

Chapter 7

Life in the Market Is Good for You

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The clerisy of artists and journalists and college professors thinks that capitalist spending is just awful. In 1985 the historian Daniel Horowitz argued that the American clerisy had been since the 1920s in the grip of a "modern moralism" about spending. The traditional moralism of the nineteenth century looked with alarm from the middle class down onto the workers and immigrants drinking beer and obeying Irish priests and in other ways showing their "loss of virtue." Traditional moralists like the U.S. Commissioner of Labor Carroll D. Wright "had no basic reservations about the justice and efficacy of the economic system—their questions had to do with the values of workers and immigrants, not the value of capitalism." The modern moralist, post-1920, in the style of Veblen and Mencken and Sinclair Lewis, looks down from the clerisy onto the middle class. Therefore "at the heart of most versions of modern moralism is a critique, sometimes radical and always adversarial, of the economy."¹ Horowitz is polite to his fellow members of the clerisy—Veblen, Stuart Chase, the Lynds, Galbraith, Riesman, Marcuse, Lasch, and Daniel Bell—and does not say that their concerns were simply mistaken. He does observe that "denouncing other people for their profligacy and lack of Culture is a way of reaffirming one's own commitment."²

The clerisy doesn't like the spending by the *hoi polloi*. It has been saying since Veblen that the many are in the grips of a tiny group of advertisers. So the spending on Coke and gas grills and automobiles is the result of hidden persuasion or, to use a favorite word of the clerisy, "manipulation." The peculiarly American attribution of gigantic power to thirty-second television spots is puzzling to an economist. If advertising had the powers attributed to it by the clerisy, then unlimited fortunes could be had for the writing. Yet advertising is

less than 2 percent of national product, much of it uncontroversially informative—such as shop signs and entries in the Yellow Pages or ads in trade magazines aimed at highly sophisticated buyers. When Vance Packard published his attack on advertising, *The Hidden Persuaders*, in 1957, he thought he would lose his friends on Madison Avenue. But they were delighted. A friend would come up and say, “Vance, before your book I was having a hard time convincing my clients that advertising worked. Now they think it’s magic.”

The American clerisy’s hostility to advertising is puzzling to a rhetorician. It’s puzzling why a country so adoring of free speech would in its higher intellectual circles have such a distaste for commercial free speech. Perhaps the distaste is merely a branch of that great river delta of anti-rhetoric rhetoric in the West since Frances Bacon. But anyway if the *hoi polloi* were as rhetorically stupid as most of the clerisy seem to believe, then as I say any reasonably clever ad writer could “manipulate” them with ease. It’s not so. The TV generation can see through advertising directed at children by age eight, and by age eighteen it bases its humor—see *Saturday Night Live*—on parodies of attempted manipulation.

So mass consumption is supposed to be motiveless, gormless, stupid. And anyway there’s too damned much of it. The modern moralism looks down on consumers. Why do they buy so much *stuff*? The dolts. The common consumer does not own a *single* seventeenth-century music recording. It is *ages*, if ever, that she has read a nonfiction book on *The Bourgeois Virtues*. She thinks the Three Tenors are classy. Her house is jammed with tasteless rubbish. And so forth. One is reminded of the disdain circa 1910 on the part of modernist litterateurs such as D.H. Lawrence and Virginia Woolf for the nasty little commuters of London. An air of immorality hangs about Waterloo Station and the super mall.

But we make ourselves with consumption, as anthropologists have observed. Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood put it so: “Goods that minister to physical needs—food and drink—are no less carriers of meaning than ballet or poetry. Let us put an end to the widespread and misleading distinction between goods that sustain life and health and others that service the mind and heart—spiritual goods.”³ The classic demonstration is Douglas’ article on the symbolic structure of working-class meals in England, but in a sense all of anthropology is in this business.⁴ Goods wander across the border of the sacred and the profane—the anthropologist Richard Chalfen, for example, shows how home snapshots and movies do.⁵ Or as the anthropologist Marshall Sahlins puts it in the 2004 preface to his 1972 classic *Stone*

Age Economics, “economic activity...[is] the expression, in a material register, of the values and relations of a particular form of life.”⁶

The amount of American *stuff* nowadays is to be sure formidable. A standard photographic ploy is to get a family in Topeka, Kansas, and one in Lagos, Nigeria, to dump the entire contents of their houses out on the front sidewalk, and then pose for the camera *en famille* and *en stuff*. The contrast is remarkable. One cause of the piles in the United States is what you might call a Consumer’s Curse. Our houses are filled with our mistaken consumption, items that turned out not to be as delightful as we thought they were going to be. As the theologian David Klemm puts it, following Heidegger, “we understand things in their *potentiality* to be.”⁷ Men, think of your gadgets; women, your clothing. But the full houses are not because we are stupid or sinful. They are because, not being omniscient, we make mistakes from time to time about the delight-generating potential of a \$250 electro-static dust remover from the Sharper Image. (Look at *that* trade name for its manipulative power, by the way.) So occasionally we buy things that turn out to be not worth the price. When we mistake in the other direction we do not buy, and wait for the dust removers to come down in price. The occasions of optimism mount up, since there is no point in throwing away the stuff if you have the room—and Americans have the room.

The Japanese have a similar Problem of Stuff. Steve Bailey tells how he furnished his house in Osaka when he was teaching there by collecting *gomi*, “oversized household junk,” that the Japanese would leave on the street for collection every month. I mean full furnishings: “refrigerators, gas rings, stand-up mirror, color television, VCR, chairs, bookshelf, corner couch, and a beautiful cherrywood table.”⁸ The shameless foreigners, the *gaijin*, competed with low-status Japanese junk men in raiding the *gomi* piles. The cause in Japan, Bailey explains, is the small size of the houses and the sacred taboo on getting or giving second-hand furniture.

But the Americans and the Japanese have a great deal to pile up because they produce a great deal. Contrary to your grandmother’s dictum—“Eat your spinach: think of the starving children in China”—consuming less in rich America would add nothing to the goods available in China. Not a grain of rice. Countries are rich or poor, have a great deal to consume or very little, mainly because they work well or badly, not because some outsider is adding to or stealing from a God-given endowment. To think otherwise is to suppose that goods come literally and directly from God, like manna. They do not. We make them.

So having a lot is not immoral. It is the good luck to be born in America or Japan or Denmark. By all means let's spread the good luck around. The luck consisting of reasonably honest courts and reasonably secure property rights and reasonably non-extractive governments and reasonably effective educational systems, and a reasonably long time for the reasonably good ideas to do their work.

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Yet every noneconomist thinks that the great consumption at least "keeps the economy going." The critic of spending will acknowledge knowingly, that "the economy" somehow benefits. The theologian Ellen Charry, to give one example among thousands, believes that advertising keeps the economy growing.⁹ Noneconomists imagine that God has so poorly designed the world that a lack of thrift tending to foolhardiness and avarice is, unhappily, necessary to keep the wheels of commerce turning, "creating jobs" or "keeping the money circulating." They imagine that people must buy, buy, buy, or else capitalism will collapse and we all will be impoverished. They believe that advertising is necessary for it, though it corrupts us. They believe that capitalism must be greedy to keep on working.

It's the alleged Paradox of Thrift. Thriftiness, a Good Thing in Christianity and most certainly in Buddhism and the rest, seems able paradoxically to impoverish us. We will do poorly by doing good. And if we do well, we are probably damned by the sins of greed and gluttony necessary to do so. Choose, ye sinners: God or Mammon. Dorothy Sayers, who was more than a writer of mysteries, though not an economist, complained in 1942 as a Christian about "the appalling squirrel-cage... in which we have been madly turning for the last three centuries... a society in which consumption has to be artificially stimulated in order to keep production going."¹⁰

Many economists in the era of the Great Depression had reverted to this noneconomist's way of thinking, and you hear echoes of it in the reaction to the Great Recession, too. The theory was called "stag-nationism." It was a balloon theory of capitalism—that people must keep puff-puffing or the balloon will collapse. It's one version of the old claim that expenditure on luxuries at least employs workpeople. Thus Pope, in a poem of 1731 subtitled "Of the Use of Riches":

Yet hence the poor are clothed, the hungry fed;
Health to himself, and to his infants bread
The labourer bears: what his [the rich man's] hard heart denies,
His charitable vanity supplies.¹¹

"Providence is justified in giving wealth to be squandered in this manner," Pope writes in the poem's Argument, "since it is dispersed to the poor and laborious part of mankind."

Since the 1940s most of we bourgeois economists have recovered our senses.¹² The old balloon theory has popped, and with it the paradox that sin is necessary to "keep production going," the paradox that vanity can in the end be charitable. It survives in Marxian critiques of the Adorno-Horkheimer type, but is no longer believed by economists of the center or right. The false paradox reflects a grimly Christian, even Protestant, conviction that we must give up the kingdom of heaven to achieve prosperity on earth. The popping of the balloon allows us to see the sacred and the profane as connected and sometime even complementary. We *can* do good by doing well, and can do well by doing good.

Nothing would befell the market economy in the long run, says the modern economist, if we tempered our desires to a thrifty style of life—one beat-up Volvo and a little house with a vegetable garden and a moderate amount of tofu and jug wine from the co-op. The balloon theory sounds plausible if you focus on an irrelevant mental experiment, namely, that tomorrow, suddenly, without warning, we would all begin to follow Jesus in what we buy. Such a conversion would doubtless be a shock to sales of Hummers and designer dresses at fifteen thousand dollars a copy. But, the economist observes, people in a Christian Economy would at length find other employment, or choose more leisure. That's the relevant mental experiment, the long run.

In the new, luxury-less economy it would still be a fine thing to have light bulbs and paved roads and other fruits of enterprise. More of these would still be better than less. "In equilibrium"—a phrase with resonance in bourgeois economics similar to "God willing" in Abrahamic religions—the economy would encourage specialization to satisfy human desires in much the same way as it does now. People would buy bibles in koine Greek and spirit-enhancing trips to Yosemite instead of buying Harlequin romances in English and package tours to Disney World. But they would still value high-speed presses for the books and airplanes for the trips, getting more books and more trips for the cost.

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And everyone believes that at least luxury consumption keeps the poor employed. But this too is mistaken, a piece with the "creation of jobs" we heard so much about in 2009 and are still hearing in 2010.

Smith uses the phrase "the invisible hand" only two times in his published writings. One of the times, unfortunately, he uses it to defend trickle down. In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* he notes that an eighteenth-century Bill Gates (as it were) cannot after all *eat* much more than his chauffeur can, speaking of sheer volume and nutrients. Nor can he wear right now more than one pair of Italian designer trousers, speaking of mere leg-covering ability. Nor can he live in more than one enormous room at a time, speaking of gross roofage and wallage. The real Gates as it happens lives in a surprisingly modest home. His palace outside Seattle is merely an architectural folly for parties, he says. But even if he were a spendthrift he couldn't possibly spend *and use* anything but a minute portion of what he earns.

The founder of the first dot-com company, the editor and humorist Brad Templeton, reckons that in 2004 Gates earned three hundred dollars a second. It was then not worth Gates' while, Templeton calculates, to bend down to pick up a one-thousand-dollar bill. For the banner year of 1998, in which he earned forty-five billion dollars, it was a ten-thousand-dollar bill.¹³ Millionaires, and especially billionaires, have limits on how much they can use incomes so very much higher than ours for correspondingly unequal consumption—of, say, trousers, put on one leg at a time. So economic growth, however unequally shared as income, is more egalitarian in its distribution of consumption. As the American economist John Bates Clark predicted in 1901,

The typical laborer will increase his wages from one dollar a day to two, from two to four and from four to eight. Such gains will mean infinitely more to him than any possible increase of capital can mean to the rich. . . . This very change will bring with it a continual approach to equality of genuine comfort.¹⁴

But Smith wants to argue against Rousseau's notion that property brings inequality in its train. He therefore claims cheerily that the rich "are led by an *invisible hand* to make nearly the same distribution of the necessities of life, which would have been made, had the earth been divided into equal portions among all its inhabitants."¹⁵ The argument is Pope's trickle-down—"Yet hence the poor are clothed, the hungry fed."

Smith is forgetting that if, say, a Saddam Hussein took 50 percent of Iraqi national produce and put it into arms and palaces, the stuff

was in consequence not available for ordinary Iraqis to consume as food or fuel or shelter. Iraq was impoverished, and so the necessities of life were available in nothing like the distribution that would have been made under real equality. The percentage distribution, to be sure, was roughly the same—at any rate, one man, one pair of trousers at any one time—but the absolute amount was reduced by the needless luxury. Saddam Hussein may not have consumed palaces he never visited. But neither did anyone else. Socially speaking the resources were thrown away. What a rich woman cannot consume, such as the diamond bauble that sits unworn in the back of her jewelry box, is simply wasted, socially speaking. She gets no pleasure from it, except perhaps the happy memory of its purchase. Pope himself gave the correct analysis a few lines later: "Tis use alone that sanctifies expense, / And splendor borrows all her rays from sense."

A noneconomist is inclined to reply that after all, the diamond bauble and the palaces and the three-hundred-dollar meals at Charlie Trotter's for Bill Gates "put people to work," such as construction workers or diamond cutters or Michelin-two-star cooks. But this is what's wrong with the notion of a paradox of thrift. Smith does *not* make that mistake, the supposition that the social problem is to find tasks for people to do who otherwise would be idle.

Noneconomists think that economics is about "keeping the money circulating." And so they are impressed by the claim by the owner of the local sports franchises that using tax dollars to build a new stadium will "generate" local sales and "create" new jobs. To a noneconomist the vocabulary of generating and creating jobs out of unthrifty behavior sounds tough and prudential and quantitative. It is not. It is mistaken. No economist of sense would use such locutions, and indeed you can depend on it that an alleged economist on TV is a phony if she talks of "creating jobs." The reply Smith and the other real economists would give to the noneconomist is that the diamond workers would not be idle if "thrown out" of work in the bauble-factory. They would in the long run find alternative employment, such as in growing oats for oatmeal or making thatched roofs for peasant houses. We are mostly pressed for time, not duties.

Smith does at the same place, though, make a third, related argument, also in part mistaken, that imagining the pleasure of wealth deceives us into labor. Admittedly the hope that our latest purchase will bring true happiness is a common imagining, by guys in Brookstone and by gals in the kitchen-equipment store. Smith notes that "what pleases these lovers of toys is not so much the utility, as

the aptness of the machines which are fitted to promote it. All their pockets are stuffed with little conveniences."¹⁶ We are in fact often deceived into laboring to get such "trinkets of frivolous utility." But the mistake is to think, as Smith says he does, that the deception is desirable: "And it is well that nature imposes upon us in this manner. It is this deception which rouses and keeps in continual motion the industry of mankind."¹⁷ Smith is articulating the paradox of thrift in a jazzed-up version.

Such lack of thrift does indeed prompt us "to invent and improve all the sciences and arts" relevant to the particular item of luxury we lust for. What is correct about the argument is David Hume's "taking delight in praise" and Frank Knight's "final interest," that is, the stimulus of a sacred vanity. The *S*-variables, representing as they do the Sacred,¹⁸ do prompt us to invent and improve and to turn "rude forests of nature into agreeable and fertile plains"—an unmarked quotation, Smith's editors note, from Rousseau's "*les vastes forêts se changèrent en des champagnes riantes*," though with a very different continuation than Smith's optimism: "which had to be watered with men's sweat, and in which slavery and misery were soon to germinate and grow with the crops."¹⁹

But as sheer industry, nothing is gained. It's the balloon theory again, the confusion of "continual motion" with *desirable* motion, directed just *this* way. It is not in itself good to be set to work raising the Great Wall of China, inventing and improving the science and art of great-wall making, when you could be getting on with your life, improving the science and art of making houses and automobiles, universities and museums.

Smith's mistake is what is known among older economists as the "Tang" fallacy, which is not about the Chinese dynasty but about the powdered orange juice of that name, which was asserted in its advertising to be a spin-off of the American space program. The fallacy is to think that we would have missed out on priceless innovations such as Tang if we had left the money in the hands of ordinary people instead of throwing it away on moon shots. "Job creation" through this or that project—the Big Dig in Boston burying a highway, the tunnel under many kilometers of "The Heart of Holland" burying a railway—is not the optimal working of a market economy, but more like its opposite. After all, notably poor economies commonly have plenty of jobs. Unemployment was not the problem faced by the slaves in the silver mines of Attica or in the quarries of Syracuse. Our leaders, buying their power and prestige with our money, "create jobs" that shouldn't have been.

The Dutch-English rhymester Bernard Mandeville articulated the mistaken supposition in 1705:

Vast numbers thronged the fruitful hive;
Yet those vast numbers made them thrive.
Millions endeavoring to supply/ Each other's lust and vanity....
Thus every part was full of vice,
Yet the whole mass a paradise.

Mandeville's claim is that vice, vanity, folly, greed, and gluttony are the springs of economic growth. The force of sin creates, unintentionally, a rich and vital society.

Mandeville's insight into unintended consequences was important. But his economics was false, though ever since then it has been a comfort to the trickle-down, I've-got-mine school of capitalist ethics. He was answered immediately and correctly by one George Blewhitt (or Bluett), the author of a pamphlet against the 1723 edition of Mandeville. Mandeville had argued that universal honesty would put locksmiths out of work and therefore would damage prosperity. Better for the hive to be dishonest. Blewhitt replied: "the change [to an honest way of life] must necessarily be supposed to be *gradual*; and then it will appear still plainer that there would arise a succession of new trades... in proportion as the trades in providing against roguery grew useless and wore off."²⁰

Adam Smith loathed Mandeville's embrace of vice. "Such is the system of Dr. Mandeville," wrote Smith in 1759 with palpable irritation,

which once made so much noise in the world, and which, though, perhaps, it never gave occasion to more vice than would have been without it, at least taught that vice, which arose from other causes, to appear with more effrontery, and to avow the corruption of its motives with a profligate audaciousness which had never been heard of before.²¹

Smith did *not* say, ever, that Greed is Good. The men in the Adam Smith ties need to do a little reading of *The Wealth of Nations* and especially of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* on the train to Westport. The Christian and other opponents of the sin of avarice need to stop conceding the point to the men of Westport. There is no paradox of thrift, not in a properly Christian world. Nor even in the world we lamentably inhabit.

If true, this should be good news for ethical people. We don't need to accept avaricious production or vulgar consumerism or

unloving work-obsession on account of some wider social prudence they are supposed to serve, allegedly keeping us employed. "Keeping us employed." Have you ever in your *private, homely* activities, doing the laundry or planting the garden, seen your main problem as *finding jobs* at which to be employed? Isn't the main problem the opposite one, a scarcity of hours in which to bake the bread or fix the car or play with the kids or nurture friendships or sing praises unto the Lord thy God? If you agree, then you grasp the great economic principle that, as Adam Smith put it, to repeat, "What is prudence in the conduct of every private family can scarce be folly in that of a great kingdom." And you will grasp why it is *not* economic prudence to "keep us all at work" by spending on luxuries and working, working, working.

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The student of the history of leisure, Benjamin Hunnicut, argues in his books on the work obsession of Americans, giving substance to Herbert Marcuse's claims long ago, that long hours—which have not much fallen since the 1930s, Hunnicutt thinks—are connected to our great Need-Love for commodities, the "New Economic Gospel of Consumption," new in the 1920s. "The job," Hunnicut writes, "resembles a secular religion, promising personal identity, salvation, purpose and direction, community, and a way for those who believe truly and simply in 'hard work' to make sense out of the confusion of life."²²

Hunnicutt is mistaken about the hours worked even in work-mad America and Japan, because people now start work later in life and add on many years of retirement at the end, which the life chances in the good old days of the 1930s did not permit.²³ But surely he's right about the making of The Job into an idol. It's a specifically bourgeois sin, because only the bourgeoisie thinks of work as a calling.

But it is also, balanced and in moderation, a bourgeois virtue. *Laborare est orare*, to work is to pray, said the Benedictine monks of Monte Cassino in the sixth century, showing in the very phrase a break with the classical world's contempt for manual labor. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in the Greek Orthodox world "painting became a holy and highly respected mode of fulfilling the requirement of manual labor prescribed for all monks."²⁴ Max Weber claimed that Tibetan and Christian monks represent "the first human being who lives rationally, who works methodically and by rational means toward a goal," namely a religious goal.²⁵

Whether or not that is so, the social theorists in thirteenth-century Europe, and specifically the learned Franciscan and Dominican friars at the new universities, transferred the attitude to cities. "The ideals of Christian society as formulated in earlier centuries," explains Lester K. Little, "had come to include high regard for creative work, and so the problem of the legitimacy of the merchant's activities generally, as well as of the profit he made, turned largely on the question of whether what he did could properly be considered creative work."²⁶ "God's work was, of course, creation," writes Jacques Le Goff on the matter. "Any profession, therefore, which did not create was bad or inferior."²⁷ Little and Le Goff explain how the rise of urban scholasticism in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries changed this, from at least a Christian point of view. The Church became for a while, Le Goff notes, "an early protector of merchants."²⁸ From an aristocratic point of view, of course, nothing changed: until the dominance of the bourgeoisie, any nonmilitary work, manual or intellectual, continued to be dishonorable.

Now we work. In an ideal world would *capitalist* work be necessary? I believe so, contrary to a widespread belief among the clerisy that good work and capitalist work are inconsistent with each other. People following Jesus, true, would make the good, plain pottery that an economy of moderation would demand and spend a lot more time with their kids. They would not pursue the illusory immortality of Work. But the plain pottery—and therefore more time with the kids, since getting the fancier Wedgwood china would require more hours of work—would still be produced most efficiently in a market-oriented, free-trade, private property, enterprising, and energetic economy, as in fact it was in the Lower Galilee of Jesus' time.

Choosing the system of natural liberty over the alternatives would make us richer, not poorer, in sacred things. In a competitive economy of enterprise Josiah Wedgwood invented thin-walled cups and teapots for the commoners, which formerly he had exported to the Tsarina and her court. The commoners used them in turn to invent high tea for the rich and the sacred cuppa for the poor.

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Imagine everyone was an active, believing, even holy, and ascetic Christian. What then would be the ideal economy to house such unusual people? The mental experiment is relevant even if you are not a Christian—because if you are a typical member of the clerisy you

nonetheless look on the ascetic ideal of Christianity (or Buddhism) as being the ideal life of virtue.

One way to imagine it is to look at the actual economic history of religious communities, from early Christians in the cities of the Roman Empire to the present-day Amish of Kolona, Iowa. Such data are not free of confounding influences, because the historical communities floated in a sea of markets. But it is worth noting, for example, that medieval Cistercian monks and nuns were the venture capitalists of their age, famous in farm management. The earliest forward contracts on grain in medieval Europe were made by them.

The Calvinists of Holland and Switzerland and Britain in the seventeenth century were skilled businesspeople, as of course Max Weber emphasized a century ago. The early Anabaptists cut themselves off from the *political* world, refusing to bear arms, for example, and were regularly burned at the stake on that account. But they usually did not cut themselves off from the *economic* world, at any rate those Anabaptists who did not go all the way to boastful communism. The Old Believers in Russia, highly orthodox and in other ways "conservative," constituted the core of the tiny commercial middle class of that sad land during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.²⁹

English Quakers, besides doing the Lord's work in resisting war and abolishing slavery and espousing the equality of all men and women, made fortunes still resonant: Cadbury, the English chocolate makers; Rowntree, and Fry, the same; Barclay, private banker of London; Lloyd, the same; and Lloyd of the coffee house, then of insurance on ships, then of insurance on anything you wish. The American Shakers were briefly brilliant at designing and manufacturing furniture, and inventing and selling to the market, for example, the clothespin and the American-style broom. But they certainly were Christians. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints made the Great Basin bloom, but not by adopting socialism. And the modern Amishman in Pennsylvania or Indiana is no slouch at striking a bargain for a plow horse. It is *not* true, as Paul Tillich maintained in 1933, that "any serious Christian must be a socialist."

The economist and priest Anthony Waterman has shown, in fact, that many serious Anglicans in the early nineteenth century approved of capitalism, and on no flimsy grounds. Classical political economy in the writings of the Reverend Malthus, Archdeacon Paley, Bishop Copleston, Archbishop Sumner of Canterbury, Archbishop Whately of Dublin, and the professor of divinity at Edinburgh Thomas Chalmers was "the mainstream of Anglo-Scottish social theory

in the early nineteenth century," while the philosophical radicalism of the atheistic school of Bentham was viewed at the time as a "backwater."³⁰

One can ask whether the examples of holy profit-makers show at least that Christianity fits smoothly with capitalism. No, not necessarily, because it could be a case of giving the Devil his due. In a sea of sin the Christian may properly sell Shaker brooms to the unbelievers at a profit for the church, as Jews and Moslems were permitted to take interest on loans to Christians but not among themselves.

One might think that if everyone were a Shaker there would be no buying or selling at all. "No buying and selling" is the vision of utopian socialism, or more properly of the anarchism that is supposed to follow the end of private property and the withering away of the state. It is the anarchism of, say, Prince Kropotkin that thrilled me, age fourteen, down at the local Carnegie-financed library.

Such economic utopianism of Europe in the mid-to-late nineteenth century was paid for with interest by the grandchildren in the twentieth century. It looked a good deal like a secular version of the evangelical Christianity, or the oddly parallel Hasidic Judaism, of the mid-eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in Europe and America. Dorothy Day (1897–1980), another founder of the Catholic Workers movement in the United States, managed a "House of Hospitality," one of thirty or so, and the newspaper *The Catholic Worker* (1931–present) in order "to realize in the individual and society the expressed and implied teachings of Christ." Robert Ellsberg writes that "The value of such a venture is not properly assessed in terms of profits and losses. Objectively speaking, *The Catholic Worker* has aspired to a kind of 'holy folly'... Dorothy displayed a willful indifference to conventional business sense."³¹

But in truth there seems to be no reason why buying and selling and a business sense *would* vanish in a perfect Christian community. A business sense has not vanished among the Amish. In one utopian, "intentional" community after another the market has burst in, as into the Amana Colonies in Eastern Iowa in 1932, who at one time, quite unlike the capitalist Amish down the road, took even their meals in common; or more recently into the hippie communes of the 1960s.³²

Even strictly isolated communities would have exchanges, in effect if not in money terms. Brother Jonathon would be the smithy, Sister Helena the baker. Self-sufficiency is an imprudent way to live, and only misanthropes—survivalists in Idaho or like Thoreau in Concord—take it very seriously. And Thoreau got his books and nails

for his separative self near Walden Pond by scrounging from people in town.

One might as well get the advantages of specialization and trade, a book or a horseshoe provided for a nail or a loaf, if "only" to have more time to pray, to write, to think, to travel a good deal in Concord. If the community is small there is nothing to be gained by having formal markets. A family, for example, works better with love than with prudence, Mother as a loving and just central planner rather than as an auctioneer. Perhaps a loving family—the adjective "loving" is crucial—presents us with one valid case of economic central planning. The other valid case is the corporation, "islands of conscious power in this [market] ocean of unconscious cooperation like lumps of butter coagulating in a pail of buttermilk," as one economist put it. Encompassing socialism retains its attraction, despite its unhappy history, from the analogy with a family, a cozy little family, say, of 292,287,454 Americans, or with a corporation of similar dimension. As Tillich and Wegener said in their "Answer to an Inquiry of the Protestant Consistory of Brandenburg," "it demands an economy of solidarity of all, and of joy in work rather than in profit." But when a community gets big and specialized there are better ways than a loving Solidarity to organize for the sacred things we want.

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The economist Frank Knight, in an anti-clerical fury, mistook the Christian morality of charity for a call to common ownership, the extreme of loving Solidarity, and attacked it as unworkable. (It is said that the only time the University of Chicago has actually refunded money to a student was to a Jesuit who took Knight's course on "the history of economic thought" and discovered that it was in fact a sustained and not especially well-informed attack on the Catholic Church.) Knight wrote a book with T.W. Merriam in 1945 called *The Economic Order and Religion*, which mysteriously asserts that Christian love destroys "the material and social basis of life," and is "fantastically impossible," and is "incompatible with the requirements of everyday life," and entails an "ideal...[which is] not merely opposed to civilization and progress but is an impossible one." Under Christian love "continuing social life is patently impossible" and "a high civilization could hardly be maintained long, ... to say nothing of progress."³³

It develops that Knight and Merriam are arguing that social life in a large group *with thoroughgoing ownership in common* is impossible. *That* is what they believe Christian love entails.³⁴ Their source is

always the Gospels, never the elaborate compromises with economic reality of other Christian writers, such as Paul or Aquinas or Luther, or the thirty-eighth article of the Anglicans: "The riches and goods of Christians are not common, as touching the right, title, and possession of the same, as certain Anabaptists do falsely boast."

But, yes: social life without private property *is* impossible, at any rate in large groups. So said Pope Leo XIII in 1891 in *Rerum Novarum*, re-echoed by Pius XI in 1931, John XXIII in 1961 and 1963, by Paul VI in 1967 and 1971, and by John Paul II in 1981 and 1991.³⁵ These men were not nineteenth-century liberals—especially, as Michael Novak explains, not in the harsh, Continental sense, the "old liberals" of Jan Gresshof's satiric poem of the 1930s.³⁶ They celebrated private property—when used with regard to soul and community. They were nothing like the Sermon-on-the-Mount socialists that Knight and Merriam attack.

Thus Leo: "private possessions are clearly in accord with nature" (15), following his hero, Aquinas.³⁷ "The law of nature... by the practice of all ages, has consecrated private possession as something best adapted to man's nature and to peaceful and tranquil living together" (17). "The fundamental principle of Socialism which would make all possessions public property is to be utterly rejected because it injures the very one's whom it seeks to help" (23). "The right of private property must be regarded as sacred" (65). "If incentives to ingenuity and skill in individual persons were to be abolished, the very fountains of wealth would necessarily dry up; and the equality conjured up by the Socialist imagination would, in reality, be nothing but uniform wretchedness and meanness for one and all, without distinction" (22).

Nick Hornby's comic novel *How to Be Good* shows the difficulties of To Each According to His Need, Regardless of His Property Acquired by Effort. A generosity that works just fine within a family works poorly within a large group of adult strangers. The husband of the narrator goes mad and starts giving away his and his wife's money and his children's superfluous toys. He and his guru are going to write a book:

"'How to Be Good', we're going to call it. It's about how we should all live our lives. You know, suggestions. Like taking in the homeless, and giving away your money, and what to do about things like property ownership and, I don't know, the Third World and so on."

"So" [replies his annoyed wife, a hard-working GP in the National Health Service] "this book's aimed at high-ranking employees of the IMF?"³⁸

It's the Sermon on the Mount, on the basis of which many people have concluded that Jesus was of course a socialist. "The love-gospel," write Knight and Merriam, "condemning all self-assertion as sin... would destroy all values."³⁹ Knight and Merriam are correct if they mean, as they appear to, that Love *without other and balancing virtues* is a sin. Knight's understanding of Christianity appears to have derived from his childhood experience in a frontier Protestant sect, the Campbellites (evolved now into the Church of Christ and the Disciples of Christ), and theirs is what he took to be the core teaching of Christianity: "No creed but the Bible. No ethic but love."

But Love without Prudence, Justice, Temperance, and the rest is not Christian orthodoxy—for example, the orthodoxy of Aquinas or of Leo XIII. Leo in fact was a close student of Aquinas, and in 1889 elevated him to dogma within the Church. And, yes, such a single-virtue ethic would *not* be ethical in a fallen world. Economists would call the actual orthodoxy a "second-best" argument, as against the first best of "if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also." Given that people are imperfect, the Christian, or indeed any economist would say, we need to make allowances, and hire lawyers. Otherwise everyone will live by stealing each other's coats, with a resulting failure to produce coats in the first place, and a descent into poverty for everyone but the chief.

St. Paul himself said so, in his earliest extant letter (1 Tim. 3: 8–11):

Neither did we eat any man's bread for naught; but wrought with labor and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you... to make ourselves an example unto you to follow us... We commanded you that if any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some... among you disorderly, working not at all.

Or to put it more positively, as Michael Novak does, "one must think clearly about what actually does work—in a sinful world—to achieve the liberation of peoples and persons."⁴⁰ "In the right of property," wrote the blessed Pope John XXIII in 1961, "the exercise of liberty finds both a safeguard and a stimulus."⁴¹ Frank Knight couldn't have put it better.

Erasmus began all editions of his *Adages* from 1508 onward with "Between friends all things are common," remarking that "If only it were so fixed in men's minds as it is frequent on everybody's lips,

most of the evils of our lives would promptly be removed... Nothing was ever said by a pagan philosopher which comes closer to the mind of Christ" as the proposed socialism of goods in Plato's *Republic*.⁴² Such is the first best. But Erasmus notes, sadly, "how Christians dislike this common ownership of Plato's, how in fact they cast stones at it." Many of his 4,150 proverbs collected from classical and Christian sources recommend attention to Prudence and work, if not quite with the insistence of, say, proverbs he might have collected in his native Dutch. We are not friends, but strangers, and even in the Society of Friends property was not held in common. Knight and Merriam are not really undermining Christian orthodoxy and Christian ethics. They are misunderstanding.

Charity is not socialism. Generosity is not a system at all. It is of a person, then two, then a few. God arranges such encounters, a Christian might say. But humans want them, too, the gift-economy of grace above material concerns. To make them into a system, *How to Be Good*, is to cancel their virtue. The heroine and narrator of Hornby's novel sees the orthodox point. One owes Love to a family first. Property, with the virtue of justice, protects the beloved family. If any would not work, neither should he eat. Work, depending on temperance and prudence, is desirable to create and to acquire the property. So is prudent stewardship in managing it, though the lilies of the field toil not. For societies of humans, she realizes, not lilies and families, the right prescription is bourgeois virtue. True, she cannot quite get rid of the notion that "maybe the desire for nice evenings with people I know and love is essentially bourgeois, reprehensible—depraved, even."⁴³ Such is the agony of the antimarket member of the clerisy.

* * *

And the side of production the market system provides a field in which ordinary people can exercise their abilities harmlessly. Indeed, helpfully. Business can be, as Max Weber and Michael Novak put it, a "calling," a *Beruf*, a "vocation." "A career in business," writes Novak, "is not only a morally serious vocation but a morally noble one. Those who are called to it have reason to take pride in it and rejoice in it."⁴⁴ But of course that is not what the clerisy thinks. Quite the contrary: "If you actually made money yourself... maybe starting from nothing, you are given the subtle impression... such a career is rather sweaty, vulgar, and morally suspect."⁴⁵

When I initiated a course in Business History at the business school at the University of Chicago in 1979 I started it with Mesopotamia, having the kids read business letters from 2000 BC collected at the Oriental Institute, because I wanted them to know that they were embarking on an ancient and honorable profession, not, as the clerisy believes, a dirty modern aberration. As Novak says, to think of business as a calling—he and I have God in mind here—“would help tie [the young businesspeople] more profoundly to traditions going far back into the past.”⁴⁶

Making and selling steel or hamburgers is not the most prestigious field among intellectuals. Writing long books is. Or among artists—installing art works or making movies is. But running a fruit stall with energy and intelligence shares in the exhilaration of creativity.⁴⁷ Don't laugh. By doing so you exhibit a nasty snobbishness, oh you misled member of the Western clerisy. And you exhibit an undemocratic ignorance of the world's work to boot. Shame on you. Maimonides left no doubt that the clerisy's pretension is a mistake. “One who make his mind up to study Torah and not to work but to live on charity profanes the name of God, brings the Torah into contempt, extinguishes the light of religion, brings evil upon himself, and deprives himself of the life hereafter.”⁴⁸

The psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi [CHICK-sent-me-high] calls the feeling of creativity “flow,” those “flashes of intense living,” “when a person's skills are fully involved in overcoming a challenge that is just about manageable.” “It is the full involvement of flow, rather than happiness, that makes for excellence in life.”⁴⁹ By “happiness” here he means mere consumption, happiness according to the grossest sort of utilitarianism or Epicureanism, *not* his Aristotle-derived ideal of the exercise of vital powers. As Martha Nussbaum notes, “Most Greeks would understand *eudaimonia* to be something essentially active, of which praiseworthy activities are not just productive means, but actual constituent parts.”⁵⁰

Even the management of possessions provided by the work of others provides an opportunity for flow, as in the housewife's artful arrangement of her furniture or the collector's absorbed passion for his goods, heedless of capital gain. The curatorial art is aristocratic, as may be seen in the Bernard Berensons and Kenneth Clarks (Clark studied as a young man with Berenson, and ended life a Baron), but capitalism permits the bourgeoisie to participate. And Berenson at least was a very busy and canny and some say unscrupulous businessman, as many an aristocrat has been in fact.

But it's work that is the main opportunity for a flow-ful life. Csikszentmihalyi tells of Joe, who worked in the cacophony of a rail-car factory, and:

who had trained himself to understand and to fix every piece of equipment in the factory. He loved to take on machinery that didn't work, figure out what was wrong with it, and set it right again... The hundred or so welders who worked at the same plant respected Joe, even though they couldn't quite make him out... Many claimed that without Joe the factory might just as well close... I have met many CEOs of major corporations... and several dozen Nobel Prize-winners—eminent people who in many ways led excellent lives, but none that was better than Joe's.⁵¹

In other words it is not merely through the piling up of goods that the market system succeeds. It is through the jobs themselves. Respect for work has been historically rare. Until the quickening of commerce in bourgeois societies, in fact, work except for praying and fighting was despised. It was the rare stoic philosopher who viewed physical labor as anything but dishonoring. The historically anti-work attitude may have been what prevented classical Mediterranean civilization or medieval Chinese society from industrializing. Nowadays it is a problem for many poor societies. Women and slaves work. Real men smoke.

Englishmen in the seventeenth century, for example, had no conception of dignity beyond what the sociologists call “ascription,” that is, rank. The result is that seventeenth-century science used gentlemanly status as a warrant for believability. William Petty (1623–1687), one of the founders of the English Royal Society, spoke of a gentleman as someone who had “such estate, real and personal, as whereby he is able to subsist without the practice of an mercenary employments.”⁵² Only a gentleman could have honor, which was only gradually coming to mean our “honesty.”

A gentleman was precisely someone without a paid occupation. The contemporary French phrase was *le honnête homme*, the “honorable” man being one who did not work for pay. The early twentieth-century irony about this convention is to call a bum a “gentleman of the road,” as earlier a highwayman was a “gentleman of the highway.” Such a man is very willing to brawl, but not to be seen to *work* even at that. Thus the Prince Hal of *Henry IV* drinks and whores away the days and nights with Falstaff through Parts One and Two, and we

are indulgently amused. We look for virtue in this romanticizing of idleness, on the circular argument that an idle man is a sort of gentleman and therefore must be virtuous—though Prince Hal explains, and Shakespeare in his proto-bourgeois way was recommending, that princes need this common touch.

Down to the nineteenth century, with fading echoes even now, the phrase “a gentleman of *business*” was considered an absurdity, a flat contradiction. The economist David Ricardo wrote in 1817 that a remission of rent to farmers from their landlords “would only enable some farmers to live like gentlemen.”⁵³ He feared having an income without work would corrupt active men of business in agriculture: “gentlemen” were nonworkers. Dickens reasoned similarly. He portrayed gentlemen without occupations as parasites.⁵⁴ Yet his heroes, all of them crypto-gentlemen, achieve success not by working but by inheriting. He had a conservative’s nostalgia for a simpler time when the rich were charitable and the poor unspoiled and income came down on a gentleman like a gentle rain.

The piling up of goods, even from the goad of the nasty, guilt-inducing thing we name “profit,” has had the direct effect of giving billions of ordinary people the scope with which to pursue something other than subsistence. But the point here is that on the other side of subsistence, so to speak, the market has provided the billions with meaning in their lives through that very participation in the making of things for the market. Only an undemocratic snob, you might say, if you were inclined to speak frankly about anti-bourgeois and anti-economic prejudices since 1848, denies dignity to anything but what priests or aristocrats do. As Knight put it, “We are impelled to look for ends in the economic process itself, and to give thoughtful consideration to the possibilities of participation in economic activity as a sphere of self-expression and creative achievement.”⁵⁵

Work in capitalism is not always alienating. Tzvetan Todorov quotes the protagonist of *Forever Flowing*, the posthumously published novel of Vasily Grossman (1905–1964), whom he says was the sole example of a successful Stalinist writer who converted wholly to anti-Communism (“The slave in him died, and a free man arose”):

I used to think freedom was freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of conscience. Here is what it amounts to: you have to have the right to sow what you wish to, to make shoes or coats, to bake into bread the flour ground from the grain you have sown, and to sell it or not sell it as you wish; for the lathe-operator, the steelworker, and

the artist it’s a matter of being able to live as you wish and work as you wish and not as they order you.⁵⁶

If you are sure this is wrong, that workers are slaves under capitalism, as I tell you they are under socialism—“Under capitalism, man exploits man; under socialism, it’s the other way around”—consider where you got the idea. If from your own actual experience at your life’s employment, or even from a blue- or pink-collar summer job, or a few months as a journalist getting nickel and dined in minimum wage jobs, you have at least the scientific spirit. You, I, and Barbara Ehrenreich can sit down and think through the balance of the evidence together. But if by any chance you got it unsullied from Marx, or from the numerous people influenced by Marx, I ask you to consider that Marx, like many of us aristocratic priests, had never worked at anything but philosophy and journalism, never picked up a shovel for pay, never so much as set foot in a factory or farm. Marx—Engels was different—had not troubled to look at manual work, much less try it out for himself. He preferred his angry theorizing in the Reading Room of the British Museum.

Studs Terkel in *Working* says that the job “is a search, too, for daily meaning as well as daily bread, for astonishment rather than torpor; in short, for a sort of life rather than a Monday through Friday sort of dying.”⁵⁷ It struck Marisa Bowe while editing a follow-up to Terkel that “very few of those we talked to”—and the interviewers seem to have talked to American workers pretty much at random—“hate their jobs, and even among the ones who do, almost none said ‘not working’ was their ultimate goal.”⁵⁸

You need not see what someone is doing
To know it is his vocation,

you have only to watch his eyes:
a cook mixing his sauce, a surgeon

making a primary incision,
a clerk completing a bill of lading

wear the same rapt expression,
forgetting themselves in a function.⁵⁹

A Cincinnati sewer worker interviewed on National Public Radio on August 29, 2002, joked that at first he viewed his job as a way of claiming credit with hippie girls that he was an “environmental” worker. But of course that’s what he is. And he grew, he declared, to

love his work, just *love* it, crawling around sewer mains. True, he earns \$60,000 a year for his trouble, as the sand hogs digging tunnels for New York's water supply earn \$150,000 a year. But *that* condition of a laboring vocation nowadays is made possible by the goods-piling-up machinery of capitalism.

A traveler from the (ideal, gentle) communist planet in Ursula Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* is startled by the prosperity of the "sturdy, self-respecting-looking people" in the (ideal, but not-so-gentle) capitalist planet:

It puzzled him. He had assumed that if you removed a human being's natural incentive to work—his initiative, his creative energy—and replaced it with external motivation...he would become a lazy and careless worker. But no careless workers kept those lovely farmlands, or made the superb cars and comfortable trains. The lure of *profit*...was evidently a much more effective replacement of the natural initiative than he had been led to believe.⁶⁰

Le Guin overlooks, though, the better case for capitalism, which is not that profit deftly replaces the instinct of workmanship. On the contrary, profit and the capitalism dependent on profit nourishes it. Marx, Thorstein Veblen, Karl Polanyi, and others have been mistaken on the point. Good, well-paid workers are not alienated or careless. Watch a team of trash men working the public barrels from a truck along a Chicago street, working fast and accurately, skimming the empty plastic barrels back to their places, tipping them back into the cast-iron holders, riding easily on the lip of the shoot, stormy, husky, brawling. I do not condescend. I've worked trash trucks in my day, and know the feeling.

Chaplin's 1936 movie *Modern Times* or the opening scenes of Sillitoe's angry-young-man novel *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* (1959; movie 1962) say that many factory jobs are monotonous. Granted. I have *not* worked in a factory. But the monotony is of course pretty common in nonindustrial society, too. Planting rice is never fun. The idiocy of rural life is not always better for the soul than the idiocy of urban life. I *have* worked as a farm laborer. Ironically, only since Romanticism and the rise of prosperous, healthy cities—London stopped killing more people than it bred by the end of the eighteenth century—have Europeans looked fondly back on their village roots.

Poor people have moved in every country worldwide for centuries from the village to the city, freely if not joyously, even when the cities

were killers. Witness the several hundreds of millions of Chinese peasants who moved in the 1990s and later to the cities of eastern China, the largest such migration in history. Living in a factory dorm room in the city of Changshu north of Shanghai and working seventy-seven hours a week for eleven months a year making IV drips for Western hospitals to bring home five hundred dollars in net pay, if she is very careful, seemed in 2004 better to the nineteen-year old young woman Bai Lin than staying in her home village of Two Dragons.⁶¹

If you as a well-off Western city-dweller and office worker think that outdoor work must be *so* much nicer than being cooped up, it's a good bet you have never worked for more than a day or two in the out-of-doors, making hay in Wiltshire or making roads in Massachusetts, not to speak of planting rice in Two Dragons. There's a reason that most people, when given the choice, prefer to work under roofs and inside heated and air-conditioned offices and in the busy cities.

A commercial society provides on a unique scale opportunities for fully flow-ful jobs—which would not describe Bai Lin's eleven-hour days cutting rubber sheets, but does describe her older brother Bai Li Peng's job as a foreman in a factory near Hong Kong. The skilled craftsperson of olden times was much admired by late Romantics such as Morris and Ruskin. But sculpting masons and master builders were a tiny fraction of the medieval workforce, and in their own day were *not* admired. No one who had to work with his hands, including a painter or sculptor, was admired. Most medievals were closer to the Monty Python vision of groveling peasant than to the pre-Raphaelite vision of free craftsman and noble saint of labor, admitting that both are fictions.

Think of the clerkly professions in this way—being a college professor, for example. There are very roughly a million of them today in the United States, about one out of every one hundred and fifty workers, more people employed now in post-secondary education than the cumulative total in all the centuries everywhere before, say, 1945. The great-great grandparents of the average college teacher worked with their hands, often at jobs providing less scope for flow. Like everyone else's, since that's what a nonmodern economy had on offer, mine were dirt farmers and lumberjacks and housewives—though my mother's mother took pride in her housewifery, in an age of home canning and home sewing and home making of the sort Cheryl Mendelson celebrates in *Home Comforts: The Art and Science of Keeping House*; and I expect that some others of my ancestors and yours wielded a spade or spindle joyfully by God's grace.

But non-clerkly jobs in a market society provide more scope, too. The uncommon but by no means unheard of Chicago bus driver who

works joyfully at making his passengers welcome, and works conscientiously at arriving at each stop exactly on time, navigating the snowy streets of the South Side with brio, is living a flow-ful life on the job. The textbook salesman who pushes the envelope (he would say), venturing into new academic buildings to confront new curmudgeons in English or Accounting, armed only with his open and sunny personality and a giant catalogue he has memorized of Macmillan books, is testing the limits of his skill.

Of course you can *refuse* to live flow-fully, even in a rich, Western society. The tram drivers of Rotterdam are known for leaving just as the university student running to make the tram gets close to the door, or speeding up to ram harder when the track is blocked by a careless auto driver. They get satisfaction no doubt in paying back the middle class. One wonders if they wouldn't do better to join it, and make their trams into little sites of bourgeois virtues.

Many college professors treat their fascinating jobs as though they were routine, and become, as Adam Smith said of the effects of repetitive work, "as stupid and as ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to become." As they stroll between their few hours of classes a week they lament the appalling stress of their lives, and form trade unions in a fantasy of proletarian status. True, the college administration encourages the fantasy, by itself playing the role of The Suits, conspiring against common sense, stuffing their executive suites with auto-busy assistant and associate and vice-thises-and-thats. But anyway such college professors are refusing flow. Immanuel Kant lectured every morning all morning including Saturdays, easily twice the average contact hours of a modern college professor, and was uncomplaining about it. As the son of a saddler he knew hard physical work. Yet in his spare time he managed to write—slowly, admittedly, by the frenetic standards of modern academic life—a few books revolutionizing Western philosophy. "When the job presents clear goals," Csikszentmihalyi writes, "unambiguous feedback, a sense of control, challenges that match the worker's skills, and few distractions, the feelings it provides are not that different from what one experiences in a sport or an artistic performance."⁶² Or in reckless driving or in street fighting—the news from Flow is not all good.

The pay matters. It is a thrill unique to a market society to find that people are willing to *pay* for one's product, to surrender their hard-earned money, as we put it. Remember your first paycheck, and the feeling it gave of adulthood, of pulling your own weight. Remember when you last sold for a professional's price something *you* produced. In his play and novella *Home Truths* David Lodge imagines

a conversation in a cottage in Sussex between two old friends, one a man who writes TV plays and will in a few hours take a flight from Gatwick to Hollywood, the other a woman comfortably well off in retirement who makes pottery:

He picked up a pottery vase. "This is nice. Did you make it?"
"Yes."

"Very nice . . . Is it for sale?"

"Not to you, Sam. If you like it, have it as a present."

"No way. Would a hundred be fair?"

"Far too much."

"I'll give you seventy-five." He took out his chequebook.

"That's very generous. I *am* selling the odd piece now, actually. It's very satisfying."⁶³

It's satisfying especially to a married woman accustomed to giving care for no pay, whose independence in a commercial society depends on a pay packet. As Peggy Seeger sang,

I really wish that I could be a lady—
I could do all the lovely things a lady's s'posed to do.
I wouldn't even mind if they would pay me,
And I could be a person too.

. . . But now that times are harder and my Jimmy's got the sack
I went down to Vicker's, they were glad to have me back.
I'm a third-class citizen, my wages tell me that,
But I'm a first-class engineer.⁶⁴

Work in a capitalist society can fulfill the Greek ideal of happiness, reiterated to the boys at English private schools in the nineteenth century: "the exercise of vital powers along lines of excellence in a life affording them scope." One can be an excellent mother in bringing up Connor and Lily to a full adult life, or an excellent carpenter making a staircase with winding treads and housed stringers, or an excellent clerk completing an intricate bill of lading, or an excellent repairer of railcar-making machinery.⁶⁵ At least one can in a modern capitalist society.

Notes

The essay is slightly revised from chapters 43–45 in McCloskey, *Bourgeois Virtues*.

1. Horowitz, *Morality of Spending*, 166–7.

2. Ibid., 168.
3. Douglas and Isherwood, *World of Goods*, 49, quoted in van Staveren, *Values of Economics*, 105.
4. Douglas, "Deciphering a Meal."
5. Chalfen, *Snapshot*.
6. Sahlin, *Stone Age Economics*, ix.
7. Klemm, "Material Grace," 232; emphasis in the original.
8. Bailey, "Of Gomi and Gaijin," 147.
9. Charry, "Happiness," 30.
10. Sayers, "Why Work?" 1.
11. Pope, "Epistle to Burlington," lines 169–72.
12. Robert Fogel gives some interesting evidence on the rise and fall of stagnationism in "Reconsidering Expectations."
13. <http://www.templetons.com/brad/billg.html>.
14. Clark, "Society of the Future."
15. Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 184ff. The suggestion that Smith is here contradicting Rousseau is H.B. Acton's, reported by the editors on 183 (note 6).
16. Ibid., 180.
17. Ibid., 183. MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*, 2, criticizes Smith on similar grounds.
18. See McCloskey, *Bourgeois Virtues*, chapter 38.
19. Rousseau, *Discourse of the Origin of Inequality*, 65.
20. Clark, *Commerce, Culture, and Liberty*, 228; emphasis in the original.
21. Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 313.
22. Hunnicutt, *Kellogg's Six-Hour Day*, 12.
23. Fogel, *Escape from Hunger*, 70–1.
24. McNeill, *Venice*, 100.
25. Weber, *General Economic History*, 365.
26. Little, *Religious Poverty*, 178, citing Le Goff, "Licit and Illicit Trades in the Middle Ages," who says: "God's work was, of course, creation. Any profession, therefore, which did not create was bad or inferior."
27. Le Goff, "Licit and Illicit Trades," 61.
28. Ibid., 70.
29. Gerschenron, *Europe in the Russian Mirror*, especially chapters 1 and 2.
30. Waterman, *Revolution, Economics and Religion*, 14.
31. Ellsberg, "Introduction," in Day, *Selected Writings*, xvi.
32. See Cosgel, "Religious Culture," on the Amish, and his work with others on the Shakers, for example Murray and Cosgel, "Between God and Market."
33. Knight and Merriam, *Economic Order and Religion*, 29, 30, 31, 46.
34. See, for example, *ibid.*, 48.
35. These are Pius: *Quadragesimo Anno*; John: *Mater et Magistra* and *Pacem in Terris*; Paul: *Populorum Progressio* and *Octogesima adveniens*; and John Paul: *Laborem Exercens* and *Centesimus Annus*. Michael Novak is my guide here: *Catholic Social Thought*, chapters 6–8.

36. Novak, *Catholic Social Thought*, 12–15.
37. Leo XIII. 1891. *Rerum Novarum*, paragraph numbers given. See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, c. 1270, IIa IIae, Q 66, quoted and discussed in Fleischacker, *Short History of Distributive Justice*, 35 and n40.
38. Hornby, *How to Be Good*, 210.
39. Knight and Merriam, *Economic Order and Religion*, 50.
40. Novak, *Catholic Social Thought*, xvi.
41. From the 1961 encyclical *Mater et Magistra*, quoted in *ibid.*, xxii.
42. Erasmus, *Adages*, 29.
43. Hornby, *How to Be Good*, 218.
44. Novak, *Business as a Calling*, 13.
45. *Ibid.*, 5.
46. *Ibid.*, 37.
47. Thus James Norwood Corbett in Bowe et al., *Gig*, 250–4.
48. Maimonides, *Mishnah Torah*, c. 1200, quoted in Sacks, *Dignity of Difference*, 95.
49. Csikszentmihalyi, *Finding Flow*, 31, 30, 32.
50. Nussbaum, *Fragility of Goodness*, 6n2. *Eudaimonia* is translated as "happiness," but means literally "the property of having a good guardian spirit"; emphasis in the original.
51. Csikszentmihalyi, *Finding Flow*, 2–3.
52. Shapin, *History of Truth*, 50.
53. Ricardo, *Principle of Political Economy*, 98.
54. Frye, "Dickens," 230.
55. Knight, "Ethics of Competition," 51.
56. Todorov, *Hope and Memory*, 69f., 48.
57. Terkel, *Working*, xiii.
58. Bowe et al., *Gig*, xiii.
59. Auden, "Horae Canonicae," 477. When he wasn't being a poet, though, Auden had conventional leftish attitudes about alienation.
60. Le Guin, *Dispossessed*, 66, italics hers.
61. Lev, "Great Migration of China," December 27, 1, 23.
62. Csikszentmihalyi, *Finding Flow*, 38; compare Knight, "Ethics of Competition," 54: i.
63. Lodge, *Home Truths*, 267.
64. Seeger, "I'm Gonna be an Engineer" (1971) © 1976, 1979 by Stormking Music, Inc. All rights reserved.
65. Schuttner, *Basic Stairbuilding*, 67ff.

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Chapter 8

Doing the Right Things: The Private Sector Response to Hurricane Katrina as a Case Study in the Bourgeois Virtues

Steven Horwitz

Both critics and defenders of the market economy are often quick to claim that market actors are not, or at least do not need to be, virtuous in the classical sense of the term. Critics use this claim as a strike against markets as they argue that markets both rely on and encourage narrowly self-interested behavior and do not reward much, if anything, of what has historically been understood as “the virtues.” Defenders of markets often argue that the very advantage of markets is that they need not rely on citizens being virtuous in order for them to produce the efficiency and productivity that will benefit all. From Mandeville through to Stigler, Friedman, and even Gordon Gekko’s “greed is good,” the beauty of markets has been seen in the parsimony of the way they produce social benefits requiring “only” self-interest and good institutions. Economists and other defenders of markets need not concern themselves with questions of virtue, nor are markets or capitalism seen as producing or encouraging any sort of virtues.

In her book *The Bourgeois Virtues* (2006), Deirdre McCloskey criticizes both of these virtue-free approaches to thinking about the market. She argues instead that markets both require and encourage a particular set of virtues that she refers to as the “bourgeois” virtues. She focuses specifically on the idea that capitalism involves more than the virtue of “Prudence,” which is her rendering of narrowly self-interested or profit-maximizing behavior. Her book offers a discussion of what she counts as the seven bourgeois virtues, of