**The Failure of Success: A Cultural-Philosophical Analysis**

An observation of the personal, professional and social lives of individuals in modern Western capitalist societies reveals that “success” and “failure” have become central and significant parameters. Success has become the object of desire of many who are building their self-image, self-worth and in many ways their identity, especially in the economic and professional spheres. Western myth posits that if we try hard enough we can “succeed” in being whatever we want. From infancy, we are inculcated with the belief that if we act correctly—be smart, good and industrious enough—we will succeed. The success and failure discourse takes place in the media, in political rhetoric, in education and in art. When striving for success gains a foothold in all areas of life, many people find it difficult to live with or admit failure. The feeling of failure is accompanied by a sense of guilt and shame. In a culture where success is the supreme value, failure is unbearable (Sandage 2005, 26). Scott Sandage, who has studied the history of those who failed in America beginning in the nineteenth century, believes that self-esteem in America depends on the ability to relate to life with a sense of absolute ambition (3). Where success is the highest good and the fulfillment of a dream, life sometimes becomes a chronic of failure.

Where and when did the race to success begin in the West? Is it a phenomenon unique to our times? Most critical theories relating to success and failure are directed towards the social, political and cultural life of Western consumer-capitalist societies, examining how the capitalist economic order is associated with different levels of that culture. Underlying these theories is the assumption that the capitalist form of economic organization fundamentally transformed many areas of society’s cultural infrastructure such as its beliefs, values, self-perception and social relations (Bell 1976, 14-16). The main assumption of this article, however, is the that the race for success did not develop with capitalism; rather, its roots are to be found deep within the sources of Western civilization. Capitalism only reinforced and nurtured it, positioning it at the very center of existence.

**Success (and “Failure”) and Capitalist Culture**

Neo-Marxist theorists claim that success and efficiency have become the central values of Western consumer-capitalist culture, and that the individual is wholly assimilated into it becomes a commodity (Gur-Ze’ev 1996, 182-86). Capitalist culture fosters greed with a merciless ethic—material greed, goal-oriented greed, and the greed of “false” needs in all areas of life.

In his critique of the ideology of success in the era of consumer capitalism, Herbert Marcuse argues that industrialized society does not, in fact, address man’s real needs (1996, 19-32). Rather, the advertising industry convinces man to buy a product he does not need. These “false” needs perpetuate injustice, aggression, extravagance, and hard labor. Industry is engaged not only in manufacturing goods but also in the creation of the need to consume them, the need to succeed, to achieve, to acquire. These needs, Marcuse states, have a social content and role, becoming part of the individual, “and no matter how much he may identify himself with them, or find himself in their consumption [...] they are still what they were to begin with: the products of society” ( 22). When the real critical dimension is absent, man finds himself living a *one-dimensional* existence. One-dimensionality signifies a situation where the negation of the forces supposed to be opposed to the current system is rendered sterile. In fact, the private, subjective, dimension of man disappears, and a “non-free society forms man and nature” (Marcuse 2005, 27). Thus, one-dimensional man lives in false consciousness in the race for success and achievement (Marcuse 1970, 32-38). Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer regard the race for success today as the only measure of individual existence: “[T]hrough the countless agencies of mass production and its culture, as embedded in the individual as modes of behavior that have become norms, [they are considered as] the exclusively natural, decent and intelligent modes of behavior. The individual has already articulated himself as object alone [...] in the sense of being a *failure or success*. His yardstick is individual existence—success or failure” (2002, 40; emphasis added).

I conclude at this point that consumer-capitalist culture in the West cultivates the pursuit of external successes, marketing social indexes of success via every advertising medium. Consumer capitalism reinforces and fosters success as an important value, positioning it at the center of existence. However, the assumption of this article is that the race for success did not in fact develop with capitalism; its roots are to be found deep within the sources of Western civilization. Capitalism only reinforced and nurtured it, positioning it at the very center of existence. The main thesis offered here is that the sources of the concepts of “success” and “failure,” culture’s cornerstones, are located at the very heart of Western culture, deeply embedded at it roots, not merely the later products of consumer-capitalist culture.

This essay seeks to present a genealogy of the desire for success and the avoidance of failure in our culture. Genealogy’s field of interest is the past, but its real goal is to understand the current reality and its critique: to understand how the cultural patterns of the pursuit of success operate today.

**Why Genealogy?**

Genealogy is the study science that explores the origins of families, their lineage and their histories. When we deal with someone’s or something’s genealogy, we tell a story about their or its past, origins and development up to the present moment (Rossineck 2004, 410). This is a critical method: exposing the past brings us face to face with the contingent and minimizes its control over our lives. This change of perspective allows for a reexamination of positions, as well as accountability for them (Foucault 1977, 152).

Adopting the genealogical method as critical practice leads to the ideas of Nietzsche and Foucault; Nietzsche is considered the father of genealogy as a critical method, and Foucault implemented and continued his work (Deleuze 2006, 2). Nietzsche regards philosophers as genealogists, but does not claim primacy in the use of this type of methodology (1976, 224). As a critical method, the interest driving genealogical research is the understanding of contemporary reality and its criticism through the reinterpretation of the past. Therefore, the long timeline chosen for this research begins today, in consumer-capitalist society, and extends backwards to biblical narrative.

This genealogical investigation will be conducted in relation to a corpus of canonical Western religious texts and will focus on the Old and New Testaments. Western Christianity is a prominent and important feature of Western civilization, and serves as a clear characteristic of it. Christian culture and religion of the West are based, in part, on the Jewish Bible – the Old Testament. Therefore, the Bible will serve as a major source of genealogical work here. Genealogy reveals worldviews, mechanisms, and forces that have operated in the history of the present in question: when we look at our situation today with regard to the parameters of “success” and “failure,” which have become key metrics in all areas of life, we can locate many forces that have steadily drained into the present moment and become a new quality. This genealogy’s thematic-interpretive mission is to identify what are the elements that constituted, at least in part, the basic structures in question, since the interactions between the various factors have been complex.

In the context of this analysis, three components that have played a major role in forming these structures of culture will be identified: the separation of man from nature, Judeo-Christian judgment and time perception in the West. Even if not regarded as clear causes and effects, these structures are marked as part of the forces that led to the formation of the current situation. That is to say, many foundational structures that have carried out a dialogue with these structures of success and failure can be identified in the history of Western culture. A final list of all the structures and forces that created the super-structures cannot be made – but the exposure of three of them, by re-describing the past, will allow us to see the contingent element of this occurrence. The current structures of success and failure did not *have* to be formed as they did, i.e., *that which often seems inevitable is not a historic necessity*. Culture is controlled by fundamental assumptions running so deep that usually they are not even visible except through a retrospective glance to another era. Genealogy undermines their obviousness. Beliefs and desires regarding success are contingent and socialization dependent; they form the modern self.

**The Separation of Man from Nature**

The first thematic element of the genealogy—the separation of man from nature—can be identified in the biblical narrative, as the Bible is a central source of the Western notion that man is the master and owner of nature (Lyotard 2006, 38). We will argue that this Western conception is not a late-Capitalist product, but originated in the Bible.Judaism originally perceived itself as a culture with the ability to generate and create, as opposed to Greek culture that viewed nature as sacred. One of the Bible’s most significant innovations against pagan views is the assertion that man can be a partner in the creation of natural reality. According to the genealogical explanation, a man enjoined to bring creation to perfection will develop, among other things, motivation for boundless success because everything is possible.

According to the conception of the Biblical narrative, there are also interrelations between humans and nature: man’s behavior affects nature, and nature repays man accordingly. Nature gives its blessing when people succeed and are moral, and withholds its blessing when human beings are sinners or fail. This conception is reflected in the various stories of the Bible, that is, in prophetic literature and the Psalms. This image differs from that of the Mesopotamian myths, according to which nature, as identified with divine beings, is indifferent to the behavior of human beings and man is unable to influence it.

**The Bible and God’s Separation from Nature**

The concept according to which the world was created by a creator whose will determines how things will look is accepted by the three monotheistic religions. The biblical God is described as an independent entity, a separate reality from nature and man. According to Yehezkel Kaufmann, “the basic idea of ​​the Israelite religion was bound up from its very beginning in a fundamental split between God and the world [...] God and the world are two distinct realities” (Kaufmann 1962, 245). Biblical faith’s innovation was in the separation of God from nature; The God of Israel is not a slave to nature or any substance but the creator of the natural world through his sovereign willpower. God does not fight fate and time since he is the one “calling the generations from the beginning” (*King James Version*, Isaiah 41.4), as opposed to the gods of the pagan world, who were bound by the laws of nature and its order, and hence could be conquered and dismissed (Galander 2009, 86).

The Greek idea of the cosmos is alien to biblical thought; the latter was able to overcome the ancient world’s tendency to imbue nature with mysterious force. Nature is no longer a cult object, but is rather meant for use and enjoyment, and is not a burden or an obstacle to achieving the supreme perfection or ultimate success (Heschel 2003, 73-74). For the Greeks and Indians, nature is supreme reality, its essence is its stability and it is subject to eternal laws. The clearest evidence that God is a personality distinct from nature is supplied in the creation narrative in Genesis, where it emerges that God had existed before the world and that he created the world and man through his will. He is a personality with its own free will and its own machinations. The act of the world’s creation appears as a clear miracle, a spectacular manifestation of God’s reign in the world. God is Lord of creation, not subject to it.

An argument regarding the issue of God’s independence and separateness has been raging throughout written Western history, focusing on the question of whether the universe had a beginning, and if so, how it in fact began. We can point to two prominent schools of thought on this issue: the first, which includes Judaism, Christianity and Islam, has asserted that the universe was created *ex nihilo* and that the human race is in the process of developing; the *ex nihilo* creation narrative is based on the idea of God’s ​​separation from nature. The second school is reflected in Plato’s and Aristotle’s perception of the divine, i.e., that God is a designer and an architect, not a creator. Material is perceived as immortal, not created: “Its creator – well, He undoubtedly had an eternal model before his mind’s eye” (Plato 1999, 530); “the model stands forever, while the sky has been and will be at all times” (Plato 1999, 539).

In the second half of the second century CE, Greek philosopher Galen formulated the difference between biblical culture and Greek culture, arguing that the fundamental distinction between them is the result of their opposing cosmologies (Dihle 1982, 8). In his view, the principle of God’s “free will” only appears against the backdrop of biblical cosmology, according to which it is God’s desire to bring matter into an ordered state. God’s will brings about a different future, which contains the ability of creation, modification, renovation, transformation, non-return and improvement. Free will leads to greater success in the future in relation to the situation of the present.

**The Bible and Man’s Separation from Nature**

The separation of man from nature is a function of God’s separation from nature, as according to this essay’s interpretive stance, God is a projection of human desires. The Bible posits a similarity between man and God: “let us make man in our image, after our likeness” (Genesis 1.26). Man must mimic the main qualities that characterize God. Biblical man, like the biblical God, is endowed with free will, is separate from nature and is supreme in the hierarchy of all created beings, a partner in creating a natural reality: “Israelite religion transformed the divine drama from the domain of nature and its powers to the domain of the human will” (Kaufmann 1962, 472). The Bible commands man to intervene in history and bring about change. Nature becomes a target, an object of human will. In the creation narrative, man is granted approval to conquer and dominate: “and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth” (Genesis 1.28).

Ludwig Feuerbach calls man’s separation from nature “Jewish Egotismˮ (1957, 34-35); he believes that the creation doctrine adopted by Christianity is based on the Bible and that its fundamental premise is this: Only where man separates himself from nature can there be the question where the universe came from. The separation reduces nature to the state of an object of human will. The Hebrews, according to Feuerbach, tie faith, natural domination and feeding: “at even ye shall eat flesh, and in the morning ye shall be filled with bread; and ye shall know that I am the Lord your God” (Exodus 16.12).

**Judeo-Christian Judgment**

A second thematic element that has played a major role in creating the aforementioned cultural genealogy is Judeo-Christian judgment. Judaism presents a judging God, and divine judgment is awarded an even more central place in Christianity. Western Judeo-Christian civilization recognizes a legislating, judging, and punishing divinity—God is posited as a non-human authority determining what is right and wrong, a supreme judge punishing men or rewarding them for their actions. The concept that a strict and meticulous supreme judge, external to man, exists is, as far as we are concerned, the cultural motivation for the pursuit of success and the fear of failure. Man fears the results of judgment, especially judgment entailing punishment, and strains with all his might to succeed in the eyes of the judge. The motivation for success is primarily religious, but later undergoes a process of secularization; when worldviews are deeply rooted in religious experience—if we accept Carl Jung’s premise—then they have a secret power to behave as cultural forces and trends, and they are conserved in the secular experience as an identical structure that is expressed in new ways (1987, 65-66).

**The Bible and Reward Theory**

I argue that the issue of reward in the Bible, according to the genealogical explanation, is closely related to perception of success and failure. I interpret biblical sin as man’s failure in the eyes of the biblical writer; the most common explanation of human suffering is included in the traditional theory of reward, which holds that suffering represents a punishment for the sins of a human or a people, with biblical sin perceived as a failure of the man and the nation. People and man determine their own destiny by their deeds (Jacobson 1958, 11). To wit, judgment of individual and community actions will determine whether the individual or the community succeed in the future (Weiss 1987, 460-61).

Judgment is a key element of the biblical story. Judaism presents a judging and examining God, and the Bible sets tests at any moment. A Jew “may be called to stand a test where he succeeds or fails to fulfill God’s will” (Rauch 1978, 10-11). According to the Hebrew conception, as Sigmund Mowinckel claims/maintains/asserts, blessings awarded to man are nothing but the life force expressed in happiness and success, and curses are a depletion of it (qtd. in Rauch 1978, 468). Act begets reward, act and reward are in a link reminiscent of the causal link of natural law. The value of deeds is determined by the judge’s laws, and man directs his actions according to the judging criteria *to gain success*.

The history of humanity and the history of the people of Israel are described in the Bible within a judgmental framework, a framework that determines what constitutes success and failure, respectively. The Bible recounts the history of the world since the early generations in light of reward theory: the narrative of the Garden of Eden and its consequences, the Flood, the Tower of Babel, Sodom and Gomorrah, Elimelech’s lesions, the Plagues of Egypt, narratives of the desert and finally the ups and downs of Israel’s history and the annals of other nations. Throughout the narrative continuum, individuals as well as entire generations are seemingly punished for their failures: “I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children” (Deuteronomy 5.9). The divine order ruling the world, we are told by the Bible, is the order of law and justice.

According to the Jewish worldview, man and community have an impact on future success, and history’s purpose is well-defined: “for thy work shall be rewarded, saith the Lord; and they shall come again from the land of the enemy. And there is hope in thine end, saith the Lord, that thy children shall come again to their own border” (Jeremiah 31:16-17). Judaism sees worldly success as a sign of divine grace, while failure in the world requires man to examine his actions.

**Christian Judgment**

Christianity examines not only acts but intentions, i.e., thoughts and feelings, as well (Schimmel 1997, 15): “Ye have heard that it was said of them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment. But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment” (Matthew 5.21-22); “Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery. But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart” (Matthew 5.27-28).

In Christianity, God does not distinguish by eyesight: in Christianity, God sees through man to his interiority. While in Judaism, judgment happens after the fact, following an action with external visibility, judgment also covers intentions in Christianity, before any deed has been carried out. There is no need to look pious, as only inner intention is of any significance: “and when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are […] but thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret” (Matthew 6.5-6). In the Old Testament, success is expected to have good visibility, and God himself is presented as an accountant managing a list of successes and failures. Old Testament reward is worldly—judgment is rendered in this world, and so is punishment; Christianity, on the other hand, transfers judgment to the afterlife—in the Christian world, the great judgment will take place on the day of the Last Judgment, at the end of history.

With the nullification of the Old Testament, the message to believers was that God’s will resided not in external action, in the mechanical success of observing the commandments “according to the flesh,” but in their performance according to their inner meaning. With the cancellation of the commandments, Christianity became a religion that is very different from Judaism, in that it did not focus on the daily carrying out of positive and negative commandments. The theological basis for their cancellation was the doctrine of grace developed by Paul: “the word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach. That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation” (Romans, 10:8-10).

Catholic judgment sees the good life as the life of abstinence from pleasure. But while the Church requires the faithful to refrain from worldly success and be humble, ecclesiastical establishment is not above wealth and worldly successes itself. On the subject of success, the Church suffers from a chronic case of double standard: on the one hand, it is full of the boundless desire to succeed in the world, take it over, manage it and enrich itself; on the other hand, many in its community sharply criticize its leadership, grounding themselves in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), which is principally opposed to worldly success: “lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matthew 6.19-21). The dissonance between primitive Christianity, the religion of the poor and the suffering Messiah, and successful Christianity—the rich Church of the Crusades – has created endless trouble for Christianity. Among its critics were Dante (Alighieri 2014, 170), Martin Luther (2001, 79) and many others.

Although Luther was not the first to criticize the Church’s conduct, the waves raised by his “Ninety-Five Thesesˮ helped undermine the Catholic Church’s thousand-year dominion over the intellectual life of Europe (Eliav-Feldon 1977, 26). The theological dilemma between man’s free will and God’s absolute power has accompanied all monotheistic religions, but Luther opted for an idea which allegedly liberated man from the freedom to choose, deepening belief in predestination as the cornerstone of his doctrine.

On the issue of sin and judgment, Calvinism is of particular interest. Developed during the sixteenth century, it strengthened the belief in predestination, a doctrine that took Lutheran philosophy to the extreme, and had an effect both in the direction of striving for success and in the direction of determinism, according to which man fails even prior to his own birth (Rotenberg 1994, 23-29). Protestant churches, despite their different emphases, rely on Luther’s view as it is formulated in his three writings of 1520. Luther’s approach is based on the concepts of human sin and divine grace (Dillenberger 1962, 29). In contrast to Judaism, which judges retrospectively, and Roman Catholicism, which judges based on worldly intention, Protestantism and Calvinism present a judgment which is unrelated to action and failure, but is in fact the fruit of God’s arbitrary decision, a ruling that human beings cannot understand or reason with. God decrees in advance, even before birth, the fate of each man (Shalom 2000, 62); he can extend or shorten life, send men to heaven or to hell, all according to his will, and man must humbly accept his fate (Calvin 1962, 240-41).

In Max Weber’s seminal study *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, he calls Calvin’s teachings “an inhuman and shocking doctrine” (Weber 1984, 49). Weber does not claim that a new phenomenon has ascended the stage of history, but rather argues that it is a renewal of the doctrine of predestination. The doctrine claims that most men are born damned and cursed, and that there is no way to change that. Judgment is arbitrary, and all man can do is augur whether he is among the chosen. To frequently have signs of success, to be able to announce that they are, in fact, God’s chosen, believers must work hard and save. Weber stresses that in Calvin’s teachings, perhaps for the first time in the history of religions, material success became synonymous with religious success (Rotenberg 1994, 27). Calvin taught believers that their wealth and success in life were proof of God’s grace and of the fact that they were chosen (Rotenberg 2008*,* 34). Those who fail in life, that is, those who cannot display visible signs of success, were sentenced to a life of failure even before birth and are unable to change this harsh reality (Rotenberg 1978,9).

As mentioned before, the link between religious success and worldly material prosperity did not first appear in Luther or Calvin. The conceptual basis for it exists in the biblical text, which ties desired behavior in the eyes of God and worldly, economic success. Many motifs of material success are interwoven into the books of the Bible as proof of chosenness. The Book of Psalms, for example, opens with a clear expression of these views:

blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly […] but his delight is in the law of the Lord […] and he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water […] and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. The ungodly are not so […] For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish. (Psalms 1.1-6)

The righteous man, who chose God, studies Torah and carries out his commandments—his worldly success is guaranteed, and anything he does will prosper. In contrast, the ungodly will lose his way. Judaism links success in this world and moral-religious conduct; success is God’s gift to his chosen people, his believers and the keepers of his faith. The God of Judaism does not act by arbitrary decision, as does the God of Calvin, but Judaism ascribes success to God’s choice.

**Time Conception in the West**

The third thematic element I found to be very significant to the formation of the thought on success and failure’s basic structure is the conception of time in the West. The concept of time is culture-dependent. At various times during the history of Western civilization, different ideas of time competed with each other, at times contradicting and at others complementing each other. I follow the dominant time concept in Western culture, working under the assumption that the unique concept of time in different cultures indicates that the concept and its meaning are fashioned and determined by the culture.

I will argue that the Bible, which is also Christianity’s founding text, is a major cultural source for a linear concept of time: in the received Western Judeo-Christian thought, time has a beginning, “In the beginning God made” (Genesis 1:1), and an end, “in the last days” (Isaiah 2.2). Linear biblical time is irreversible and is fully aimed at the final event, the kingdom of heaven (Leibowitz 2002, 95). The Prophets assure us that we have a decisive influence on this end: “For if ye thoroughly amend your ways and your doings […] Then will I cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers, for ever and ever” (Jeremiah 7.5-7).

According to the genealogical position presented here, the concept of linear time—which entails its conception as open to development, in which the hope for a better future can jump-start present action of free will—forms the race for success. This time perception, leading from beginning to end, is at the base of Western culture. It can be described as a curved vector, representing a consciousness of rising time: since there is hope for future success, the future is perceived as a higher place.

Belief in the end of days, which is increasingly awarded a more significant place within Christianity, brings with it the possibilities of real success and real failure, the expectation of a future good, instead of the foreseeable future, which was common in the ancient world. It is a process, a journey, whose result is yet unknown. Time is neither circular nor arbitrary, according to xyz; it cannot be divided but rather it is unidirectional and irreversible. Recognition of God’s commandments, in the present, is the source of hope for a better future, a future that offers reward: “Thus saith the Lord; Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears: for thy work shall be rewarded, saith the Lord; and they shall come again from the land of the enemy. And there is hope in thine end, saith the Lord, that thy children shall come again to their own border” (Jeremiah 31:16-17).

The arrow of biblical time begins at the moment of creation and lasts until the end of days; it is dependent on man’s activity in history. Man and community have an impact on future success: history is seen as a sequence of successes and failures of individuals and peoples.

The writing of history, generation after generation, was influenced by the ways biblical narratives were told. The three historical religions have impressed in our consciousness the concept of history as a chain of fathers (Sand 2004, 24). Such a historical perception evaluates peoples and periods according to their contribution to human success. Even such monikers as “Renaissance” and “modernity,” which replaced the so-called Dark Ages, express a belief in new, redeeming forces operating in history. This belief is, at its base, Judeo-Christian—the faith that we are moving towards a new era of success and achievements which stands in stark contrast to the failures of the past.

This linear conception of history, as well as its division into sections adding up towards an end, was dominant in all cultural realms grounded in the Jewish – Biblical worldview (Dan 2000, 265-308). Cultural areas marked by modernity, capitalism and democracy are founded upon the Christian worldview, which inherited its concept of time and history from Judaism in turn (Russell 2001, 242-43).

The expectation of the future, as suggested in the Bible (instead of the *foreseeable future-* concept prevalent in the ancient world), brings with it a new conception of faith. It is a belief that real success or failure await at the end of the journey, even though this is a process whose end result is unknown. Time is not circular but unidirectional and irreversible. Recognition of God’s commandments in the present is the best hope for a better, rewarding future—in other words, success. This concept is expressed in God’s words to Abraham: “Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will shew thee. And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great” (Genesis 12.1-2); “That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore” (Genesis 12.17).

With the process of increasing secularization in Europe, the relation to eternal, mystical time weakens and man becomes ever more rooted in worldly time. During the Renaissance, the individual in its modern sense was born: the term “Renaissance man,” coined by Jacob Burckhardt and Friedrich Nietzsche (Fromm 1992, 72; Nietzsche 1986, 60), describes a free and educated, hedonistic personality, one that derides religious holiness and received morality; a personality interested in worldly material success and striving for glory. The development of individualism in its modern guise was made possible by the process of secularization (Shanahan 1992, 56): individualism allowed the individual to abandon the link to the moral structure of the divine universe and accept any “truth” it then discovered.

Paradoxically, individualism develops under Christianity despite the total lack of freedom under the rule of the Catholic Church. Christianity teaches the individual to discern between good and evil, and allows it to strive for self-fulfillment. In Judaism and Greek cosmology, the individual bears less responsibility than in Christianity. Biblical success has a communal character, while the promised Catholic success in the hereafter is of a personal nature; secular success, compared to these two, is related to the individual and to personal success in worldly time. In the consumer capitalism of today’s technologized society, time has become an expensive individual resource linked to success and achievement. Social or economic success is measured by terms of efficiency and maximum results within a limited time frame, with those failing to meet them branded as different or failed.

Scheduling and timetabling had become the norm back in industrial capitalism, which fed off speed. The year 1748 saw Benjamin Franklin’s famous dictum that “time is money” (Levine 2006, 90). The assumption is that time is a resource to be treated exactly like money, such that one can “buy time,” “save time” and “sell time” (Zakai 1998, 93-94). In Western society, one can tangibly feel the passage of time. Time “passes” and “is running out.” On the personal level, citizens of the West live life with the biological sense of the passage of time, of death and personal annihilation. Expressions such as “the biological clock is ticking” express an image of life as a kind of organic clock whose time is limited and fixed in advance. In modern society, time is experienced as a major but ever-dwindling resource: it is a unit of value, a common currency, a resource for investment and consumption, and especially an important resource for success.

**Epilogue**

In the genealogy carried out above, I made use of three essential elements that undergird Western civilization—the separation of man from nature, judgment, and time perception in the West. Each of the components listed is closely tied to the relation between success in the West and the fear of failure. The discussion conducted about each individual structure was necessary so that we can identify its contingent foundation. However, the structures do not stand on their own, and in many respects they interact and integrate with each other, so much so that it is impossible to separate the unique contribution of each one to the structuring of concepts of success and failure in Western culture. We cannot see man’s biblical separation from nature and his natural domination for the sake of worldly material success in isolation from the biblical conception of time: linear biblical time is the time of toil, investment and hard work towards an end goal. The combination of man’s separation from nature and his placement at the top of the hierarchy of created beings as a partner in creation and as endowed with free will, with the linear biblical conception of time, is what matures into a new quality. When we add individualism— which put man at the center—together with the fear of failure and the desire to succeed in the eyes of an external judge setting external criteria for success to this mix, then we can understand the forces operating at the base of the culture, at its roots, draining together to become, at the present time, a new quality. Many other factors we have not investigated here contribute to the race for success in the West, but the exposure —and deconstruction—of the underlying phenomenon of the race for success allows us to view the contingent element of the race.

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