic landscape. Like Marx, he proposes that if we went back far enough into human history we could see primitive communism as a universal way of life—one that directed all forms of human association. For him, as for Polanyi, the emergence of markets and the development of nation states promoted the appearance of vast social inequities and the decline of a collective consciousness. Jameson believes that the primitive communistic state, as in the pagan myth of the Golden Age of Saturn and the Christian myth of Eden, was one in which there was universal sharing. All property was held in common and all thought was collective. The concept of the individual did not and could not exist. While he admits that such a system today might appear neomythical, he proposes that it can be authenticated from the remnants of history. It still can be found in some tribal societies.

Jameson's interpretation of history, while in keeping with the Marxist tradition, is also divorced from it in some respects. He throws into question the Enlightenment project and the dichotomization that was inherent in it. While his notion of the primal collective conscience is certainly a part of anthropological and sociological tradition, his subscription to it frequently exposes him to charges of romanticizing history and the primitive collective. Still, it remains an important component of his thought, and he insists is essential to Marxism.

Modern alienation, for Jameson, is a product of the evolving market system. It runs counter to tribal communal expression. Modernization forces the loss of the primitive collective mind. By responding to the specialization inherent in capitalism, thought processes are fragmented. Even the senses are estranged from each other and start to function independently. The collective mind is further fragmented and thinking compartmentalized. Under capitalism there is a loss of vividness or color that is an essential aspect of modern alienation. As specialization diminishes perception, there is a real loss of sight, hearing and an overall sense of

reality. Under this system of capitalism there is a severing of emotions from reason. Functions of the mind become limited to empirical and descriptive processes. Splitting, in fact, becomes the norm. Modernism evolves from this.

For Jameson, Freud's essential ideas, like those of Smith, reflect a human nature that is isolated in time and place—a consequence of market capitalism. He sees Freud as providing an exemplary method of unearthing that which lays hidden and buried within us. While Freud's model of the unconscious and the psyche are reflective of the alienation and fragmentation brought about by capitalism, they provide important tools for unearthing our political unconscious.¹⁴ We will return to Jameson and these ideas later on in this book.

CAPITALISM AND ABANDONMENT

As an engine of social change, capitalism was an important generator of human abandonment. Historical renditions, both conservative and radical, reveal how it helped to usher in the collapse of feudalism throughout Europe and around the world. These accounts reveal a shattering of relations bound by collective endeavors and ways of life.

The commodification of land through the enclosure movement, accompanied by the forced expulsion of tens of thousands of peasants from commonly farmed lands, produced a rise in both peasant tenancy and in the number of displaced nomads who pursued refuge in overly congested towns. While massive numbers of peasants were forced from public lands between 1570 and 1630, enclosure actually began as early as the thirteenth century and lasted well into the 1800s resulting in a crazy quilt of individually operated farms, each under private management.¹⁵ Along with enclosure was a sudden upsurge in poverty and squalor. Those who found their way into the ranks of tenants also found themselves separated from any control of the means of production. All were powerless and under the direction of new landlords. Each succeeding harvest failure increased unsettlement and insecurity. The severing of feudal ties and a separation from the land marked a new wave of social abandonment. Thus, capitalism undermined systems of communal obligation, reciprocity and redistribution. Capitalism in conjunction with mercantilism and the development of nation states, created enormous wealth for the few. For some it meant the freedom to expropriate the work of others for profit. It was a form of self-expression, a creative venture, and in the eyes of the Protestant Church an act of civic responsibility.¹⁶ For the peasant laborer, however, it meant personal fragmenta-

tion as well as social alienation. The worker was commodified in the marketplace, and labor became just one of a number of other commodities to go up for sale. Marx noted:

Finally, there came a time when everything that men had considered as inalienable became an object of exchange, of traffic and could be alienated. This is the time when the very things which till then had been communicated, but never exchanged; given, but never sold; acquired, but never bought—virtue, love, conviction, knowledge, conscience, etc.—when everything finally passed into commerce. It is the time of general corruption, of universal venality, or, to speak in terms of political economy, the time when everything, moral or physical, having become marketable value, is brought to the market to be assessed at its truest value.¹⁷

In 1941, Erich Fromm, who examined both the psychological and social consequences of this breakdown of feudal life and the subsequent rise of market forces recapitulates Marx and reinvigorates his sentiments:

By losing his fixed place in a closed world man loses the answer to the meaning of his life; the result is that doubt has befallen him concerning himself and the aim of life. He is threatened by powerful supra personal forces, capital and the market. His relationship to his fellow men, with everyone a potential competitor, has become hostile and estranged; he is free—that is, he is alone, isolated, threatened from all sides.¹⁸

Fromm posits that early capitalism engendered these feelings of personal insecurity and anxiety, as well as an estranged form of liberation. They were all necessary for the new system's success. Yet, capitalism also entailed an escape from these feelings of hostility and aloneness by repressing them and converting them into productive energy.

Thus, with the decline of feudalism and the central authority of the Roman Catholic Church, capitalism exerted an enormous influence over the lives of many. The importance of the Protestant Reformation in this transition became the subject of Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.¹⁹ Here he asserts that the Protestant Reformation transformed both the survival anxiety and spiritual dread of workers into a secular work ethic. All of these feelings of worker alienation and economic insecurity were discharged through blind submission to the forces of capitalistic production. Weber proposes that the Reformation helped to make successful the transition from feudalism to capitalism in Europe by providing the necessary ideology that could assist in launching a thriving industrial revolution.²⁰ The Protestant Ethic's emphasis on individual autonomy, blind obedience to authority, self-sacrifice, and the vocationalizing of work all contributed to capitalism's ascent. Anxious energy, transformed into productive labor power, was now guided by the

Calvinistic piety. Abandonment in the form of relinquishment of the self to another without resistance found its way into the lexicon of the Reformation as Martin Luther preached that there was no sure road to salvation other than complete surrender to God's authority.

John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, written in 1644, became a metaphor for the abandonment generated by the new capitalistic order—a social banishment from a definite secure place to a placelessness haunted by personal insecurity. This was movement away from the center flooded by God's light to the dark periphery characterized by chaos.²¹ Thus, the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden produced an ontological dread that had to be countered by an emphasis on individual initiative, sacrifice and self-denial. There was no looking back. The sin of enlightened consciousness could only be redressed by hard work and sacrifice.

Capitalism set into motion what Joseph Schumpeter called a process of creative destruction, wherein the new constantly destroyed and displaced the old.²² Where there was industrial capitalism factories sprung to life, darkening the urban skies with black clouds of smoke. Rivers and streets became sewers. New waves of consumables now dislocated the previous wave. Dangerous machines displaced farmers and manual workers. The primary purpose of the market was not only the satisfaction of wants, but the creation of new desires for the purpose of ever-growing profits. With the advent of the nation states, centralized markets, and currency of exchange, a dynamic system of perpetual change was set into place. This was a pulsating system, seemingly with a life of its own. The impulse to produce and consume became the propelling force. Exploration, colonialism, and imperialism helped to stoke the furnace of human productivity and exploitation around the world while opening new markets and meeting growing European demands for inexpensive and exotic goods. If labor costs became too dear, there was always colonial slavery.

As the dynamic force behind the new social ordering, capitalism provided little hope for security, stability and permanence. Profits became the fulcrum of economic production. To maximize them required, then as now, cheap factors of production. The safest way to assure that profits were not being lavished on workers was to keep them on the brink of starvation. Capitalism required a state of perpetual abandonment—of place, of people, of things—as well as a threat of abandonment. As it generated social instability, periodic booms, and recessions, it inculcated deep-seated feelings of anxiety centered around economic loss both for the capitalist and the laborer. While the quality of living rose for many, for more it fell. But, for the far greater number, it was uncertain.

Statistical data from the seventeenth century onward showed that the fluctuations of death rates corresponded to trade booms and depressions.²³ Infant mortality rates jumped throughout Europe and were connected to economic slumps and growth. Families were frequently forced to reduce their size through measures as extreme as infanticide.

Although the economy of France in the eighteenth century was primarily agricultural, major trade depressions destroyed supporting businesses and shops in many cities. Businesses in Rouen and Lyons, for instance, were financially ruined as a result of the crop failures of surrounding farmlands. Town workers wholly dependent on industry were also affected overnight as people were thrown into conditions of extreme deprivation.²⁴

With the advent of more intensified enclosures in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, rural people were forced into cities and towns where they either worked or starved. A few were able to tenant farm land they occupied. Heilbroner recounts one example: "Thus in 1820 nearly fifty years after the American Revolution, the Duchess of Sutherland dispossessed 15,000 tenants from 794,000 acres of land, replaced them with 131,000 sheep, and by way of compensation rented her evicted families an average of two acres of submarginal land each."²⁵ Many not as lucky entered into inhumane factory systems of these dark cities, or descended into dank and dangerous coal mines outside of them, working fourteen hours every day, seven days each week, with little to show for their labor but a subsistence wage and deteriorating health. There was no security.

These poor conditions under which workers lived and worked offended many with humane sensibilities. Friedrich Engels in his classic *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, written in 1844, laid out this situation in a blazing protest against human exploitation in Manchester:

The workers have to live in damp dwellings. When they live in cellars water seeps through the floor and when they live in attics the rain comes through the roof. The workers' houses are so badly built that the foul air cannot escape from them. The workers have to wear poor and ragged garments and they have to eat food which is bad, indigestible and adulterated. Their mental state is threatened by being subjected alternately to extremes of hope and fear. They are goaded like wild beasts and never have a chance of enjoying a quiet life. . . . Every day they have to work until they are physically and mentally exhausted. . . . If the workers manage to survive this sort of treatment it is only to fall victims to starvation when a slump occurs and they are deprived of the little they once had.²⁶

According to Karl Marx, the mode of production shaped all other dimensions of society; this included marriage and family. With the advent of market capitalism, children of the poor became either burdens or a means to enhance meager working class incomes. Some were placed into servitude, some were killed, others were deserted. That child abandonment reached record proportions during the industrial revolution is therefore not surprising.

John Boswell, who conducted a masterful study of the abandonment of children in the medieval period, was astonished at figures he discovered for child abandonment in eighteenth-century Europe. Here desertion reached record proportions.²⁷ In Toulouse, France, for instance, one in four children was known to have been abandoned. In the poor laborers' quarters of that town, the rate reached 39.9 percent. In Lyons, between 1750 and 1789, the number of children abandoned was approximately one-third of the number of registered births; while in Paris for this same period children known to have been abandoned amounted to between twenty and thirty percent. France was not exceptional. In early nineteenth-century Florence, the rate of child abandonment reached forty-three percent, up from fourteen percent in the eighteenth century.²⁸

Although a fair number of abandoned children were illegitimate offspring of well-to-do parentage, a far greater number appear to have been children of the very poor—those overtaken suddenly by economic hardship. “Social and economic conditions alone might have induced more parents to abandon children in 1780 than in 1680. . . ,” notes Boswell, “or the expansion of public facilities for abandoned children might have inspired more abandonment, as contemporary appeals to terminate state support for foundling homes suggest. But it is also likely that improved public assistance simply made the matter more open and recognizable.”²⁹ Boswell notes that in the second half of the eighteenth century, one in every three or four children was abandoned in many French, Italian, and Spanish cities. In France, particularly, infanticide was a major problem. Bodies of suffocated newborns were found in fields and towns. It was common to find dead infants stuffed into sewers and drains.³⁰

The intensity of the industrial revolution also produced a breakdown in the traditional welfare system, including those programs that addressed the needs of foundlings. Promoters of capitalism in Britain, such as Thomas Malthus and David Ricardo, campaigned to put an end to the Speenhamland Law—a public assistance program put into place by the Elizabethan Poor Laws of 1601, which guaranteed everyone a subsistence income in order to prevent starvation during difficult economic periods. They called for an end to all handouts and no more than subsistence wages for workers as they laid out convincing arguments to

those in power.³¹ Generous wages and welfare programs, they asserted, could only contribute to social problems that were originally wrought by natural population increases in the first place. An excess of children, sex and sloth were viewed as the primary causes of poverty. According to Polanyi, Speenhamland was abolished by the middle classes in order to remove the final obstacle to unbridled capitalism. Speenhamland had prevented the establishment of a ruthlessly competitive labor market.³² Labor, insisted Polanyi, was the last market to be organized into the new industrial system. There would be no economic safety net.

Cities were now overcrowded, teeming with bands of the homeless poor. Unwanted boys and girls filled streets imposing both an eyesore and a threat to the bourgeoisie. The poor, especially women with children out of wedlock, increasingly became the targets of the state's draconian laws.³³ As an alternative to public relief, asylums were erected throughout industrial Europe. In England, workhouses proliferated after the enactment of the new Poor Law in 1834, which eliminated Speenhamland and most other forms of welfare. These workhouses, as well as some of the lesser notorious "orphanages" of England, became the common methods of state-supported relief and foster care. The only assistance for most poor families was through admission to one of these houses. Small children and the aged who were begging on the streets would be placed here, commingled with the chronically ill, the criminally insane, and the mentally retarded. Mental illness became a significant focus of urban concern. As psychologist Philip Cushman notes, many such incidents of mental disturbances during this time can be linked to problems of economic instability and unemployment.³⁴

Workhouses often were run by individual contractors whose primary interest was making a profit—which they rarely did. In return for bad food and lodging, men, women, children, and frequently the mentally ill, would be confined to labor with rare permission to go outside. Mothers, fathers, and children were segregated into separate quarters, and visitations would be granted at the whim of the house officials. Workers who failed to produce their allotted work would not be fed. Many young children who were incarcerated at the age of two or three never saw the outside world again. Historian Roy Porter points out: "The death-rate in the workhouse of St. George's, Middlesex, was one hundred percent. Out of 2,339 children received into London workhouses in the five years after 1750, only 168 were alive in 1755."³⁵ Engels describes the abusive treatment suffered by children who did live:

In the summer of 1843 a five-year-old boy, who was an inmate of the Greenwich Union (at Depford) was punished by being locked-up in a

mortuary for three nights and he had to sleep on some coffin-lids. At Herne (Common) workhouse a little girl was treated in the same way because she wet her bed. This particular punishment appears to be very popular in the workhouses.³⁶

Thousands of men, women and children were housed in these facilities. Workhouses were rampant with all forms of diseases and inhuman punishments and tortures. Engels recounts incident after incident of wanton abuse of impoverished inmates. "In West London Union workhouse one of the porters suffered from syphilis, with which he infected (three or) four girls. But he was not dismissed. Another porter took a deaf and dumb girl to his room for four days and slept with her. He, too, was not dismissed."³⁷ From rape to beating to murder, poor working-class children as well as adults suffered enormously under the conditions associated with early industrialization.

The tearing apart of families, particularly in Britain, was the hallmark as well as the legacy of centralized capitalism and the industrial revolution. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw not only the separation of people from the land and the herding of surplus populations into towns and cities, but also the removal of both the worker and work from the home. Cottage systems of production were displaced by factories. With the atomization of family, the alienation of the worker was complete. Impersonal factories and offices beyond the boundaries of family and kinship systems established a new order based on depersonalized production and worker commodification. The functions of family as a source of socialization rapidly deteriorated as the home was emptied of meaningful activity.

Feminist sociologists Michèle Barrett and Mary McIntosh assert that the insulation of the patriarchal family was overall fortified by industrial capitalism. Families that remained intact became more privatized, participating less frequently in communal life.³⁸ The nuclear family itself, insist Barrett and McIntosh, was a result of early capitalistic development as was the emergence of individuation as the central familial process.³⁹ This familial function would have a tremendous influence on the future of all relationships. Childhood socialization, aimed at rapid individuation, produces an array of problems connected to issues of attachment and separation that do not appear in tradition-based societies.

The individual in this socioeconomic context found the experience of alienation inescapable. As Marx explained it, commodification and alienation were essential features of market capitalism. Alienation was not simply a feeling of estrangement, but an important societal process that took on special significance during the industrial revolution.

Capitalism and its inherent specialization fragmented everything, including laborers, removing them from their homes and families, assigning identities relative to their place in the production process. Out of this disintegration came a sense of loss, which was manifest in *entfremdung*, or estrangement. According to Marx, it was the commodification of labor that produced these feelings. People lost an historic sense of self and community, were turned against one another, or became tools of each other in their drive for survival. All workers were made into factors of production, instruments for another's wealth. In the *Communist Manifesto*, Karl Marx noted: "The bourgeoisie, wherever it got the upper hand has put an end to all [that was] feudal. . . and has left remaining no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous cash payment."⁴⁰ This produced an epidemic of interpersonal estrangement. Capitalism as a system could not only destroy meaningful human relationships, but also could produce a fragmented self that lowered the possibilities for future, healthy relations.

Such a portrait of early capitalistic development is quite bleak. Nevertheless it was Marx who saw the power inherent in capitalistic productive technology to change the world for the better in the short-run. Inevitably, the inequities of a capitalism pregnant with its own self-destruction would succumb to revolutionary social change; it would take an awakening of consciousness on the part of the workers to make this happen. Despite the alienation of the laborer and the commodification inherent in the capitalistic system, Marx remained hopeful that reason would triumph over injustice. Capitalism, with all of its flaws, would be crushed by those who were the targets of its exploitation and abuse. He remained steadfast in this optimism: "The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win."⁴¹

Capitalism has been depicted here, and in various discourses, as a powerful social force that set into motion a state of affairs that led to fragmentation, alienation and separation. The separations are frequently associated with the process of creative destruction, which is a constant annihilation of the old to bring about the new in the pursuit of profit. It is a system wherein market relationships displace all others, one in which all value is assigned by the market and all work is oriented toward satisfying market demands. The all-consuming nature of market capitalism with its power defined by its ability not only to organize the means of production in a manner that will materially enrich the lives of those who own them, but also to construct a culture predicated on a seamless production/consumption process, requires a class system to support it. It is this system with its exploitive inequalities that gives life to capitalism's productive enterprise.

Abandonment produced by the capitalistic machine results from two primary sources. The first is the inordinate inequities in power—a class system in which most perceive of themselves as dependent on a very few for their survival. The second is the process of perpetual change generated by shifts in market demand and technologies of production spawning social instability and personal vulnerability. In this regard, capitalistic societies can be identified by an intensity of material and human relinquishment: an abandonment not only of things but of practices, places and people.

MODERNITY AS SOCIAL CHANGE

While the affinity between capitalism and modernity is great, there needs to be a clear distinction between the two. Modernity takes many forms, but as a term it generally describes a type of social landscape arising through a process of modernization. In philosophy it is linked to the ideas promoted by such thinkers as Descartes, Bacon, Hobbes, and Machavelli. It deals with such issues as the nature of knowledge, the uses of science, political individualism, and the essence of modern power. In sociology it describes the rise of industrial cities, secularization, market economies, and democratization.⁴² Yet, modernity is a problematic concept for most social theorists. Although it reflects some of the same central concerns of market capitalism—not least of which is its emphasis on fragmentation, objectification, individuation, and rational control—modernity is essentially an intellectual construct of critics, theorists, and philosophers. Its definitions are too numerous, too varied, too abstruse to serve any common purpose. Any discursive treatment of modernity tends to be inherently ideological, male-oriented, and Eurocentric. Modernity shares with capitalism definitional plasticity making it a problematic signifier for social science.

If modernity is an era, as many have suggested, then there is vast disagreement as to when this era began or ended. Some contend that its origins date back to the Renaissance or the sixteenth century, others favor the eighteenth or nineteenth century. Many see a temporal division between modernity and postmodernity, but some do not. Those who praise modernity and defend it from its detractors define it to reflect their own political ideologies, although the same might be said of those who champion capitalism. Yet it is the relationship that modernity has to capitalism that is most troubling for some analysts. Where the conceptual terrain of modernity leaves off and capitalism begins is a matter of extensive intellectualization and speculation. Likewise, there is consider-

able difficulty, although much less, in distinguishing the central features of modernity from those of the Enlightenment. Great confusion abounds. The differences between modernity, modernization, and modernism seem even more frustrating as various theorists use these terms interchangeably to mean the same thing.

Modernity is associated with the civilization/savagery opposition promoted by the European Enlightenment. In this dichotomy, the “modern” is distinguished from primitive. What is frequently labeled as modern is a particular state of western economic development and intellectual cultivation applied as a universal standard of achievement and progress, a standard frequently used to oppress, control, and sometimes enslave an “underdeveloped world.” This Eurocentric brand of modernity is often an ideology imbued with racism, sexism, and a belief that modern life arises out of the natural evolutionary course of events. It is this brand of modernity that became part of a romantic narrative in which what is *not* modern (what is underdeveloped) is typically thought to be a closed primitive enclave. Such a place is thought to be in need of development, requiring modern means of production, transportation, communication, and enlightenment. The “developing world,” on the other hand, is one that has begun to open up to outside investment—to the “assistance” of transnational corporations and those already modernized who prepare the way for economic integration into a system of global colonialism. Thus, this sort of modernity shares an agenda with capitalism, which is the absolute undermining of traditional life and the substitution of a nearly complete reliance on the global marketplace. Social historian Rajani Kannepalli Kanth notes:

Amazingly, the wholesale destruction of local autonomies, and the authoritarian hierarchial organization of all societal institutions . . . , is seen by the modernist impulse as but so many splendid moments in the exciting ascent of (European) man. To alienate, and then to subject to a craven subordination—that in a nutshell, is the modernist way . . . of catastrophic uprooting of social relations.⁴³

Defenders and detractors of modernity comprise an impressive cadre of scholars and social theorists. Many early modernists, such as Claude Henri de Rouvroy de Henri Saint-Simon and Auguste Comte, suggest that its potential for good is quite vast. In their writings we have a clear indication of the initial romance with (and contribution to) modernity’s narrative of industrial utopianism in post-revolutionary France. In Saint-Simon’s early nineteenth-century renderings, we have a technocratic means for integrating a society shaken by revolution and class strife through centralized planning and empirical social science.

Inspired by elements of the Enlightenment, Saint-Simon and his followers formulated principles of civic engineering aimed at achieving equity and social progress. Both Comte and Saint-Simon called for building a coalition of public and private interests that would engage inordinate resources for social benefit through public works. Canals, bridges, railroads, and massive feats of technological innovation are all a part of a vision in which scientists, businessmen, and engineers will guide social change. Both men were enthralled with science and envisioned a society directed by scientific and technocratic elites: priests of reason. Enlightenment science could be applied to discovering the important facts about society so it could be more easily controlled. Although the engine of capitalism would drive the course of modernity, it had to be guided by an enlightened cadre of bourgeois intellectuals. It was Saint-Simon's grand vision that the agenda of industrialization would be exported around the world. Also, it was Saint-Simon, not Marx as commonly thought, who first observed that capitalism was the initial stage in an evolutionary progression toward socialism. His work set the tone for other utopian planners such as Charles Fourier and Robert Owen who attempted to develop and organize industrial societies predicated on a medley of capitalistic efficiencies and socialistic humanism. For Saint-Simon, modernity represented human progress predicated on technological advances.

This romance with modern society was frequently offset by more pessimistic views of modernity. By the mid to late 1800s social theorists such as Sir Henry Main and Ferdinand Tönnies described modernity as a process of communal degeneration wherein society's interpersonal relationships deteriorated from trusting, primary, tradition-based connections to impersonal, superficial, contractual associations. For them, human belongingness was corrupted by the market system and cost-to-benefit calculations. In this shift from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft* traditional communities guided by human sentiment gave way to impersonal modern societies. Tönnies observed a decline in the power of religion, and a near abandonment of family life. According to this perspective, the process of modernization led to increased secularization, the ascent of the market and weakened communities.

In the late nineteenth century, social theory became more equivocal. While Tönnies' work was rejected in many important intellectual circles as too emotionally laden and reactionary, theory became increasingly more ambivalent toward the forces of modernization. Emile Durkheim, who was Comte's intellectual successor and therefore a supposed champion of modernity, espoused the benefits of modern life in his work, but also sounded a cautionary note. In two of his sociological classics, *The*