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Wesley, 'Holy Tempers', and Commercial Practice

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In the early 18th Century, satirist Bernard Mandeville presented a controversial paradox that has elicited attention to this day. His book, *The Fable of the Bees*, originally published as a pamphlet, rejected the noble, elevated conception of modern man, appealing to his baser, “vicious” self. Specifically, Mandeville suggested that private vices such as greed, avarice, and pride can actually service the public good. To shun virtue, and to gratify one’s appetites—an “impulse of nature”—was, ironically, the more laudable act because it motivated and mobilized industrious action, trade, and economic growth.¹

The paradox is clear. The pursuit of virtue is not only what Mandeville calls a “vain eutopia”—but an albatross; a prohibitive chain that dulls our motivation to purchase and produce, thus stifling enterprise.² Indeed, only the foolish bees in Mandeville’s allegory “strive to make a great an[d] honest hive.”³

The argument for unashamedly entertaining our more odious nature is hardly new. It was Glaucon in Plato’s *Republic* who suggested that “the life of the unjust man is... far better than that of the just man.”⁴ Drawing upon the familiar “Ring of Gyges” story—Glaucon suggests that the possessor of a ring whose power could make its bearer invisible would shun moral uprightness and, alternatively, take license to satiate one’s baser proclivities (sex, wealth, and revenge). However, Glaucon pulls up short when it comes to promoting public vice. While “[A]ll men suppose injustice is far more to their private profit than justice”—indulging one’s lesser appetites may harm reputation or run afoul of legal standards.⁵ It is only in private, goes the argument, that we would scratch our ignoble itch. At best, a just life is a compromise; a restraint of sorts between the counterbalancing forces of individual interest and public good. To paraphrase the famed playwright Oscar Wilde, it is when presented with a mask that man will reveal his true face.

This is what makes Mandeville’s assertion unique. Beyond recognizing the darker character of individuals, restrained and suppressed by reputation and law—he openly advocates for individual iniquity, appealing to what economist Alan Storkey has called the “chief rival to God” in modern society: economic consumerism.⁶ This is an important point. Mandeville does not assert that vice, in itself, is good. Consonant with the theory of ethical consequentialism, the rightness of human self-indulgence, pride, and vanity is bound up in the consequence such

¹ Mandeville, Bernard. 1970. *The Fable of the Bees: Or Private Vices, Publick Benefits*. New York: Penguin Classics (Page 86).

² Ibid., p. 76

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., page 36

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Storkey, Alan. 2000. "Postmodernism is Consumption." In *Christ and Consumerism: Critical Reflections on the Spirit of our Age*, by Craig Bartholomew and Thorsten Moritz, 100-117. Carlisle: Paternoster Press (Page 100).

unsavory qualities produce. That is, cupidity, envy, etc. are to be praised because they are “ministers of industry.”⁷

It is this formula that carries Mandeville’s spirit to our present economic arrangement. While perhaps less strident than *The Fable of the Bees*, industrial apologists from Milton Friedman to pop culture’s iconic Gordon Gekko have beaten the “greed is good” drum.⁸

Despite its unscrupulous character, the claim has substance. Though he softened Mandeville’s description of vice, it was Adam Smith who suggested that self-regarding behavior can lubricate society’s economic engine. Such a stimulus for growth, regardless of the moral significance of its origin, is naturally beneficial to the whole of society. Smith famously writes: “It is not the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our necessities but of their advantages.”⁹

As Friedman has suggested, there is no society that does not operate implicitly or explicitly on the principle of self-regarding behavior or, as he puts it, “greed”; rather, the challenge is how to mobilize this axiomatic feature of economic participants inhabiting a given society. Moreover, as history has borne out, societies that have supported private enterprise have experienced significant growth and stability. No economic system, argued the late Michael Novak, has lifted the marginalized out of poverty like the engine of capitalism.¹⁰

Yet if greed, avarice, and envy are good for an economy, and economic growth is good for society’s participants, where, we might ask, does this leave the person of faith? Scripture consistently warns against entertaining lower human impulses such as greed (Luke 12:15; I Cor. 6:10), pride (James 4:6; Proverbs 8:13; Romans 12:13), envy (James 3:16; Galatians 5:19-21; Exodus 20:17), acquisitiveness (Colossians 3:2; Proverbs 11:28; Matthew 16:26) vanity (I Samuel 16:7; Proverbs 31:30), and self-centeredness (Phil. 2:4-8; II Timothy 3:2; Romans 2:8). Yet such

⁷ Mandeville, p. 68. Mandeville could, however, be interpreted as appealing to prudence. That is, the best way to achieve the common good of “the hive” is to promote self-regarding behaviors. Yet while satirical, Mandeville’s writing elevates “vicious” behaviors (avarice) at the expense of virtuous ones (honesty)—which would complicate any interpretation of Mandeville as arguing for prudence.

⁸ It should be noted that not all who hold a “greed is good” position appeal to consequentialist rationality (i.e., greed is good *because* it produces economically desirable outcomes). A more deontological appeal to greed, for example, can be found in Ayn Rand, who staunchly supported free and private enterprise, but not for its efficiency and/or benefit to the public. At best, for Rand, those were secondary benefits to the primary virtue of freedom and unfettered human agency.

⁹ Smith in Fleischacker, Simon. 2004. *On Adam Smith's Wealth of Nations: A Philosophical Companion*. Princeton: Princeton University Press (Page 90). While this quote is famous, it would be a mistake to read Adam Smith as a crass utilitarian. Smith was greatly concerned with moral nuance, and *Wealth of Nations* should be read in light of the insights from his earlier work, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*.

¹⁰ Novak, Michael. 2015. "Capitalism Is the Most Moral of a Bad Lot of Economic Systems." *The New York Times Opinion Pages: Room for Debate*. March 23. <https://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2014/06/25/has-capitalism-become-incompatible-with-christianity/capitalism-is-the-most-moral-of-a-bad-lot-of-economic-systems>.

attributes serve to facilitate industry which correlate to social well-being (employment, living standards, security, etc.).

This raises questions. Should Mandeville's paradox be accepted wholesale? Rejected? How is this tension understood today? What might be a more faithful expression of Christian action and understanding within the realm of marketplace activity?

It is here that we might turn our attention to the 18th Century Reverend John Wesley, as his unique theological contribution provides a helpful path by which to navigate these tensions. A contemporary of the industrial revolution, Wesley lauded various forms of commercial labor, industriousness, diligence, and the necessity of freedom to achieve economic growth. "In many respects," writes historian Chris Armstrong, "John Wesley had the sensibility of a businessman."¹¹ Yet Wesley, and the "Wesleyan" theology that Methodism would come to embrace, was quite concerned with human disposition, holy appetites, ordinate affections, and the cultivation of heavenly sensibilities. For Wesley, the Christian ethic pervaded all realms of life, thus moderating commercial practices and pursuits to cohere with faithfulness toward God and right-relations toward others.

The balance of this paper aims to bring the Wesleyan paradigm to bear on normative judgments and commercial action. Today, few voices will openly support "vicious" behaviors or dispositions for the mere sake of economic gain—particularly within the Christian faith community. However, it will be argued that a neo-Mandevillian argument has, in fact, found its way into our collective vocabulary—both non-Christian and Christian alike. While the argument differs in many ways from Mandeville's original rationalization, its character is equivalent. The article ends by drawing out Wesleyan insights that challenge the utilitarian hue of such arguments without abandoning economic considerations (particularly those consistent with Christian ends).

The Utilitarian Reflex

The key notion behind utilitarian ideology is simple: the correct action is that which produces the most good.¹² It should be no surprise, then, that such a view plays a decisive role in evaluating normative considerations within the economic realm. That is, an action or attribute is good if it produces a desirable outcome (e.g., profit; growth; efficiency); if not, then it is not.

Today, within the faith community, one is less likely to encounter an unapologetic justification for iniquitous behavior solely on the basis of the industry it is said to beget. In other words, we need not valorize vice or vicious action in order to justify the efficiency and growth associated with a free-market arrangement. There may be various reasons for this, but likely among them is the observation that capitalism is more palatable to the faith community due to its consonance with a set of religiously oriented aims. For one, a free-market seems naturally suited

¹¹ Armstrong, Chris. 2014. "About God's Business." *Christian History* 32-36 (Page 34).

¹² Lebacqz, Karen. 1986. *Six Theories of Justice: Perspectives from Philosophical and Theological Ethics*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House (Page 15).

for a liberal democracy. That is, it makes intuitive sense that societies that prize one dimension of liberty (political/social rights; religious liberty) will naturally prize another (economic rights). In some cases, we might even say that the link is inescapable. For example, should one have a religious motivation to engage in counter-market practices such as an “economy of gift” (to use a term by Theologian Kathryn Tanner)—such action would still presuppose economic liberty. That is, a free-market is the arrangement that, ironically, best allows agents to act in non-market ways.¹³

Second, markets have become a dependable arrangement when it comes to realizing a host of religiously-motivated outcomes (relieving poverty, new mediums for missional activity, sustainability/funding, etc.). As Arthur Brooks has suggested, political rhetoric and poverty-fighting initiatives can be categorized as holding one of two conceptions of the person: an asset to be developed or a liability to be managed.¹⁴ While there are numerous programs that have successfully ameliorated the effects of global poverty, “the biggest poverty-reduction measure of all is liberalising markets to let poor people get richer.”¹⁵ This presupposes the conception of a person as an “asset”: a vessel of potential who shares all the same capacities of intellect, creativity, and productivity as others, but who may lack the resource networks to escape their impoverishment. Thus, for those who seek to address poverty, and who equally hold a high-view of human potential, market structures—embedded in stable infrastructure with education/training institutions and rule of law—become a hopeful means for poverty reduction and human flourishing. In this sense, free markets are not simply a “necessary evil” as authors John Mackey and Rajendra Sisodia argue in their book *Conscious Capitalism*, but a force for good.¹⁶

Finally, it is possible to speak of a link between economic practice and religious faith at a deeper ontological level. As image bearers of a productive, relational, and creative God—it is in our own nature to be creative, productive, and relational. In his book *Redeeming Economics*, John Mueller writes:

Jesus once noted (as an astute empirical observation, not divine revelation) that since the days of Noah and Lot, people have been doing—and presumably will continue to do for as long as there are humans on earth—four kinds of things. He gave these examples: “planting and building,” “buying and selling,” “marrying and being given in marriage,” and “eating

¹³ Relative to this claim, the liberty inherent in a market would provide the antecedent framework to make an act of gift volitional. Moreover, it could be argued, markets are the best economic mechanism by which to produce wealth, therefore providing a more efficacious means to provide a gift-giver something to give.

¹⁴ Brooks, Arthur C. 2015. *We Need Optimists*. Prod. The New York Times. July 25.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/26/opinion/sunday/arthur-c-brooks-we-need-optimists.html>.

¹⁵ The Economist. 2013. *Toward the End of Poverty*. June 1st.
<https://www.economist.com/leaders/2013/06/01/towards-the-end-of-poverty>.

¹⁶ Mackey, John, and Rajendra Sisodia. 2014. *Conscious Capitalism: Liberating the Heroic Spirit of Business*. Boston: Harvard Business School Publishing Corporation (Page 22).

and drinking.” In other words, we human beings produce, exchange, give (or distribute), and use (or consume) our human and nonhuman goods.¹⁷

Thus, related to the capacity of fulfilling human ends, market liberties allow participants to create, own, and dispose as a means to fully express one’s God-designed humanity in a faithful way. Indeed, other arrangements prohibitive of these freedoms may risk short-circuiting the development of such God-reflecting capacities.

While not exhaustive, the aforementioned examples suggest that a commitment to capitalism and its associated economic benefits need not rely upon a “greed is good” justification reminiscent of Mandeville. Moreover, as mentioned, arguments for “vicious” attributes as a service to industry are rare in the modern economy—particularly from within the Christian faith tradition. On this take, it may seem as if the free-market arrangement is a means, not an end; a mechanism in service to larger aims motivated by faith and compassion.

However, this does not necessarily mean that our commercial imagination has been divested of utilitarian sentiment, particularly when evaluating actions based upon their capacity to service industry and growth. Christian faith is closely associated with Christian practice; to believe is to become, and we become through a set of actions, rituals, and liturgies so as to be “transformed by the renewing of our minds” (Romans 12:2). Yet the animus for such practices is often cut from a utilitarian cloth. Though obviously different from vice, appeals are often made to virtuous Christian action (prudence, honesty, thrift, etc.) because of the outcomes such attributes are said to produce. Mandeville argued for the goodness of vice as being intimately connected with economic prosperity. A remnant of this position exists today, what we might call a neo-Mandevillian argument. That is, virtue is also intimately connected to economic prosperity, thus establishing its moral character. Virtue is now the new vice; its goodness is bound up in what it produces. We should seek to be virtuous, goes the argument, because of its positive economic fruit.

Across the contemporary business landscape, the appeal to ethical activity is often animated by the increases in profit, growth, or innovation it is said to produce. Put differently, virtuous activity is praiseworthy because it is “good for business.” Harvard’s Lynn Sharp Paine, for example, writes that enhanced ethical awareness “is essential to building a high-performing company that is going to survive and thrive over the long term.”¹⁸ For her, morality is a costless benefit to an organization—thus making its inclusion strategic for forward-minded organizational leaders.¹⁹ Understanding morality as strategic is not limited to Payne. Consider, for example, the

¹⁷ Mueller, John D. 2010. *Redeeming Economics: Rediscovering the Missing Element*. Wilmington, Delaware: Intercollegiate Studies Institute Books (Page 18).

¹⁸ Paine, Lynn Sharp. 2003. "Is Ethics Good Business? Interview with Lynn Sharp Paine." *Challenge* 46 (2): 6-21 (Page 10).

¹⁹ Her distinction that organizational ethics comes without a significant cost begs the question: if moral excellence came at a high cost for a business, would it not be worth adopting at that point? (or, at a cost that exceeded its financial benefit to the organization?).

advice from a popular Business Ethics Scholar, who suggests that “ethical behavior is the best *long-term business strategy* for a company—a view that has become increasingly accepted during the last few years.”²⁰

Often when evaluating virtuous action within a business environment, the idea of trust is invoked. The Ethics Director of Texas Instruments, for example, recently extolled the value of trust in business relationships: “There are very positive, even competitive, reasons to be ethical. If you walk into a relationship and somebody says, ‘I know you, I know your track record, I can trust you,’ that’s important.”²¹ Other ethics scholars suggest that a solid moral foundation that supports employee commitment and trust, investor loyalty and trust, and customer satisfaction and trust—will ultimately lead to profits.²² Indeed, a recent article in *Forbes* calls trust the most important “commodity” in business.²³ But why trust? Business ethics professor Donald Robin provides a telling answer:

A world without ethics...makes trust impossible, a particularly damning conclusion for the conduct of business. Without trust at any level, business would be impossible, and the more trust that business can develop with each of its stakeholder groups (employees, customers, suppliers, etc.), the more efficient and effective business dealings with those stakeholders become.²⁴

To understand this better, we need simply to recognize the opposite of trust: distrust, or dishonesty. Introducing dishonesty into a situation invites chaos. Motivations are questioned, behaviors change, and a new environment emerges that is less hospitable to efficiency and productivity. Therefore, trust, writes ethicist LaRue Tome Hosmer, is a necessary first step to achieve commitment and effort. Moreover, this can produce solidarity and mutually beneficial partnerships within the organization. The result? An atmosphere where each organizational member feels embedded into the fabric of the institution’s mission: “We’re all in this together.”²⁵ To summarize, the motivation for trust (or other similar values) seems intimately tied to their contribution to productivity and efficiency. Hosmer reflects this spirit in his summary of why a manager should be moral in the workplace: “[M]oral management is *necessary* to achieve the

²⁰ Velasquez, Manuel G. 2002. *Business Ethics: Concepts and Cases*. 5th. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall (Page 5, Italics Mine).

²¹ Skoogland in Trevino, Linda K., and Katherine A. Nelson. 2017. *Managing Business Ethics: Straight Talk How To Do It Right*. 7th. Danvers, MA: Wiley (Page 25).

²² Fraedrich, John, Linda Ferrell, and O.C. Ferrell. 2013. *Ethical Decision Making in Business: A Managerial Approach*. 9th. Nashville, TN: South-Western (Page 17).

²³ Williams, David K. 2013. *The Most Valuable Business Commodity: Trust*. *Forbes Magazine*. June 20. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/davidkwilliams/2013/06/20/the-most-valuable-business-commodity-trust/>.

²⁴ Robin, Donald P. 2005. "Why Ethics and Profits Can and Must Work Together in Business." In *Peterson, Robert A.; Ferrell, O.C.*, by Business Ethics: New Challenges for Business Schools and Corporate Leaders, 196-221. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe (Page 198).

²⁵ Hosmer, LaRue Tome. 2010. *The Ethics of Management*. 7th. New York: McGraw Hill Education (Page 120).

cooperation, innovation, and unification that are so essential for *success* in a competitive global economy.”²⁶

Interestingly, and of more relevance, a similar line of reasoning can be found from many within the Christian Faith Tradition. Here, people of faith draw a link between the virtue Christianity extols and the productivity gains the free-market economic engine produces. Thus, it is not at all unusual to run across formulaic assertions that make virtue a causal mechanism for productivity gains. For example, when asked to comply with the Affordable Care Act’s contraceptive mandate, Hobby Lobby CEO and founder David Green suggested that it was Christian faithfulness, and not strategic business practice or the creation of market value that was responsible for their chain’s success: “We believe wholeheartedly that it is by God’s grace and provision that Hobby Lobby has been successful.”²⁷ In this sense, market success rises to the level of a person or firm’s faithfulness to religious conviction.

The association between biblical application and market success is hardly new. The tendency to correlate material prosperity with Godly favor dates back centuries, even preceding Christ himself. From an early first-century Palestinian context to today’s modern globalized world, the belief that human practice can manipulate the favor of the gods has infiltrated our imaginative landscape. Here, the creator of the universe is more or less constituted by caprice, somewhat akin to “Santa Claus” (better be good, because “Santa Claus is coming...”) and not constituted by love—particularly a love that, writes hymnist Isaac Watts, “demands my soul, my life, my all.”

It is this capricious, shallow god that is often appealed to when promoting Christian practice and virtuous behavior. For example, one popular Christian leadership guru writes: “If you embrace ethical behavior [it will] pave the way for you to become successful...*Ethics + Competence* is a winning equation.”²⁸ Where moral practice is a “winning combination”—Holy scripture can be viewed as a Holy manual: a timeless set of principles invoked to engender success. A recent New York Times article summarizes the perspective well: “For some, the Bible is a kind of business manual you’d buy in an airport bookstore, offering timeless precepts that happen to maximize profits.”²⁹

Related, inculcating virtuous action within marketplace settings can serve as a kind of salve for scrapes and burns of ethical infractions. Indeed, *Activist Business Ethics* author Jacques Cory

²⁶ Ibid. (*Italics Mine*)

²⁷ Rappeport, Alan. June . *Hobby Lobby Made Fight a Matter of Christian Principle*. Prod. New York Times. 30 2014. <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/01/us/hobby-lobby-made-fight-a-matter-of-christian-principle.html>.

²⁸ Maxwell, John. 2003. *There's No Such Thing as "Business" Ethics: There's Only One Rule for Making Decisions*. Manhattan, NY: Center Street (Page 15; *Italics His*).

²⁹ Oppenheimer, Mark. 2013. *At Christian Companies, Religious Principles Complement Business Practices*. The New York Times: Beliefs. August 2nd. https://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/03/us/at-christian-companies-religious-principles-complement-business-practices.html?_r=1. Notice that this stands in contrast to Chris Armstrong’s assertion that Wesley was concerned about how the wealth earned by Methodists during the industrial era might have a corrupting effect upon their purity, etc.

claims that Christian ethics became relevant at the start of the 21st Century as a means to “counterbalance the immoral norms of the 80s and 90s.”³⁰ Similarly, Phil Clements, the founder of the Center for Christian Ethics in Business (CFCBE), describes the motivation for the Center’s origination in 2009: “[The center was established] to address the *need* for the application of Christian principles to strengthen business operations.”³¹

In summary, these views suggest that it is virtue, not vice, that is actually good for business. Moreover, the success virtue is said to engender in the marketplace, and the inefficiencies of unethical practice it is believed to ameliorate, is a motivating animus for its pursuit and embodiment. This perspective, what we might call the neo-Mandevillian argument, reveals a particular conception of spiritual formation—one that, writes Wesleyan scholar Greg Clapper, “seem[s] to be about making the reader a more effective salesperson or business manager.”³² Yet how would Wesley, himself, evaluate this perspective?

Motive Matters: A Wesleyan Critique of Economic Consequentialism

Like Glaucon before him, Mandeville’s original rationalization of vice offers a consummate utilitarian argument when he questions the pursuit of virtue since, while seemingly honorable, it fails to bear economic fruit. If vice is the vessel by which to spur industry, then such outcomes are, ipso facto, sufficient to justify the means.

A contemporary of Mandeville, John Wesley found this justification abhorrent. Upon reading *The Fable of the Bees*, he journaled, “Till now I imagined there had never appeared in the world such a book as the works of Machiavel. But de Mandeville goes far beyond it.”³³

Wesley was not opposed to the pursuit of wealth and earning. To the contrary, in his famous dictum to “earn all you can”—he suggested that such an act was the Christian’s “bounden duty.”³⁴ However, there are significant moral limits on how we come to acquire wealth—what Wesley calls “honest industry.”³⁵ That is, the moral weight of economic activity does not simply rest with what one does with their money, but how they come by it. First, the person of faith is to realize their gain without harming one’s neighbor. This may include the sale of a product that elicits physical harm to the consumer. Indeed, Wesley unambiguously asserts that anyone who harms a neighbor for the sake of economic gain deserves the punishment of hell.³⁶ Second, and of

³⁰ Cory, Jacques. 2004. *Activist Business Ethics*. New York: Springer (Page 35).

³¹ The Center for Christian Business Ethics Today. n.d. *About the Center for Christian Business Ethics Today*. Accessed November 2013. <http://www.cfcbe.com/about/> (Italics mine).

³² Clapper, Greg. n.d. *Putting Legs on Your Longings: John Wesley's Vision of Spirituality*. https://www.gbhem.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/PUB_ClapperLegsLongings.pdf.

³³ Mandeville, p. 8

³⁴ Wesley, John. 2013. "The Complete Sermons." In *Sermon 50: The Use of Money*. Scotts Valley, CA: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform (Page 270).

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Marquardt, Manfred. 2000. *John Wesley's Social Ethics: Praxis and Principle*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers (Page 40).

equal importance, sales practices that harm one's soul through "temptation, unchastity, or deceit" are illegitimate means of gain.³⁷

Furthermore, Wesley rejected the correlation of economic success with God's favor.³⁸ For one, Wesleyanism sought to "minister primarily to the classes of people who were disfranchised [sic] politically, economically, and religiously."³⁹ Wesley did not valorize poverty, nor did he commend wealth. As Wesley Scholar Thomas Oden writes, "Wesley was less interested in theories of how the economy works than in nurturing the habits of the practice of stewardship of God's gifts of time and possessions."⁴⁰ Thus, for Wesley, stewardship—the management of what has been entrusted to us—is a significant theme. He writes, "But employ whatever God has entrusted you with, in doing good, all possible good, in every possible kind and degree to the household of faith, to all men."⁴¹

Because of Wesley's emphasis on how the person of faith earns their money, it is not surprising, then, that he would have such a strong reaction to Mandeville's rationalization that "bare vertue [sic] can't make Nations live"⁴² and, thus, "man should commit to gratify any of his Appetites."⁴³

Yet what, we might ask, would Wesley have to say about today's neo-Mandevillian argument—which argues not for vice, but for its noble opposite: virtue. On the surface, it would seem that those from within the orthodox Christian tradition would flock to support an argument that elevates virtuous action. Yet a closer inspection suggests that such a line of reasoning is as damnable as Mandeville's original Faustian bargain of vice for enterprise. There are two arguments for this: the first practical and the second theological.

To begin, the neo-Mandevillian argument asserts that virtuous behavior produces desirable marketplace outcomes. The assertion is not without merit.⁴⁴ Whether citing classical virtues (justice, temperance, fortitude, courage), theological virtues (faith, hope, charity), or even a more generic conception of virtue (trust, goodwill, compassion, resilience, reciprocity, etc.)—it makes intuitive sense that such characteristics would naturally fertilize the fields of commercial growth.

³⁷ Oden, Thomas C. 2014. *John Wesley's Teachings*. Vol. Volume 4: Ethics and Society. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan (Page 64).

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 42. Related, Thomas Madron points out that in this regard, "Wesley represents an exception to the general Protestant ethic of Calvinism, which influenced the eighteenth century so greatly." See Madron, p. 109.

³⁹ Madron, Thomas W. 1981. "John Wesley on Economics." In *Sanctification and Liberation: Liberation Theologies in the Light of the Wesleyan Tradition*, edited by Theodore Runyon, 102-115. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press (Page 103).

⁴⁰ Oden, p. 59

⁴¹ Wesley, "On Money," p. 273

⁴² Mandeville, p. 76

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 86

⁴⁴ Several authors have sought to make this very case—that is, an empirical connection between moral and ethical actions and successful business outcomes. See, for example, Adam Grant's 2014 book "Give and Take: Why Helping Others Drives Our Success" or Doug Lennick and Fred Kiel's 2007 book "*Moral Intelligence: Enhancing Business Performance & Leadership Success*."

Yet the neo-Mandevillian argument does not rest upon an empirical claim (virtue aids enterprise), but a normative claim (one *should* act virtuous *because* it aids enterprise). Thus, the neo-Mandevillian argument maintains the same utilitarian architecture as Mandeville's original fable. That is, in consequentialist fashion, the rightness of the action and/or disposition (virtue/vice) is based upon the consequence it produces.

Put differently, vice or virtue find normative justification based upon their capacity to produce efficacious market outcomes. This is an important insight, as in reality, markets mobilize a variety of behaviors—both good and bad. Moreover, a mounting body of research suggests that, consistent with Mandeville's original assertion in *The Fable of the Bees*, vice can indeed produce successful marketplace outcomes as well as virtue.

For example, in his Atlantic article titled “Why it Pays to Be a Jerk”—author Jerry Useem documents a host of research suggesting that power, overconfidence, snobbery, and immodesty are primary drivers of wealth and success in today's market.⁴⁵ Moreover, desirable attributes such as agreeableness, modesty, and being nice may actually harm one's ability for success. Related is the “Money-Empathy Gap” phenomenon, revealing that the pursuit of profit can make us less human in a variety of ways.⁴⁶ In a recent “Scientific America” article, scholar Kevin Dutton talks about the success lessons that can be gleaned, not from educators or business leadership gurus, but from psychopaths. Indeed, notes Dutton, psychopaths share a host of similar traits with successful CEOs. These include manipulation, lack of remorse, grandiose sense of self-worth, and a lack of empathy or compassion for others.⁴⁷ It is unsurprising, then, that a popular 2012 poll found that nearly one out of four financial executives believe it is necessary to undertake what would be commonly viewed as unethical activity in order to be successful.⁴⁸

For these reasons, Stanford's Jeff Pfeffer suggests that we must get beyond the nonsense of associating ethical action with marketplace success. He suggests that such a story is nothing other than a “modern day morality tale.”⁴⁹ The narrative may capture some areas of truth, but it ultimately misses a wider, more dominant dimension of reality: vice can also correlate with success.

⁴⁵ Useem, Jerry. 2015. *Why it Pays to be a Jerk: New Research Confirms What They Say About Nice Guys*. The Atlantic. June. <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/06/why-it-pays-to-be-a-jerk/392066/>.

⁴⁶ Describing the gap, Miller writes, “[L]iving high on the socioeconomic ladder can, colloquially speaking, dehumanize people. It can make them less ethical, more selfish, more insular, and less compassionate than other people.” See Miller, Lisa. 2012. *The Money-Empathy Gap*. New York Magazine. July 1st. <http://nymag.com/news/features/money-brain-2012-7/>.

⁴⁷ Dutton, Kevin. 2012. *What Psychopaths Teach Us about How to Succeed*. Scientific America. October 1. <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/what-psychopaths-teach-us-about-how-to-succeed/>.

⁴⁸ Labaton Sucharow. 2012. *Financial Services Professionals Feel Unethical Behavior May Be a Necessary Evil and Have Knowledge of Workplace Misconduct, According to Labaton Sucharow Survey*. Labaton Sucharow. July 10. <https://www.labaton.com/en/about/press/Labaton-Sucharow-announces-results-of-financial-services-professional-survey.cfm>.

⁴⁹ Pfeffer, Jeff. 2016. *Getting beyond the BS of leadership literature*. McKinsey Quarterly. January. <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/leadership/getting-beyond-the-bs-of-leadership-literature>.

To summarize, when the rightness of virtue or vice is only understood in terms of the desirable economic outcomes it is believed to produce, these qualities have no inherent normative dimension. Their moral excellence, or lack thereof, is relevant to their consequence. They are a mere means, not an end.

This leads to a second, more theologically-informed argument against the neo-Mandevillian position, which draws from the Wesleyan paradigm. Of note, where Wesley found Mandeville's crass consequentialism repugnant, he equally does not advocate for a deontological, or principle-based, response. Rather, his theological ethic is teleological in its makeup. As Oden writes, Wesley was not opposed to money or economic growth; rather, wealth and its use was "a training ground for eternity."⁵⁰ Such "everlasting habitations" were intimately tied to Wesley's larger, more nuanced, understanding of the faith life.

In many ways, Wesley's theology was informed by, or at the very least reflected, much of the reformed theology of Luther and Calvin. For example, he held a similar doctrine of original sin, justification (as being restored to God), and the denial of works-righteousness, or the idea that salvation is conditioned upon human merit. Like Luther, Wesley believed that *sola fide*, faith alone, was the singular condition for justification.⁵¹

Yet for Wesley, one's faith, simply put, should never be "alone." His theology uniquely combined dimensions of what might be understood as Roman Catholic faith (i.e., habits, actions, and human cooperation with God) with a more Protestant or evangelical faith (God's sovereign work in us). Scholar Ken Collins writes, "[T]he former aspect displays the ongoing growth and development that is a normal part of any vital spiritual life. The latter aspect displays not process but the crucial element of actualization or realization."⁵² Put differently, our salvation is not contingent upon our habits and practices alone. However, faith unaccompanied by certain habits and practices would cease to be faith. The two have a somewhat inseparable character, or what Collins calls a "thoroughgoing synergism."⁵³

This links with another very important dimension of Wesley's theology: his doctrine of holiness. Wesley understood sin as both an act and a nature. The former being a transgression against the known will of God; the latter being a dispositional bent, or *incurvatus in se*—Luther's description of a person "curved inward on oneself."⁵⁴ Holiness, therefore, is a dispositional change, or "the establishment of the love of God in the soul without any rival."⁵⁵ Naturally, a dispositional change will manifest in human action. Specifically, as Collins writes, the love of God will become

⁵⁰ Oden, p. 60

⁵¹ Collins, Kenneth J. 1997. *The Scripture Way of Salvation: The Heart of John Wesley's Theology*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press (Page 95).

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 99.

⁵³ In this regard, Wesley quotes St. Augustine, who says "he that hath made us without ourselves, will not save us without ourselves." Collins, p. 44.

⁵⁴ Jenson, Matt. 2006. *The Gravity of Sin: Augustine, Luther and Barth on homo incurvatus in se*. London: T&T Clark (Page 5).

⁵⁵ Collins, p. 122

a “ruling habit” of the soul. Where sin orients us toward rebellion and other unholy tempers, this habit will orient us towards God and eternity and will radically transform our own affections.

Here, Wesley echoes Augustine’s definition of virtue as *ordo amoris*, or “ordered love.”⁵⁶ In his famous sermon “On Zeal” Wesley outlines the properties of Christian zeal, which are also, he claims, the properties of love. These include humility, meekness, patience, and a consistent, “steady rooted” disposition of love.⁵⁷ Importantly, Wesley does not argue for the love or zeal (“heat”) of good works alone, but for “holy tempers”: “for planting and promoting, both in our own souls, and in all we have any intercourse with, lowliness of mind, meekness, gentleness, longsuffering, contentedness, resignation unto the will of God, deadness to the world and the things of the world, as the only means of being truly alive to God.”⁵⁸

For Wesley, this is the *telos* of the Christian life—the “full restoration of the Imago Dei in which we were created.”⁵⁹ Put differently, true religion is “right tempers towards God and man”⁶⁰—and these tempers will “accompany us into heaven.”⁶¹

This last point is of utmost importance. Dr. Victor Shepherd provides a very helpful way of parsing out Wesley’s notions of justification and sanctification:

We can be admitted to the concert hall, any concert hall, only if we have a ticket. The ticket of admission gives us the right to hear the symphony concert. Let us suppose we possess such a ticket. We sit down to listen to the glorious music of the masters — only to discover that we are bored out of our minds, since the music seems much ado about nothing; or worse than being bored, we are jarred, upset, since the concert strikes us as grating, pointless, seemingly endless, an utter waste of an evening we could have spent at something fruitful — and all of this just because we are tone-deaf. The ticket of admission gives us the right to be present; but as long as we are tone-deaf we aren’t fit to be present. Regardless of our right to be at the concert, it is only our musicality that fits us for the concert. Without that musicality which fits us for the concert, the concert is merely a huge frustration.

John Wesley insisted that forgiveness of sins gives believing people the right to heaven; but only holiness renders us fit for heaven. Justification (pardon, forgiveness) admits us; sanctification (holiness, new birth) fits us. Justification means that in Christ believers have

⁵⁶ In his famous work *The City of God*, Augustine writes: “So that it seems to me that it is a brief but true definition of virtue to say, it is the order of love.” See Saint Augustine of Hippo. 2009. *The City of God*. Translated by Marcus Dods. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers (Page 461).

⁵⁷ Wesley, John. 2013. “The Complete Sermons.” In *Sermon 92: On Zeal*. Scotts Valley, CA: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform (Page 463).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Collins, p. 153

⁶⁰ Collins, p. 164

⁶¹ Wesley, John. 2013. “The Complete Sermons.” In *Sermon 92: On Zeal*. Scotts Valley, CA: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform (Page 463).

a new standing with God; sanctification (holiness) means that in Christ believers have a new nature from God.⁶²

Wesley held to this theme until his death. As Collins writes, the righteousness of Christ provides a means to heaven (the right; our entitlement), but it is our holiness, our “fitness”—that qualifies for it.⁶³ Wesley writes: “Without the righteousness of Christ, we could have no *claim* to glory; without holiness we could have no *fitness* for it.”⁶⁴

It is this important emphasis upon the interior life that challenges both the Mandevillian and the neo-Mandevillian arguments for vice and virtue respectively. Holy tempers are not to be prized for the industry they produce. Rather, it is the inculcation of virtue, holy habits, and holy appetites that makes us fit for our eternal reality. Virtue is not a tool; a means to utilitarian gain. If it were, then at best, it could only be understood as what C.S. Lewis described as a “mercenary reward”—or a reward that is “quite foreign to the desires that ought to accompany those things.”⁶⁵ For Wesley, like Lewis after him, virtue is a teleological end and a humanizing temperament.⁶⁶ Put differently, for the person of faith, salvation is not simply “a way to heaven” but also “a way on earth.”⁶⁷

Wesley’s notion of sanctification has been summarized as, simply put, having the “mind of Christ” (Phil. 2:5-8). As Manfred Marquardt suggest, this theme occurs repeatedly in Wesley’s writing as both a description of sanctification and “the proper tenor of the Christian’s existence.”⁶⁸ But, he points out, imitating the life and mind of Christ is not simply a matter of reduplicating his deeds. Rather, it is “being filled with love, as Christ was, and letting love control all one’s deeds.”⁶⁹ “The goal of the process of sanctification is perfection in this life,” writes Thomas Madron, “that is, the perfect possession of the perfect motive—love of God and love of others.”⁷⁰

Perfect motive. This is a Wesleyan summary of what it means to be faithful in a complex, globalized commercial marketplace. Our moral, ethical, and spiritual growth cannot, and should not, be animated by the economic growth and industry it is said to service (i.e., “mercenary rewards”). Rather, marketplace navigation is to be moderated by the Christian’s commitment to another kingdom. As Armstrong summarizes, “[G]et the heart in order, and good, ethical actions will follow—in the marketplace as well as the church, home, and public square.”⁷¹ Such a

⁶²Shepherd, Victor. 2003. "What Did John Wesley Mean by “Holiness of Heart and Life?”." *Sermons and Writings of Victor Shepherd*. August 24. <http://victorshepherd.ca/what-did-john-wesley-mean-by-holiness-of-heart-and-life/>.

⁶³ Collins, p. 199

⁶⁴ Wesley in Collins, p. 199 (Italics his)

⁶⁵ Lewis, C.S. 1976. *The Weight of Glory*. New York: Harper One (Pages 26-27).

⁶⁶ Lewis writes that the cultivation of virtue and ordinate affection is no mere bribe, “but the very consummation of [our] earthly discipleship.” See *The Weight of Glory*, p. 28.

⁶⁷ Armstrong 2014

⁶⁸ Marquardt, p. 114

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Madron, pp. 105-106

⁷¹ Armstrong 2014. He notes that while Methodists did, indeed, resist the industrialization that emerged around them, they also embraced it, “for *Methodist reasons*” (Italics his).

configuration—the ordinate love for what is good, right, and true—is most certainly relevant to modern business practice and society’s economic health. Yet its aim extends beyond such considerations, as it speaks to human *telos* and eternal fitness.

Such a perspective provides guidelines for business practice, or what Madron describes as Wesley’s attitude toward “business integrity.” He writes: “[Wesley’s] primary questions was, ‘In what spirit do you go through your business? In the spirit of the world, or in the spirit of Christ?’”⁷² For the Christian committed to the latter, all activities, practices, transactions, investments, and strategies are aimed toward the glory of God.⁷³ On this point, Wesley is clear: “No outward works are acceptable to him [God] unless they spring from holy tempers.”⁷⁴ Unlike the utilitarianism of Mandeville or the neo-Mandevillian argument for virtue where the ends justify the means, the life of faith seeks participation in the life of God as the end, and such an aim conditions the means of human practice—including our commercial endeavors.

As a final note, there is a residual point to be made in the Wesleyan articulation of heart holiness. Sanctification and eternal fitness are not mere stipulations for a heavenly destination or boxes to be checked to attend the “great banquet.” Rather, holiness—possessing the mind of Christ with an orientation toward other-centered love—is also linked with happiness. Contrary to our modern notions of happiness as a state of mind (i.e., feeling good), Wesley would have held to a more classical understanding of the term, where happiness is an “outcome of moral comportment.”⁷⁵ Reminiscent of Augustine’s famous confession that God made humanity for himself, and “restless is our heart until it comes to rest in you”⁷⁶—Wesley understood sanctification as key to human flourishing—the realization of our fullest, richest self.⁷⁷

In Sermon 77 “Spiritual Worship”—Wesley writes: “In this alone can you find the happiness you seek; in the union of your spirit with the Father of spirits; in the knowledge and love of Him who is the fountain of happiness, sufficient for all the souls he has made.”⁷⁸ Instead of looking for satisfaction, fulfillment, and general happiness from external sources, Wesley

⁷² Madron, pp. 112-113

⁷³ Note that commercial activity given over to the glory of God does not necessarily dismiss business consequences. As argued, virtue is not commendable simply because of the desirable “bottom line” outcomes it is said to produce. Indeed, virtue may actually harm business outcomes or efficiency. That said, outcomes for the sake of employee relationships, shareholders, or stakeholders may also be influenced by God-honoring motivations—which may impel the worker toward more effective practices.

⁷⁴ Wesley in Collins, p. 167 (Italics his)

⁷⁵ McMahon, Darrin M. 2010. *A History of Happiness*. Yes! Magazine. October 1st.

<https://www.yesmagazine.org/happiness/a-history-of-happiness>.

⁷⁶ Augustine. 2007. *Confessions*. Translated by Albert C. Outler. New York: Barnes and Noble Classics (Page 3).

⁷⁷ Hindmarsh, Bruce. 2014. *Holy and Happy?* Biola University Center for Christian Thought. March 9.

<https://cct.biola.edu/holy-and-happy/>.

⁷⁸ Wesley, John. 2013. “The Complete Sermons.” In *Sermon 77: Spiritual Worship*. Scotts Valley, CA: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform (Page 398).

predictably returns to the heart. “[T]rue religion,” he writes, “or a heart right toward God and man, implies happiness as well as holiness.”⁷⁹

This stands in contradistinction to the popular idea that to adopt Christian faith and its associated practices required divesting one’s self of desirable, delectable pursuits in exchange for a more mundane, puritanical, and prudish lifestyle. Indeed, as credited to H.L. Mencken, many define Puritanism as a fear that someone, somewhere may be enjoying themselves. In William Law’s “A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life”—an essay influential to a younger John Wesley—Law challenges this popular conception. Indeed, the habits and temperaments of the committed faith life, writes Law, “will render [Christians] full of content and strong satisfactions” or what he refers to as “real happiness.”⁸⁰

Thus, to be a Christ follower did not commit a Christian to ascetic drudgery or banish them to a life of unfulfilled desire. Nor did it limit the promise of fulfillment to an otherworldly, heavenly realm. In reflecting upon Christ’s Sermon on the Mount, Wesley provides another translation of Christ’s invitation: “Behold, I show you the thing which your soul longeth for! See the way you have so long sought in vain; the way of pleasantness; the path to calm, joyous peace, to heaven below and heaven above!”⁸¹ Indeed, believes Wesley, this is true satisfaction, and such fulfillment is available this side of heaven.

Conclusion

In his popular book on Christian perfection, Wesley writes that such perfection entails “giving God all our heart; it is one desire and design ruling all our tempers.”⁸² To understand “perfection” in this sense as being faultless or inerrant would miss a much larger dimension of the Wesleyan faith. One popular variation of “perfect” in Greek is *teleioi*, derived from the word *telos*—a thing’s purpose, end, or good.⁸³ That is, to be perfect is to fulfill, or realize, our teleological ends as beings created in God’s image.

This key notion animates much of the larger Wesleyan tradition, and challenges arguments for vice and its opposite, virtue, as a means to a more industrious, growth-oriented economy. As this article has attempted to suggest, the Mandevillian and neo-Mandevillian arguments differ due to their appeal to vice and virtue respectively. Both, however, are constituted by a desire to

⁷⁹ Wesley, John. 2013. “The Complete Works.” In *Sermon 7: The Way to the Kingdom*. Scotts Valley, CA: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform (Page 31).

⁸⁰ Law, William. 1959. “A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life.” In *Classics of Protestantism*, edited by Vergilius Ferm, 149-164. New York: Philosophical Library (Page 150).

⁸¹ Wesley, John. 2013. “The Complete Works.” In *Sermon 21: Upon Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse One*. Scotts Valley, CA: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform (Page 107).

⁸² Wesley in Collins, p. 176.

⁸³ For example, this can be found in Matthew 5:48, “Therefore, you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect”—or, “Therefore, you are to be *telos*...”

maximize market outcomes and, therefore, are to be rejected as the animus for normative Christian action.

As it relates to the neo-Mandevillian argument, the problem is not the appeal to virtue (a pursuit seemingly praiseworthy). Virtue and a virtuous disposition is integral to the life of faith. Rather, the problem relates to leveraging virtue as a means to an end (not as an end in itself). In this sense, the Mandevillian and neo-Mandevillian arguments—while rightly understood as utilitarian—are also teleological in the sense that they aim toward a particular end (desirable business outcomes).⁸⁴ This reduces virtue to a tool or a mere shadow, not an internal disposition woven deeply into the fabric of our humanity—or what Wesley has called “holy tempers.”⁸⁵ Marquardt summarizes Wesley’s position well:

Wesley distinguished between the outward performance of good, which was not without value but nevertheless only provisional, and the performance of good that followed the inner renewal by God’s grace, prompted and shaped by love. Only this latter activity should in the proper sense be characterized as good. Only a person who acted out of love was really doing good.⁸⁶

To be constituted by love is not a “means of gain” as Paul writes in I Timothy.⁸⁷ Rather, it is moderating force in the here and now, thus making it highly relevant to our business affairs. While holy habits, temperaments, and appetites may fan the flames of industry—their pursuit, adoption, and embodiment ultimately relate to the teleological ends and irreducible essence of our existence: to reflect the image of our creator. In Wesley’s notes on I Corinthians 13, he writes: “[Love] accompanies to, and adorns us in, Eternity; it prepares us for, and constitutes Heaven.”⁸⁸ Love is our *fitness* for glory. It is an internal disposition that—while related to our earthly affairs—maintains an eternal aim.

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⁸⁴ Actions aim toward an end or a good—the question is what good is worthy of our aim? What are we meant to orient ourselves around? Wesley’s teleology was grounded not simply in an outcome as being good, but the very nature of what it means to be a human made in God’s image (i.e., the purpose of being a human).

⁸⁵ In his Sermon “On Zeal”—Wesley writes: “But of all holy tempers, and above all others, see that you be most zealous for love.” On Zeal, p. 465

⁸⁶ Marquardt, pp. 103-104

⁸⁷ I Timothy 6:5. 2009. *The Wesley Study Bible (NRSV)*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press.

⁸⁸ Wesley, John. 1818. *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament*. New York: Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States (Page 550).

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