
GOD OF THE MARKET PLACE: JOHN STUART MILL AND MAXIMOS CONFESSOR ON ECONOMIC VIRTUE

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It is a curious happenstance of history that, when ethics are spoken of in a public forum today, it is now necessary to frame the arguments within an appeal for consensus before an audience of radically separated individuals whose only obvious association with their fellows is through economic life. Very few of us think of ourselves as part of an interdependent community where each person has direct and immediate moral obligations to everyone else. Rather, people now have to be convinced to act one way or another, and usually such decisions are measured against the relative costs to one's own self in terms of time and money. In countless daily scenarios personal ethical identity is becoming increasingly 'economic' along these lines. Worse and all too often a disquieting internal dialogue accompanies such reflections with questions like, *what's in it for me? Or, why should I care?*

Clearly and most thankfully, not everyone is that cynical. Altruistic compassion, charity and philanthropy still define the best of us. Yet it is undeniable that the monstrosity Thomas Hobbes saw in the heart of humanity—an impulse for an exclusionary selfishness coupled with an inclination toward social indifference when it does not advantage one's calculated aims—has indeed clawed up from the depths of our nature and now reveals itself all too often in society.

Greed is good. This was the unabashed motto of the business elite of the 1980's, and now even among ordinarily decent upright citizens Hobbes' monster tries to make itself unnoticed within their moral conscience. It disguises itself as libertarianism and proudly proclaims its radical individualism as birthright to the divine Image. Just as God is sovereign over Himself, it says, so each rational mind is also the sole and unqualified master over him- or herself.

This idea was promoted by John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) who declared that "over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign."¹ Mill also went on to proclaim that government should be restrained from imposing itself upon personal liberty, excepting only to guarantee the physical protection of others in civil society.² No other moral claims can be made on a citizen. Rather, each person is solely responsible for their greater wellbeing; they are to be the author of their own lives—for better or worse. While this may seem theologically

¹ John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (Oxford University Press, 1991) 14.

² Mill, *On Liberty*, 15. He gives here examples such as requiring persons to give evidence in a court of law when needed, to provide for a common defence, and to save another's life whenever it can be said that it was "obviously" in that person's direct and immediate ability to effect.

benign,³ Mill's libertarianism manifests itself today as an inclination to measure personal moral responsibility to others against what are perceived to be the harsh economic realities governing a society of such individuals. Utilitarianism is a 'me first' system of ethics that sets forth a first principle of self-chosen happiness, and sees its upshot as allowing for the greatest good for the greatest number of people in a society of free citizens happily co-existing with whatever forms of enlightened or base hedonism appeals to them. But when Mill's utopian vision became married to economics, human life itself was devalued and the societal pathways to personal prosperity began to be closed-off to an increasing number of citizens.

It will be helpful to now move from abstract commentary to a concrete illustrative example. Case in point of this economic measure of human life can be found in the difference between the public health advisories that define 'maximum contaminant level guidelines' for drinking water safety, and the actual legally enforceable standards for water quality. In the United States up to 5 parts per billion (ppb) of the carcinogenic pollutant Benzene is allowed to be present in the drinking water, yet the non-enforceable public health guideline for the same pollutant is *zero* ppb—a recommend level based solely on medical research on the adverse health effects associated with this

carcinogen.⁴ The difference between the legal standard and the health guideline arises from the cost of monitoring and treating the public water supply versus the expected increased occurrences of cancer caused by the Benzene. An 'acceptable risk' trade-off has been calculated to balance public health concerns against impacts to the overall economy. This is true face of the economic utilitarianism today—the greatest good for the greatest number, just not everyone. Some people will die of cancer, sure. But others will prosper economically, and most other people will be able to dodge the 'statistical-bullet' of having a little extra Benzene in their water supply. It is just one of the countless trade-offs that define life in the modern world. This kind of utilitarian moral calculus is found not only with national policy-makers but also with those citizens who vote their pocketbook and not what their moral conscience tells them. The cycle thereby perpetuates itself.

It might be asked at this point whether this is just the difference being drawn here is between theological idealism and just being realistic. Exposing the historical legacy behind the development of the modern moral conscience such as the kind that would consider this particular question is what in fact frames much of this essay. In brief, what this paper seeks to reveal is that the Western moral conscience derives from a misbegotten social experiment in 19th Century England, and that the invented social institutions of that time have altered and damaged the moral conscience of modern society. People are not naturally Hobbesian. Rather, the origin of the cynicism that sets one person apart from another is not true human nature but a decidedly unnatural cultural invention

³ In contrast, Orthodox Christian theology presents the Image of God as Trinitarian, in that God's personhood is always relational; see Vladimir Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001) 178. The human person is called to reveal and fulfill the birthright of the Image within a community of persons, or as stated by Gregory Baum: "Christian individualism is thus essentially social" (Gregory Baum, *Karl Polanyi on Ethics and Economics* [Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996] 32). Mill's conception of an exclusive dignity apart from communitarian responsibility is therefore decidedly unchristian.

⁴ The United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), "National Primary Drinking Water Regulations—May 2009," Environmental Protection Agency, <http://www.epa.gov/ogwdw000/consumer/pdf/mcl.pdf>.

now plaguing society. At the heart of this social experiment were particular conceptions of the 'Laws of God and Nature' that formed key justifications for the self-regulating market to organize society. This is what destroyed the previous social institutions that had brought people together in communities of interdependence and mutualism. The market in turn inculcated into the public psyche foreign ideas of competitive exclusion and economic isolationism from one's neighbours. This is the modern economic era as we know it today.

For this very reason, the historical foundations of the modern market economy need to be brought to the fore and critically examined. Only then can these very same ideas about the Laws of God and Nature now operating at the heart of the modern market economy be reviewed and revised, only then may ethical arguments regarding improving human welfare be presented in public forums without being dismissed out of hand as hopelessly sentimental and idealistic by the public at large. And so this is where this essay necessarily begins.

Historical Origins

Economists would say they no longer look back to the religious foundations of the market economy set forth by John Stuart Mill, taking from him only his utilitarian ethics which were actualized into the prevailing social reality. Yet in this case it is not possible to separate the chaff of history from the wheat. The religious foundations that were used to ground economics as a form of applied social ethics are still operable in the market economy today. The theology at the heart of this system must be reordered if the social ethics promoted in a market economy are to be redirected to the true betterment of human welfare. To this end a competing view of the natural and social

economy by Maximus Confessor (580-662 CE)⁵ will be brought forward to challenge Mill. But first, the history of the development of the modern market economy must be outlined.

The problem of reconciling collective human behaviour with what were presumed to be the Laws of God and Nature became a particular problem after the age of monarchs. The utilitarianism of John Stuart Mill would come to dominance as the solution to this problem for the sole reason his philosophy alone had a means of implementation to carry it into widespread popular acceptance. This came about when William Stanley Jevons proposed 'marginal utility' as an extension of Mill's utilitarian ethics in his 1863 treatise, "A General Mathematical Theory of Political Economy." With this development, the utilitarianism of John Stuart Mill became a central ideological foundation supporting the new self-regulating market system that was radically transforming society in the 19th Century.

Mill, while generally considered agnostic or at least rather hostile to the idea of super-naturalism, nevertheless did make a direct appeal to religious sensibilities when he declared that, "if it be a true belief that God desires, above all things, the happiness of his creatures, and that this was his purpose in their creation, utility is not only not a godless doctrine, but more profoundly religious than any other."⁶ This understanding of natural theology would become the ideal for society itself, and it was translated into economic reality through the marginal utility dynamic that drives Adam Smith's 'free hand' of the market. Such an analogy conjures the image of the Hand of God distributing

⁵ He is sometimes identified as Maximus the Confessor, or Maximus Confessor.

⁶ John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1979) 21.

divine plenitude and blessings to those of proper virtue through collective (but impersonal) human agency, as well as a stern Hand to rebuke those without the personal fortitude to be hard workers. Succinctly put, economic utilitarianism is applied theological ethics—pure and simple. It is an ordering of society to accord with what Mill presumed to be the natural law. Worse, this particular utopian vision actively promoted a “new creed [that] was materialistic and believed that all human problems could be resolved given an unlimited amount of material commodities” extracted from nature.⁷ This is the modern consumerist economy which continues to cause so much damage to the biosphere.

Mill gave a means to reconcile the apparent theodicy of the natural and social worlds, as well as an easy way to rationalize away personal economic decisions that cause further harm to people and nature. Both would become de-personalized as abstracted commodities of labour and land aggregated in the marketplace. In the transformative alchemy of economic efficiency, it could be imagined that the greatest good for the greatest number of people would in fact happen in the long run. The concept of a market society allows people to look past the present evils of dehumanizing poverty and biological impoverishment to a hopeful utopian vision of some future perfect society. This project to ‘improve’ society continues overseas and is greatly furthered by globalization. Developing nations are each brought into the formal economy by liquidating their natural resources for marketable commodities to exchange for consumerist goods; traditional livelihoods and culture are being destroyed to create an indigenous labour force for furtherance of the same.

⁷ Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001) 42.

This reveals a subtle but very ominous change to utilitarian theory. It is no longer the greatest good for the greatest number, but rather what is perceived to be the greatest good for the global economy itself that is now the principle criterion and ultimate arbiter for all these decisions affecting lives at home and abroad. We have surrendered our collective wills to the God of the Marketplace.

Understanding Social and Economic History

A few words must be said of a central figure in the following discussion. Karl Polanyi (1886-1964) was a renowned economic historian and cultural anthropologist. Curiously though, his name is reviled by some economists today.⁸ The underlying dispute hinges on whether ‘market-less’ societies have ever existed in history, and is ostensibly about human nature itself. Are we first and foremost the self-interested, calculating animal *Homo economicus*? Or are we communitarian and social beings who look to our relationships with others as the primary orientation in life? The problem is that, if Polanyi is right, much of economic science rests on dubious premises about basic human motivations. While a full technical discussion regarding the former point is beyond the scope of this paper, the conception of human nature as a social being is at the very core

⁸ In examining this debate, Tandy and Neale (1994) find that the central issue is most often not what Polanyi actually said, but *how* he said it—it is for the most part a question of style and nuance. Polanyi created essays that sought to persuade an audience of both academics and the general public to accept a particular interpretation of facts. And so, “many of his interpretations appear as unqualified statements when such phrasings as ‘probable’ or ‘more likely than’ would have been more suitable for his audience” of economists (David Tandy and Walter Neale, “Karl Polanyi’s Distinctive Approach to Social Analysis and the Case of Ancient Greece: Ideas, Criticisms, Consequences” in *From Political Economy to Anthropology: Situating Economic Life in Past Societies* [Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1994] 10f.).

of what is argued herein.⁹ And so, and in brief, it should be kept in mind that the scholarship that has emerged since the time Polanyi wrote does suggest that he was indeed right to challenge a very narrow conception of the human person as merely a solitary profit-oriented animal. Rather, developing social relations and prestige among peers is indeed a foremost concern in the personal psyche. The point of contention as to whether all interpersonal relations can or should be classified as a type of (or are somehow analogous to) a marketplace calculus of exchange and gain is another and an exceedingly esoteric debate altogether.¹⁰ Again, and in view to the following debate on the modern market society, even harsh critics of Polanyi take contention, not with the history itself, but whether the pre-history to the self-regulating market of the 19th Century was not still some kind of ‘market’ in another way; the underlying

point about the social role of communitarian reciprocity and redistribution is not in dispute.¹¹

The Birth of the Modern Market Society

The emergence of the modern self-regulating market has roots going back to the peasant revolts that swept through Europe in the 16th Century. After exceptionally bloody repression against the agrarian workers by the upper classes,¹² the social chaos eventually settled over the next century into new institutions—some of which were designed to make life more tolerable for the working classes. One such new institution was founded under the 1662 Settlement Act in England. This legislation bound peasants to the parish in which they lived: the Church of England thereby became directly responsible for the social welfare of all through a local parish tax. While perhaps not ideal in every respect, no one was allowed to starve and the local parish priest would provide individualized assistance to all the varied social problems that arose within the parish.¹³ Community itself became the basis of social organization, and it worked—at least for awhile.

What changed was a growing wave of industrial mechanization and sheep.

⁹ Here, Polanyi’s views on Aristotle and Ancient Greece are foundational to the arguments presented in this essay. Ian Morris (1994) concludes that Aristotle “was waging a rear-guard action, defending the idea of the polis as a community of equals at a time when other, larger and more hierarchical, social systems were becoming dominant in the eastern Mediterranean” (Morris, “The Community against the Market in Classical Athens” in *From Political Economy to Anthropology: Situating Economic Life in Past Societies* [Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1994] 53). Morris finds that the social dynamics described by Polanyi were therefore correctly assessed as being indicative of a time when the economy was indeed embedded in social relations, and not the other way around.

¹⁰ For example, Colin Duncan in defence of Polanyi highlights that the modern concept of money functioning as an intermediary in marketplace exchanges covering all goods and that allows for equivalences to be established between use-values “has greatly mislead economists” (Colin Duncan, *The Centrality of Agriculture between Humankind and Nature* [Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1996] 165, see also 3f.). As such, the mere existence of money in traditional or archaic societies was not enough to presume that a price-setting market actually exists the way economists presume (164f.). In addition, the economic concept of ‘surplus’ of goods breaks down in traditional societies where social prestige may outweigh other productive use or market exchanges of goods (Duncan and Tandy, *From Political Economy to Anthropology: Situating Economic Life in Past Societies*, 3f.).

¹¹ Hejeebu and McCloskey, for example, argue that “Polanyi’s passion for the non-market ways of reciprocity, redistribution, and [Aristotelian] householding led him to unreasonable skepticism about the scope of markets” prior to the invention of the self-regulating market for land and labour, yet they still readily concede Polanyi was right about several aspects of this history. See Santhi Hejeebu and Deirdre McCloskey, “The reproving of Karl Polanyi.” *Critical Review* 13/3 (1999) 297-9, 309.

¹² See André Biéler, *Calvin’s Economic and Social Thought* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2005) 4-28. The scale and savagery of the persecution is almost beyond imagination; Biéler notes that ten thousand peasants were massacred in Swabia and eighteen thousand in Alsace alone (24).

¹³ Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, 82.

Under pressure of the mercantile economics and the advantages of international trade, wealthy landowners were inclined to dispossess the agrarian peasantry living on their properties, and instead enclose arable land exclusively for sheep pasture. Wool for the growing textile industry was much more profitable to the land owners than the agriculture produced by their former tenants.¹⁴ Some of the now landless peasants could find employment in local textile mills, but the rest were unable to provide for themselves and so it fell to the Church of England parish system to provide for them. The working poor however did not find a better life at the mills. The Speenhamland Law of 1795 had to be established to subsidize wages to ensure the employed could at least afford bread for subsistence, yet this in turn only encouraged their employers to lower wages further knowing public assistance would make up the difference. And so in the period from 1696 to 1818, the rates of pauperism increased twentyfold.¹⁵ To solve both problems and relieve the growing economic burden upon the parishes, the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 ended Speenhamland welfare and allowed for the free movement of labour across England. This greatly facilitated the Industrial Revolution by creating a wage-setting national labour market determined by industry itself. But this was no utopia of personal freedom. Polanyi described what resulted this way:

[I]t was an improvement on the grandest scale which wrought unprecedented havoc with the habitation of common people. Before this process had advanced very far, the labouring people had been crowded together in new places of desolation, the so-called industrial towns of England; the country folk had been dehumanized

into slum dwellers; the family was on the road to perdition; and large parts of the country were rapidly disappearing under the slack and scrap heaps vomited forth from the 'satanic mills' [of the Industrial Revolution].¹⁶

New social problems emerged from this social experiment of a 'parish-less' labour market including an alarming increase of poverty and starvation even while unprecedented wealth was being created for the business and land owners. How this could be explained away by the newly wealthy beneficiaries of the Industrial Revolution was by an appeal to a primitive form of naturalism that legitimized the social consequences of unregulated commerce and trade. Joseph Townsend (1739-1816) in his *Dissertation on the Poor Laws* proclaimed that starvation was simply the laws of nature working for the improvement of society, with poverty being the very means to achieve that proper end: "hunger will tame the fiercest animals, it will teach decency and civility, obedience and subjection, to the most perverse. In general it is only hunger which can spur them [the poor] on to labour."¹⁷ Poverty was equated with proof of an anti-social disposition—it became morally wrong to be poor. The utilitarian Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) would concur and likewise see hunger as the only proper, and indeed the only "scientific and economical" remedy for poverty in society.¹⁸ The poor simply had to better themselves without public assistance no matter how low the wages. The unemployed, according to this logic, were seen as wilfully refusing to work for available wages—they would be sent to Bentham's hellish Panopticon workhouses

¹⁴ Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, 38ff.

¹⁵ Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, 115.

¹⁶ Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, 41.

¹⁷ Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, 118.

¹⁸ Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, 122.

for 're-education' in proper social virtues.¹⁹

Adam Smith (1723-1790) in his *Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of The Wealth of Nations* also upheld the social virtues of poverty, noting that not only do the 'industrious poor' labour more and produce better quality commodities,²⁰ but that poverty also creates a culling effect upon the lower classes such that society achieves a natural balance between the upper and working classes:

A half-starved Highland woman frequently bears more than twenty children, while a pampered lady is ... generally exhausted by two or three ... [yet] in some places half the children die before they are four years of age ... this great mortality, however, will everywhere be found chiefly among children of the common people, who cannot afford to tend them with the same care as those of better stations ... in civilized society it is only among the inferior ranks of people that the scantiness of subsistence can set limits to the further multiplication of the human species ... the liberal reward of labour, by enabling them to provide better for their children, and consequently bring up a greater number, naturally tends to widen and extend those limits [on population].²¹

This notion of a cruel but beneficial naturalism working itself out in economic society would become embraced by some religious thinkers. The Evangelical Christian Hannah More (1745-1833) wrote a series of religious stories to provide moral guidance for the working poor, *The Cheap Repository Tracts*. Her books would uphold the virtues of hard

work and taught the poor to accept their lowly condition in stride. As one such moral lesson concludes, "this story ... may teach the poor that they can seldom be in any condition of life so low as to prevent their rising to some degree of independence if they choose to exert themselves, and there can be no situation whatsoever so mean as to forbid the practice of many noble virtues."²² The ultimate responsibility for raising a person out of poverty therefore resided squarely with the individual—and even then only marginally so. People were urged to focus on spiritual benefits of hard work and to accept their place in society as God's will. Liberation Theology would have to wait for more than another century to emerge and try to rid world of such pious but mistaken acquiescence to economic repression.

The common wisdom had coalesced around the idea that any direct relief to feed the poor was a grievous social ill. Such thought can be traced to thinkers like Daniel Defoe (c.1659-1731) who declared that giving alms to the poor was not charity for it only took away their motivation to work, and employing them in public works projects would in turn ruin private business.²³ This economic worldview abandoned the poor to work-out their spiritual salvation and material sustenance through the Laws of God and Nature in the marketplace, or simply starve. The desperate working classes were thus forced to flee from the jobless rural countryside to the cities of the Industrial Revolution which had become "demographic black holes" to devour them—lethal industrial pollution, epidemics from overcrowding, and malnutrition from poverty had caused

¹⁹ Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, 122, 146.

²⁰ Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976) 75.

²¹ Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, 70f.

²² Cited from Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, 179.

²³ Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, 114.

death rates to exceed the natural increase.²⁴

The truth is that the greatest good for the greatest number under such market forces *necessarily* does not include everyone. There must be winners and losers in such a system. Mill's natural theology would become a key justification to explain away the new social ills such a market economy; the natural law was simply perfecting the human herd by eliminating the immoral and weak. The question before us now is how much of this ideology of radical individualism, naturalistic competition, and the abandonment of communitarian wellbeing to market forces is still present with us today.

Modern economics goes largely without question—economics is seen as simply the way the world really works. While the horrendousness of this primitive naturalism as a social ideal is self-evident to the reader, it is still the case that some Free Market fundamentalists and neo-liberal economic purists vehemently decry market interferences like social security programs, worker safety regulations, environmental protection legislation, and socialized medicine. Very fortunately they have not had their way, at least not entirely. The inherent malevolence of a Free Market has been greatly mitigated, through not entirely eliminated, through protectionist regulations and legal impositions upon the market. Social safety net exists in Western nations (to varying degrees) as a consequence of democratic action to restrain market forces in the name of human dignity. Polanyi referred to this as a 'double movement' of social protectionist

measures against market forces—examples of which include the formation of worker unions and the creation of legislative restrictions on employers (e.g., a minimum wage, maternity leave, child labour laws, windfall profit taxes, etc.). Polanyi considered the double movement essential to alleviate some of the worst injustices in a market economy. Yet under the name of trade liberalization and increasing efficiency, market fundamentalists often succeed in removing the same regulatory protections today. The good of the economy itself is held up as justification.

Some of the inherent ill-effects of the globalized market are now being displaced overseas in developing nations and hidden away in sweatshops populated by migrant workers. And here, just as it was in 19th Century England, it is not only economic exploitation that is the sole cause for the depreciation of human life. Rather, as Polanyi concluded, it is also “the disintegration of the cultural environment” through the commoditization of land and labour that destroys the prior social relations in society of interdependence and reciprocity.²⁵ He also warned that “where such methods were forced upon a helpless people [in developing nations] in the absence of protective measures, as in exotic and semicolonial regions, unspeakable suffering ensued.”²⁶ Quite regrettably this too continues today in a neo-colonialism of globalization—a subject to be covered in an upcoming section.

Truly, the Free Market cannot be said to represent the Laws of Nature and God. As a system of applied social ethics that once claimed such authority, its theological grounding needs to be

²⁴ John R. McNeill. “Social, Economic, and Political Forces in Environmental Change,” in *Sustainability or Collapse? An Integrated History and Future of People on Earth*, eds. Robert Costanza, Lisa J. Graumlich, and Will Steffen (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2007) 324.

²⁵ Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, 164, 165-169.

²⁶ Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, 223.

reformed. It is revealing that the barbaric social Darwinism of the self-regulating market came from religiously minded persons, not the Church itself. Accordingly, the insights of a real theologian, in this case Maximos Confessor, can have particular resonance as a counter-narrative to the misbegotten utopian ideal of a market society.

Maximos Confessor on the Natural Law

Maximos Confessor is a saint of both the Eastern Orthodox Church and Roman Catholic Church. While perhaps best known for his Christology which defended the view that Jesus has a fully human will in kenotic harmony with His divine will, Maximos was as a systematic thinker who discussed a great variety of other important subjects. Of interest to us here are his views on the cosmological aspects of God's plan for redemption, which in theological terms happens to be called 'the divine economy.' *Oikonomia* in Patristic writings describes the operation of the divine will in creation and redemption.²⁷ A literal translation of the Greek means 'household management' which explains why the same term appears both in the theological writings and economics texts—God's 'household' in this case is creation itself. For Maximos, the centerpiece of the divine economy is a naturalistic *eros* operating as a cosmological force in both society and the natural world. This force reveals itself as an embedded attraction and affinity for certain behaviours and modes-of-being. Today we would say *eros* is synonymous to what are now called natural instincts, and is the social inclination behind human nature.

Maximos writes that the redemptive economy for the world is made operable

through *eros* manifested in three progressive laws: the natural law, the scriptural law, and the spiritual law.²⁸ The natural law exists to provide for the enjoyment of being (*to einai*) for all creatures through their natural instincts. The scriptural law, on the other hand, opens the door for higher wellbeing (*to eu einai*) for those creatures with a rational nature—which is to say, humankind. The possibility for eternal wellbeing (*to aei eu einai*) is then made possible through the spiritual law. Maximos presents these three laws working cooperatively in human society such that what can be learned naturally (*phusikos*) through the law of nature allows for reason to overcome the sensual attachment to self-love, and thereby leads to the proper enjoyment of being in community with others.

It is noteworthy that Maximos is presenting a similar natural inclination for people to form associations with others just as described by Hobbes, but here the original state of humanity is not an evil and brutish monstrosity as he would have it. Maximos also differs from Hobbes in that society is not stagnated at the point of rational self-interest to form social contracts for survival. Rather, Maximos then points to the next evolution of *eros* in society: the scriptural law. The Bible opens the door to what can be learned spiritually (*pneumatikos*) through the scriptures, which then leads to a higher wellbeing than merely commodious coexistence. This then sets the stage for the final evolution of *eros* that allows a person to become deified (*Theikos*) and

²⁷ For further discussion see Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God*, 15.

²⁸ For a detailed discussion of the summary that follows, see Maximos the Confessor, *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003) 167-171 (*Ad Thalassium* 64). See also "Fifth Century of Various Texts" by Maximos Confessor in *The Philokalia*, Volume II (Boston: Faber & Faber, 1981) 262-264 (Aphorisms 9-14), 280-284 (Aphorisms 84-100).

'the equal of angels' through the spiritual law of Grace (Luke 20:36). This reveals another important distinction to the conceptions of natural theology by Hobbes and Mill. Personhood is not an individualistic and private affair, but socially actualized and achieved. Maximos also does not cast aside the unfortunate ones for the sake of the greater good of society. Instead, he describes the three laws of the divine economy working together to open up a path for ever-greater wellbeing within society as a whole. No one is necessarily left behind by a cynical utilitarian calculus.

Maximos writes that each law of the redemptive economy has its respective role to play in deification. Creation manifests an overall *harmonia* of creaturely interaction and coexistence through the natural law. Yet death and predation fights against the divine economy at the level of individual beings—that is until the *apokatastasis*, the restoration of all things to their proper Edenic order (Acts 3:21; cf. Romans 8:23). But there is one creature that does not 'naturally' create a harmony with others: humankind. Through improper exercise of free will, many people do "not move in accord with the Logos" and instead willingly obeys the carnal law—which Maximos writes is the inclination toward disobedience and death resulting from the original sin.²⁹ It is the carnal law that fights against the other three laws of the divine economy.³⁰

For human beings, each law or the redemptive economy has its own proper discipline (*agoge*) to overcome the effects of the carnal law. The natural law can only be realized through the Golden

Rule—which is to do unto others as you would have them do unto you (Matthew 7:9-12). While itself scriptural, Maximos writes that the Golden Rule is an *agoge* speaking to rational self-love and a cooperative fear born out of the prospect of retaliation.³¹ From this meagre beginning, the full scriptural law can lead to a higher mode-of-being in mutual love. The *agoge* of the scriptural law is that people are called to love their neighbours as themselves (Matthew 19:19, et al.).³² The Golden Rule is transcended by the full revelation of the scriptures, growing and transforming itself into a more selfless kind of neighbourly love. A person capable of this higher love has manifested spiritual growth and progressive development toward God through the scriptures. But there is still one final step in the perfection of human nature to its intended and deified end. This is through the spiritual law, which calls upon a type of love beyond the vicarious self-love as seeing your neighbour as yourself. This law proclaims that there is no greater love than to lay down your life for the sake of another (John 15:13).³³

Through Grace, the mere natural inclination for self-love (*eros*) has at this stage been entirely transcended and transformed by the spiritual law. Grace brings the person fully into a likeness to God from merely an inherited image. The spiritual law is what allows for martyrs to achieve the highest development of kenotic humility in imitating Christ—or as stated in the words of Ignatius of Antioch, to 'attain God' by partaking of a Eucharist wherein one's own body becomes the wheat of God's bread in the *anaphora* unto Him.³⁴ But, and this is the very key to

²⁹ Maximos Confessor, *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ*, 58 (*Ambiguum* 7).

³⁰ Maximos Confessor, *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ*, 55 (*Ambiguum* 7); *Philokalia* II 265 (Aphorism 20).

³¹ Maximos Confessor, *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ*, 167-169; *Philokalia* II 262-3 (Aphorisms 9-10).

³² *Philokalia* II 263 (Aphorism 11).

³³ *Philokalia* II 263-4 (Aphorisms 12-14).

³⁴ Epistle to the Romans 4:1-2.

divine economy, the spiritual law is not limited or restricted to just martyrdom. It also expressed through an un-quenching thirst for compassion and justice for all of God's creatures, humans and non-human alike.³⁵

Maximos describes the three progressive laws in terms of an Irenaean type of soul-building and the very means for the collective realization of the *eschaton* of the redemptive economy for the world as a whole. Soul-building takes place in three metaphysical dimensions in that "the great city of God, the Church ... [is made manifest in that] the entire orderly arrangement of the Church is encompassed in these three laws, having its length in virtue, its width in knowledge, and its depth in the wisdom of mystical theology."³⁶ Stated another way, the collective expression of the Church comes by way of individual soul-building from bodily virtue (*ascesis*), by the knowledge gained in cataphatic contemplation (*theoria*), and by wisdom revealed in apophatic revelation (*theologia*). Each soul therefore develops a dimensional volume in relation to spiritual progress—a calculable metric to measure greatness of each saint. The eschatological City of God takes its dimensional manifestation, as it were, 'brick by brick' of souls measured in these three spiritual dimensions.

Maximos' vision of the ongoing construction of the heavenly City of God

provides an image for seeing how the three laws of the redemptive economy operate for social justice in the present world. The true Laws of God and Nature are such that humankind's teleological purpose can only be fulfilled in a *polis* in fellowship with others. In contrast to Mill's natural theology behind modern economic theory in which only the greatest good for the greatest number can and *should* be provided for, the true Christian position is that people are called upon to act as moral agents to raise up the least of our brethren—all of them. Maximos' economy is not competitive. It is based on virtue. Nor is it exclusionary. It is communitarian. And yet Maximos is not being idealistic. He echoes real-world lessons reflected in traditional economies and social realities, a subject explored by Karl Polanyi to criticize the unnaturalness of modern market societies.

Historical Lessons on Economy and Society

Polanyi argued that the ancient Greeks made a distinction between marketplace generated wealth (*euporia*) and wealth generated from personal excellence (*ousia*).³⁷ Merchants (*euporoi*) were typically strangers in the city, coming and going with seafaring trade (*poreia*). Aristotle considered commercial trade for this sort "hucksterism" (*kapelike*) since wealth was made 'unnaturally' through surcharge.³⁸ Real wealth was made through the substance (*ousia*) of the man through personal excellence, and social power (*exousia*) expressed through the

³⁵ An illustrative example is found with St. Isaac of Syria (7th Century CE), who wrote: "What is a charitable heart? It is a heart which is burning with charity for the whole of creation, for men, birds, for the beasts, for the demons—for all creatures ... a heart which is softened and can no longer bear to see or learn from others of any suffering, even the smallest pain, being inflicted upon a creature. This is why such a person never ceases to pray also for the animals." Cited from Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Crestwood: NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1976) 111.

³⁶ Maximos Confessor, *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ*, 169-170.

³⁷ Karl Polanyi, "Aristotle Discovers the Economy" from *Primitive, Archaic and Modern Economies: Essays of Karl Polanyi* (New York: Anchor Books, 1968) 93-108. For an expanded discussion, see David K. Goodin, "Social Insecurity and the No-Avail Thesis: Insights from Philosophy and Economic History on Consumerist Behaviour," *Ethics, Place and Environment: A Journal of Philosophy & Geography* 13/1 (March 2010).

³⁸ Polanyi, "Aristotle Discovers the Economy," 101.

same. Prices were to be set through measures that ensured social justice and reciprocity.³⁹ Naturally, this idea of wealth included physical treasure in the common sense, but was also inclusive of honour and prestige among peers.⁴⁰ Athens promoted a vision of the *metrioi*, a unified and balanced “core” of like-minded citizens not given to extremes in either emotion or wealth.⁴¹ The mentality was not of scarcity and exclusionary competition, but rather strengthening the entire community through social power aimed at mutually enriching *philia*—a word which in this context is “best translated as ‘balanced reciprocity’.”⁴² As such, the more wealthy citizens would engage in a particular type of philanthropy called *anti-peponthos*, which was a willingness to alleviate another’s burdens and suffering by making them one’s own concern.⁴³ This would strengthen the social bonds of the community and enrich the *ousia* of both persons. This ensured Athens could survive as a secure military power. In fact, the military phalanx was used as a social metaphor encouraging interdependence and solidarity among the Athenian citizens.⁴⁴ The ethic was not survival of the fittest, but that the city was only as strong as its weakest person; each citizen must therefore be made stronger and more interdependent in every way so that the entire community could thrive.

While the *philadelphia* of ancient Greece was born of militaristic realities, we find a

similar conception of an interdependent community with Maximos Confessor. He also noted that people possess different abilities; whether measured in terms of intellectual or physical gifts at birth, or wealth and power attained in later life, inequalities do in fact exist. But this disparity does not mean that certain people are entitled to exploit their gifts for selfish advantage over their neighbors in society. Rather Maximos says we are meant to come together in complementary inter-relationships such that “rather than magnify ourselves over others in view of the inequality all around us, we should by prudent consideration even out the disparity of our [common human] nature, which is in its own right equal in honor, by filling others’ deficiencies with our own abundances.”⁴⁵ Maximos goes on to say that “perhaps it is even the case that the present inequality is allowed to prevail in order to display our inner rational capacity for preferring virtue above everything else.”⁴⁶ Humanity was intended to exist as a singular whole, a true community formed from disparate people united together by a common *philadelphia*. In the proper expression of Trinitarian personhood, the community comes together to raise up the least of the brethren, thereby enriching the *ousia* of all through social virtue. The divine economy is thus revealed in a *polis* through a common currency of compassion. Nevertheless, his was not a call for ecclesial rule over society. Rather Maximos is in keeping with the Orthodox position regarding the separation of Church and State: a secular authority is required to look after the physical wellbeing of society through civil defense and law enforcement, and the Church is

³⁹ Polanyi, “Aristotle Discovers the Economy,” 107f.

⁴⁰ Polanyi, “Aristotle Discovers the Economy,” 93.

⁴¹ Morris, “The Community Against the Market in Classical Athens,” 56.

⁴² Morris, “The Community Against the Market in Classical Athens,” 56.

⁴³ Polanyi, “Aristotle Discovers the Economy,” 96.

Morris also notes that “rich citizens who flaunted their wealth and refused to follow proper norms of behaviour could be brought down through prosecutions” (56).

⁴⁴ Morris, “The Community Against the Market in Classical Athens,” 57.

⁴⁵ *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ* 78 (*Ambiguum* 8).

⁴⁶ *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ* 78 (*Ambiguum* 8).

needed to challenge the State for the cause of social justice for all.⁴⁷

Globalization and Ethics Today

In contrasting these alternate insights on the Laws of God and Nature there are two scenarios to consider in the modern context. The first is the effects of the international market forces on traditional societies in developing nations. The second is reforming the economy in developed nations to promote social justice and ethics at home. The discussion will approach each of these issues in turn. We will begin by once again returning to some important lessons from the ancient world.

Aristotle warned that money was meant to be only an intermediary for facilitating social justice in the exchanging goods.⁴⁸ It becomes 'unnatural' when money is used to breed (*tokos*) more wealth through usury.⁴⁹ Aristotle considered it perverse to pretend that an inert metal like gold can reproduce like a living organism through interest. Rather, wealth must instead arise through an interdependent community,⁵⁰ by which he meant personal initiative and enterprise, not foreign investment and debt servicing. Likewise, for Plato, the

biggest threats to society were overpopulation and foreign trade since both lead to social strife.⁵¹ He said that economic development in particular was detrimental for it "fills a country with merchandise and money-making and bargaining; it breeds in men's minds habits of financial greed and faithlessness."⁵² His warning is still pertinent today, yet his solutions for these problems were for the most part heavy-handed and ethically inapplicable. Plato's utopia was also isolationist and stagnant. Wherever possible, when considering these lessons from ancient societies, Western philanthropy must proceed in ways that promote quality of life over mere economic growth, and we should be asking what *kind* of economic growth is actually being promoted.

One look at the landmark 2006 film *Manufactured Landscapes* shows the dire ecological and human consequences of unbridled economic expansion upon the biosphere.⁵³ The push for globalization has been about creating export markets within nations without formal economies. The moral and ethical 'good' of poverty alleviation, modernizing health care, and access to worldwide consumer products are all held up as justification. But these are two different things which have been uncritically conflated in the rhetoric. Are all these moral and ethical 'goods' necessarily tied to the creation of export markets? No—this is only one way to finance such secondary aims. This

⁴⁷ For further discussion, see David K. Goodin, "Just War Theory and Eastern Orthodox Christianity: A Theological Perspective on the Doctrinal Legacy of Chrysostom and Constantine-Cyril," *Theandros* 2/3 (2005), <http://www.theandros.com/justwar.html>.

⁴⁸ *Nicomachean Ethics* V.5.10.

⁴⁹ Will Durant, *The Story of Philosophy* (New York: Pocket Books, 2006) 107; *Politics* I.10.

⁵⁰ A fascinating modern expression of such a community-building and zero-interest modern economic arrangement is discussed by Colin Duncan: the Local Exchange Trading System (LETS). These are alternative local currency systems that facilitate indirect barter exchanges within a community, not just between two people. One upshot of a LETS economy, Duncan notes, is "a liberating effect on the self-esteem of many individuals who indeed may have nothing of value to offer from the perspective of the conventional, 'outside' economy" (Duncan, *The Centrality of Agriculture*, 171).

⁵¹ Durant, *The Story of Philosophy*, 48; *Laws* 373, 622.

⁵² Durant, *The Story of Philosophy*, 48; *Laws* 704-7.

⁵³ Historian Clive Ponting provides an unblinking assessment of economic activity upon human lives and the environment in his book, *A New Green History of the World: The Environment and the Collapse of Great Civilizations* (New York: Penguin, 2007). See in particular the section on World Bank, IMF and WTO activity to overrule environmental protection laws in the name of Free Market ideology (132f.), as well as the chapters entitled "The Rape of the World" and "The Threat to Global Systems."

distinction then raises the question whether the primary aim of globalization is the export market or Western philanthropy? Obviously, if philanthropy was the true aim, then all these good things could be distributed to such underprivileged societies by different means, even outright gifts. The other aim of improving economic life within these nations could be achieved through developing an internal (non-export) subsistence economy through small scale water improvements (using and augmenting indigenous knowledge wherever possible), village-scale electrical and other technical grants (e.g., solar ovens for cooking, 'micro' wind- and hydro-power stations for specific communal industries, etc.), educational assistance to develop indigenous experts in science and engineering, promoting local seed banks, etc. Philanthropy and economic improvement are two different things: they are best kept separate to ensure the social empowerment needed for the demographic transition to a stable population in balance with regional carrying capacity. This way cultural identity, protection of national resources, and ecological sustainability are placed at the forefront. Consumer goods can then be brought in by import markets, all the while preventing destructive export markets from depleting natural resources.⁵⁴ Food security *must* come through a domestic capacity to feed the local population, not the questionable idea of importing food stuffs from international markets that can be disrupted, or when international demand sets prices out of reach for the poorest in that society.

⁵⁴ A good model for how indigenous communities can administer and develop natural resources for export with true sustainability is found with the Menominee Tribe in Wisconsin, USA. See Ronald L. Trosper, "Indigenous influence on forest management on the Menominee Indian Reservation" *Forest Ecology and Management* 249 (2007) 134–139.

Tying philanthropy to globalization can become pretence for allowing exogenous actors to extract natural wealth from vulnerable societies, all the while saddling them with impossible debt under full cost recovery. The benefit to the affected nations will be to the merchant classes, which are likely to grow, though the lion's share of profit will always be to the financing foreign interests who seek access to those natural resources.⁵⁵ The labour force itself, realized in part from displaced subsistence farmers, will have mixed benefits depending on the social safety nets established against the capriciousness of the Free Market. Yet even so, the loss of previous cultural relations to land and

⁵⁵ A case study is offered here in support of this point. In the African nation of Gabon, even after its independence from France in 1960, French firms continued to hold "the lion's share ... nearly 70% of total foreign investment" in Gabonese development projects, particularly those benefiting French interests such as the petroleum firm Elf Aquitaine—see James Barnes, "The Bongo Phenomenon: Power in Gabon," in *Culture, Ecology, and Politics in Gabon's Rainforest* (Lampeter, UK: Edwin Mellen Press, 2003) 324f. Direct control is not required for powerful nations to get what they want. Rather, "Neocolonialism 'allows' de facto control of a territory over which de jure legitimacy has been lost. It is clearly a neo-colonial model that the French applied to retain their various possessions without losing the economic benefits of the colonial relationship" (Barnes 322). Worse, in 1994, 41% of Gabon's public sector budget was being set aside for foreign debt servicing, and the World Bank and IMF continue to urge Gabon to restructure their economy—see WWF International, "Resource Use in Gabon: Sustainability or Biotic Impoverishment?" in *Culture, Ecology, and Politics in Gabon's Rainforest* (Lampeter, UK: Edwin Mellen Press, 2003) 27. This is all performed even though Gabon has no crises of overpopulation nor does it have explosive birth rates (WWF International 10). Investment in human development such as literacy and education programs is low, and Gabon ranks at the bottom of the Human Development Index (which measures citizen wellbeing in terms of quality of life) for the 174 countries surveyed in 1999 by the UN Development Program (WWF International 23). This is because "Gabon, like many other developing countries, borrows heavily to finance economic growth and is now deeply in debt, with limited means to meet its obligations to private and government lenders. The result has been an increase in natural resource exploitation and export to finance debt repayment" (WWF International 34). Gabon is now being pressured to open up its export markets for its old-growth forests, oil and mineral extraction even further.

community is a 'value' not easily measured by economists simply looking at new-found purchasing power of this new labour force.

The modern social experiment that gave birth to the self-regulating market was seen as a way to transform evil humanity into a socially virtuous society through a direct appeal to what were then seen as the Laws of God and Nature—a project now extended internationally through globalization. Maximos Confessor stands in opposition to the implicit social Darwinism of the modern market economy, a system where the greediest victors are free to exclusively enjoy the spoils of their conquests while the losers are left to starve and die—and sometimes literally as they once did in Adam Smith's day. Most thankfully, human population is not 'managed' as viciously as it was then, yet there is undeniably still something of that perverse mentality in the rationale used to justify that little extra Benzene in the public drinking water supply. The privileged classes, after all, can afford expensive home water treatment systems.

This may seem a petty example. But it is indicative of the utilitarian calculus that occurs around the world, including at the United Nations (UN). In 2002, legal experts at the UN identified access to clean drinking water as a Human Right under *existing* international covenants (General Comment 15—The Right to Water).⁵⁶ However, this decision has been met with strong opposition by the member states. By recognizing water as a Human Right under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, disenfranchised local and indigenous people would be empowered legally to resist the destruction of their communities

caused by globalization. The Covenant, which entered into force in January 1976, identifies the family as the fundamental group unit of society (Article 10), not higher levels of abstraction such as the nation itself (which obscures the impacts to individual families).⁵⁷ Member states would rather see water as a 'basic need' that can be supplied by large-scale economic development projects through international actors such as the World Bank.⁵⁸ By opposing the identification of water as an extension of cultural Human Rights, government bureaucracies and international actors are empowered to politically marginalize those who will be displaced and have their subsistence livelihoods destroyed by capital-intensive projects like new hydroelectric dams benefiting industry and the World Bank creditors.

Here it must be recalled that the concept of Human Rights came up after the horrors of World War II when nation-states ignored their responsibilities to individual human beings (and indeed entire populations of people) in favour of what seemed to them as 'the good of the nation' as a whole. Human Rights were meant as a check to government power. Yet today an insidious economic utilitarianism has undermined the memory of the immoral decisions made by nations in the past, and now international actors are seeking to exploit natural resources such as water under the banner of philanthropy and the utilitarian mantra of the greatest good for the greatest number. Whether it is about the

⁵⁶ See Salman M.A. Salman and Siobhan McInerney-Lankford, *The Human Right to Water: Legal and Policy Dimensions* (Washington, DC: The World Bank, 2004).

⁵⁷ Sneddon and Fox discuss how impacts to local persons become obscured when compared to geo-political institutions and vague abstractions such as the World Bank and "the good of the nation". See Chris Sneddon and Coleen Fox, "Rethinking Transboundary Waters: A Critical Hydropolitics of the Mekong Basin" *Political Geography* 25 (2006) 181-200.

⁵⁸ See Asit K. Biswas, "Water as a Human Right in the MENA Region: Challenges and Opportunities," *Water Resource Development* 23/2 (2007): 209-225.

acceptable risk of drinking water quality that measures human health against economic costs, the rights of traditional societies to resist destruction of their culture under globalization, and every type of economic decision in between these scales of consideration, moneyed interests are being measured against real harm to individuals. Such a focus is inherently dangerous since the abstraction ‘the greater good’ is a matter of perspective while individual human beings and families are not. This ideological trope all too often becomes a means for the politically powerful to victimize the unaware or disenfranchised.⁵⁹

Economic Reforms in Western Society

In his analysis of the works of Karl Polanyi, Gregory Baum focuses on the damage done to the ethical conscience of people in Western society. An inner conflict now festers within people over the economic realities that they suspect in their hearts to be morally wrong:

A part of us ... contributes to the cause of the injustices committed by society, while another part of us, separated from the first and possibly unaware of it, is [also] the effect of these unjust conditions. These two parts stand against each other, they divide the soul, they cannot be synthesized, they produce internal division and ethical dilemma. The social conditions in which we live make us colonizer and colonized at the same time. Few ethicists have recognized the human condition thus.⁶⁰

John Stuart Mill had a vision of a society in which the greatest good was achieved

for the greatest number of people—a vision that fit perfectly with the emergent social realities of a society organized by the Free Hand of the self-regulating market. The popularity of utilitarianism was undoubtedly due in part to a confirmation bias in which Mill’s view on the distribution of divine plenitude matched and affirmed economic realities that were advantageous to the privileged classes, providing them with psychological assurance that their material ‘blessings’ over and against their fellows was indeed proper. This helped quiet the inner conflict described by Baum and Polanyi. People could imagine, or at least hope, that in the long run what was happening somehow accorded with God’s divine plan for society. They could tell themselves that all this unpleasantness was simply the Laws of God and Nature working their way through society for the common good.

These observations are not to unduly scapegoat Mill,⁶¹ or to slander his ethics

⁶¹ Mill is perhaps best described as a pessimist regarding the present state of his fellow human beings. “In the comparative early state of human advancement in which we now live, a person cannot, indeed, feel that entireness of sympathy with all others [as required for true utilitarian morality, rather] ... this feeling [of compassionate sympathy] in most individuals is much inferior in strength to their selfish feelings, and is often wanting altogether” (Mill, *Utilitarianism*, 33). This becomes the basis for why his system of ethics has as its first principle personal happiness since this selfish inclination is universally present in all individuals (Mill, *Utilitarianism*, 30). Yet Mill saw this as a starting point only, a means to advance society to a time when true compassionate unity was possible. “If we now suppose this feeling of unity [is] to be taught as a religion, and the whole force of education, of institutions, and of opinions directed, as it once was in the case of religion, to make every person grow up from infancy surrounded by the profession and the practice of it, I feel that no one who can realize this conception will feel any misgivings about the sufficiency of the ultimate sanction for the happiness morality” (Mill, *Utilitarianism*, 32). This has in fact happened, but the result has not been to produce a unified and compassionate society. Mill’s thought experiment has instead been realized in today’s consumerist society with its educational institutions aimed at producing a world-class labour force to further the advance of market

⁵⁹ For further discussion, see Sneddon and Fox, “Rethinking Transboundary Waters: A Critical Hydropolitics of the Mekong Basin,” particularly the discussion between World Bank executive directors and local villagers facing forced displacement on page 195.

⁶⁰ Baum, *Karl Polanyi on Ethics and Economics*, 28.

with allegations of ulterior motives. Mill actually advocated such progressive ideas as an inheritance tax and other distributive mechanisms to ensure that even the lower classes of labourers could enjoy the affluence of society; he even warned of the dangers of an ever-growing economy destroying every last inch of wild nature for agriculture.⁶² Rather, his philosophy became joined in an unnatural marriage when it was married to Adam Smith's Free Hand of the market through the bond of the marginal utility dynamic. Mill's philosophy was thereby stripped of its greater hopes and aspirations for society. It became merely a justification supporting the economic calculations behind the self-regulating market. What remained of his utilitarianism was only its ethical first principle of pleasure, an individualistic libertarian absolute, and a distorted worldview regarding the presumed Laws of Nature and God. This stripped-down utilitarianism would find a perfect home in a strange, unfamiliar industrializing world of upsetting social realities—it became a valuable ethical tool to, at least, try to achieve the greatest amount of good for the greatest number of these people, if not real justice for all.

This distorted ethical vision and primitive naturalism from 19th Century England continues to be the prevailing social reality influencing ethical conscience today. Even theology has been corrupted such that 'Biblical Capitalism' is gaining credence. John Schneider, for example, on one hand acknowledges that "the entire weight of historic Christian tradition seems to be against the integration of faith with the habits of

acquisition and enjoyment," but then argues that "we must have a distinctly Christian way to affirm the economic habits of acquisition and enjoyment of affluence as they necessarily exist within the culture of modern capitalism."⁶³ Such views, indeed, go against the very heart of Christian tradition. Even John Calvin, who some mistakenly think would vouchsafe Biblical Capitalism, echoes the very same communitarian mandate put forth by Maximus Confessor:

[God] could very well give each person plenty so that no-one would need help from anyone else, but He wants to test the love and fraternity we have together when we thus communicate with each other as He commands us to do: that is, that the rich should not be like wild beasts to eat and gobble up the poor and suck their blood and their substance—but should rather help them and look upon them with fairness, and not in order to say, "Oh! This is what I owe him; I gave him work and I paid him properly." But they should know that they owe every help to those who are needy and in want, each indeed according to their means. For otherwise that are like murderers if they see their neighbours wasting away and yet do not open their hands to help them. In this, I tell you, they are certainly like murderers.⁶⁴

So how does these historical and religious insights on the laws of God and nature mean for reforming market societies today? While it is rather straight forward to recommend a 'do no harm' principle in preserving the social integrity of traditional societies in the face of globalization, Western society has been

society, and with commercial advertising and popular culture directed to promoting mere consumption as a means to happiness. For further discussion on this subject, see David Orr, *Earth in Mind—On Education, Environment, and the Human Prospect* (Washington: Island Press, 2004) 1-40.

⁶² John Stuart Mill, *Principles of Political Economy* (New York: Routledge, 1982) 497.

⁶³ John R. Schneider, *The Good of Affluence: Seeking God in a Culture of Wealth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002) 26.

⁶⁴ Biéler, *Calvin's Economic and Social Thought*, 299 (Sermon XLIV on the Harmony of the Gospels; cf. Mathew 3:9f.).

wholly organized by market forces—and for nearly two centuries now. The pathway to re-embedding the economy to serve Western society is less clear. Karl Polanyi said the market needed to be reformed by getting rid of the fictitious commodities of land and labour from market forces, meaning that he wanted to restore self-determining power to human institutions for considering these vital cornerstones for human wellbeing. But Polanyi could not give concrete recommendations since such institutions had not yet been invented. He could only identify the example of worker co-ops established by Robert Owen (1771-1858). The Owenite Villages of Cooperation were business ventures centered around the social life of the entire community, and they made a profit too.⁶⁵ But besides this communitarian business model, Polanyi could only point to the power of worker unions to wrest wages from market forces—a project that was and continues to be vehemently resisted by market fundamentalists. The power of worker unions has also been compromised and greatly complicated by globalization and the existence of multi-national corporations.⁶⁶

I will have to leave the specific recommendations for reforming the market to those economists that specialize in social justice through progressive taxation, distributive justice, and social reforms at the legislative level. Equally important will be the work of religious thinkers in challenging the theological and societal preconceptions that now bias ethical discourse, hindering the work of these progressive economists. I have sought here in this essay to establish a

theological foundation for beginning this important work.

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⁶⁵ Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, 133-135, 178-180.

⁶⁶ For further discussion, see Ronaldo Munck, "Globalization and Democracy: A New Great Transformation?" *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences* 581, (2002) 10-21.

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Awa Dembele-Yeno is a translator with a great passion for photography or a photographer with a great passion for translation, she does not yet know how to define herself. Is it compulsory to define oneself anyway?