Blog on Capitalism
Exploring the nature of Capitalism

How Born Again Christians rescued capitalism, launched an industrial revolution, and set the moral tone of The West

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> …they have divided their nations into two classes, wolves and sheep. I do not exaggerate. This is a true picture of Europe. …man is the only animal which devours his own kind; for I can apply no milder term to the governments of Europe, and to the general prey of the rich on the poor. (Thomas Jefferson, 1787) [1]

The 18th century saw the crystallisation of what, in later centuries, would be considered 'modern' forms of understanding and action [2]. This was the century of 'the enlightenment':

- the time when western European educated and wealthy 'middle sorts' became increasingly convinced of the *material* nature of life in this world;
- the time when they began to live life by truly 'rational' principles as independent, autonomous, self-interested individuals whose activities would inexorably produce both individual and social well-being;
- the time when they took increasing responsibility for mastering and

profitably 'using' the natural world;

- the time when most of the remaining rural labourers and small farmers were dispossessed of their livelihoods and robbed of their access to land;
- the time when the activities of Protestant evangelists, coupled with the catastrophic failure of small businesses and impoverishment of trades people (the 'little gentry'), dependent on the patronage of the 'poor', kick-started capitalism into an industrial revolution;
- and the time when the 'middle sorts' finally took full responsibility for re-educating the 'indolent poor' [3].

This was the century in Western European history when the turmoil of previous centuries had distilled into a new version of 'objective reality' for those who held the reins of power. It was the century in which they would take responsibility for transforming the rest of the world to live by the reality they now lived in - starting with their own, home grown 'savages'. It was also the century in which the justification for natural laws shifted from divine decree to the innate characteristics of environments in a self-existent natural world [4].

In social thought, independent, autonomous individuals became the 'atoms' of human interaction and society. As Louis Dumont (1965, pp. 30) put it, "the hierarchical Christian Commonwealth was atomised at two levels: it was replaced by a number of individual states, themselves made up of individual men". The material realm, also, would be found to be comprised of independent 'atoms' - the building blocks of a new reality resulting from the new understanding of the world. And a new 'environment' would be conceived, to contain and explain the newly apprehended natural laws found to be driving human ambition and the wealth of nations.

In Search of the 'Greatest Good' - The *Summum Bonum*

All the presumptions of the past concerning the nature and purpose of natural laws remained intact. It seemed absurd to question the *summum bonum* consequences of employing them in furthering human control of the material world [5]. By conforming to and employing the principles being uncovered in daily life, human beings could look forward to living in the best of all possible worlds. As Immanuel Kant was to explain at the end of the century,

> The realization of the *summum bonum* in the world is the necessary object of a will determinable by the moral law. But in this will the perfect accordance of the mind with the moral law is the supreme condition of the *summum bonum*.
> (1788 Bk 2, Ch. 2, pt. 4)

For increasing numbers of the 'middle sorts' in the 18th century, individuals were self-existent, self-developing beings. The presumption of previous centuries, that "the state is by nature clearly prior to the family and to the individual, since the whole is of necessity prior to the part" (Aristotle, *Politics*

Bk 1, Part 2) [6] now seemed under attack.

To the intellectual protagonists of the century, the controversy between atomism and holism was a real one, perceived as a confrontation between materialism and spirituality, between atheism and godliness. It was, however, the logical outcome of Aquinas's model in an age when life within this world became the dominant focus, with religion secondary in importance to material prosperity for those who held the reins of power.

Now, one did not start from a presumption of perfect wholes and distil the laws which enabled them and determined the nature of their parts. One started with the 'atoms' from which the wholes were extrapolated, determined the innate characteristics of those atoms, and then extrapolated from that information to ways in which they could best be 'developed' and combined to yield their *potential* [7].

For those 'on the side of God', human beings reaped the rewards of their morality. And that morality was summed up in obedience to the 'will of God' spelt out in the natural laws he had established to ensure the perfection of the natural world. For those 'on the side of nature', human beings pursued their own 'natural' interests, and reaped the rewards of successfully doing so, since conformity to the 'real' nature of human beings must necessarily result in the *summum bonum*. It is this implicit presumption of collective good being a necessary outcome of individual self-interest [8] which is the inconsistent heart of utilitarian philosophies of the period and of the gamut of utilitarian and economic models which have flowed from them.

Bernard Mandeville's acerbic verse on the ways in which the private vices of the bees of a hive produced prosperity for the whole, set the scene for confrontation between the two perspectives,

> … every Part was full of Vice,
> Yet the whole Mass a Paradice;
> Flatter'd in Peace, and fear'd in Wars
> They were th'Esteem of Foreigners,
> And lavish of their Wealth and Lives,
> The Ballance of all other Hives.
> Such were the Blessings of that State;
> Their Crimes conspired to make 'em Great;
> And Vertue, who from Politicks
> Had learn'd a Thousand cunning Tricks,
> Was, by their happy Influence,
> Made Friends with Vice: And ever since
> The worst of all the Multitude
> Did something for the common Good.
> (1705, lines 155-168)

By the 1720s Mandeville's verses, together with a range of similar writings, were provoking a storm of protest from those who knew that the material gains of prudence and industry came not from self-interested greed but from correct

application of and adherence to the laws of God which underwrote the natural world. It seemed that the very basis for morality was being undermined. If Mandeville's assertions were right, then morality was a chain about the neck of society, and immorality was virtue well disguised. The fundamental principles underpinning the natural rights of human beings seemed to be under challenge as these thinkers pointed to greed and self-interest as the fundamental motivational factors leading to material success and the consequent *summum bonum*.

The search for natural laws, and determination to live by them, had been a preoccupation of western Europeans over several centuries. That search focused on phenomena which were identified as belonging within recognised 'environments' of the natural world. Sets of natural laws were derived from and legitimate within the domains within which they had been distilled.

By the 18th century, there were a number of fundamental presumptions which 'responsible' western Europeans employed in 'making sense' of their world [9]:

- *order* was built into the 'structure' of the universe;
- the material and sensible world was separate from and independent of the supernatural, governed by its own ordering principles;
- human beings were separate from, and should control and 'develop' their material environments which, when developed, would yield their 'potential';
- entities within any environment could be separated into their constituents which could then be recombined in a range of ways, limited only by human ingenuity and the laws governing form and process in each environment.
- the principles upon which 'natural order' rested were not only explicable and immutable, but also, in their correct utilisation, would inexorably produce social and individual well-being, even if, in the short term, this did not appear to be the case.
- there could be 'no gain without pain'. Not only did the responsible people of western Europe believe in the existence, and positive consequences of employing natural laws, they also firmly believed that short term hardship is usually necessary in order to secure long term well being [10].

The Economy: a new 'Environment'

By the 18th century, a number of distinct environments had been identified in the non-human material realm [11]. However, in the realm of human existence in the natural world, no distinct environments had been identified. All human activity was considered contained within the 'social' domain, interconnected and subject to the same set of 'moral' laws.

At the start of the 18th century, the money-makers moved to centre stage. Their behaviours became accepted as important to the well-being of all members of society and the nature of their activities became the focus of serious deliberation. Mandeville's observations might have been delivered with sardonic humour, but he meant what he said.

Natural laws were not merely important in explaining the operation of the natural world, they also justified what they explained. They provided legitimate, indeed, necessary means for successfully manipulating (for the common good) those areas of the natural world which western Europeans recognised as having objective existence. Now, however, it seemed as though the area of natural law which applied to human behaviour was flawed. How could it be that the self-interested 'unsocial' behaviour of those engaged in trade could lead to commercial success?

Attempts to explain this, were to produce recognition of the first social 'environment', anticipated in the 17th, but formally outlined in the 18th century - *The Economy*. Since its 'discovery', this new environment, through the laws and associated structures formulated and reformulated within it, has increasingly dominated and controlled life in Western European communities.

In the first half of the 18th century, the money-makers of Europe were in relatively secure political control. Their activities were accepted as fundamental to social and individual wellbeing by those who now dominated political life in Britain and Western Europe. However, it became increasingly obvious that there were certain fundamental human behaviours which seemed to underwrite economic success, which were not in harmony with the moral laws which western European jurists had identified and spelt out in the 17th century [12]. These behaviours had not been incorporated within the moral law structures developed in the 17th century and seemed, once they were identified, to challenge and often invalidate them. As Harold Cook explains, Mandeville's critics,

> correctly detected a view of reason that made it largely into a device for calculating ends rather than for developing inner moral wisdom. The essay began with a meditation on whether people really did act out of charity, defined as "that sincere Love we have for our selves ... transferr'd pure and unmix'd to others, not tied to us by Bonds of Friendship or Consanguinity." Acts on behalf of friends and family, or to gain honor and public respect, were not counted as truly charitable by this definition. Nor were any actions arising from the passions of pity or compassion, which make us feel better when we indulge them. "Pride and Vanity have built more Hospitals than all the Virtues together," Mandeville declared, referring sarcastically to the recent munificent gifts in the will of Dr. John Radcliffe. Mandeville went on to declare that "Charity, where it is too extensive, seldom fails of promoting Sloth and Idleness, and is good for little in the Commonwealth but to breed Drones and destroy Industry." He urged that while the helpless needed relief, most seeking charity should be put to work.

(1999, p. 104)

For the next fifty years controversy was to rage in gentry circles as to whether the recognised virtues of a social conscience *did* undermine sound economic management and promote sloth, or whether the apparent logic of Mandeville's assertions was nothing more than well phrased sophistry.

For those who believed that the moral virtues were primary and that life should conform to them, it was necessary to actively address the social problems of the age through education and a variety of forms of welfare. For those who saw the virtues of the age as undermining sound economic management, well-meaning people simply compounded the difficulties they sought to ameliorate. This was to be a theme which grew louder as the century passed, producing a range of policies aimed at ensuring that the gentry were freed to disciplined self-interest. [13]

In the intellectual climate of the 18th century, it is scarcely surprising that someone should finally conclude that such behaviour related to a particular realm of social life, an environment with its own internal logic and operational principles or laws. The necessary behaviours which underpinned success in this environment really did seem to conflict with the recognised moral virtues which applied to the rest of life.

Of course, if an environment was discovered, it would be found to be governed by its own set of natural laws, essential to successful endeavour in that environment, but illegitimate in other environmental contexts. Behaviours and attitudes which seemed to threaten the moral values of social and spiritual life, could be contained, insulated within the bounds of this new environment.

Appropriately, the nature of this new environment was to be distilled and explained by someone who had trained for the Anglican clergy and could be considered a morally responsible gentleman. As Adam Smith (1723-1790) explained, in a hugely popular text entitled *An Inquiry Into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776), the apparent contradiction between moral virtue and the requirements of successful economic activity, could be traced to a failure to recognise that all *economic* activity conformed to sets of principles which were appropriate to *economic* behaviour. There was a confusion of environments implicit in the observed contradiction.

Just as all other environments in the world were governed by natural laws which determined their characteristics, so was 'the economy' governed by a set of natural laws. These laws determined not only its characteristics, but also the kinds of behaviour appropriate for individuals and groups *when engaged in economic activity*. So, behaviour which was highly appropriate in economic activity could still be regarded as entirely inappropriate in other spheres of life. On the other hand, to apply those values which related to non-economic activity within an economic setting would produce economic malaise.

'The economy' was a self-existent, self-sustaining environment, with its own peculiar characteristics and principles of organization and behaviour. And, of course, if natural laws were found within this newly described environment,

human beings had a moral responsibility to live by them. [14]

The movement of the money-makers of western Europe from the demonised periphery of the 10th and 11th century medieval world [15] to the sanctified centre of the new modern world was complete. They not only could be considered moral by association with religious reformers, now they were moral because of the very behaviours and attitudes in which they engaged in making money.

Indeed, a new kind of immorality was to emerge, that demonstrated by people who, when engaging in economic activity, did not conform to the necessary behaviours and attitudes and so jeopardised not only their own activity, but the activity of all those with whom they associated. What Kant was to assert concerning moral law could be asserted with equal certainty of economic law, 'the perfect accordance of the mind with the [economic] law is the supreme condition of the *summum bonum*.' As Adam Smith explained, considering the activities of merchants,

> … he intends only his own gain, and he is in this, … led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention. Nor is it always the worse for the society that it was no part of it. By pursuing his own interest he frequently promotes that of the society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it. I have never known much good done by those who affected to trade for the public good. It is an affectation, indeed, not very common among merchants, and very few words need be employed in dissuading them from it. (1776, Book 4 Ch. 2)

Here was a solution which rescued moral virtue, while establishing the appropriateness, indeed, the *necessity* of self-interested behaviour in economic activity. And, in keeping with the times, Smith claimed to have distilled the laws of economics through an examination of the actual economic behaviour of people [16]. In doing so he seemed to satisfy both sides of the controversy. He had distilled his laws from the 'real' world, but he had, at the same time, rescued moral virtue from the materialist assault. Both camps could accept the laws he presented without seeming to betray their own positions [17].

The capitalist could, quite reasonably, be a self-interested individual intent on his own gain on Friday and a public spirited philanthropist on Sunday (or even at the same time in different contexts!) and remain a truly moral, consistent person throughout.

Inevitably, Adam Smith became the 'father of economics', the person who first spelt out the natural laws which underwrote economic organization and activity. At the same time, his writing reaffirmed, for Western European 'responsible' people, the correctness of both their understandings of the world and their preoccupation with economic activity.

Of course, when one distils the fundamental attributes of human beings from the current behaviours of oneself and one's compatriots, inevitably, those behaviours which stem from the primary ideological presumptions of one's own

community become accepted as the fundamental attributes of all people. Adam Smith did for economics what Pound (in Grotius 1957, p. xiv) claimed Grotius did for the "natural rights" of human beings [18]. Just as the common law rights of the English became the natural rights of all people in the 17th century, so the economic predilections of 18th century British gentry became the instinctive behaviours and economic motivations of human beings [19].

From that time to the present, western Europeans, whether in their homelands or in their colonised worlds, have assiduously applied themselves to refining and expanding the natural laws which underwrite economic activity and organization. And the task is not yet, and, of course, never will be, complete. As we've already seen, the primary ideological presumptions upon which human understanding is founded are in long-term flux through dialectical interaction with the environments which human beings define and within which they live.

Over the last two hundred years western Europeans have attempted to reach a consistent and coherent explanation of the positive consequences of the exercise of both economic self-interest and moral virtue. Could it be that the apparently contradictory requirements of economic and moral law might, in some less than obvious way, or at some 'deeper' level of congruence, work together for good? Might human beings achieve much more in life through holding the requirements of moral and economic law in tension? If this could be shown then, indeed, economic activity would receive its final validation [20].

It was, perhaps, inevitable, that it would be the foremost Western European philosophical thinker of the late 18th century who would first convincingly draw the threads together. Just as John Locke's philosophical validation and justification of modern primary ideological presumptions had established the early credentials of modern business [21], Immanuel Kant, a century later, would explain why the apparently contradictory sets of economic and moral laws were *both* essential in reaching toward the *summum bonum*. There is an innate antagonism between opposed human capacities which is mediated in human nature. Through a dialectical tension, or 'antagonism', between self-interest and sociability, all the finest qualities of human society and achievement are generated.

> By antagonism, I here mean the unsocial sociability of mankind – that is, the combination in them of an impulse to enter into society, with a thorough spirit of opposition which constantly threatens to break up this society. The ground of this lies in human nature. Man has an inclination to enter into society, because in that state he feels that he becomes more a man, or, in other words, that his natural faculties develop. But he has also a great tendency to isolate himself, because he is, at the same time, aware of the unsocial peculiarity of desiring to have everything his own way; and thus, being conscious of an inclination to oppose others, he is naturally led to expect opposition from them… All the culture and art which adorn humanity, the most refined social order, are produced by that unsociability which is compelled by its own

> existence to discipline itself, and so by enforced art to bring the seeds implanted by Nature into full flower.
> (Kant 1784 p. 147)

Human beings are 'compelled' by their unsociability to *discipline* themselves and from that discipline flow the enhancements and benefits of 'all the culture and art which adorn humanity' [22]. The corollary, of course, is that lack of self-discipline threatens the 'refined social order'. Human beings who wished 'to bring the seeds implanted by Nature into full flower' had a responsibility not only to be self-disciplined, but also to discipline those who seemed unable or unwilling to discipline themselves. Stifle that urge to unsociability, and one stifles human progress. At the heart of human progress lies disciplined independent individualism. The manure of competitive self-interest grows beautiful flowers! [23]

By the middle of the 19th century Kant's explanation had grown into a belief [24] in the innate propensity of human beings, allowed to indulge in unfettered self-interest and self-promotion, to produce the common good. The moral virtues of an earlier age were to be displaced, for many western Europeans, by a belief that all things work together for good, provided self-disciplined individuals are freed to pursue their own self-interested ends. Life was to be considered an evolutionary adaptation of individuals to their environments. Provided it was not distorted and choked by government regulation and direction, this would result in the best possible adaptation of not only individuals but of human societies to their environments [25].

The Need to separate Government and Commerce

Increasingly, as the 19th century unfolded, it was to be argued that social and political controls, regulations, and 'interference' in individual lives produced only social ill. The only role for government was that of ensuring that no-one and nothing interfered with the right of each self-disciplined individual to pursue his or her own self-interest uninhibited by social and political rules and regulations. The role of government would become seen as that of a 'watchdog' of private liberty and a stern school-master to those who threatened disciplined self-interest.

For those who took the new doctrine to extreme, and there were many very influential people in this camp by the latter half of the 19th century, governments should not get involved in trying to 'improve' society. Such attempts were doomed to long-term failure. The role of the state was the *protection* of those who, through their disciplined self-interest, had acquired the wealth which was its sure reward [26]. The 'free market' would sort out everything else! Thomas Huxley (1871) described the position of those who opposed legislative attempts at improving the lot of the poor in the second-half of the 19th century,

> … the Education Act is only one of a number of pieces of legislation to which they object on principle; and they include under like condemnation the Vaccination Act, the Contagious Diseases Act, and all other sanitary Acts; all attempts on the part of the State to prevent

> adulteration, or to regulate injurious trades; all legislative interference with anything that bears directly or indirectly on commerce, such as shipping, harbours, railways, roads, cab-fares, and the carriage of letters; and all attempts to promote the spread of knowledge by the establishment of teaching bodies, examining bodies, libraries, or museums, or by the sending out of scientific expeditions; all endeavours to advance art by the establishment of schools of design, or picture galleries; or by spending money upon an architectural public building when a brick box would answer the purpose.
> According to their views, not a shilling of public money must be bestowed upon a public park or pleasure ground; not sixpence upon the relief of starvation, or the cure of disease. Those who hold these views support them by two lines of argument. They enforce them deductively by arguing from an assumed axiom, that the State has no right to do anything but protect its subjects from aggression. …[and] these views are supported *a posteriori,* by an induction from observation, which professes to show that whatever is done by a Government beyond these negative limits, is not only sure to be done badly, but to be done much worse than private enterprise would have done the same thing. (1893, p. 258-9) [27]

In order to understand how these views could become so dominant one needs to understand the social and political tensions of the preceding century. The 18th century saw the flowering of the assertion of near-absolute property rights and the private aggregation of wealth, which had matured in the previous century. Self-interested pursuit of wealth and accumulation of property had become socially approved.

Over the next 150 years, the gentry pursued their own interests at the expense of all those who lacked the political or economic power to resist them. They dispossessed most of the smallholders of Britain and completed the alienation of the commons [28] from those who had for centuries relied on access to it for survival. In the process, millions lost access to rural resources and were forced into relying on parish welfare support [29]. Then, because the burden became too great for the parishes to sustain in the long-term, they were compelled to move to the emerging industrial towns of Britain. As the process compounded the problems of the poor, many were compelled to move to the 'New Found' lands which were rapidly becoming a destination for people who felt or found themselves disenfranchised by developments in the 'Home Country' [30].

By the start of the 18th century, Britain, with most of the rest of western Europe to one extent or another, had in place all the necessary primary ideological understandings, motivations and organisational processes and practices which would produce both the discipline of economics and the 'industrial revolution'. What it lacked, was a deep religious commitment to capitalism.

The 'middle sorts' now thought and organised life as capitalists. However, their earthly-minded materialism, self-satisfied complacency and self-interested stripping of the livelihoods and entitlements from more than half the

population could very easily have produced not an industrial revolution but a 'revolution of the proletariat'. Without the continued religious dedication and commitment to 17th century morality of a small minority of the gentry, the self-interested greed of the 'middle sorts' in the early 18th century might well have reduced capitalism to a footnote in European history.

A Deeply Religious Capitalist Revival

But for the peculiar consequences of the dispossession of small landholders and the consequent undermining of small business through much of Britain, capitalism might well have faltered in the 18th century, another 'blind alley' of history [31]. Those who held the purse-strings of Britain, in their self-interested drive to accumulate property and wealth, not only dispossessed 'the poor', they threatened the livelihoods and wellbeing of less affluent members of the middle ranks. Less wealthy households and individuals, who held to the same understandings and were motivated by much the same impulses as the financiers, stock-holders and large property owners, were being threatened by their activities with both social ruin and material destitution. [32]

These 'little-gentry' found themselves victims of policies and practices geared to enhancing the wealth and increasing the property of those with political clout. And, as they either lost their livelihoods or became fearfully aware of the possibility of becoming destitute, they found themselves being treated as though they were members of those 'lower ranks' who 'ought' to be subjected to the disciplines of the century.

It would be easy to see battle lines drawn in 18th century Western Europe between the reforming 'middle ranks' and the oppressed 'lower ranks' of the century. But this would be a distortion of reality. Those consigned to the lower ranks of society had lived through the same centuries as the middle rank reformers. The growing influence and authority of the money makers of western Europe had not left them untouched.

While the broad rankings of society included the aristocracy, gentry and 'the poor', there were, between each ranking, large numbers of people who did not quite fit the stereotypes of the age. There were aristocracy who more properly seemed to be middle ranking in their behaviour and in their fortunes, and middle ranking people who moved easily in the ranks of the nobility. There were middle ranking people who, in their behaviour and fortunes could easily be ranked with the poor, and people who might be considered peasants or yeomen but who moved easily in the ranks of the gentry. In particular, there was a substantial grouping which comprised small landholders, artisans, tradespeople and other small business people who certainly considered themselves separate from 'the poor', and, in their own minds, were ranked as 'almost gentry'.

The 'almost gentry' and those who identified with them as employees and neighbours - in England, who had fought with the forces of Oliver Cromwell - very often held the opinions of the gentry toward the 'idle poor' as strongly, or more strongly than those whose lifestyles seldom brought them into direct

contact with such people. They had long ceased to consider themselves members of 'the poor'. They were, in their own minds, closely allied with the gentry and, through their networks of associates and friends this perception was continuously reinforced.

As is all-too-often true in such situations, those who subconsciously sensed that they could easily be lumped together with people they considered hierarchically inferior to themselves, strongly emphasised the differences, emphasising the negative stereotypes of those from whom they wished to be separated [33].

The 'little gentry' of the 18th century were strong in their denunciations of people who seemed to expect the parish to support them. Why should the parishes, and therefore, people who provided the parishes with their income, support the lazy poor who were, in growing numbers, relying on parish support for their subsistence?

Paradoxically, as these people found their own livelihoods under threat they more strongly resented the costs of supporting the indigent. They were not presuming that some day they also might need parish help – the spectre of being forced into the ranks of the poor was, for these people, one they could scarcely contemplate. Rather, their own difficulties were best addressed through minimising the demands of the parish on their own incomes.

As the reformers set about rationalising landownership and use, these people found themselves caught up in the consequences of the policies. Rural labourers and smallholders were dispossessed and driven from the land and the infrastructural supports sustained by them collapsed. As is true in the present in countries all around the world, as rural communities disintegrated, both those directly affected by the reformist policies of the century and all those who depended on them for their subsistence, found their livelihoods collapsing and found themselves no longer able to subsist in the countryside. As they lost their means of livelihood they found themselves defined with the poor by the authorities, rather than recognised as members of a disenfranchised 'lower middle' ranking in society. As Toynbee (1884) described,

> at the conclusion of the seventeenth century it was estimated by Gregory King that there were 180,000 freeholders in England,… less than a hundred years later, the pamphleteers of the time, and even careful writers like Arthur Young, speak of the small freeholders as practically gone… 'The able and substantial freeholders,' described by Whitelock, 'the freeholders and freeholders' sons, well armed within with the satisfaction of their own good consciences, and without by iron arms, who stood firmly and charged desperately,' - this devoted class, who had broken the power of the king and the squires in the Civil Wars, were themselves, within a hundred years from that time, being broken, dispersed, and driven off the land.

The 18th century was a century of wealth and well-being for the middle and upper ranks of society but, as Toynbee (1884) says, in the midst of all the

wealth and prosperity which began in the 18th century, there were vast numbers of destitute people. The later 18th and 19th centuries were to demonstrate that unfettered competitive self-interest does not necessarily produce the *summum bonum*. As Toynbee described:

> The misery which came upon large sections of the working people at this epoch was often, though not always, due to a fall in wages, for, as I said above, in some industries they rose. But they suffered likewise from the conditions of labour under the factory system, from the rise of prices, especially from the high price of bread before the repeal of the corn-laws, and from those sudden fluctuations of trade, which, ever since production has been on a large scale, have exposed them to recurrent periods of bitter distress. The effects of the industrial Revolution prove that free competition may produce wealth without producing well-being. We all know the horrors that ensued in England before it was restrained by legislation and combination [34].

Wendeborn, a German living in England during the second half of the 18th century described what he saw,

> In no other country are more poor to be seen than in England, and in no city a greater number of beggars than in London. A foreigner who hears of many millions annually raised for the benefit of the poor… will find himself unable to explain how it happens, that in his walk he is, almost every hundred yards, disturbed by the lamentations of unfortunate persons who demand his charity. (quoted in Simon 1908 p.60)

As the 18th century unfolded, those people in the lower-middle ranks of British communities [35] looked for support and help from those whom they had long considered their superiors and community leaders. All-too-often, they found not only no support, but an active rejection of them and the difficulties they faced. They seemed to have been condemned by those they sought to emulate to a life of fear and possible destitution.

These 'almost poor', 'almost middle ranking' people knew that their only hope of avoiding the destitution which was all around them lay in being accepted, and so being supported by the middle ranks who seemed to be escaping the worst consequences of the reforms of the era. They both deeply wanted to be accepted by them and, at the same time, felt a deep need to be identified as *not* belonging to the pernicious ranks of the slothful. They were not vagabonds and wastrels. They took life seriously and wanted nothing more than to be recognised as morally upright, desirous of owning and conserving property and willing to engage in work to that end. They had already adopted, or were more than willing, if they could find employment, to adopt "those habits of industry, which always tend to steadiness and sobriety of conduct, and to consequent material wealth and prosperity" (Codere 1950, p. 24).

They found the means of achieving both of these heartfelt longings in the religious revivals which swept Britain and the American colonies (soon to become the United States) through the 18th and on into the 19th century. The

religious revivals were to provide a means for lower-middle ranking people to demonstrate and reaffirm their respectability.

Nothing reduces human beings to greater despair and distress than threat of the imminent loss of not only the means of livelihood but of self-esteem and status. The lower middle ranks of the 18th century found themselves facing possible destitution and treatment as though they belonged with those who, as Joseph Townsend (1786) described them later in the century, had

> by their improvidence, by their prodigality… drunkenness and vices, … dissipated all their substance… by their debaucheries… ruined their constitutions, and reduced themselves to such a deplorable condition that they have neither inclination nor ability to work.

There seemed no way out, no way in which they could reassert their status and respectability and demonstrate their commitment to industry and to all the associated 'middle sort' moral virtues of the century.

Then, seemingly out of nowhere, they were thrown a lifeline. Preachers, clearly members of the gentry, began travelling the country, offering them acceptance, legitimacy, and the possibility of banding together into societies of disciplined, industrious, moral people. They flocked to hear them and to commit their lives to their causes in the hundreds of thousands. At meeting after meeting, they expressed their heartfelt relief at the possibility of redemption, of committing themselves, unreservedly, to a life of industry and frugality, of religious and moral discipline and virtue [36].

Born-Again to Industry: the Conversion of the Little Gentry

The preachers were bemused both by their own success in attracting such crowds to hear them speak, and by the depth of the emotional response to their message. Time and again, to messages as prosaic as many of the sermons of John Wesley, people lost emotional control, falling to the ground, crying uncontrollably, losing control of their faculties. And the fervour with which they sang the songs of the revival was a testimony to the depth of their despair and their revived hope for the future.

In the early to mid 18th century the middle ranks increasingly confused money-making and religious ideals. More and more of them justified themselves through involvement in money-making activities and the churches, which had been so strong in the 17th century, found it difficult to attract and hold members [37].

At the same time, the minority who took their religion seriously felt increasingly ill at ease with the worldliness and materialism of the age and felt themselves burdened with a responsibility of their own to maintain their spiritual focus. John Wesley, as a young man in 1734, expressed it well in writing to his father,

> I take religion to be, not the bare saying of so many prayers, morning and evening, in public or in private; nor anything superadded now and then to a careless or worldly life; but a constant ruling habit of the soul;

> a renewal of our minds in the image of God; a recovery of the Divine likeness; a still increasing conformity of heart and life to the pattern of our most Holy Redeemer.
> (quoted in Harrison, 1942, p. 17)

Through the 18th century, in the face of what such people saw as a constantly increasing hedonistic materialism among the affluent middle ranks, they held to their faith and brought it to those who were prepared to listen. But, of course, they carried within them the understandings of their time and of their social ranking. As historians have stressed over the years [38], the religious revivals of the eighteenth century were conservative, not radical in orientation. The disciplines imposed on and accepted by the converts have been viewed as repressive and restrictive. Yet, as we will see, these were the very features which resulted in its enormous influence over the subsequent three hundred years in, first, English speaking countries and communities, and then, through the subsequent efflorescence of capitalism, in much of the rest of western Europe.

It was one of the early concerns of the Wesley brothers and other members of the 'Holy Club' at Oxford (from which many of the preachers came) that they too easily succumbed to laziness, a great 'weakness of the flesh', when God wanted them to 'employ their time profitably'. Industry and frugality, as John Wesley was to repeat time and again, are the inevitable outcomes of true godliness. The following advice to his followers, in a tract published in 1762, providing instructions for daily living to those who belonged to Methodist Societies, is typical of his views on the subject,

> Be active. Give no place to indolence or sloth; give no occasion to say, `Ye are idle, ye are idle.' Many will say so still; but let your whole spirit and behaviour refute the slander. Be always employed; lose no shred of time; gather up the fragments, that nothing be lost. And whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might. [39]

If human beings found themselves destitute, if they felt that God had abandoned them, they had only to commit their lives to Him and live as He had intended them to live. This would inevitably result in God's blessing. The demonstration of one's commitment to God was the diligence with which one applied oneself to 'one's calling'. If one was called to preach, then preach one must. If one was called to ply one's trade, then ply one's trade 'as unto God'. As Wesley put it, "Religion must necessarily produce both industry and frugality, and these cannot but produce riches." (quoted in Thompson 1980, p. 391)

In the 18th century, for both the religiously committed and for the majority of more loosely religious people of the middle ranks, progress was closely tied to God's plan for the world. Those who lived by his precepts, through their commitment and dedication, would ensure that the future would be that which He had planned. To show weakness in the face of unrepentant immorality was to endorse such behaviour. One rejoiced 'with the Angels at one sinner brought to repentance', but one thundered the wrath of God to those who wilfully

refused His grace.

The century saw many very successful evangelists carrying this message to the 'lost'. It was, however, John Wesley, a man who knew that God had a plan for the world and that His plan could only be worked out through people who dedicated themselves to ensuring it, who was to fashion the doctrinal base for evangelical Protestantism over the next two hundred years. He was, in their hundreds of thousands, to 'convert' the deeply threatened lower-middle ranks to 'Methodism' [40]. In doing so, he was also to set the scene for the 'Victorian morality' of the next century.

In the 16th and 17th centuries, emphasis on the freedom of the individual from domination by both political and religious bureaucracies had led, in some instances, to anarchy, to an *anti-law* (antinomian) view of the rights of the individual. Since the individual was saved by grace, any attempt to merit God's favour through 'works' countered the grace of God. So, it was, in the most extreme forms of antinomianism, argued that the individual could display the depth of the grace of God through ignoring or contravening both moral and social rules and regulations. In reaction to this, Luther, Calvin and other protest leaders of the 16th century emphasised the importance of civil law and order, and required their followers to live closely regulated lives. Nonetheless, the evils of the centuries were commonly believed to be a consequence of this lawless strain in extreme forms of Protestantism.

By the turn of the 18th century the common teaching was that, while individuals were saved by grace through faith, this salvation was demonstrated in the life of the individual through the Christian's 'blameless' life - as Jesus had said, "By their fruit you will recognise them" (Matthew Ch. 7 Verse 16). Wesley, as a consequence both of his family's experiences while growing up and of his own disputes with antinomian pietists and Calvinist dissenters, developed a theology which, while perhaps not as consistent as those of earlier protestant leaders, nonetheless directly addressed what he perceived to be fundamental weaknesses of both antinomianism and Calvinism.

Calvinists stressed the Divine prerogative in salvation. Since people were saved by grace, not works, no person could *do* anything to gain salvation, it was a 'free gift of God'. If people had to believe in order to be saved, they had to perform a 'work', that of actively believing. To get around this problem, Calvin had argued that God had, from the time of creation, 'elected' those to be saved. All that happened when people became religiously 'awakened' was that they became aware of what had already happened. This awakening did not bring about their salvation, they simply became conscious of the salvation which God had accomplished 'before the foundation of the world'. Because they now knew they were among the elect, they delighted to do the will of God. Any person who was truly one of the elect, once he or she realised this, would, in thankfulness to God, want to live to please him. By their lives they would show that they really were among the elect. Of course, the flaw in this was that if people were destined to be saved, no matter what they did, then the door was always open to antinomianism.

Wesley, as a confirmed high church Anglican, was brought up in a religious environment in which faith and works went hand in hand. One showed one's faith through membership of the church, and one 'worked out one's salvation with fear and trembling'. The danger of this approach was, of course, the one which the Calvinists sought to avoid through the doctrine of election. People could be seen as 'earning' salvation through their works - the papist doctrine which Protestants claimed had brought about the Reformation in the first place.

Wesley's solution, while perhaps logically flawed, was nonetheless persuasive for ordinary people not embroiled in the intricacies of theology. First, people were saved by God's grace, through the active exercise of their free will. This was the only 'work' that any person could do to merit salvation. No form of morality, no form of legal rectitude, no membership of any religious body could bring a person to salvation. They merely exercised their 'free-will' in deciding whether or not they wanted to be saved. When the person approached God in this way, He always accepted them. As a hymn of the period put it - "Only Believe, Only Believe, all things are possible, Only Believe". So, there were no 'elect', with the rest of humanity damned whether they liked it or not.

When people, aware of their utter helplessness and sinfulness, approached God, He gave them a 'new life', they were 'born again'. It was no longer them, but 'Christ in them'. They were given the 'Spirit of Christ' and from that point on *could* please God by their works, since they were not their own works, but the works of 'Christ in them, the hope of glory'. They were on the path to sanctification. Their hearts having been reoriented to God, they were being "transformed by the renewing of their minds". As Kathryn Long has put it, speaking of attitudes reflected in the religious revivals of that century in 19th Century United States, "the stress on personal piety confirmed long-standing convictions that the only true path to social change came through individual conversions" (1998 p. 107).

However, Wesley felt the need for some stronger reason for living lives 'acceptable to God' than an individual desire to be sanctified. Not only were people saved through an act of faith, they could also be lost through an act of will. The person who did not live to God, lived to self and, therefore, gave room to evil. This was why one had to 'work out one's salvation with fear and trembling'.

Wesley was to teach, for more than half a century, that while individuals were saved by grace through faith, and could not begin to please God until they had been 'born again', they could also commit spiritual suicide by failing to live as God intended them to. Such people had 'the form of godliness but denied the power of it'. When these people who were 'neither hot nor cold' were found within a community of Christians they should be expelled. Christians had a duty to discipline one another.

Those who were not "pressing on toward the goal" of the renewing of their minds, were 'backsliding'. And Christians could recognise such people. As Jesus (Matthew 6: 16, 21) had said, "By their fruit you will recognise them… Not everyone who says to me 'Lord, Lord', will enter into the kingdom of heaven,

but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven." So, one either pressed toward the goal, or one was in danger of being rejected by God – and, if by God, then also by Wesleyan Christians.

The theology might have been shaky, but the motivational message was forceful. It proved hugely successful in motivating those who accepted the message on both sides of the Atlantic over the next two hundred years.

By the end of the 18th century they would become a major religious, economic and political force within Britain and the emerging United States of America, deeply dedicated to industry and frugality, to the principle of "whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might". And it was they, not the financiers, bankers, and landowners of the country, who provided the engine for what was, indeed, to be an 'industrial revolution' which would set Britain and her transatlantic offspring on course to world empire and economic domination in the next centuries.

In a century when the moral commitment of the gentry to industry and frugality faltered, and might well have died, a new kind of 'gentleman' emerged, religiously dedicated to the unending pursuit of wealth and property, and to innovative production.

Born Again Manufacturers and Retailers

The religious organisations which grew from the revivals or were transformed to accommodate them, provided these people with an ongoing means of deeply reaffirming the values which their 'conversions' had affirmed. Through them, they could re-establish the networks of respectability in which they had been brought up, and promote those values as essential to salvation for all human beings. They *knew* that 'but for the grace of God', they too would have found themselves counted among the destitute of the century.

They also quickly learned, through the preaching and teaching of the itinerant evangelists who were their leaders and mentors, that, having been saved by grace, through faith, they had begun lives of discipline and commitment to all the virtues of the century. The Wesleyan Methodist societies, classes and bands provided the clearest model, but what John Wesley built up over more than fifty years in England was replicated with modification by many other evangelists not only in England but through Ireland, Wales, Scotland and the American colonies [41]. The religious revivals of the time were, largely as a result of Wesley's vision, strongly organised, with the redeemed encouraged to long-term discipline and direction by their peers and leaders.

The deep, emotional nature of their conversion, based on a commitment to the moral values of those who brought the possibility of redemption to them, resulted in them being far more committed and determined to live by the understandings of the century than those who, till this time, had been the major promoters of modern values. By the mid 19th century, the religious revivals of Britain and the United States were overtly focused within the newly successful middle ranks of the population.

The 1858 revival in New York sprang from "a weekly prayer meeting for businessmen" (Long 1998, p. 13). Those involved in the religious 'awakenings' which recurred over more than a century on both sides of the Atlantic from the early 1730s onwards, became, over the next two centuries, the moral centre, the 'moral majority' of the western communities in which they lived, convinced that only through faith and reliance on 'the grace of God' had they escaped catastrophe. Committed also to living by both both moral and economic laws and convinced, as Kant explained, that

> All the culture and art which adorn humanity, the most refined social order, are produced by that unsociability which is compelled by its own existence to discipline itself, and so by enforced art to bring the seeds implanted by Nature into full flower.

When they sang "Amazing grace! How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me", they meant it with every fibre of their being. The 18th century had launched a new, emotionally committed, community of capitalists. The driving force of the 'industrial revolution' was to come, not from the financiers and well-established gentry of the era, but from those who had been redeemed to be productive.

The term 'Methodist industrialist' was, by the early 19th century, a common descriptor for those who took both their religion and their productive enterprise seriously, establishing factory towns and day schools and concerned not only with money-making, but also with the moral development of those they employed. Andrew Ure observed, in 1835, speaking of the Methodist, Richard Arkwright's contribution to the emergence of the industrial factory,

> What his judgment so clearly led him to perceive, his energy of will enabled him to realize with such rapidity and success, as would have done honour to the most influential individuals, but were truly wonderful in that obscure and indigent artisan… The main difficulty did not, to my apprehension, lie so much in the invention of a proper self-acting mechanism for drawing out and twisting cotton into a continuous thread, as in the distribution of the different members of the apparatus into one cooperative body, in impelling each organ with its appropriate delicacy and speed, and above all, in training human beings to renounce their desultory habits of work, and to identify themselves with the unvarying regularity of the complex automation. To devise and administer a successful code of factory discipline, suited to the necessities of factory diligence, was the Herculean enterprise, the noble achievement of Arkwright.
> (*The Philosophy of Manufactures*, 1835)

The revivals of the 18th century shared little with the cerebral, theological drive for religious reform which had brought 16th and 17th century protestant groups into being. They were 'charismatic', as that term has come to be used of similar movements in the 20th and 21st centuries. Those who were 'saved', displayed all the passion for salvation and for recognition one might expect from people who felt themselves trapped and destined to be treated as what they were not.

And they accepted and determined to live by the precepts and directives of their spiritual mentors. Their mentors reaffirmed the presumptions of capitalism. As Whitefield, one of the very successful evangelists of the century on both sides of the Atlantic explained,

> Nothing tries my temper more than to see any about me idle; an idle person tempts the devil to tempt him… if anybody says the Methodists [followers of the Wesley brothers] teach to be idle, they injure them. We tell people to be at their work early and late, that they may redeem time to attend the word. If all that speak against the Methodists were as diligent, it would be better for their wives and families. What, do you think a true Methodist will be idle?
> (quoted in Armstrong 1973, p. 123)

A New Moral Leadership and Support Network

The Methodist movement of the 18th century found its leadership, not in the dissenting churches, descendants of the puritanical, protestant movements of the 16th and 17th centuries, but in the established Church of England. And, although the hierarchy of the state church seemed reluctant to be associated with such enthusiastic Christianity, the leaders of the movement were, largely, committed to ensuring that their converts remained within the Church. So, for more than fifty years, the tightly organised and disciplined Methodist societies remained religious communities connected to the parishes of the state church.

This prolonged association did more to convince dedicated Methodists of the worldliness and lack of moral leadership in higher levels of society than almost anything else could have. Since the Anglican clergy were appointed by the Anglican hierarchy, local communities had little influence over those selected to lead them. Very often, they found themselves having to endure leadership which seemed almost inimical to the lives they had committed themselves to leading. As Archibald Harrison put it,

> The Methodists themselves were increasingly reluctant to attend services conducted by clergy with no apparent interest in spiritual religion, and, too frequently, with reputations far below the standards of the gospel it was their business to proclaim.
> (1942, p. 169)

They became increasingly convinced that they, themselves, would have to provide the moral leadership they sought. They could not look to their social superiors for moral direction. Rather, they could expect that those above them would, at best, display a lukewarm attitude to the moral virtues. For these 'born again' Christians, the 'upper middle ranks', together with the aristocracy, were largely composed of people who, as Paul had explained to Timothy (2 Tim. 2:5), held "the form of religion but denied the power of it." Wesley had no hesitation in endorsing Paul's advice, "Avoid such people". He provided his own description of their shallowness, "So much paint and affectation, so many unmeaning words and senseless customs among people of rank" (quoted in Armstrong 1973, p. 88).

Those 'born again' in the 18th century revivals became the guardians of morality and prosperity. So dominant did they become that the virtues they espoused and promoted became the virtues of more than a century of middle ranking people. Even those who were, in truth, part of the earlier gentry, largely untouched by the religious revivals, found themselves having to publicly endorse the virtues. And they knew, with a conviction confirmed by experience, that if they did not hold the moral centre, no one would.

The stern nature of the discipline they imposed on each other was tempered by social responsibility for those who repented and joined their ranks. The societies and classes of Methodism were not just religious groupings, they took moral, social and economic responsibility for each other. In doing so, they formed strong support networks, providing a social and economic refuge for people who saw the world closing in on them. As Armstrong (1973, p. 88) describes,

> The societies helped the poor among their members – it was one of the duties of the stewards to arrange such relief. The maintenance of a 'lending stock' by the societies meant that loans of from one to five pounds could be made to poor members on the recommendation of the borrower's class leader.

This approach to the problems of the poor in their ranks is very similar to some of the 'pump priming' activities of 'credit banks' over the last forty years in 'developing' areas. The primary difference is that the pump priming lending of Methodist societies went to people who were already oriented to capitalist endeavour and whose activities were overseen by others of similar bent. The lending did not produce the capitalist orientation, as some credit societies seem to presume will happen in Third World communities. Rather, it facilitated small business activity for people already aware of the need for frugal industry, the deferment of short term rewards for long term gain, and intent on the accumulation of capital as a means of demonstrating their inherent morality [42].

Methodists did not develop small scale credit societies among the unredeemed poor as a means of stimulating small business among them. They knew that money lent to such people would be spent on present needs and wants, not used to make more money. In fact, many of those who were 'saved' from the ranks of 'the poor', failed to remain within the societies. They quickly proved themselves unreliable borrowers, who could not be trusted to use the money given them 'wisely' and, consequently, fell short of the moral requirements of the communities in which they found themselves. The Methodists, quite unconsciously, selected people of like temper, those who were already committed to the middle ranking virtues of the century. Those whose background was among the 'poor' seldom demonstrated the long term 'habits of industry' which ensured acceptance.

Not only was this kind of support given within Methodist societies to help members out of poverty, it was also seen as a means of ensuring that they remained committed to Methodism. Since the networks of Methodism provided strong business support to small business people, those who found themselves

expelled from a society because they failed to measure up to the spiritual and moral requirements of the group, often found that their businesses suffered once they no longer had access to the networks through which their business activity had been established.

John Wesley, ever a practical leader, realised the power which such support had in ensuring that people remained committed to the cause, or were drawn back to commitment through being helped in this way. In a letter to the Methodist Society at Keighley, London, in 1779, he describes the financial difficulties into which a former member of the Society had fallen. The person concerned, one William Shent, had for many years been a faithful member of the Society, but had been disciplined some time earlier and expelled for not living up to the moral requirements of membership. With support from the group removed, his business activities fell apart and he and his family were now in danger of being evicted from their home. Wesley wrote,

> Who is he that is ready now to be broken up and turned into the street? William Shent. And does nobody care for this? William Shent fell into sin and was publicly expelled from the Society; but must he also starve? Must he with his grey hairs and with all his children be without a place to lay his head?… Who is wise among you? Who is concerned for the Gospel? Who has put on the bowels of mercy? Let him arise and exert himself in this matter. You here all arise as one man and roll away the reproach. Let us set him on his feet at once. It may save both him and his family.
> (Brash 1928, p. 105)

It is in this group of religiously committed capitalists that one must look to find the capitalist spirit of the 19th century, that spirit to which the British prime minister Margaret Thatcher referred when she claimed, in the late 1970s, that British people should revive the moral values of the previous century. The superficial charge laid against 19th century middle ranking people, that their morality was largely hypocritical, only holds if one fails to recognise the large number of fellow travellers who came under the influence of Methodists and members of those dissenting Churches which were reinvigorated through participation in the 18th century religious revivals. It is a testament to the social force of the movement, that the values of those saved by grace in the 18th century, became the values of an age.

Of course, although the religious revivals of the 18th century produced a morally committed middle class of capitalists, *they brought their values with them* into the revival. The revival preachers and teachers of the 18th century strongly reaffirmed the important moral values of the middle ranks of western European communities. Those from the lower middle ranks, who found themselves most directly threatened by the reforms of the period, were drawn to leaders who offered them both recognition and practical support in a time when little distinction was being drawn between the poor and the lower middle ranks as reformers set out to teach the lower ranks the importance of work. In the process they developed strong, religiously reinforced support networks which enabled them to succeed in business in a way that had not been possible

in earlier times.

Wesley summed up the impact of Methodism on the lives of his followers in a sermon toward the end of his life,

> The Methodists grow more and more self-indulgent, because they grow rich. Although many of them are still deplorably poor… yet many others, in the space of twenty, thirty or forty years, are twenty, thirty, yea, a hundred times richer than they were when they first entered the society. And it is an observation which admits of few exceptions, than nine in ten of these decreased in grace, in the same proportion as they increased in wealth. Does it not seem (and yet this cannot be) that Christianity, true scriptural Christianity, has a tendency to destroy itself?
> (quoted in Armstrong 1973, p. 95)

While the Methodists took their religion seriously, all their energies were focussed on life within this world. The religous virtues they promoted were capitalist virtues from the 17th century, shaped by the understandings of the 18th. They lived in an age when self-interest and the private accumulation of wealth and property were assumed to result in the *summum bonum*. As Appleby has explained,

> Where earlier the disposal of a harvest or the pursuit of a trade had been conditional upon the likely social impact, the acceptance of near-absolute property rights had driven a wedge between society and the economy. With the curtailment of political oversight over economic life, the formal link between the material resources of the country and the people to be sustained by them had been cut. The commonwealth had become an aggregation of private wealth.
> (Appleby 1978, p. 151)

Good Methodists knew that self-interested private enterprise, driven by a deep commitment to industry and frugality, and resulting in the private accumulation of wealth, were virtuous. As Harrison says,

> The Wesleyans were particularly numerous among the shopkeepers, farmers, and better-class artisans… In some cathedral cities nearly all the shops in the High Street would be Methodist shops and a great Wesleyan congregation would gather under the very shadow of the Cathedral… In big business and in Northern factories, too, Wesleyan Methodism was prominent and grew in wealth in the prosperous years.
> (1942, p. 180)

As Methodists grew wealthy they found themselves able to emulate the lifestyles and become accepted by the middle sorts with whom they had long desired to be identified. Methodism provided a moral leavening to the 19th century. In the process, the 'old money' middle ranking families took on a veneer of 'morality' which enabled the 'new money' Methodists to interact with them without seeming to betray their Methodist values. The values of the two groupings slowly merged. In business one emphasised disciplined self-

interest. In social life one accepted philanthropic responsibility for the 'improvement' of the poor.

By the 19th century, Methodists and others belonging to communities which came out of the 18th century revivals were dominant in both manufacturing and retailing. Those who were the descendants of 17th and 18th century gentry very often provided the finance for the more extensive of their activities. As Andrew Ure (1835, pp. 20,1) described, while explaining the emergence of factories in the late 18th century,

> In its precise acceptation, the Factory system is of recent origin, and may claim England for its birthplace. The mills for throwing silk, or making organzine, which were mounted centuries ago in several of the Italian states, and furtively transferred to this country by Sir Thomas Lombe in 1718, contained indeed certain elements of a factory, and probably suggested some hints of those grander and more complex combinations of self-acting machines, which were first embodied half a century later in our cotton manufacture by Richard Arkwright, assisted by gentlemen of Derby, well acquainted with its celebrated silk establishment.

From the outset, as Brash (1928, p. 179) says, "Methodism was an army of missionaries". Every convert was a potential evangelist, every society and class accepted an evangelical mission to 'the lost'. Those who were at the forefront of the religious revival movements in Wales, England, Ireland, Scotland and in the various American colonies, believed they had been directly chosen by God. They had His mandate to "bring sinners to repentance", and if they failed, the damnation of those they had failed to reach would be their responsibility. They *knew* that the warning God had given Ezekiel was theirs also,

> … if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet to warn the people and the sword comes and takes the life of one of them, that man will be taken away because of his sin, but I will hold the watchman accountable for his blood. (Ezekiel 33:6)

Equally, they accepted the responsibility that Wesley had made his own. They not only 'saved' the lost, they *organised* them into churches and communities, and they introduced the disciplines of 18th and 19th century Methodist Christianity and economic rationality to those they organised in these ways. They had the responsibility not only to bring salvation to the lost, but, in the process, to bring civilisation to them also. Richard Whateley, Archbishop of Dublin, in 1854, explained the problem, "Men, left in the lowest, or even anything approaching the lowest, degree of barbarism, in which they can possibly subsist at all, never did, and never can raise themselves, unaided, into a higher condition" [43].

Because all human beings were sinners, and because 'enlightenment' depended on the grace of God, not only were people 'saved' from perdition, they were also, inevitably, saved to a new way of life, to a higher level of civilisation than they could ever reach on their own. They were, by God's grace, and by the disciplines of their churches, delivered from lives of sloth and indigence into

lives of industry and prosperity. Through this they would "overcome the present disposition either to sloth or to enjoyment. This habit is slowly acquired, and is in reality a principal distinction of nations in the advanced state of mechanic and commercial arts." (Ferguson 1767 Part 2, Section 2)

As Herbert Schlossberg describes,

> In 1837 a clergyman in Leeds remarked that "the most established religion in Leeds is Methodism, and it is Methodism that all the most pious among the Churchmen unconsciously talk," That is, Methodism, which by then had separated from the Church of England, had come to dominate the thinking of the city to the extent that even Anglicans had been swallowed up in its spirit, albeit without realizing it…
> The "secular' eighteenth century, when we look beneath the surface, turns out to be the start of a profound spiritual revival. As it spread from the Church of England throughout the society, it affected the life of non-Anglican, or Dissenting, congregations. The chapels in which the dissenters worshiped increasingly rang with the ideas and hymns of the evangelical movement.
> (2000, pp. 8, 10)

By the mid nineteenth century, Methodism would become the leavening of Victorian Britain. From the high, to the lower-middle, to the artisanal 'working class' (but seldom to the 'idle poor'), the British increasingly committed themselves to the understandings of Methodism, to a religiously invigorated capitalism.

The American War of Independence resulted in a hiatus in direct influences from Britain to the American colonies. The revival in Britain preceded a similar movement in the colonies by some thirty to forty years. The missionaries of the British 'Awakening' proved most effective as the colonies settled down and law and order were reimposed under the new United States administration. As Mary Cayton (1997) explains, between 1794 and 1832 thousands of converts streamed into the non-conformist churches of British North America, and, as in Britain, the bulk of those who committed themselves to an active religious life were involved in petty-business. As Cayton says,

> Especially in the Northeast, then rapidly being drawn into a net of complex market relationships, those entering upon the responsibilities of adulthood but also many of other life stages, and members of an emerging entrepreneurial class but also those of other stations and callings, were caught up in intensified religious expression. They experienced conversions, joined organizations designed to promote a host of benevolent causes, and swelled church rolls. They were Congregationalists and Presbyterians, Baptists and Methodists, and together they comprised a movement that historians in retrospect have called the Second Great Awakening.

First The Poor, Then The World!

What started in Britain, very quickly reached outward to the whole world.

Those who entered the movement in the 18th century knew that there were no geographical boundaries to bringing sinners to repentance. With Wesley, they asserted that the world was their parish. Out of the 18th century religious revivals came the evangelical missionary movement of the 19th and 20th centuries. And, as they moved into the world, they took their Western European lower middle class values with them. As Cairns has described of missionary attitudes in central Africa in the 19th century,

> The proper attitude was indicated by Carson of the L. M. S. [London Missionary Society] who, after noting that African men spent 'much time in indolence', remarked that it was inconceivable 'how the practice of that vice in the African race can be supposed to conduce to happiness in them when it makes us so miserable'.
> (1965, p. 80)

Those who were 'born again' should, in the minds of these missionaries, be born into frugal, self-disciplined industry, into conserving possessions, into accumulating wealth, and into using the wealth they accumulated 'wisely'. They took capitalism to the world. And, since people in other communities seemed to have so little internalised discipline, so little regard for prudent, productive endeavour, they realised they had a responsibility to discipline and train them. Out of missionary endeavour among the poor, among the destitute in western Europe, and out of similar activity among the 'benighted' of other regions, came a strong belief in the need for practical education to teach converts to live as 'God had intended them to live'.

But, despite all its success in the Anglo-speaking world, and the extensive network of societies and churches which sprang from the movement, very few of those on the lowest rungs of the social order were drawn into the revival movement. The redemption of the lower middle rankings of British and North American communities still left large numbers of poor dispossessed and cast adrift in the century, relatively untouched by the revivals which had swept their countries.

The redemption of the artisans, tradespeople and smallholders of the century did not predispose them to accepting the irreligion and laziness of the poor. It made them resolute in doing something about 'the problem'. They did not have to look far to find those who constituted it, they were on their own door step, a group of people who defied all law and morality. As James Kay (1832) described the lower classes inhabiting a district in Manchester,

> This district has sometimes been the haunt of hordes of thieves and desperados who defied the law, and is always inhabited by a class resembling savages in their appetites and habits. It is surrounded on every side by some of the largest factories of the town, whose chimneys vomit forth dense clouds of smoke, which hang heavily over this insalubrious region.

Capitalism was in full bloom! It was time for the new moral capitalist leaders of Britain to tame and civilise the hordes of thieves and desperados which lived on their own doorsteps. And they set about it with all the determination they had

employed in building their new industrialising world.

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Endnotes

1 Letter to Colonel Edward Carrington, Paris, January 16, 1787

2 This discussion follows on from An Explanation and History of the Emergence of Capitalism

3 See Teaching Western Europeans to Work for more on this.

4 See 'From the Divine to the Statistical' for more on this

5 See 'The Perfection of Creation' for more on this

6 Aquinas' version of the same claim was:

> ... natural processes develop from simple to compound things, so much so that the highly developed organism is the completion, integration, and purpose of the elements. Such indeed is the case with any whole in comparison with its parts. (Gilby 1960, p. 369)

7 'Human potential' was, increasingly, to displace ‘perfection’ as the goal of human activity, but this still implied a 'purpose' in creation. However 'earthly-minded' Western Europeans were to become, they carried with them an implicit understanding that there was more to life in this world than meets the eye!

8 Although many of those who held this position claimed that it no longer relied on a metaphysical dimension to reality, the presumption that individual self-interest leads to communal good assumes the 'Unseen Hand' at work. Of course, many (including most economists) still, either implicitly or explicitly, hold this position

9 See 'From the subversion of tradition to plotting the future' for more on this.

10 Summed up in ‘development’ circles over the past fifty years as ‘you can’t make an omelette without breaking eggs’.

11 See The emergence of environments in European History

12 See 17th C. Protestant jurist-theologians for more on this

13 The divide between the virtue of a 'social conscience' and the virtue of self-interest remains as potent now as it was in the 18th century. Many of the most bitter confrontations in U. S. politics are a consequence of ideological commitment to one or other focus.

14 It is easy to forget that, while the formulation of environments seems perfectly logical and based on the distillation of features of an objective reality, the objective reality itself is subjective to Western communities. The environments are reifications of aspects of life, not distinct areas of life. Though, of course, once an environment is outlined and behaviour channelled into conformity with its requirements, it will, in the minds of those involved, become a distinct area of reality.

15 See "'Money-making' patron-client networks and an emerging emphasis on quantification" for more on this

16 Though, in keeping with the times, he distilled his laws from *postulated* behaviours and postulated forms of social organization and interaction through history. This is a form of reasoning which became common in the 18th and 19th centuries, and, indeed, is all-too-often employed in the 21st century. Determine what life must be like by reasonable extrapolation from what you know, then, from that postulated reality, distil the principles which 'explain' it. The principles, inevitably, reflect those which order 'objective reality' for the reasoner.

17 If this solution seems familiar, that is because it is. It is very similar to the approach Thomas of Aquinas used in defining the nature of natural

and ecclesiastical laws. And, it has produced very similar consequences. The end result of Aquinas's separation of the natural and the supernatural was the dominance of the natural over the supernatural in Western European thinking. The end result of Adam Smith's model has been that 'moral virtue' is under seige (see Economic Rationality).

18 See 'Producing Conformity To The Nature Of Rational Creatures'

19 See Social Exchange Theory for an example of this reasoning in the 20th and 21st centuries

20 How wonderfully adept human beings are in rationalising apparent contradictions when they feel the need to do so!

21 See Teaching Western Europeans to Work

22 As Samuelson (first American to win the Nobel Prize in Economics) would explain in the mid 20th century, although the Western world prizes individualism and 'freedom', this freedom is guaranteed through the imposition of 'order'. 'We ... have to coordinate and cooperate. Where cooperation is not forthcoming we must introduce upon ourselves coercion' (Samuelson 1972, p. 629). In the West the individual's 'freedom' is contingent upon acting within the framework established for 'legitimate' economic behaviour. Impersonal bureaucratic agencies are endowed with responsibility for ensuring such compliance.

23 The claims of the past decade - that those involved in financial activity must 'discipline themselves' flows from this reasoning. To impose discipline from outside the 'economic environment' is illegitimate.

24 among many of the middle and upper ranks of British and western European communities - including many of those who had been involved in the religious revivals we examine shortly

25 This logic only holds if one accepts Aquinas' holistic view of reality - that we live in a perfect creation, governed by laws which ensure that perfection. If you don't believe in a Supreme, Benevolent Creator, then you really have no reasonable base from which to argue this.

26 While many would argue that government exists to protect the poor and weak, this was not the presumption of 18th and 19th century 'responsible' Western Europeans. It was the task of government to train the poor to productive endeavour and protect the rights of those engaged in self-interested accumulation of 'assets'.

27 The more extreme extrapolations of neoliberal economic thought of the past 30 years have a long history. From the outset, belief in the *summum bonum* consequences of whole-hearted commitment to the 'natural laws' of the economy, produced such reasoning.

28 See The alienation of property for more

29 See From Subsistence to Open-ended Accumulation for more

30 It was this early movement of 'potential labour' into towns *prior* to the expansion of industrial production in the late 18th century which inspired those modernisation evangelists, Lewis (1955), Hirschman (1958) and

Rostow (1961), to formulate their plans for 'Third World development' in the 20th century. In order to ensure 'economic development' in the Third World it was necessary to move 'surplus labour' from the countryside to the towns, build factories, and provide 'seeding capital' to entrepreneurs which, it was presumed, would produce that 'trickle-down' effect for which the world has waited so long. Those who taught this doctrine 'knew' that they were right. Their models were based on and consistent with the 'laws of economics' and demonstrated in their interpretation of Western European history.

31 Marx was a little late in his speculations on the possibility of a revolution against capitalism. The revolution of the proletariat which Marx anticipated in the second half of the 19th century, might possibly have happened in the 18th but for the intervention of Protestant evangelicalism. The revolution which occurred was not an overthrow of capitalism but a religious conversion of the dispossessed and down-trodden to a reinvigorated version of the values of their oppressors.

32 Large numbers of these people formed the backbone of Cromwell's 'New Model Army' in the English civil war and subsequent Commonwealth (1645-1660). Following the restoration of the monarchy they lost political protection and became fair-game to those who had opposed the parliamentary reforms - and any others who saw in their political weakness an opportunity for profit.
I am sure that those who know that economic principles are indeed universal laws of nature, crafted by an 'unseen hand', will argue that the description which follows is yet another demonstration of the 'unseen hand' at work – I prefer to believe in blind chance – or, perhaps, a greater law which ensures, as Hobbes suggested, that human beings, unfettered, are red in tooth and claw. As Jefferson put it "they have divided their nations into two classes, wolves and sheep".

33 This is not surprising of course. Processes of categorisation and classification require that, if closely similar groupings are to be kept separate, the *differences* between them must constantly be emphasised. The more similar they seem to be, the more often one will focus on and emphasise the differences.

34 Toynbee (1884) Lecture VIII 'The Chief Features of the Revolution'

35 whether already destitute or fearful of the possibilities of destitution which they saw around them as rural communities came increasingly under attack and life became more and more difficult

36 See Armstrong (1997) for a description of some of these preachers. As a Christian reviewer puts it:

> John Armstrong introduces his readers to five key evangelists whose ministries covered a period of two hundred years, impacted hundreds of thousands of lives, and were marked by unusual boldness, passionate proclamation, and an outpouring of Spiritual blessing on two continents.

37 A similar confusion followed the success of those whose material fortunes

resulted from their religious conversion in the 18th and early 19th centuries - as John Wesley was to lament

38 cf Stephen (1876), Hammond & Hammond (1918), Hobsbawm (1964), Thompson (1964), etc.

39 published in a separate tract in the year 1762, under the title of "Cautions and Directions given to the Greatest Professors in the Methodist Societies,"

40 See John Wesley, *A Short History of Methodism* (From the Thomas Jackson edition of *The Works of John Wesley*, 1872) for a brief account of the movement.

41 As Gamm and Putnam (1999) claim of the United States between 1760 and 1840, 'Methodist and Baptist churches flourished in this era … In communities across the country, Americans established Bible and tract societies, missionary societies, temperance groups, and benevolent associations. Sunday schools, too, were organized in these years'

42 The often quoted successful organisation and activity of the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh over the past twenty five years is an excellent example of the way in which this kind of 'pump-priming' works when properly adapted to the understandings and organisation of the communities within which it is developed. As its founder, Muhammad Yunus (1991), explained, in an interview on CBC,

> I came across a woman and she makes only two pennies a day by making bamboo stools. And I couldn't accept why anybody should work so hard and make only two pennies. And she explained why she makes two pennies: she doesn't have the money to buy the bamboo which goes into the bamboo store, so she has to borrow money from a trader, the trader who buys the final product. So he lends her the money to buy the bamboo. When he buys the final product, he offers her a price which barely covers the cost of all the raw materials. Her labour comes almost like free, like she works like a slave. So I said, look, this is so simple to solve. It doesn't need big theories to solve this.

His solution was to take the initiative away from those exploiting the woman, allowing her to reap the profit of her activity rather than allowing the lender to set the terms of the interaction. The result was the Grameen Bank.

> The loans average no more than seventy-five dollars -- too small for other banks to even bother with -- and yet with these loans people revolutionize their lives. The Grameen Bank is founded on a bold but simple idea that the answer to poverty is not charity but credit.

The Grameen Bank has restricted its activities to destitute women, and has, whether consciously or not, developed very similar patron-client relationships between the borrowers and lender as exist in the wider community. It has not, until recently, challenged existing structures but augmented them, and this is precisely why the Methodist system was so successful in the 18th and early 19th centuries and received so little

opposition from those involved in business in the period. What it did, however, was to emancipate those who were destitute from reliance on money lenders and others intent on exploiting them, allowing them build up their businesses in a protected environment, and, as the movement grew in strength, allowing networks of business interaction to emerge based on similar principles.

43 Campbell's (1871 Pt 1 P.1) explanation of the Archbishop's views is as follows:

> The Arch-Bishop's position is shortly this, — that mere savages —that is to say, "men in the lowest degree, or even anything approaching to the lowest degree, of barbarism in which they can possibly subsist at all — never did and never can, unaided, raise themselves into a higher condition"; that even when they are brought into contact with superior races, it is extremely difficult to teach them the simplest arts; that they "seem never to invent or discover anything," because even "necessity is not the mother of invention except to those who have some degree of thoughtfulness and intelligence"; that whatever the natural powers of the human mind may be, they require to have some instruction from without wherewith to start. He holds it to be "a complete moral certainty that men left unassisted in what is called a state of nature — that is, with the faculties Man is born with not at all unfolded or exercised by education — never did, and never can, raise themselves from that condition." Therefore, "according to the present course of things, the first, introducer of civilization among savages is, and must be, man in a more improved state."