



IDOLS OF NATIONS

BIBLICAL MYTH AT THE ORIGINS OF CAPITALISM

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“When Adam delved and Eve span, Who was then the gentleman?”
—*The Rev. John Ball, Lollard priest,*
from a sermon preached at Blackheath
at the beginning of the Peasants’ Revolt (1381).

On the cover: The Labors of Adam and Eve.
Panel from the Grabow Altarpiece at the St. Petri Church in Hamburg, 1379–1383
(oil tempera on wood; Inv. 500 h/3; photo: Elke Walford).

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Preface

How did the early ideologues of capitalism engage with the Bible and theology? How did they wrestle with the Bible in constructing myths to justify what was still a new economic order? What is it like to read those whom Marx read when researching *Capital*? These are some of the questions that played in our minds as we read, discussed, and wrote this book. Hugo Grotius, John Locke, Adam Smith, and Thomas Malthus are our concerns, and into their thoughts we have delved. We have been intrigued, surprised, exasperated, underwhelmed at their banalities, often laughing out loud at their astonishing contortions as they sought to retell biblical stories. Or rather, they try to retell the story of the Fall, and of Adam more generally, finding there the origins of private property, self-interest, labor, exchange, commerce, law, and states. In the process, greed becomes a social benefit, acquisitiveness part of the divine plan, and labor a result of God's command to subdue the earth. Idols indeed, worshipped and justified by a text that systematically condemns those idols. After all, it takes some deft storytelling to make the biblical text say almost exactly the opposite of what it does say.

In the process of writing, we have been assisted by those who have read and commented on regular posts on Roland's blog, *Stalin's Moustache* (stalinsmoustache.org). Often these posts contained some of the more outlandish quotations from these early economic thinkers, quirky and offensive pieces that reveal the truth about their proposals as a whole. In addition, Warren Montag provided sage advice on John Locke and Adam Smith. Mika Ojankangas from Finland gave insight into the workings of their thoughts, as well as those of Grotius and Malthus, on human nature and moral philosophy. And the participants of the Bible and Critical Theory Seminar (which meets annually in a pub somewhere in Australia or New Zealand) asked pointed questions. Last but not least, Neil Elliott of Fortress Press urged and encouraged us to write this work. To all these people, we are extremely thankful.

As we read and wrote, we were mindful of the fact that we were treading in Marx's footsteps to some extent. He read these same texts in the slow process of writing *Capital*. Although we cannot hope to match his critique and insight, we have undertaken this

project with a similar approach: to ascertain the patterns of argument, myth-making, and the blind spots of what became the ideological carapace for capitalism. For many a long year we have discussed and debated our individual projects, but this is the first full work we have written together. As such, it is truly a joint project.

On the Красная стрела (Red Arrow) train
Somewhere between St. Petersburg and Moscow
September 2013

Introduction

The present study investigates the interaction between theology and economy in the writings of four political economists—Hugo Grotius, John Locke, Adam Smith and Thomas Malthus—who are commonly grouped with the founding “fathers” of “economics.” If, as Ben Fine and Dimitri Milonakis argue,^[1] the discipline of economics constituted itself through a process of individualization, de-socialization, and de-historicization, we would like to add to this the process of de-theologization, as also an important step in the dialectic of reduction and universalism that is crucial to economics imperialism. For Fine and Milonakis, “economics imperialism” refers to the application of supposed universal criteria derived from classical and neoclassical economics to all aspects of human existence, including the choices people make in relation to religion. That is, religion too is a marketplace, and human beings as economic animals make rational choices in light of what they regard as their own benefit. In the process of reduction and universalization, the specific and limited nature of the economic theory in question is effaced. These limitations appear when one investigates not only the social and historical context of its emergence, but also the biblical and theological nature of those earlier debates. Our task here is to focus on this final element, namely, the way the Bible and theology indelibly stamp the theories in question.

We have decided to focus on four of the key theorists rather than offer a grand sweep characteristic of what is known as the “History of Economic Thought” (HET).^[2] These histories inevitably either lead up to Adam Smith, or begin with his work and then follow his successors, thereby marking him as both the culmination of a preparatory phase and the inaugurator of a new tradition. We opt to place Smith within this continuum rather than designate him as a beginning or end of a particular tradition. But why do we focus on these four? It enables us to dig deeper into their work, to explore the crucial deployments and rewritings of the myth of the emergence of private property, labor, if not the free market itself. Thereby, we are able to investigate with some patience their engagements with the Bible and the myths they derive from it, especially how they struggle to force new theories of economic activity and human nature from biblical narratives that resist such theories.^[3]

Thus, in the chapter on Grotius (1583–1645), we identify his Arminian (or Remonstrant) theology and the constituent role it plays in his interpretation of the Fall. Keen to avoid the imputation of evil to God and to assert the freedom of the will for each individual, Grotius effectively minimizes the effects of the Fall on human nature. As a ruling class ideologue in the United Provinces (Netherlands) during the first capitalist commercial empire, he shares their abhorrence at the central doctrinal point of Calvinism that all one's works, achievements, wealth, and power count as nothing before God. This effort to tame the Fall provides the necessary preconditions for what is arguably the first version of the myth of capitalism—a myth that constructs a story of the origin of private property out of an original common, as well as the growth of law, states, and commerce. That myth also provides Grotius with a means for arguing that the seas cannot be private property, for they have never met the criteria he has invented. Grotius also provides an excellent example of the constitutive limitations of the doctrine of liberalism, particularly in the way he shows how slavery is entailed by private property.

From Grotius we move to Locke (1632–1704), who develops the myth further on the basis of his own effort to limit the effects of the Fall. For Locke, the Fall pertains only to mortality, which enables him to sidestep the other curses relating to labor and property. However, the Fall continues to trip up Locke as he outlays both his principles of human nature (freedom and equality) and his myth. In order to trace the Fall's deft ability to trouble Locke's efforts, we focus on both of his treatises on government, since the first treatise's detailed biblical engagements (especially Genesis 1–3) provide the basis for his famous myth of property in the fifth book of the second treatise. Like Grotius, Locke provides clear examples of the logic of exclusion found in the universal claims of liberalism, particularly in terms of children, the state of nature, and ethnocentrism.

Grotius and Locke may have provided early versions of the myth of capitalism, but Adam Smith (1723–90) is really the preeminent mythmaker and storyteller. Not content with a single myth, he develops two: a foundation myth and a grand narrative. While the former seeks to justify his assertions concerning human nature (that human beings naturally truck, barter, and exchange, and that self-interest leads to greater social benefit), the latter universalizes the chronic particularity of Smith's ideas concerning capitalism and the free market. Beyond those myths, we also explore his penchant for vignettes, fables, sayings, moral tales, and parables. But does the Fall make its presence felt in Smith's writings? At first glance, he seems to have left it behind; yet at a deeper, narrative level it recurs—not merely in the construction of myths but also in the tension between narratives of difference and those of identity, between those stories that need to narrate a

passage from a different state in the past to those that assert that the past was largely the same as the present. We close by observing that Smith's ambivalence concerning religion enables both theological and secular readings of his rambling works.

We close our in-depth analyses with Thomas Malthus (1766–1834), not least because he troubles any clear narrative of the secularization of economic thought after Smith. Malthus is one of the few with a decidedly strong doctrine of evil. Obviously, this means that the Fall is once again crucially important, especially when one studies Malthus's sermons (he was a priest in the Church of England). With this in mind, we analyze closely his essay on population, especially the first edition with its stark observations concerning the goodness of God that turns into evil. For Malthus, God's gifts of procreation and the impulse to work for our subsistence lead inevitably to misery and vice through overpopulation and inadequate food. That Malthus shies away from the full implications of his argument is made clear through the subsequent editions of his essay on population, where he asserts the role of moral sanction on restricting the drive for sex. His backpedaling only serves to highlight the possibility that God may be responsible for both good and evil. All of these issues appear in his half dozen efforts to retell the myth of capitalism. Although Malthus dabbles with a myth of progress, he clearly prefers a myth of regress, with its increasingly dire outcomes that result from the growth of human societies and economies. Yet Malthus's chronic racism—which he shares with Adam Smith and indeed John Locke—is once again the clearest indication that liberalism's universal claims are far from universal.

Thus, the central themes that appear in the following study include the importance of the biblical Fall (to the extent that the early economic theories of capitalism were wrested from the text of Genesis 1–3), the importance of myth,^[4] the theorists' near-obsessive deliberations concerning human nature, and the systemic limitations of liberalism and its claims to freedom. However, given that a number of recent studies deal with matters concerning religion and economics, we would like to point out what this work is not.

First of all, we do not undertake a study of economic theology, by which we mean the spate of studies that emphasize moral and social justice issues. For the most part, these studies are written by theologians of a mildly left-wing persuasion seeking to critique capitalism and its ravages. While we are in some sympathy with the general tenor of such works, we remain suspicious of ethics as an elite discourse.^[5] That is, given the very way ethics first appears in the oft-cited work of Aristotle, especially *The Nicomachian Ethics*, it continues to be determined by the ruling class assumptions in which he framed his treatment.^[6] Second, we are not engaged in adding to the arsenal of

neoclassical economic theory, using religion as a way to understand the psychological and motivational factors that the traditional *homo economicus* fails to answer.^[7] Third, we find the efforts by those who are inspired by a radically conservative agenda (often known as radical orthodoxy) to be quite wayward. This emphasis may appear in a weak form, making the unremarkable point that economic theory is based upon unexamined moral and ideological assumptions or that economics and religion may be loosely analogous.^[8] It may also appear in a distinctly reactionary form, arguing that “revealed religion” is the basis of economics.^[9] Finally, we are clearly opposed to any form of economics imperialism, which approaches the study of religious belief, behavior, and institutions from an economic, market, or “rational choice” perspective.^[10]

One question remains: why “Idols of Nations” as our title? Since Adam Smith most likely drew the title of *Wealth of Nations* from Isa. 61:6,12 (and 60:5), we consider it apropos to draw upon the Bible for a title that presents an opposing view. Thus, we found that the psalms and prophetic texts also speak of the idols of nations. Jeremiah 14:22 asks, “Can any idols of the nations bring rain? Or can the heavens give showers?” But Ps. 135:15 comes straight to the point: “The idols of the nations are silver and gold, the work of human hands.” In other words, the development of classical economics identifies not so much the sources of the wealth of nations but rather provides—unwittingly—a theory that seeks to justify the idolatry of the nations which worship the work of human hands.

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1. Dimitris Milonakis and Ben Fine, *From Political Economy to Economics: Method, the Social and the Historical in the Evolution of Economic Theory* (London: Routledge, 2009); Ben Fine and Dimitris Milonakis, *From Economics Imperialism to Freakonomics: The Shifting Boundaries between Economics and Other Social Sciences* (London: Routledge, 2009); Ben Fine and Dimitris Milonakis, “From Freakonomics to Political Economy,” *Historical Materialism* 20, no. 3 (2012): 81–96.↵
 2. One of the most sweeping of such efforts is that of Viner, or rather the snippets that appeared of a project he was never able to complete. He runs all the way from classical Greece to the 1960s, thereby replicating the myth of classicism and the grand narratives characteristic of economic theorists such as Smith. The effect is both to universalize the specific forms of economic behavior peculiar to capitalism and to exclude or sideline significant contributions, including Marxists and Calvinists. Jacob Viner, *The Role of Providence in the Social Order: An Essay in Intellectual History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972); Jacob Viner, *Essays on the Intellectual History of Economics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).↵
 3. Others may have made the list, such as John Stuart Mill, but his self-proclaimed “Religion of Humanity” in its hand-wringing liberal form offers little in the way of intense struggle, by which we mean the effort to wrest a new story of human nature and economic activity from the traditions he inherited. To be sure, his thoughts on communism and the stable state of society are perhaps the best parts of his work, but they fall short of a serious engagement with communism. Hobbes might also have been worthwhile to discuss, especially since he argues that human beings left to their own devices do not obey the laws of nature. Rather, they are given to the desires for safety, gain, glory, and power, thereby engaging in continual warfare

with one another. For that reason, they need a strong, authoritarian government to keep them in line. In the state of nature, man's life was "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short" and was engaged in a "war . . . of every man against every man." The government may be democratic to a limited extent, but Hobbes preferred absolute monarchy. He focuses on human nature and government, with little in the way of economic thought. Already in the 1950s, Levy was able to summarize Hobbes's economic thought in a few pages. Aaron Levy, "Economic Views of Thomas Hobbes," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 15, no. 4 (1954): 589–95.↵

4. Of all the works we have read, only Sedlacek notes the mythical nature of economic theory, although he prefers to speak of an underlying metaphysics of economics, which he seeks to trace throughout human history. Tomas Sedlacek, *Economics of Good and Evil: The Quest for Economic Meaning from Gilgamesh to Wall Street* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).↵
5. Albino Barrera, *Market Complicity and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); John Cobb, *The Earthist Challenge to Economism: A Theological Critique of the World Bank* (New York: Macmillan, 1999); Philip Goodchild, *Capitalism as Religion: The Price of Piety* (London: Routledge, 2002); Philip Goodchild, *Theology of Money* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009); Stephen D. Long, *Divine Economy: Theology and the Market* (London: Routledge, 2000); David Loy, "The Religion of the Market," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 65, no. 2 (1996): 275–90; M. Douglas Meeks, *God the Economist: The Doctrine of God and Political Economy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989); Max L. Stackhouse, *God and Globalization*, vol. 4, *Globalization and Grace* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 2007); William Schweiker and Charles Matthews, eds., *Having: Property and Possession in Religious and Social Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004); Robert Wuthnow, "New Directions in the Study of Religion and Economic Life," in *The Handbook of Economic Sociology*, eds. Neil J. Smelser and Richard Swedberg, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 603–26. By contrast, McCloskey offers a cloying study that attempts to defend and perfect capitalism and its attendant ideologies, again on ethical grounds. Deidre N. McCloskey, *The Bourgeois Virtues: Ethics for an Age of Commerce* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2006).↵
6. Aristotle coined the term itself as *ta ethika*, from *ethos* or custom, habit, and the status quo. However, these ethics are not for the lowly: "The utter vulgarity of the herd of men comes out in their preference for the sort of existence a cow leads." Aristotle, *The Ethics of Aristotle*, trans. J.A.K. Thomson (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1955), 30. See further Roland Boer, *In the Vale of Tears: On Marxism and Theology V* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 245–86.↵
7. Bradley Bateman, "Presidential Address: Reflections on the Secularization of American Economics," *Journal of the History of Economic Thought* 30, no. 1 (2008): 1–20; Bradley Bateman, "In a Space of Questions: A Reflection on Religion and Economics at the Beginning of the Twenty-First Century," *History of Political Economy* 43, no. 2 (2011): 389–411; Bradley Bateman and H. Spencer Banzhaf, eds., *Keeping Faith, Losing Faith: Religious Belief and Political Economy* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008); Kelly Johnson, "Whose Economics? Which Religion? Comments on Brad Bateman's 'In a Space of Questions,'" *History of Political Economy* 43, no. 2 (2011): 417–22.↵
8. Duncan K. Foley, *Adam's Fallacy: A Guide to Economic Theology* (Cambridge: Belknap, 2006); Robert Nelson, *Economics as Religion: From Samuelson to Chicago and Beyond* (Pittsburgh: Penn State University Press, 2001); Robert Nelson, "What Is Economic Theology?" *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 25, no. 1 (2004): 58–79; Sedlacek, *Economics of Good and Evil: The Quest for Economic Meaning from Gilgamesh to Wall Street*.↵
9. Paul Oslington, "A Theological Economics," *International Journal of Social Economics* 27, no. 1 (2000): 32–44.↵
10. Robert Barro and Rachel McCleary, "Religion and Economic Growth," *American Sociological Review* 68 (2005): 760–81; Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America, 1776–1990* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992); Lawrence Iannaccone, "The Consequences of Religious Market Structures:

Adam Smith and the Economics of Religion," *Rationality and Society* 3 (1991): 156–77; Lawrence Iannaccone and Rodney Stark, "A Supply-Side Reinterpretation of the 'Secularization' of Europe," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 33 (1994): 76–88; Rachel McCleary, ed. *The Oxford Handbook of the Economics of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Rachel McCleary and Robert Barro, "Religion and Economy," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 20, no. 2 (2006): 49–72; Lionel Charles Robbins, *An Essay on the Nature and Significance of Economic Science* (London: Macmillan, 1935 [1932]); Larry Witham, *Marketplace of the Gods: How Economics Explains Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Wuthnow, "New Directions in the Study of Religion and Economic Life," 615–18; Lawrence Iannaccone, "Introduction to the Economics of Religion," *Journal of Economic Literature* 36, no. 3 (1998): 1165–95. For current research on this approach, the reader may consult <http://www.thearda.com/asrec/index.asp>. ↵

Hugo Grotius: Rewriting the Narrative of the Fall

The authority of those books which men inspired by God, either writ or approved of, I often use. ^[1]

Ruling class lawyer, Renaissance man, intimate of the Dutch East India Company (VOC), prison escapee, exile from his Dutch homeland, Swedish ambassador, and articulate advocate of liberal theology (with its focus on free will of the individual), Hugo de Groot (Latinized as Grotius) was an early ideologue of the hard-headed capitalism of the Dutch commercial empire.^[2] Above all, we are interested in the way Grotius inaugurates a tradition in which the biblical account of the Fall is reread and rewritten in order to justify the increasingly clear contours of capitalism. In the process of his revision, Grotius constructs an alternative myth, one that John Locke, Thomas Malthus, and Adam Smith in turn reshaped for largely the same reason. Why the Fall? Grotius, and those who came after him, believed the Fall held the key to understanding human nature. Since God had created human beings, it would be remiss not to consider the nature of those first creatures, Adam and (occasionally) Eve. For these reasons, human nature, the Fall, a new myth, and the newly emerging reality of capitalism are the four nodal points of our analysis. The following discussion begins with the questions of human nature and the Fall through the lens of Grotius's Arminian theology, a theology that would also influence the thought of Locke. In light of that theology, Grotius reads the Fall as less of a catastrophe. Through the work of the Holy Spirit (prevenient grace), human beings become free-willing agents able to choose between good and evil, even to accept or resist God's call of grace. This analysis leads to our main concern—Grotius's effort to construct an alternative myth that bounces off and reshapes the Fall narrative in order to provide an account of the origins of private property, law, commerce, the state,

and those zones (such as the sea) that fall outside the claims of such property. From here, we deal with a couple of implications of this myth: an early articulation of the free individual with rights (plural) as private property; the contradictions inherent in the liberalism that Grotius sets under way, particularly in terms of the universal of exclusion whereby freedom for “all” restricts what counts as “all.” We close by dealing with the question of class, for both the Arminian theology and the economic and ideological doctrines advocated by Grotius served the interests of the ruling class (of which he was a member in the United Provinces). Class will also emerge as a consistent feature of the economic thought we analyze in the following chapters, since the thinkers examined speak on behalf of ruling class consciousness.

Before proceeding, let us comment regarding our focus on Grotius’s economic thought. Though well known for reshaping the long and rich tradition of natural law, he also wrote on areas of politics, ethics, and theology. Indeed, Grotius wrote during a time when these subjects were seen as a larger whole rather than being divided into discrete disciplines. Consequently, an emphasis on economic theory requires a process of distillation, a careful sifting for clarity. As anyone who has distilled alcoholic spirits knows, such distillation is never complete, so from time to time we include items from Grotius’s wider interests.

Softening the Fall

The power of chusing moral good or evil, with which he is endued.^[3]

We begin with the cluster of problems surrounding the Fall—when the first human beings disobeyed God and ate of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the garden. Not only is the Fall central for the economic theorists we discuss later, but it also feeds into Grotius’s myth of the emergence of private property and thereby the doctrine of the free seas. As a result, it gives rise to the free-willing individual who reveals the paradoxes of liberalism. These lines of thought emerge from theological, if not biblical, engagement. More precisely, Grotius arrives at an early form of the grand myth of capitalism as well as a statement concerning the private, free individual by means of theological argumentation.

In order to set the scene, we need to offer a brief exposition of the theological framework to which Grotius gave his assent and without which his work cannot be understood.^[4] The “Remonstrants” (or Arminians) followed the thought of Jacobus Arminius (Harmenzoon), who sought to oppose Calvin’s doctrine of election and

double predestination.^[5] Arminius argued that through the Fall, human beings are depraved and corrupted. So also did Calvin, but now Arminius veers away from Calvin, specifically through his theory of *prevenient grace*—the groundwork of the Holy Spirit, which removes the guilt of the first sin. To be sure, Calvin sometimes equivocates, suggesting on the one hand that the Fall effaces our status as beings created in the image of God, thereby rendering us entirely depraved; on the other hand, he leaves open the possibility that the image of God is not entirely lost with the Fall. Here, Arminius saw a small crack, through which he was able to slip a new set of doctrines. His understanding of prevenient grace goes much further than Calvin's, for in removing the guilt of the sin of Adam and Eve, it makes a person capable of responding to the call of salvation. Even so, Arminius is careful to say that this capability is not inherent to human beings, but rather a gift of God's grace:

Though we always and on all occasions make this grace to precede, to accompany and follow; and without which, we constantly assert, no good action whatever can be produced by man. Nay, we carry this principle so far as not to dare to attribute the power here described [free will] even to the nature of Adam himself, without the help of Divine Grace both infused and assisting.^[6]

Yet, the implications are momentous, for prevenient grace opens up a wide arena for free will. That is, the Holy Spirit comprehensively covers all bases; its preparatory work affects all people and the entire person, the outcome being that everyone possesses free will, a power that God grants to human beings (thereby limiting God's own power).^[7] It should not be difficult to see what this means for salvation. God's grace is no longer irresistible but resistible; human beings exercise their free will by either accepting grace or resisting it. A similar pattern of moving from the universal to the particular operates in Arminius's Christology. Although Christ dies for all in a potentially universal atonement for every human being, his atonement is effective only for those who accept the call of God to salvation. Even more, the exercise of free will means that one may at some time accept that call of grace and then at another reject it. The loss of one's faith removes him from the elect—salvation may well be lost.

We have traveled far from Calvin's doctrine of predestination according to which one is always numbered with either the elect or the damned. This should not come as a surprise, since Arminius set out to undermine precisely that doctrine: through prevenient grace and free will, human beings cooperate with God in the process of salvation. What happens to the central doctrine of election? It becomes conditional, dependent upon human response. Yet, Arminius gives election an intriguing twist. Although salvation involves the human response to God's election, God foreordained who would possess

such faith. In other words, God knows beforehand who will believe, who will exercise free will and choose to accept God's election. As Arminius puts it: "the decree of God by which, of Himself, from eternity, He decreed to justify in Christ, believers, and to accept them unto eternal life, to the praise of His glorious grace."^[8] This twist may seem to bring Arminius back to Calvin, for if God knows beforehand who will have faith, does that not really mean that God predestines who will be saved? Not quite, for God operates within the limits of foreknowledge: as omniscient, God may be able to peer ahead, as it were, and determine who is going to respond favorably; God may even limit election to those who will answer the call. But this is a far cry from predestining those who, before the creation of the world, are of the damned and of the saved.

Arminius was, therefore, a true theological liberal before liberalism became fashionable. However, we would like to focus on the questions of evil and the Fall, for these lead us directly to Grotius. Arminius found Calvin's predestination unacceptable, for he saw it attributing evil to God. If God arbitrarily saves some and condemns others to hell, then God becomes a monster and a tyrant. Even more, if God predestines people before the Fall, they have no free will, and their evil acts can have only one source—God. For Arminius, and Grotius following him, the source of evil is instead free will. Concerning this matter, the Bible offers three possibilities. The first is an evil being who, in opposition to a God who is entirely good, is the source of evil. The New Testament references to the Evil One and Satan, which are then read back into the serpent of Genesis 3 or the "satan" (adversary) of Job (see also 1 Chron. 21:1 and Zech. 3:1-2), are the obvious biblical sources. The unresolved theological issue concerns the source of such a figure, a problem that led to the apocryphal myth of Satan as a fallen angel. The second option positions human free will as the source of evil. Free will in itself may be good, a gift from God to human beings so that they may worship him of their own volition rather than as automatons, but it leaves room for choosing the wrong course. Genesis 3 once again does service in this option as well, for the human beings are commanded not to eat of the fruit of the tree of good and evil, but they disobey. Yet, a problem emerges here, too, for God is the one responsible for the flawed crystal; he placed the tree in the garden. So a third possibility appears, namely, that God is responsible for both good and evil. Though this represents a strictly monotheistic position, many have found it objectionable on moral grounds. Nonetheless, the Bible is little concerned for that aristocratic discipline known as ethics,^[9] presenting God as one who visits evil upon people. In many cases, one may argue that such evil is really punishment, but in other cases it is clearly not so. The story of Job comes to mind, as does Ezek. 20:25, in which

God gives the people laws that are evil: “Moreover I gave them statutes that were not good and ordinances by which they could not live.” This appears to be a reference to child sacrifice (mentioned in the following verse), which would thereby be a divine statute that led the people to disobey other laws forbidding such sacrifice.

Of these three options, Grotius (following Arminius) favors the second concerning free will, while expressing abhorrence at the possibility that God may be the source of evil. Yet, if God is the creator, how does one account for the presence of evil? Grotius answers that God is the author of “all such things as have a real existence,”^[10] which may include accidents, loss, pain, and punishment.^[11] Yet, evil itself does not have a real existence; it is a negative, an absence of good, or (as Grotius puts it) a “defect.”^[12] This means that an evil force or principle does not exist in and of itself. Why not? Because *being* is inherently good, an evil being is an oxymoron; in this way, Grotius counters the first position mentioned earlier, namely, that a being opposed to God is the source of evil. His argument is not new, and its weakness is easily discerned. By arguing that evil is merely a negative or a defect, Grotius severely hobbles himself when it comes to dealing with the presence of evil. For instance, the CEO responsible for serious environmental destruction, through pursuit of dangerous industrial activities, can hardly be said to be guilty of an action with no real existence. The dead fish, birds, and ailing human beings are rather tangible presence of such evil. Or take exploited workers, whose long hours and low pay enable the boss’s profits: We would hazard a guess that they would probably object somewhat strenuously if we were to suggest that their onerous conditions are merely a negative, an absence rather than a lived and daily reality.

To counter such arguments—that the world is overcome with a virtual deluge of wickedness—Grotius is forced to make up ground: God provides ample warning, laws, threats, and promises, all of which are enforced with punishment or reward of the soul after death.^[13] Further, he ensures that states and even empires persist in order to keep such acts from spreading too far. Even more, the knowledge of God’s laws is not completely extinguished, especially with the Fall. Here, his consistent effort to reshape natural law emerges, for once these laws are given by God, they are known in and of themselves^[14]—so much so that they apply “though we should even grant, what without the greatest wickedness cannot be granted, that there is no God, or that he takes no care of human affairs.”^[15]

The best argument Grotius can muster is that the free individual is the cause of evil, the one who through the exercise of that free will may choose to do evil. While free will is in itself good, no less than an attribute of God bequeathed to human beings, the

exercise of that free will may result in moral evil: “Liberty of acting is not in itself evil, but may be the cause of something that is evil.”^[16] Hardly an original position, at least in our day and age, for it is standard fare among theological liberals. In Grotius’s time, it was still a fresh argument, following in some way in Erasmus’s footsteps rather than those of Arminius. That is, it was consistent with Erasmus’s objections to Luther’s argument that human beings have no free will,^[17] except that now Grotius shapes it in response to the sharper articulations of Reformed theologians.^[18]

Retelling the Myth

But men did not long continue in this pure and innocent state of life, but applied themselves to various Arts, whereof the symbol was *the tree of knowledge of good and evil*, that is, of the knowledge of things which one may use either well or ill.^[19]

This engagement with the Fall gives rise to three repercussions of an economic nature. Obviously, it leads to Grotius’s argument for the free-acting agent, whether an individual or a private company, which may act on its own volition to foster good and punish evil. It also brings us to the paradox of liberalism (as the ideological complement of capitalism), not least because Grotius is an early ideologue of a core liberal idea—the free-willing individual. Before we deal with those matters, we would like to explore another, less expected, implication of this effort to reshape the doctrine of the Fall: Grotius’s retelling of that narrative in terms of the emergence of private property. The significance of this retelling lies in its engagement with the biblical text in terms of the theological theme of the “fortuitous Fall” and by means of a significant displacement that assists this reading.^[20] Such an interpretation reads the sin of Adam and Eve as a happy event, for it enabled salvation to take place. In Grotius’s hands, the fortuity is even more immediate because the outcome of the Fall is desirable for human beings. In order to achieve this move, he displaces the trouble and strife of the Fall to a later moment. Thus, while he reads the act of Adam and Eve as relatively benign, it is only later, with the accounts of Cain and Abel, the Flood, and then Babel that one encounters the evil desires and acts of human beings, determined by jealousy, murder, ambition, and the search for pleasure.^[21] Through this rereading of the Fall, the retold myth becomes one of the earliest articulations of a story that is to be developed until it becomes the infamous myth of Adam Smith.

In the crucial twelfth chapter of *De jure Praedae*, which was the only section to be published in Grotius’s lifetime as *Mare Liberum* (*Freedom of the Seas*),^[22] Grotius

constructs a mythical narrative to account for the origin of property, law, commerce, states, and of those areas of the world that are neither private nor public property.^[23] His immediate objective is to arrive at an argument for the seas as outside the domain of property relations, but in the process he constructs a story, a grand story that would be taken up by those following in his wake. As is typical for Grotius' humanist style, it abounds with references to Greek and Roman authors, along with one or two medieval ones (we have more to say on that later).^[24] While one may be tempted to follow Grotius into those works, that would miss the biblical tenor of his creative mythmaking.^[25] He begins by observing that we need to be careful about the terminology used, for common possession (*communio*) and property (*dominium*) have different meanings now than they had at the origins of human existence. In that context, *communio* meant what was common over against the particular, and *dominium* meant the privilege of using common property. Grotius seeks to show how the modern meanings arose, namely the distinction between common or public property and private property.

He then writes:

There was no private property under the primary law of nations, to which we also give the name of "natural law," from time to time, and which the poets represent in some passages as prevailing in the Golden Age while in other passages they assign it to the reign of Saturn or of Justice. . . . For in the eyes of nature no distinctions of ownership were discernible. In this sense, then, we say that all things were common property in those distant days, meaning just what the poets do when they declare that the men of earliest times made acquisitions on behalf of the community, and that the communal character of goods was maintained by justice in accordance with a sacred pact. In order to clarify this point, they explain that fields were not divided by boundary lines in that age, and that there were no commercial transactions.^[26]

Communal property was then the primal form, one that was according to nature, or under the sway of his all-important "natural law." Yet, what are we to make of his comment that this was not a barbaric and primitive state, but a "Golden Age" characterized by justice? Here, Grotius is referencing the underlying theme of paradise, the state of human existence in the garden before the Fall. In fact, this natural state was divinely ordained, for "God had given all things, not to this or that individual, but to the human race; and there was nothing to prevent a number of persons from being joint owners, in this fashion, of one and the same possession."^[27] By no means a new theme, this idea goes back to the arguments of the "Church Fathers," Basil and Ambrose, that the redemption of Christ means a return to the state of communal property. That is, they read backwards, taking the image of the first Christians having "everything in common" (Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-35) as a sign of what it was like before the Fall—redemption being a return, at least in part, to the prelapsarian state.^[28] Elsewhere, Grotius indicates his

awareness of this argument, locating the communism of the early Christians (and those who lived in such a way in his own day) within this simplicity of life characteristic of the “primitive” age of human existence.^[29] The first human beings (embodied in Adam and Eve) were then the joint owners of a common possession, with neither private property nor commerce anywhere to be seen. They were, of course, naked as well.^[30] How then did we arrive at our current state?

It is evident, however, that the present-day concept of distinctions in ownership was the result, not of any sudden transition, but of a gradual process whose initial steps were taken under the guidance of nature herself. For there are some things which are consumed by use, either in the sense that they are converted into the very substance of the user and therefore admit of no further use, or else in the sense that they are rendered less fit for additional service by the fact that they have once been made to serve. Accordingly, it very soon became apparent, in regard to articles of the first class (for example, food and drink), that a certain form of private ownership was inseparable from use. For the essential characteristic of private property is the fact that it belongs to a given individual in such a way as to be incapable of belonging to any other individual. This basic concept was later extended by a logical process to include articles of the second class, such as clothing and various other things capable of being moved or of moving themselves. Because of these developments, it was not even possible for all immovable things (fields, for instance) to remain unapportioned, since the use of such things, while it does not consist directly in their consumption, is nevertheless bound up with purposes of consumption (as it is when arable lands and orchards are used with a view to obtaining food, or pastures for clothing), and since there are not enough immovable goods to suffice for indiscriminate use by all persons.^[31]

The key lies in use. If an object is used, it becomes one’s private property. In order to reach this point, some deft footwork on Grotius’s part is required. He needs an account of the transition from the divinely instituted state of nature to private property, a transition that he depicts in his urbane style as gradual and negotiated. Yet, beneath that text a number of struggles lie half-concealed. To begin with, Grotius must counter the dominant direction of the biblical story of the Fall. Here use of the earth through tilling is clearly a punishment, for the earth itself is cursed: “in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life . . . By the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread” (Gen. 3:17 and 19).^[32] In going against the narrative of disobedience and rupture in the biblical text, Grotius also takes his stand against the interpretation of the Church “Fathers” we mentioned earlier, who argue that the transition from the common ownership of all goods to private property was clearly a result of the Fall—the outcome being that redeemed human beings should seek to return to the state of paradise. Here, we would like to note that Grotius also counters his own interpretation of these verses in his annotations to the Old and New Testament. He writes: “Non erit qualis Paradisus, qui te sponte natis alebat vegetumque praestabat, sed subacta multo labore ne sic quidem puras fruges proferet (It will not be like Paradise, which of its own accord fed its children and flourished, but having been

subdued through much labor it provided not even pure crops).”^[33] Even here, Grotius restricts the sense of the text to the production of food, refusing the interpretation of the Church “Fathers.” Instead of property being the result of the Fall, all it means is: “Plerumque poena peccato respondet, qui in cibo peccauerat, in cibo punitur (Punishment for sin is usually reciprocal: he who has sinned in terms of food is punished in terms of food).”^[34] Grotius certainly keeps the idea of use far away from his interpretation of Gen 3:17–19.

At another level, Grotius deploys the theme of the fortuitous nature of the Fall, for the process leading to private property took place “under the guidance of nature.” This was the way it had to develop if human beings were to progress to their current state. In a way that breathes the sense that the Fall enabled the incarnation, cross, and redemption, Grotius sees the process as one that was beneficial for human beings. Indeed, in *De jure Belli* he interprets even the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in a beneficial direction: it is a symbol of the “knowledge of things which one may use either well or ill.” The first human beings needed to eat of the tree to their benefit, for they could not “long continue in this pure and innocent state of life,” so they “applied themselves to various arts,” for which the tree becomes the logo.^[35] As we mentioned earlier, he is able to make such an interpretive move by displacing the rupture of the Fall to later points, especially with Cain and Abel, the flood, and Babel. In order to assist with this alternative reading, he deploys other biblical texts in his favor. Gen. 1:29 comes to his aid, where God tells the first human beings that they may have every plant and every tree for food (barring the tree of good and evil), and Gen 9:3, in which the range of options for sustenance is extended to everything that moves.^[36] And in *De jure Belli*, Grotius refers to the account of the allocation of wells between Abram and Abimelech (Gen. 21) as an example of the gentler and negotiated process towards property.^[37]

In light of these various moves, Grotius can develop his central idea of use. If a human being makes use of some object, it becomes his or her property.^[38] Notably, Grotius focuses on exactly the same item—food—as the biblical texts do in his argument for use as the key to private property (whether the fruit eaten by the woman and then the man, or the food produced by sweat of the man’s brow). If we masticate and swallow, then the piece of fruit or bread becomes part of our bodies and is of no use to anyone else. Only a short step needs be taken to arrive at a second category of items, such as clothes and movables. Once the flax or wool has been picked, spun, and woven into a garment, it gains a specific use for a particular person and is of less use for anyone else. Yet before he gets to that point, when still discussing food, he has already given his

definition of private property: “The essential characteristic of private property is the fact that it belongs to a given individual in such a way as to be incapable of belonging to any other individual.”^[39] Now it becomes obvious, or so he believes, to apply that definition to the other category, which includes clothing and then movables and immovables. While a rhetorically clever move, this reasoning is really a sleight of hand. There is no clear reason why the eating of, say, a banana, makes it one’s private property. All that can be said with certainty is that one has consumed a banana for the sake of sustenance (though the potassium it contains is also good for one’s heart). If this reasoning is a dubious move on Grotius’s part, then his extension of this principle to clothing and movables is equally questionable.

Such thinking also conveniently ignores the actual history of private property (*dominium*), which was invented by Roman jurists of the second century BCE in the context of slavery. In contrast with Grotius’s myth, the invention of private property emerged as a way of dealing with the multitude of slaves in the Roman world. By defining a slave as a thing (*res*), these jurists were able to define private or absolute property as a relationship with a thing rather than with other (legally defined) human beings. Thus, absolute property was *dominium ex jure Quiritium*, lordship according to the law of Roman citizens. Even more, such property meant the right to dispose perfectly of a material thing insofar as it not forbidden by law: *jus perfecte disponendi de re corporali nisi lege prohibeatur*. The term *dominium* (which first appears late in the second century BCE) was chosen for good reason: the dominus was master over his slave, the thing in question.^[40] Since the studies that trace this development appear much later than Grotius’s work, it may be possible to excuse him, but we do find it strange that one who was so careful in citing ancient sources would overlook the crucial role of the Roman jurists.

Grotius next considers the development of the law in his own way, but it is worth noting that he leaves open (near the end of the previous quotation) the possibility that some immovables were not apportioned as private property: not all immovables could remain unapportioned, he writes. The “not all” implies that some objects remain outside private property. This point becomes crucial in his argument for the free seas. To return to his text:

The recognition of the existence of private property led to the establishment of a law on the matter, and this law was patterned after nature’s plan. For just as the right to use the goods in question was originally acquired through a physical act of attachment, the very source (as we have observed) of the institution of private property, so it was deemed desirable that each individual’s private possessions should be acquired, as such, through similar acts of attachment. This is the process known as “occupation” [*occupatio*], a

particularly appropriate term in connection with those goods which were formerly at the disposal of the community.^[41]

Within the narrative structure of the myth, private property emerges as people claim and then divide among themselves items from the common pool. Having seen that this is possible, human beings then hit on the bright idea that it may be extended to other items. The consumption of food and use of clothes, the claim to a humble dwelling, and perhaps a few sheep and goats—these give the sense that such appropriation or occupation may then be applied to a water bottle or a cart, a toe tickler or an ear scratcher. Elsewhere, Grotius makes it clear that the process of seizing property was not an affair of the dim and distant past. It is ongoing, a feature of everyday human existence that happens time and again. Thus, the second “law” in the prologue to *De jure Praedae* states: “It shall be permissible to acquire for oneself, and to retain, those things which are useful for life.”^[42] In *De Jure Belli*, Grotius goes so far as to argue that if one takes from another what is necessary for the preservation of one’s own life, it is not theft—even to the extent of acquiring women for a hypothetical society in which there were only men.^[43] The crucial point remains that human beings need a structure of law, which—as is usually argued—arrives post factum. A law forbidding some act, such as sex with animals, assumes that people are having sex with animals and that it is undesirable for them to do so (Exod. 22:19; Lev. 18:23; 20:15–16; Deut. 27:21).^[44] So also, a law that stipulates a certain process responds to a situation. In this case, it is the law concerning private property, whether in Grotius’s narrative or in the actual invention by the Roman jurists. However, we prefer the dialectical argument that the law itself produces the transgression or the act in the first place.^[45] That is, a certain act becomes illegal or legal only when the law designates it so. Rather than giving expression to cultural norms, to codifying those norms in a way that fixes them, the law functions to transform the act in question into something forbidden or sanctioned. It thereby wishes to reshape cultural expectations, usually in terms of the ideological agenda of a certain group that seeks influence and power. Is it possible that the law’s imagination may also bring certain acts into existence?

Once the law is in place within Grotius’s story, he elaborates upon the types of conditions that count for private property.^[46] First, he distinguishes between types of possession, the one being continuous (as with wild animals that require domestication) and the other, after an initial seizure, a condition that continues as a mental and legal category. Second, he differentiates between what seizure (*apprehensio*) means for movables and immovables, the former demanding physical seizure and the latter evidence of “some

activity involving construction or the definition of boundaries.”^[47] This last point is crucial regarding the oceans, for Grotius later argues that it is difficult to produce evidence of having constructed anything on the open seas or of having defined clear boundaries (apart from wharves and jetties on the shore). We leave aside the obvious Eurocentrism of this observation, or at least the bias of those from particular modes of production in which the construction of buildings and fixtures, along with the clear demarcation of boundaries in land, is universalized as a distinct mark of possession. At this stage of his mythic narrative, Grotius finds a place for the emergence of commerce and states, overlooking all details of those matters for the sake of the final moment in the story. He states:

Accordingly, we find that those things which were wrested from the original domain of common ownership have been divided into two categories. For some are now public property, or in other words, they are owned by the people, which is the true meaning of the expression “public property”; and others are strictly private property, that is to say, they belong to individuals.

Nevertheless, occupancy of public possessions is achieved by the same method as occupancy of private possessions . . . On the other hand, lands that did not fall into the possession of any nation in the process of apportionment . . . are called by Thucydides *aoriston*, that is to say, “undefined” regions, marked by no fixed limits.^[48]

Grotius attempts to cover all bases. Of those items seized from common ownership, two types emerge: public property owned by the people and private property owned by individuals. However, another category exists, for which he leaves an opening with his comment that “not all” immovables remain unapportioned. Therefore, some were apportioned or seized and others remained as they were. This point enables him to observe that some parts of the earth remain outside the grasping hands of individuals or nations. These “undefined regions” exist without limits. Indeed, they can never be seized as property due to their nature. He concludes:

From the foregoing discussion, two inferences may be drawn. The first runs as follows: those things which are incapable of being occupied, or which never have been occupied, cannot be the private property of any owner, since all property has its origin as such in occupancy. The second inference may be stated thus: all those things which have been so constituted by nature that, even when used by a specific individual, they nevertheless suffice for general use by other persons without discrimination, retain today and should retain for all time that status which characterized them when first they sprang from nature.^[49]

The first point is to be expected from the earlier story, for anything that simply cannot be occupied remains outside the domain of property. Here, Grotius makes a subtle but crucial shift: common ownership does not mean “everybody’s property” (as at creation) but rather “nobody’s property.” No one is the rightful owner, but so also is no one

excluded.^[50] This enables Grotius to argue that seas and oceans,^[51] wastelands through which wild animals roam, and even the air, are precisely such items; thereby, they remain open for anyone to use and cross. He then slides in the second point, even though the myth does not explicitly mention it earlier: even if someone uses such an item (given that use is a sign of claiming property), this does not preclude others from doing so, since by their nature such areas cannot become property. Translated, this means that sailing across a sea does not give one the right to claim that sea as private or public property. Of course, this final observation is meant to counter the Portuguese^[52] argument that sailing across the seas to the Indies gave them ownership of those seas, to the exclusion of others.

What should be made of this myth? We have already indicated our objections at various points concerning the speciousness of the claim that use entails property or that law follows on practice, and we have pointed out that Grotius's tale of the emergence of property is far from what really happened. Likewise, we have emphasized that this tale amounts to a myth, a grand narrative for the sake of bolstering a specific argument concerning Dutch commercial desires in the Indies. The problem with myth, of course, is that pointing out its flaws or laying out facts rarely dents its power. The reason is not merely that myth provides a motivation that can withstand such criticisms, but that myth also has a double meaning in light of its checkered history.^[53] It is simultaneously fiction *and* deeper truth, a made-up story *and* one that expresses (through metaphoric language) a truth that cannot be expressed in conventional forms. What is the deeper truth of this myth? It provides one of the earliest instances of a myth that would become vital for the ideology of capitalism. In modified form, it turns up in Locke, Malthus, and Smith, thereby becoming the greatest story ever told in the development of economic theory. That such a story is a refashioned version of the Fall, understood now in terms of its fortuitous meaning, only enhances its status and power as myth.

The Paradox of Liberalism

God made man a free agent, and at liberty to do ill or well.^[54]

Grotius's retelling of the Fall narrative—or rather, the creation of a parallel version—sets in train several features that we mentioned earlier, one being the free agent with rights, which leads to the paradox of liberalism. The temptation on these matters is to become lost in natural law theory, a temptation we seek to avoid so as to focus on the economic ramifications.^[55] We wish to make two points here. First, a central feature of later classical and then neoclassical economic theory emerges already in the work of Grotius from a

specific theological engagement, an engagement that is subsequently suppressed while the ideological position is maintained. By this we mean the rationally acting individual who possesses rights and operates in terms of self-interest and sociality. In due course, this rationally calculating individual will come to be known as *homoeconomicus*, but the seeds of this idea already appear in the work of Grotius in the context of both the Dutch commercial empire and theological debates. Second, the paradox of liberalism—in which freedom is proclaimed for “all” when “all” is always a universal by exclusion—appears in Grotius’s writings. Liberalism was to become the dominant and perpetually adapted ideological framework of capitalism, to which those of conservative and progressive tendencies find themselves forced to adapt.^[56] The argument is often made that Grotius saw through the glass darkly, that his thought is still too mingled with medieval strands and needs later theorists to clarify its meaning. We wish to take a different tack, for Grotius embodies a paradox that is constitutive of the ideology of liberalism.

As we pointed out earlier, one result of Grotius’s struggles with his Reformed opponents in the Netherlands is the development of his argument (in accord with Arminius) that a human being is a free-willing individual. This free will was the result of the Holy Spirit’s work (prevenient grace), which undermines the effects of the Fall and enables human beings to respond positively and negatively to God’s grace. It also means that human beings are the source of both good and evil.

Ultimately, this argument concerns human nature. Far as his thoughts are from Calvin’s (Weberians take note), the ramifications are ominous for economic theory. His basic position appears in two sections of his major works, in the second chapter of *De jure Praedae* and in the prologue of *De jure Belli*.^[57] For Grotius, human nature operates in a tension between self-interest (a self-love that seeks the good for oneself) and “an exquisite desire of society.”^[58] Of the two, the former tends to dominate, so much so that the reason human beings opt to be part of society (or of a state) is because it is to their profit to do so.^[59] Largely the same opposition appears in the works of Locke, Malthus, Smith, and J. S. Mill, but Grotius also introduces a proposition that will become central to that ideal construct of classical economics, the *homo economicus*. These dual forces within human beings operate not according to base passions but to the “sovereign attribute of reason.”^[60] This power of reason is, for Grotius, the result of God imprinting on human beings the rational workings of God’s own mind. To be sure, such a faculty may be darkened by sin and vice, but the “divine light” of reason shines more strongly.^[61] The function of reason appears not merely as content, but also in the form of Grotius’s urbane and carefully measured writing. He was, after all, a lawyer and diplomat, and for such a

person the carefully worded statement and argument is the highest aim of a thinker and writer. But it is also the dimension of God's mind bequeathed to human beings, enabling them to function by that rather useful presence of prevenient grace. Grotius will have none of the groveling depravity of Calvin's doctrine of the Fall.

For our purposes, this eminently theological discussion of human nature entails a number of ramifications. In the first place, the argument is not only theological but also ethical. Given that ethics is the preserve of the false universal of the ruling class,^[62] we suggest that this search for a universal nature seeks to reshape greed as benign self-interest—or, as Grotius puts it, self-love. That is, it pushes the notion of the fortuitous Fall as far as it will go, to the extent that the human beings banished from the garden and scraping a soil full of thistles and thorns in the sweat of their brows are now transformed into entrepreneurs who seek their own benefit – rationally calculated of course. Further, by focusing on human nature, Grotius shows the tendency to universalize from a particular economic and class situation. As human nature, that nature becomes universal to all, a move that enacts one of the most stunning acts of ethnocentrism, let alone class-centrism and econo-centrism. This method of reasoning becomes necessary for the later creation, from the brains of classical economists, of *homo economicus*, a creation that has little connection with the real world.

In linking the free-willing individual with the rational man (we choose the word deliberately) who balances his self-interest with a social imperative, Grotius produces a powerful actor indeed: “Absolute power every man has over his own actions.”^[63] Or, more extensively:

God created man *autexousion*, “free and *sui iuris*,” so that the actions of each individual and the use of his possessions were made subject not to another's will but to his own. Moreover, this view is sanctioned by the common consent of all nations. For what is that well-known concept, “natural liberty,” other than the power of the individual to act in accordance with his own will? And liberty in regard to actions is equivalent to ownership in regard to property. Hence the saying: “every man is the governor and arbiter of affairs relative to his own property.”^[64]

Of course, this statement is true of only that small segment of a socio-economic system in charge of their own affairs, and not of a good many others subject to them. But it also means that such human beings may act for good or evil—recall Grotius's position that we may accept or reject God's grace, but remember also his belief that human free will is the source of evil in the world. This position leads him to conclude that evil deeds must be punished and good deeds recompensed.^[65] Yet, this mechanism of punishment and recompense does not merely involve states and their judiciaries (an argument that one

might expect), but is also the task of individuals.^[66] At one level, this argument makes sense within the logic of Grotius's own system. If these laws constitute part of the natural law, laid down by God but according to universal principles (for God wills only what is just), then an individual may act on these laws. At another level, it enables Grotius to make the rather convenient argument that Dutch mariners were justified in seizing Portuguese ships. We speak not of a fleet of Dutch war ships under the direction of the government but of individual captains working for a private company in the distant seas of the Indies, far from the practices of Western European customs and laws. Grotius's case in point (and the reason he wrote *De jure Praedae*) involved the famous capture of the Portuguese carrack *Santa Catarina* by the Dutch captain, Jakob van Heemskerck, on February 25, 1603. The seized cargo was sold in Amsterdam later that year for no less than three million Dutch guilders. Grotius's genius enabled him to find—via theological, philosophical, and legal argumentation—a perfectly good reason for such an act. As rational, free-willing actors, the Portuguese had willingly violated the laws of nature by claiming the seas as their own, but the Dutch captain also acted in accordance with those principles by punishing them for such an act. Of course, he was also an agent of a sovereign and independent Dutch state – asserted by the Dutch at the time but certainly not recognized by the Spanish, among others. That Grotius's argument was eminently suitable for those with whom he worked so closely, the directors of Dutch East India Company (VOC) was merely icing on the cake.

Not unexpectedly, few theorists since have been willing to pursue this argument to its relentless conclusion in the way Grotius does. However, they have been more than willing to develop another ramification of his reflections on human nature in terms of human rights. For Grotius, *right (ius)* can pertain either to a community or state (with a view to the right of war) or to an individual person.^[67] That right is defined as “a moral quality annexed to the person, enabling him to have, or do, something justly.”^[68] When perfected, it becomes a “faculty,” but when still under development, it remains an “aptitude.” In other words, a right is something owned and exercised by an individual human being who has the power and means to do so.^[69] It joins the long list of items that count as private property, seized from the common pool and then legally encircled. But what does such a right entail? The plurality of rights Grotius outlines includes: the right to liberty (in relation to oneself and thereby without hindrance from an outside authority like the state), the right to maintain control over others (such as children and slaves), the right to property, and the right to demand what is due to one or owing.^[70] While three of these points usually make liberals salivate, the right concerning slavery

makes them squirm. As we will argue, the tension between liberty and slavery embodies the paradox at the heart of liberalism. However, we would first like to focus on the last item: the right to demand what is owed. To be sure, Grotius's seismic shift^[71] in the understanding of rights took some time to gain traction, but when it did this feature of rights undergirded one political movement after another in the context of bourgeois democracy. Previously, Grotius had given voice to the liberal slogans concerning the right to self-defense and the right to private property, especially of the things that are useful for life.^[72] Many more would be added after him, so that the claim to rights became a powerful weapon indeed: the rights to food, shelter, and clothing; indigenous rights to land and to be counted as citizens of the bourgeois state; the civil rights of African Americans in the United States; the right of women to assert absolute control over their own bodies, thereby sanctioning abortion; the rights of gays and lesbians to be married; the rights of children as individuals; the rights of refugees and asylum seekers to fair process; the right of workers to strike; indeed, human rights as such . . . The list is almost endless; and it relies upon the proposition that Grotius first proposed, that a right is a possession of an individual. However, given the nascent liberal framework of his ideas, any claim to a right means both acquiescence to that framework and admission to the liberal club—or rather, to bourgeois democracy.^[73]

The shift to identifying rights as the property of individual human beings also means that these rights came to be seen as commodities. In other words, they enter the network of commodities within capitalism in which commodities are defined as the products of human labor. These commodities operate at the intersection between use value and exchange value, and the powers of the social interaction of labor—which now appear as the social relations between things—transfer to them.^[74] As commodities, rights can be exchanged. They can be sold and traded in exchange for other commodities. A common example: the way employers meet demands from workers by asking them to trade away certain rights that have been gained in previous struggles. This might include holiday pay, sick leave, or job security. We would like to point out that rights are a far cry from inalienable property, for they also have a price.^[75]

Immediately flowing out of Grotius's early articulation of some core liberal doctrines is the paradox of liberalism itself. We focus here on the tension between the individual and the collective, followed by the universal of exclusion. On both counts, liberal commentators take a standard line: Grotius's account is still mired in all manner of seventeenth-century (if not medieval) concerns, to the extent that the full realization of these doctrines would take some time. The problem with this argument is twofold: as

standard liberal fare, it holds onto a myth of an ideal, fully realized future; yet if such a future were to be achieved, the whole system would come crashing down. The reason is that the very structure of that ideology is built on the hindrances to that future, on the hurdles that seem to be perpetually in the way.^[76] In other words, it is the contradictions that make liberalism work, and Grotius provides an excellent, early example of those contradictions.

The first contradiction may be dealt with swiftly. Grotius deliberately postulates two forces at work in human nature—self-interest and social need. Some liberal critics are keen to emphasize the former at the expense of the latter,^[77] but they miss the real import of Grotius's opposition between the two terms. We do not mean that Grotius seeks a careful balance or Aristotelian mean; rather, we make a dialectical point that unfolds from Grotius's argument. Precisely because everyone thinks they are autonomous individuals, working for their own benefit, they are united with all those who share the same ideology. That is, in their very individuality they manifest their collectivity; or even more sharply, they achieve such a collective identity through that curious claim to being a self-seeking private individual.

The more important paradox concerns the universal by exclusion: liberalism operates by claiming that individual freedom is a universal, but it can be a universal only by excluding those who do not fit the agenda—who oppose it, espousing a different ideology. Even more, liberalism needs to keep the majority outside the scope of freedom as the very condition of this liberty.^[78] Grotius provides a wonderful example of this paradox. While he argues that the free-willing and autonomous individual can choose good and evil—as well as enjoy rights to liberty, private property, self-defense, and to what one is owed—he also argues that this individual has the right to lord it over others. Two telling examples are given, the first sliding into the second. He writes that one has a right to power “over others, such as that of a father over his children, or a lord over his slave.”^[79] This is a characteristic tactic in his argumentation, moving from the obvious and easy point in order to make a more contentious point (as we saw with his myth of private property, where he moved from food consumed to movables and immovables). Of course, one nods, a parent has the right to direct and control children, for they are dependent and helpless without the exercise of power.^[80] But then, Grotius shifts to the slave, who is in a similar state:

Now perfect and utter slavery, is that which obliges a man to serve his master all his life long, for diet and other common necessities; which indeed, if it be thus understood, and confined within the bounds of nature, has nothing too hard and severe in it; for that perpetual obligation to service, is recompensed by the certainty of being always provided for.^[81]

To complete the circle begun with the father and his children, Grotius opines that parents, especially if slaves themselves, may sell their children into slavery, with due consideration for their well-being.^[82]

One can trace a slight shift in Grotius's argument concerning slaves between the earlier *De jure Praedae* and the later *De jure Belli*. In *De jure Praedae*, Grotius asserts that lording it over a slave is a right comparable to liberty and private property (which a slave is for Grotius). And he agrees with Aristotle's assertion that "certain persons are by nature slaves, not because God did not create man as a free being, but because there are some individuals whose character is such that it is expedient for them to be governed by another's sovereign will rather than by their own."^[83] In the later *De jure Belli*, he is at times less comfortable with this argument,^[84] so he proposes an alternative: people may, through a rational weighing of the benefits and losses, voluntarily give up the right to freedom and become slaves. Thus, just as a man may sell his labor, so also is it "lawful for any man to engage himself as a slave to whom he pleases."^[85]

We have used the example of slavery quite deliberately, for it highlights not so much an uneven contribution to liberalism—a body of thought mingled with non-liberal themes—as an inadvertent insight into the paradox of liberalism itself. To offer another telling example: the liberal clarion call for equality, freedom, and liberal democracy in the establishment of the United States depended upon and was sustained by the systematic slavery of Africans and the displacement of indigenous peoples. In addition, the claim that "all men are created equal before God" in the Constitution of the United States of America was written by slave owners (as was the Declaration of Independence). "All men" is therefore a universal by exclusion, for not all count as "men."^[86] The objection may be made that slavery was eventually overcome and that indigenous people were given land rights. One might respond by pointing out the continued relegation of these people to lower working class status (as much out of work as in it) and the high rates of substance abuse, violence, and prison occupancy. One might also counter that while the line may shift, it always demarcates those outside the liberal definition of "freedom." Thus, during the "Progressive Era" at the turn of the twentieth century, numerous "democratic" reforms took place (secret ballots, primaries, referenda, and so on) precisely in the context of intense Ku Klux Klan terrorist activity and efforts to assimilate indigenous people. Even today, the United States systematically continues the liberal project by designating some states as "rogues" and "pariahs."^[87] These "rogue" states may then be destroyed by the "world's oldest democracy" in the name of freedom and democracy. The examples may be multiplied,^[88] but we want to draw attention to Grotius's early indications of the deep

paradox of liberalism's universal by exclusion. If they won't join us, they are obviously not partakers of the universal "all"—so crush them.

Class, or, The View from the Height

Who were men of good judgement, and no small learning.^[89]

To your publick actions you have, to compleat the measure of justice, added such innocence and sanctity of life, as deserves the admiration, not of men only, but of the blessed above.^[90]

One would hardly expect otherwise, for Grotius gives voice to the contradictions inherent in any ruling class ideology. That he should be writing in the context of the first commercial empire of capitalism only makes his work all the more revealing, particularly in light of his attempt to work through to a new form of that ideology. Like Arminius,^[91] Grotius was very much part of the emerging bourgeois dominance within a country that had turned its small size and marginal status into a hub of European commerce. His family counted itself among the regents of the town of Delft and part of the new oligarchy that remembered vividly the struggle of the United Provinces against Spanish colonial dominance a generation before. This ruling class status was not due to some tattered aristocratic lineage; rather, they were beneficiaries of the Dutch Baltic trade, as well as the more illustrious but less profitable *Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie* (VOC), which set the standard for the relatively vast corporations that would later fuel European colonialism. The result of the amalgamation of a number of the smaller companies in 1602, the VOC generated more revenue in its first year than the English government. As shareholders in the company, the De Groot family were on the board of its Delft "chamber." As van Ittersum has argued, much of Grotius's work was both in service to and stimulated by the new issues that arose from the vigorous activities of the VOC.^[92] Not surprisingly, the acts of the VOC would form the substance of Grotius's first major work, *De jure Praedae*, in which he generated the first articulation of "free" trade, which would later become a standard premise of classical economics.

Given such a background, Grotius inevitably gained a typical humanist education: he read the texts from ancient Greece and Rome, studied rhetoric, and used Latin in verbal and written communication with his fellow humanists. Apart from these signals of ruling class assumptions, he also championed liberal tolerance, seeking to unite the various political and theological groups. In the same vein as Arminius's 1606 address, "On Reconciling Religious Dissensions among Christians," Grotius wrote that like the early Christians who knew no sect or faction, he sought to show that "there was no one

sect that had discovered all truth, nor any but what held something that was true.”^[93] The truth could be found only through the discovery of common ground and the eschewal of factional struggles. This motive underlies *The Truth of the Christian Religion*, in which he sought to unite Protestants and Roman Catholics. It should come as no surprise that, in his last years, Grotius undertook the task of ambassador for Sweden. A good, liberal project, is it not? Yet, liberal tolerance is always proposed by “men of good judgment, and of no small learning”^[94]—that is, from a position of ruling class power—for tolerance seeks to leave the status quo as it is. “Toleration, sure, but only insofar as you recognize our position of influence.” Or, more perniciously: “Tolerance yes, but on our terms.”

Another signal of Grotius’s class assumptions directly bears on later developments of classical economic theory. We mean not merely the fact that most of those who followed after him spoke in terms of a ruling class, but also the tendency to pack his texts with quotations and references to classical Greek and Latin authors, along with a few medieval scholastics. Obviously, this practice was a result of his humanist education, but it produces an effect that would become important in the later imperialism of classical and then neoclassical economic theory. In attempting to harmonize ancient sources with another ancient source—namely, the Bible—Grotius undertakes some deft exegetical work to deal with their differences.^[95] Yet, this harmonization also functions in a temporal way; the ancients come to be no different from ourselves. They too were interested in the free individual with rights; they too saw the development of private property and commerce as beneficial; they too agree with us. Above all, they too were nascent capitalists. Here lie the seeds of economics imperialism, in which capitalist impulses are simply part of human nature and history becomes the grand narrative of capitalism’s unfolding.

Looking forward: Grotius fires off a number of trajectories that become important for the other theorists with whom we deal in this book. These are the construction of a myth that wrestles with the biblical story of the Fall but sets out on a new path. Locke, Malthus, and Smith also deal in myth, reshaping what they have inherited while staying geared toward the features of capitalism they saw springing up around them. Theology and especially the Bible play significant roles for Locke and Malthus, while Smith occupies a transition point. We also find replicated the paradox of liberalism and its false universal, which closely connects with the inescapable ruling class assumptions they bring to their texts. In the case of these later theorists, a virulent ethnocentrism ultimately reveals the lie of their universal claims.

However, we would like to finish on a different note, one that is germane to Grotius. It concerns the nature of his Arminian theology and economic theory—specifically, the way it questions Weber’s well-known proposal regarding Calvinism as the vanishing mediator of capitalism.^[96] For Weber, the particular nature of Calvinism provided the enabling ideological structure for the emergence of capitalism, in the Netherlands and then the United Kingdom. If we grant Weber’s methodological assumptions for a moment, then he has missed his target. Those who took up a Reformed position tended to come from the poorer, peasant and new working class areas of the United Provinces. These were the same people who had been enamored with the radical and revolutionary currents of Anabaptism not long before. But amidst the commercial ruling elite (among whom Grotius was a leading ideologue), Arminianism was far more popular. Here, we find the rewritten myths of the emergence of capitalism, the assertion of the free individual, and the paradoxes of liberalism. Perhaps, it would be better to speak of the Arminian ethic and the spirit of capitalism.



1. Hugo Grotius, *The Rights of War and Peace*, ed. Richard Tuck, trans. John Clarke, 3 vols. (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2005 [1625]), I. Prol. 49.↵
2. For a comprehensive biography of Grotius, see Henk Nellen, *Hugo de Groot. Een leven in strijd om de vrede, 1583-1645* (Amsterdam: Balans, 2007).↵
3. Hugo Grotius, *The Truth of the Christian Religion*, trans. John Clarke (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2012 [1627]), II.8.↵
4. The desire to read Grotius as a nascent secular modernist thinker is understandable, but such a reading flies in the face of the overwhelmingly theological nature of his work. Knud Haakonssen, “Hugo Grotius and the History of Political Thought,” *Political Theory* 23 (1985): 239–65. For useful studies that recognize the importance of theology for the nature of Grotius’s thought, see A. H. Haentjes, *Hugo de Groot als godsdiensig denker* (Amsterdam: Ploegsma, 1946); Henk Nellen and Edwin Rabbie, eds., *Hugo Grotius, Theologian: Essays in Honour of G.H.M. Posthumus Meyjes* (Leiden: Brill, 1994). We should point out that describing Grotius’s position as Socinian (denial of the trinity and original sin) is imprecise and accepts the general label of condemnation directed at Grotius by his opponents. Jan Paul Heering, “Hugo Grotius' *De Veritate Religionis Christianae*,” in *Hugo Grotius, Theologian: Essays in Honour of G.H.M. Posthumus Meyjes*, eds. Henk Nellen and Edwin Rabbie, 41–52 (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 46–48; Fiammetta Palladini, “The Image of Christ in Grotius’s *De Veritate Religionis Christianae*. Some Thoughts on Grotius’s Socinianism,” *Grotiana* 33 (2012): 58–69.↵
5. Arminius (b. 1560) was a minister in Amsterdam for some fifteen years before becoming professor of theology at the University of Leiden from 1603 until his death in 1609. The Remonstrant position is named after the “five articles of Remonstrance,” a position statement published soon after Arminius’s death by those who followed him. For a discussion of the Arminian controversy in the English religious landscape see Peter Harrison, “*Religion*” and the Religions in the English Enlightenment (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 23–28.↵
6. Jacobus Arminius, *The Complete Works of James Arminius* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986 [1853]), II: 19.↵

7. “The providence of God is subordinate to creation; and it is, therefore, necessary that it should not impinge against creation, which it would do, were it to inhibit or hinder the use of free will in man.” *Ibid.*, II: 460.↵
8. *Ibid.*, III: 311. Note also: “God decreed to save and damn certain particular persons. This decree has its foundation in the foreknowledge of God, by which he knew from all eternity those individuals who *would*, through his preventing [prevenient] grace, believe, and, through his subsequent grace *would* persevere by which foreknowledge, he likewise knew those who *would not believe and persevere*.” *Ibid.*, I: 248.↵
9. Roland Boer, *In the Vale of Tears: On Marxism and Theology V*, Historical Materialism Book Series (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 245–86.↵
10. Grotius, *The Truth of the Christian Religion*, 1.8.↵
11. See also Hugo Grotius, *Commentary on the Law of Prize and Booty*, ed. Martine Julia Van Ittersum, trans. John Clarke (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2006 [1868]), 30–33.↵
12. Grotius, *The Truth of the Christian Religion*, 1.9.↵
13. *Ibid.*, 1.19–25.↵
14. Grotius distinguishes between the specific law for ancient Israel, given to Moses, and the universal law first given at creation, then to Noah, and finally through Jesus Christ. The latter can be known in and of itself. Christoph A. Stumpf, *The Grotian Theology of International Law: Hugo Grotius and the Moral Foundations of International Relations* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2006), 71–100; Matthijs de Blois, “Blessed [Are] the Peacemakers . . . Grotius on the Just War and Christian Pacifism,” *Grotiana* 32 (2011): 20–39, 23–24.↵
15. Grotius, *The Rights of War and Peace*, I. Prol. 11. Note also: “The Law of Nature is so unalterable, that God himself cannot change it.” *Ibid.*, I.1.10. It is on the basis of these statements that efforts have been mounted to argue that Grotius is really a secular thinker. Haakonssen, “Hugo Grotius and the History of Political Thought.”↵
16. Grotius, *The Truth of the Christian Religion*, 1.8.↵
17. Martin Luther and Desiderius Erasmus, *Luther and Erasmus: On the Bondage of the Will and On the Freedom of the Will*, eds. E. G. Rupp and P. S. Watson, vol. 17, Library of Christian Classics (London: SCM, 1969).↵
18. Despite occasional disagreements, especially on the matter of war and pacifism, Grotius was close to Erasmus in many aspects of his thought. Johannes Trapman, “Grotius and Erasmus,” in *Hugo Grotius, Theologian: Essays in Honour of G.H.M. Posthumus Meyjes*, eds. Henk Nellen and Edwin Rabbie (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 77–98; Blois, “Blessed [Are] the Peacemakers . . . Grotius on the Just War and Christian Pacifism,” 28–31.↵
19. Grotius, *The Rights of War and Peace*, II.2.2.↵
20. For a welcome emphasis on the deeply biblical nature of Grotius thought, see Blois, “Blessed [Are] the Peacemakers . . . Grotius on the Just War and Christian Pacifism.” Unfortunately, Schermaier’s otherwise detailed study misses this biblical engagement, preferring to follow Grotius’s lead and finding the sources of his ideas in Greek, Roman, and medieval Scholastic thought. Martin J. Schermaier, “*Res Communes Omnium*: The History of an Idea from Greek Philosophy to Grotian Jurisprudence,” *Grotiana* 30 (2009): 20–48. A comparable avoidance of the struggle with the biblical text in developing his thought concerning private property appears in Stumpf, *The Grotian Theology of International Law: Hugo Grotius and the Moral Foundations of International Relations*, 169–76; Stephen Buckle, *Natural Law and the Theory of Property: Grotius to Hume* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991).↵
21. Grotius, *The Rights of War and Peace*, II.2.2. Efforts to reinterpret biblical themes in light of his own argument appear repeatedly in his works. For instance, in the long discussion of self-defence, he writes, “The Christian Religion commands, that we should lay down our Lives one for another; but who will pretend to say, that we are obliged to this by the Law of Nature.” *Ibid.*, I.2.6. See also his efforts to argue that Christians can and must seize booty in war, with a heavy emphasis on the story of Abraham’s raid in Genesis 14. Grotius, *Commentary on the Law of Prize and Booty*, 51–88. It is worth noting that in the prologue of the

second edition of *De jure Belli*, he revised the text to make it more palatable to Reformed theology, as a way to ease his aborted attempt to return to the Netherlands from exile.↵

22. Grotius, *Commentary on the Law of Prize and Booty*, 315–21; Hugo Grotius, *The Freedom of the Seas* (Kitchener: Batoche Books, 2000 [1609]). *Mare Liberum* appeared in March 1609 at the request of the directors of the VOC while they were engaged in the Ibero–Dutch negotiations for the Twelve Years Truce (signed on April 9, 1609). The full text of *De iure Praedae commentarius* was published more than 250 years after he wrote the work. Somewhat fortuitous was the discovery, for it had been placed in a box, only to be discovered when his descendants auctioned (through the bookseller and printer Martinus Nijhoff) some of Grotius’s papers in 1864. Subsequently acquired by the University of Leiden Library, the first edition appeared in 1868 under the editorship H. G. Hamaker, a former student of the university. In what follows, we cite *De jure Praedae* as *Commentary on the Law of Prize and Booty*.↵
23. A more disjointed version appears in the second book of the later *De jure Belli* (Grotius, *The Rights of War and Peace*, II.2.2–3). We refer to it where appropriate, but since its digressions make it less clear than the version of the myth in *De jure Praedae*, we focus on that version in our analysis.↵
24. Cicero, Horace, Seneca, Quintilian, Ovid, and Thucydides make appearances in the myth.↵
25. Schermaier, “*Res Communes Omnium*: The History of an Idea from Greek Philosophy to Grotian Jurisprudence.”↵
26. Grotius, *Commentary on the Law of Prize and Booty*, 316.↵
27. Ibid., 317. In *De jure Belli*, nature becomes “almighty God,” who gave common dominion at creation and after the Deluge. Grotius, *The Rights of War and Peace*, II.2.2.↵
28. See the references in Schermaier, “*Res Communes Omnium*: The History of an Idea from Greek Philosophy to Grotian Jurisprudence,” 30–31.↵
29. Grotius, *The Rights of War and Peace*, II.2.6. He even keeps open the possibility that communal property may become viable again in some later situations.↵
30. Ibid., II.2.2.↵
31. Grotius, *Commentary on the Law of Prize and Booty*, 317–18.↵
32. This text will also become a stumbling block for John Locke and Thomas Malthus.↵
33. Hugo Grotius, *Hugonis Grotii Annotationes in Vetus & Novum Testamentum* (Farmington Hills: Gale Ecco, 2010 [1727]), 12.↵
34. Ibid., 12.↵
35. Grotius, *The Rights of War and Peace*, II.2.2. Here, he seems to follow Philo’s allegorical reading in which the tree becomes an instance of a “middle prudence” (*phronēs in mesēn*). Indeed, these “arts” become the initiative of the entrepreneurial nature of human beings: “Because men no longer contented with what the earth produced of itself for their nourishment; being no longer willing to dwell in caves, to go naked, or covered only with the barks of trees, or the skins of wild beasts, wanted to live in a more commodious and more agreeable manner; to which end labour and industry was necessary, which some employed for one thing, and others for another” (ibid., II.2.2). Even the death–struggle of Cain and Abel becomes a manifestation of the most ancient arts, crop growing and feeding cattle.↵
36. Ibid., II.2.2.↵
37. Ibid., II.2.2.↵
38. As he puts it in the second chapter of *De jure Praedae*, since “‘what had been seized as his own’ by each person should become the property of that person. Such seizure is called *possessio* (the act of taking possession), the forerunner of *usus* (use), and subsequently of *dominium* (ownership)” Grotius, *Commentary on the Law of Prize and Booty*, 24.↵
39. Ibid., 317.↵
40. A number of studies trace this development in detail, as well as the subsequent loss of the idea of private

property and its gradual recovery until it became a centerpiece of capitalism. Perry Anderson, *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism* (London: Verso, 1974), 65–67; H. F. Jolowicz, *Historical Introduction to the Study of Roman Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952), 142–43, 426; Andrew Linklater, *International Relations: Critical Concepts in Political Science* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 1432; Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 31; David Graeber, *Debt: The First 5,000 Years* (New York: Melville House, 2011), 199–201, 205, 290; Schermaier, “*Res Communes Omnium*: The History of an Idea from Greek Philosophy to Grotian Jurisprudence,” 28–29.↵

41. Grotius, *Commentary on the Law of Prize and Booty*, 318.↵
42. *Ibid.*, 23.↵
43. Grotius, *The Rights of War and Peace*, II.2.6; II.2.21. See also his later efforts to ameliorate such a direct statement. *Ibid.*, II.2.10–11.↵
44. Roland Boer, “From Horse Kissing to Beastly Emissions: Paraphilias in the Ancient Near East,” in *Sex in Antiquity*, Mark Masterson and Nancy Rabinowitz, eds. (London: Routledge, forthcoming).↵
45. It is worth noting that this dialectical approach to the law is found in the Apostle Paul’s reflections in Romans 7.↵
46. See also Grotius, *The Rights of War and Peace*, II.3.4.↵
47. Grotius, *Commentary on the Law of Prize and Booty*, 319.↵
48. *Ibid.*, 319–20.↵
49. *Ibid.*, 320–21.↵
50. Schermaier, “*Res Communes Omnium*: The History of an Idea from Greek Philosophy to Grotian Jurisprudence,” 35.↵
51. See also Grotius, *The Rights of War and Peace*, II.2.3; II.3.8–18.↵
52. Grotius generally designates the Portuguese as Spanish, since Portugal was under control of the Spanish crown, with whom the Dutch were engaged in a protracted struggle for independence.↵
53. Bruce Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology, and Scholarship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Roland Boer, *Political Myth: On the Use and Abuse of Biblical Themes* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).↵
54. Grotius, *The Truth of the Christian Religion*, 1.19.↵
55. For a recent discussion of Grotius’s theory of natural law in relation to divine law in light of his biblical exegesis, see Blois, “Blessed [Are] the Peacemakers . . . Grotius on the Just War and Christian Pacifism.”↵
56. Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System IV: Centrist Liberalism Triumphant, 1789–1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).↵
57. Grotius, *The Rights of War and Peace*, I. Prol.; Grotius, *Commentary on the Law of Prize and Booty*, 19–50.↵
58. Grotius, *The Rights of War and Peace*, I. Prol. 7; see also Grotius, *Commentary on the Law of Prize and Booty*, 24–28, 39–41. Reiterations of these two principles appear repeatedly in his texts, at times with small differences. In *De jure Praedae*, the relationship between them is mutually cooperative, with self-interest being the first attribute of human beings (through a nature created by God) and sociality the second. Grotius is keen to indicate that self-interest does not mean greed but a beneficial desire based on love and justice. However, in *De jure Belli*, the relationship between them is more fractious, for the social impulse counters the excessive focus on the self, especially against those who assert that self-interest serves as the only basis for human existence. Grotius, *The Rights of War and Peace*, I. Prol. 5–7. His revision of the prologue—in which he plays down the focus on self-interest to assuage his Reformed critics—resulted in a tense relationship between the two.↵
59. Grotius, *The Rights of War and Peace*, I. Prol. 17.↵
60. Grotius, *Commentary on the Law of Prize and Booty*, 24; see also Grotius, *The Rights of War and Peace*, I. Prol. 13. See also his comments on the human faculties of “prudent management” and “sound judgment,” which

enable one to discern the pleasant from the hurtful. Grotius, *The Rights of War and Peace*, I. Prol. 9–10. The social role of justice enhances this situation, operating according to a calculus of equality and compensation. Grotius, *Commentary on the Law of Prize and Booty*, 28–33.↵

61. Grotius, *Commentary on the Law of Prize and Booty*, 25.↵
62. Boer, *In the Vale of Tears: On Marxism and Theology V*, 245–86.↵
63. Grotius, *The Truth of the Christian Religion*, 1.24. Or, as rule three in *De jure Praedae* puts it, “What each individual has indicated to be his will, that is law with respect to him.” Grotius, *Commentary on the Law of Prize and Booty*, 34. In the last pages of the second chapter of that work, he offers a balance to this assertion, suggesting that individuals are also subject to the judiciaries of states and even international agreements.↵
64. Grotius, *Commentary on the Law of Prize and Booty*, 33–34; see also Grotius, *The Rights of War and Peace*, I.3.8. Grotius’s theory of the state, as a collection of individuals, follows through the implications of this argument concerning the autonomous individual: “The will of individuals, manifested either in the formal acceptance of pacts, as was originally the case, or in tacit indication of consent, as in later times, when each individual attached himself to the body of a commonwealth that had already been established.” Grotius, *Commentary on the Law of Prize and Booty*, 36.↵
65. Grotius, *Commentary on the Law of Prize and Booty*, 29–30.↵
66. See further Stumpf, *The Grotian Theology of International Law: Hugo Grotius and the Moral Foundations of International Relations*, 11–27; Benedict Kingsbury and Benjamin Straumann, “The State of Nature and Commercial Sociability in Early Modern International Legal Thought,” *Grotiana* 31 (2010): 22–43, 31–32.↵
67. Ever wary not to undermine the legitimacy of a state, Grotius goes on to clarify that the right of the state is superior to that of the individual. Grotius, *The Rights of War and Peace*, I.1.6. In doing so, he has let the individual cat out of the collective bag.↵
68. *Ibid.*, I.1.4.↵
69. See the discussion in L. Winkel, “Problems of Legal Systematization from *De iure praedae* to *De iure belli ac pacis*: *De iure praedae* Chapter 2 and the Prolegomena of *De iure belli ac pacis* Compared,” *Grotiana* 26–28 (2005–2008): 61–78.↵
70. Grotius, *The Rights of War and Peace*, I.1.5; see also Grotius, *Commentary on the Law of Prize and Booty*, 33–34.↵
71. Haakonssen, “Hugo Grotius and the History of Political Thought,” 240.↵
72. Grotius, *Commentary on the Law of Prize and Booty*, 23; Grotius, *The Rights of War and Peace*, I.2.3; II.2.11.↵
73. It is no accident that the imperial propaganda of the United States uses the mantra of “human rights” as part of its agenda.↵
74. Marx transforms a term from the study of religions to describe this process at the heart of capitalism: the “fetishism of commodities.” Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Vol. I*, in *Marx and Engels Collected Works*, vol. 35 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1867 [1996]), 81–94; also see Roland Boer, “*Kapitalfetisch*: ‘The Religion of Everyday Life,’” *International Critical Thought* 1, no. 4 (2011): 416–26.↵
75. This development was seen more than fifty years ago as one of the most significant outcomes of the seventeenth century. C. B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011 [1962]), 3–4.↵
76. Boer, *Political Myth: On the Use and Abuse of Biblical Themes*.↵
77. Richard Tuck, Introduction to Hugo Grotius, *The Rights of War and Peace*, ix–xxxiii (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2005 [1625]), xviii–xx; Martine Julia Van Ittersum, Introduction to Hugo Grotius, *Commentary on the Law of Prize and Booty*, xiii–xxi, (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2006 [1868]), xviii; Haakonssen, “Hugo Grotius and the History of Political Thought.”↵
78. We draw here on the landmark study of liberalism by Dominico Losurdo, *Liberalism: A Counter-History*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2011 [2006]). See also Dominico Losurdo, “Lenin and *Herrvolk*

- Democracy,” in *Lenin Reloaded: Towards a Politics of Truth*, ed. Sebastian Budgen, Stathis Kouvelakis, and Slavoj Žižek, 239–52 (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).↵
79. Grotius, *The Rights of War and Peace*, I.1.5. For the painstaking and slow motion version of this argument, see the fifth chapter of book two of *De jure Belli*. Ibid., II.5.↵
 80. The same applies to a husband’s control over his wife. Ibid., II.5.8.↵
 81. Ibid., II.5.27.↵
 82. Ibid., II.5.5, 29. However, if slaves are prisoners taken in war, their children are automatically slaves as well. Ibid., III.7.2. In classic New Testament fashion, he also points out that masters should treat their slaves well, or at least not kill them. Ibid., II.5.28; III.7.5.↵
 83. Grotius, *Commentary on the Law of Prize and Booty*, 95.↵
 84. Grotius, *The Rights of War and Peace*, III.7.1.↵
 85. Ibid., I.3.8. The same holds true with the sovereign: when people surrender their rights to a ruler, they cannot make this ruler subject to their wishes. Ibid., I.3.8. The sovereign may, of course, consult with the people if he wishes, but he is certainly not bound by such opinions.↵
 86. As John Stuart Mill put it in his “On Liberty,” “despotism is a legitimate mode of government in dealing with barbarians”; liberty is only for “human beings in the maturity of their faculties.” John Stuart Mill, “On Liberty,” in *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, vol. 18, 213–310 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977 [1859]), 224.↵
 87. “Rogue” was initially used for slaves, but if a slave owner had white semi-slaves, they were branded with an *R* to indicate their status.↵
 88. Lenin, who was an excellent and earlier analyst of this paradox, writes of the Dreyfus case in republican France, the lynching of African Americans in the democratic republic of America, the treatment of Ireland and Ulster in democratic Britain, the baiting of the Bolsheviks in the democratic republic of Russia in 1917, and the reaction by the bourgeoisie to the German republican revolution in 1918. V.I. Lenin, “The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky,” in *Collected Works*, vol. 28, 227–325 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1918 [1965]), 245; V.I. Lenin, “Report at the Second All-Russia Trade Union Congress, January 20, 1919,” in *Collected Works*, vol. 28, 412–48 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1919 [1965]), 417; Lenin, “First Congress of the Communist International,” in *Collected Works*, vol. 28, 453–77 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1919 [1965]) 461–63.↵
 89. Grotius, *The Truth of the Christian Religion*, 2.3.↵
 90. Grotius, *The Rights of War and Peace*, Dedication.↵
 91. Through his marriage to Lijsbet Reael in 1590, Arminius entered the circles of Amsterdam’s most influential people.↵
 92. Martine Julia van Ittersum, *Profit and Principle: Hugo Grotius, Natural Rights Theories and the Rise of Dutch Power in the East Indies, 1595–1615* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), li–lv.↵
 93. Grotius, *The Rights of War and Peace*, I. Prol. 43.↵
 94. Ibid., I. Prol. 43.↵
 95. See his principles for reading Greek and Roman authors alongside the Bible. Grotius, *The Truth of the Christian Religion*, 2.16.↵
 96. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (trans. Talcott Parsons. London: Routledge, 1992 [1904–5]).↵

John Locke and the Trouble with Adam

As Adam was turned out of Paradise, so all his Posterity were born out of it, out of the reach of the Tree of Life, All like their Father Adam in a state of Mortality, void of the Tranquility and Bliss of Paradise.^[1]

In comparison with Grotius, John Locke led a somewhat less exciting life. Instead of shipwrecks,^[2] Locke gave up a university post to tutor the children of an obscenely wealthy and mildly progressive Whig; instead of holding an ambassadorial post, he opted to remain quietly at home and write; instead of fighting robustly for a cause, he hid his authorship of any work he suspected might be ever so slightly controversial; instead of public life, he remained excessively secretive.^[3] Locke was known to be pedantic, quick to take offence, and singularly lacking a sense of humor. Despite all this, he provides an embarrassment of riches when it comes to the Bible and economic theory.

We focus on his two “Treatises of Government,” drawing (where appropriate) from his curious *The Reasonableness of Christianity*.^[4] The core issues for our analysis of Locke concern human nature and the origins of labor and of private property.^[5] In both cases, his theoretical efforts turn on and are often tripped up by the biblical text of Genesis 1–3.^[6] Why this text? If one wished to develop a new theory of human nature in Locke’s time (although he was already working in a tradition that goes back to Grotius), then the obvious person with whom to begin was that primal clod,^[7] Adam. Here, surely, is the paradigm of human nature, for God created him directly (Eve barely rates a mention).^[8] The problem is that the near obsessive concern with identifying an eternal human nature took place at a time when human nature itself was changing with the spread of capitalism. As for labor and private property, the early chapters of Genesis too were where one began analysis. Labor is clearly one of the curses of the Fall (Gen. 3:17–19), so if one

wished to develop an alternative myth, parts of Genesis needed to be reinterpreted and rewritten. In light of these themes—human nature and property—we have organized the following analysis in two sections: the first focuses on Adam and the second on Locke’s reworking of the origin myth of property and labor. In the initial section, we trace the way Locke’s ideas on freedom, reason, and self-interest emerge from his deliberations over Adam. More explicitly, they emerge from his debates with Robert Filmer, who sought to argue that absolute monarchy derives from Adam.^[9] Locke disagreed, and in the process developed his positions. Although they may be stated (often repeatedly) in the celebrated second treatise on government, they are initially formulated in the first treatise where the debate with Filmer and the close engagement with Genesis take place. The following section of our analysis focuses on Locke’s myth of the origins of property and labor. Not only is this myth a retelling of the story the Fall in Genesis 1–3, but it also serves as a reworking and extension of Grotius’s earlier version of the myth. At this point, we also draw upon *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, in which Locke faces squarely the problem of the Fall. In a daring reinterpretation of the Fall, he restricts its consequences to one man alone: Adam brings mortality into the world. Locke thereby effaces the other consequences, especially concerning labor as a punishment for disobedience. This leaves him plenty of scope to develop an alternative story in which labor, and therefore property, are the outcome of God’s command to subdue the earth. We continue to give close attention to this foundation myth of classical economic theory, for it would be retold and reformulated by those who came after Locke.

Since we deal extensively with Locke’s theological, or rather biblical, arguments, a preliminary comment on his theological preferences should be made. Locke’s position may seem initially to be a theological mix, adhering to no single direction. His desire to base his thoughts in the Bible alone makes him seem somewhat Reformed, yet he had little interest in the “systems of Divinity.” Locke famously wrote, “The holy scripture is to me, and always will be, the constant guide of my assent; and we shall always hearken to it, as containing infallible truth, relating to things of the highest concernment.”^[10] However, he had specific ideas as to how that guide should be read: the “drift of the discourse” rather than proof-texts; the supposed historical context in which the texts were written rather than elaborate theological formulations; the “plain and intelligible” meaning (that is, “reasonableness”) of the text, understandable by the poor and common man, rather than the “superfine distinctions of the schools.”^[11] The result was an approach that regarded faith as intellectual and moral assent to basic propositions found in the Bible, especially those sections Locke deemed most historical.^[12] Beneath this

distinct and (for his time) reasonably modern approach to the Bible lies an undercurrent that links him to none other than Hugo Grotius. One of Locke's two favorite theologians was Philipp van Limborch.^[13] A leading Remonstrant of the generation following Grotius, Limborch (1633–1712) was also a member of the ruling class. After studying theology, he ministered to Remonstrant parishes in Gouda and later Amsterdam, where he also became professor of theology at the Remonstrant college. In that capacity, he was often called upon to deal with matters of practical theology and ecclesial organization, but he also corresponded (in Latin) with leading intellectuals in Germany, France, and especially England. Besides writing frequently to Locke, his personal and intellectual friend, Limborch managed to write several major works of Remonstrant theology, including the first systematic exposition of that theology.^[14] In Limborch's work, Locke seemed most at home; or rather, he found that his own conclusions accorded well with those of Limborch.^[15] These include: opposition to the Calvinist doctrine of election; abhorrence of the idea that God could be the author of sin; the position that faith requires obedience to basic propositions, upon which all Christians may agree—especially that Jesus Christ is Lord and Messiah; a desire to find unity and tolerance among the many forms of Christianity through these simple propositions;^[16] ruling class proclivities that included an abhorrence of revolution; but especially—for our purposes—his tendency to limit the effects of the Fall, thereby attributing a great deal of importance to human agency in terms of freedom. Indeed, Locke's positioning of himself as an independent Christian seeking a simple, biblical message as the basis for peace and understanding drew him closest to the Arminians.^[17]

Something about Adam

Every man had a right to the creatures by the same title Adam had, viz. by the right every one had to take care of and provide for their subsistence: and thus men had a right in common, Adam's children in common with him.^[18]

The topic is human nature, and the focus is Adam. Locke searches for a new theory of human nature, albeit one that he sought to reinforce and develop, rather than create *ex nihilo*. In Adam one may, feels Locke, find insights concerning freedom, reason, self-interest, property, and labor. Yet Adam is not as cooperative as Locke would like, twisting this way and that as Locke attempts to tie him down. The reason? Adam is caught between paradigm and exception. Thus, Locke's assumption is that as the first, Adam provides insights into the truth of human nature, offering a paradigm for all his posterity.

He is everyman, common to all. At the same time, Adam is the exception, the one who is different from all of us. He was directly created, walked with God, experienced a state of perfection no one has been able to match.^[19] Most importantly, Adam cannot be extracted from the narrative in which he is found—a narrative of creation, of a flawed paradise, of disobedience, and of a fall from grace. That story may have bequeathed to Locke the tension between everyman and singular man, but it also tied him to the story of the Fall, a story that left Locke with more problems than answers.

Given that the first treatise of government is usually ignored in analysis—dismissed as arcane and time-bound^[20]—we deal with both treatises here.^[21] The reason for this avoidance is that Locke develops his main points through detailed engagement with his beloved Bible. His main points may be boldly stated in the second treatise, but they are painstakingly wrested from biblical texts in the first.^[22] We have organized the following analysis in terms of the main categories that have made Locke (in)famous as an early ideologue of liberalism and capitalist market economies: freedom, reason, and self-interest.^[23] In each case, we begin with his bold claims in the second treatise, only to track back and examine how he wrests each claim from the Bible in the first treatise. By using this approach, the clear connections between the two treatises should become clear.

Freedom

Man has a natural freedom . . . since all that share in the same common nature, faculties, and powers, are in nature equal, and ought to partake in the same common rights and privileges.^[24]

In the second treatise, Locke formulates his battle cry for freedom: the natural state of “men” is “a state of perfect freedom to order their actions and dispose of their possessions and persons, as they think fit, within the bounds of the law of nature; without asking leave, or depending upon the will of any other man.”^[25] Rather pleased with his opinion, he repeats it on not a few occasions.^[26] But it does not suddenly emerge in the second treatise, for already in the first treatise he has made the same point: “I cannot see; nor consequently understand, how a supposition of natural freedom is a denial of Adam’s creation.”^[27] Indeed, Adam was a perfectly free being, created by God, without parents, when “it pleased God he should.” No other conclusion is possible except that Adam embodied the “natural freedom of mankind.”^[28]

So far; so good. The natural freedom and equality^[29] of human beings is of the created order, first vested in Adam and then vouched to all who follow. But what does Locke mean by “all”? Does he reveal the universal by exclusion—the characteristic feature

of bourgeois freedom—that we identified with Grotius? We suggest he does so in three ways, in terms of children, society, and ethnocentrism.^[30] We discuss children first, since society and ethnocentrism manifest the many traps that the Fall produces for Locke. We are all free in our natural state, proclaims Locke, but are we born free? The answer is a firm no: only Adam was born, or rather created, free, for he was created in the full flush of his masculine prowess. Giving the impression that he is watching a body builder’s posing routine, Locke gushes: “Adam was created a perfect man, his body and mind in full possession of their strength and reason, and so was capable from the first instant of his being to provide for his own support and preservation, and govern his actions according to the dictates of the law of reason which God had implanted in him.”^[31] Not so babies and children, who account for the rest of the variety of the human species. Or rather, they seem to have freedom *in potentia*. As helpless babes, they are reliant upon and subject to their parents until they reach an age—conveniently unspecified—when they can exercise freedom.^[32] Thus, they may be born free but cannot exercise that freedom until some time later. Is this not a little too close to the advice given to slaves that they are free in spirit (if not in Christ), and that the master is in even worse “bondage?”^[33] Freedom without actual freedom—here, the universal claim meets its first significant restriction.

The limitation in terms of children is both sweeping and rather obvious, but the matters of society and ethnocentrism are somewhat more complex. The ambivalent benefits of society as well as Locke’s persistent ethnocentrism turn on his approach to the state of nature. We suggest that the category of the state of nature, with its natural law, is not so much a production of Locke’s narrative as it is an effort to deal with the Fall. The garden and its occupants thereby become the paradigmatic state of nature.^[34] Yet, human beings must undergo a transition from the state of nature to society, to government and the body politic. While this distinction does not originate with Locke (think of the nature–culture opposition or barbarism–civilization), it does become a code for this inveterate lover of the Bible as he transitions from the Garden of Eden to the wider world. But is the transition a matter of regress or progress? Disobedience and banishment from the garden would suggest a downward turn, yet the Fall may also be read as a great boon. If Adam and Eve had not disobeyed God, then the history of salvation would not have taken place; Christ would not have come, and life on earth would have been poorer for it. This fortuitous reading of the Fall has many layers (narrative necessity, a parable of maturity, the serpent as the true manifestation of God), but our point, in relation to

Locke, is that he transfers this theological ambivalence over the Fall to his dealings with the state of nature and society.

This ambivalence leads Locke to qualify freedom yet again. In their natural state, he declares, men are free individuals. How free? Is one at liberty to exercise any and all individual freedoms, even if chaos ensues as each person seeks to assert his or her freedom at the expense of another's? Frightened by nightmares of a Hobbesian hue, Locke hastily observes that freedom is not the equivalent of license—that is, the liberty to destroy oneself or another. So he rolls out the “law of nature” as a check on rampant freedom, the law under which Adam first found himself. The basis of that law is reason, which handily teaches all those free and equal beings that they should avoid harming one another's possessions, especially life, health, and freedom.^[35] All the same, law in the state of nature is not quite sufficient for managing the rampaging egos of natural human beings; so Locke suggests that the role of government is to produce just and reasonable laws for the protection of these vital possessions.^[36] Adam cannot remain in his primitive state forever, for the sophistications of society and civilization beckon. Lest society appear a distant option for our naturally free man,^[37] Locke deftly inserts society into the garden itself: the creation of Eve begets the first society,^[38] which is entered into voluntarily. One consents to give up certain freedoms for the greater good—to foster what is supposedly another dimension of human nature, the care for others. As in marriage, so with government: “A man can never be obliged in conscience to submit to any power, unless he can be satisfied who is the person who has a right to exercise that power over him.”^[39]

Initially, the transition from the state of nature to government seems to be beneficial: the dangers of the former are overcome in the latter. Locke's reformulation of the Fall seems to be of a fortuitous tenor. However, a closer look reveals an undercurrent of regress in the transition to society and governance. When human beings consent to be governed, they must give up certain freedoms—a clear limitation of the full freedom inherent in the state of nature. Freedom turns out not to be so universal.^[40] Aware of this problem, Locke initially suggests that the law of government merely fulfills, in a smooth transition, the law of nature. Not quite pleased with this proposal, he argues more strenuously that the voluntary giving up of certain freedoms is precisely for the purpose of ensuring at least some freedoms. Even this suggestion is too weak, so he waxes dialectical: given that no one freely makes a decision that is to his or her detriment,^[41] then the handing over of equality, liberty, and executive power functions to enhance self-preservation, freedom, and property.^[42] In this way, regress and progress, the Fall as

disaster and boon, meet face to face. Yet, Locke protests too much in his desperation to avoid the clear shrinkage in freedom entailed by society and government.

The nature–society transition is largely a temporal one, happening in some mythical past. Not so Locke’s ethnocentrism, for this is spatial, located in places other than England and yet contemporaneous. That is, the state of nature exists now, in more primitive locales elsewhere on the globe.^[43] Yet here, too, Locke is torn. On the one hand, he would like to think that true freedoms exist only in places like his own island off that peninsula on the western fringe of the Eurasian landmass. Clear signs of civilized life, as also of advanced political and economic life, appear in places like Devonshire but not in the “wild woods and uncultivated wastes of America.”^[44] In Devonshire, they engage in tillage as the basis of property, while the wild Indians of America gather nuts and apples. Furthermore, in some exotics places, the locals are enslaved to barbaric passions, begetting “children on purpose to fatten and eat them.”^[45] On the other hand, life for our Devonshire farmer is rather limited in terms of freedom, for he has surrendered not a few freedoms to the government, and his children are free only in name. Is freedom then found in the state of nature in which such people exist? At times, Locke seems to think so. For instance, the agreements for exchange and truck, between “two men in the desert island, mentioned by Garcilasso de la Vega, in his history of Peru; or between a Swiss and an Indian, in the woods of America,” take place freely within the state of nature.^[46] They are not bound by the constraints of government, of one body politic—much like Adam, who was created in the full vigor of life and freedom. Locke fails to resolve this contradiction, opting now one way, now another. To reference our earlier discussion: the transition from the garden may be a boon or a curse.^[47]

In each case—whether children, society, or ethnocentrism —freedom becomes the entitlement of a rather small group. Children, the civilized, and ethnic others need not bother. The preeminent individual must wait until an unspecified adulthood, must give up some freedoms for the sake of security of society and government, and must not be from some barbarian backwater. Yet neither the state of nature nor social life in a body politic seems to be granted freedom in Locke’s equivocations. Not only is freedom limited, it is exceedingly elusive as well.

Reason

Human nature is becoming somewhat problematic in Locke’s effort at recasting. Much the same applies to reason, although less needs to be said here since much of Locke’s

thought concerning freedom applies to reason as well (primarily from the first treatise). As with freedom, children are not born with reason, for this arises only with maturity. The difference is that reason is not held *in potentia* at birth—it must be learnt. However, reason poses further problems for Locke, problems that would later bedevil the creation of the eminently reasonable *homo economicus*. To begin with, reason is the determining feature of the law of nature.^[48] Here, Locke faces the same contradiction we noted regarding freedom. Is reason purer in the state of nature, until it is partially surrendered with the shift to government? Or is it preeminently a feature of the laws of proper government, needed to rein in the wildness of the state of nature? Once again, the paradoxes of the Fall emerge from between the lines of Locke's text. Furthermore, Adam is trapped. Within the various theological traditions (as we indicated earlier), Adam is both the exemplar of all human beings and the exception, unlike any other person. With regard to reason, the law that governs him, the law of reason, governs all his posterity;^[49] yet, he is the only one who possesses reason from the first moment of existence, unlike those who come after him, who must bide their time until maturity.

Despite the way that Locke champions reason—so much so that intellect is itself part of the image of God according to which we were created^[50]—he is rather wary of reason. It can never function on its own, for it should always function alongside revelation, especially when one is in search of truth.^[51] Indeed, when it comes down to a difference between reason and revelation, the latter wins out (Locke increasingly tended toward this position in later life). We would suggest that this recourse to revelation was an effort to deal not merely with tensions between reason and revelation, but even more so with the irresolvable contradictions of reason itself, if not freedom. It hardly needs to be said that revelation raises myriad problems of its own, which means that Locke's desperate effort at resolution only produced more problems.^[52] Nonetheless, Locke's wariness concerning reason is rather refreshing, even if one is not persuaded by his solution. This wariness would not afflict those who followed in Locke's wake. Eschewing revelation as so much old-fashioned superstition, they championed reason to produce the rather curious notions of comparative advantage, rational choice, and that eminent misfit, economic man.

Self-Interest

Thus far we have covered two aspects of Locke's effort to create a new theory of human nature. As we have seen, he cannot avoid straying into moral territory, not least because

of the contested theological nature of that terrain. Are human beings corrupted by the Fall, or do they retain some trace of the image of God within them? For Grotius, prevenient grace restores some (or rather, a good deal) of that image, producing free-willing and reasoning individuals who are able to accept or resist God's grace. As we indicated, Locke also exhibits some Arminian tendencies, considering that his favorite theologian was the Remonstrant, Philipp van Limborch. While Locke does not have recourse to the theory of prevenient grace (the Fall's only effect is to render human beings mortal), he does take a stand for freedom, no matter how limited that freedom turns out to be.

However, on the matter of self-interest, he is fully in agreement with Grotius. Yes, says he, we may be driven by self-interest, but that needs to be balanced by a concern for others. Accordingly, in the second treatise, Locke opines that if one's own preservation is not in question, then it is only proper to look out for others—or rather, to ensure that the property of another is preserved, property that is defined as “life, liberty, health, limb, or goods.”^[53] Yet, his formulation in the first treatise is sharper and more obviously theological. Self-interest may be the “first and strongest desire God implanted in men,” which manifests itself in the desire to preserve oneself, and to ensure sufficient resources to live. Not to be too one-sided, “God planted in men a strong desire also of propagating their kind,” which entails the concern for one's immediate others, the fruit of one's loins.^[54] That the treatment of concern for both self and others should slide into the question of property and inheritance is no accident. At an obvious level, each man is not the sole possessor of property, for his children are entitled to it upon his death.^[55] But at a deeper level, it is worth noting that when Locke speaks of property and inheritance, he relies heavily on the language of rights: children have a right to share the possessions of their parents and then take them over upon their parents' death, a right that is embodied in both the law of God and the law of the land.^[56] Yet, this close connection between property and rights in Locke's text should not surprise us, for Grotius had already spoken of rights as property belonging to individuals. By Locke's time, the two were inextricably connected.

A Myth Retold—Again

Thus in the beginning all the world was America.^[57]

All paths turn towards property, it seems. On a number of occasions, we have noted that Locke's thoughts slip in this direction. Indeed, the work's real contribution lies in its

theory of property, which appears in its clearest form in the fifth chapter of the second treatise. But it is theory in terms of story, a glorious myth that is nothing less than the retelling and reshaping of the myth that Grotius had created some years earlier.^[58] Given its importance, we explore that myth in detail. As we have shown, the building blocks of the myth have already been constructed in the first treatise, so we note those pieces at the appropriate points. Not surprisingly, the Fall looms large in this myth as well, more through Locke's strenuous efforts to sidestep the implications of the Fall for his proposal concerning property.

Setting the Scene

Before we sink into the myth and analyze its workings, we need to set the scene by way of two other texts by Locke—*The Reasonableness of Christianity* and a recently published note called “Homo ante et post Lapsum” (Man Before and After the Fall).^[59] In both texts, Locke deals directly with the Fall. While the former was published in his lifetime (albeit anonymously), the other remained unpublished, a private reflection that manifests some doubts about his published opinions. We begin with the text from *Reasonableness*, for it clears the interpretive path for the myth he seeks to construct in the second treatise. The basic story of Genesis 3 is known well enough: the garden, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the serpent, Eve and then Adam eating from the tree, the punishments. Of these, the punishments are the most important (Gen. 3:14–19). Two curses each are handed out to the serpent, woman, and man—six in total. The serpent is cursed to move on its belly and to be in constant enmity with the woman's posterity. The woman is to have pain in childbirth and be ruled over by her man. The man is condemned to work for food, wresting it from a resistant and weed-infested soil, and eventually to die. Or, as the text puts it:

Cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return (Gen. 3:17–19 NRSV).

Let us examine what Locke does with this text. He opens *Reasonableness* with a treatment of the Fall, seeking a path between those (Calvinists) who saw in Adam's sin the complete condemnation of all human beings (if not the whole of nature) and those who regarded it as but a trifle (Deists). Not too much and not too little, for Christ did need to redeem us from at least some evil. So what did Adam bring about through his act of

disobedience? Quite simply, “the doctrine of the gospel is, that death came on all men by *Adam’s* sin.”^[60] Tellingly, Locke draws this conclusion not from Gen. 3:19, but from other texts. Thus, he quotes the earlier words of God concerning the tree: “In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.”^[61] He then glosses over the reason given for the banishment from paradise: “Lest he should take thereof and live for ever”.^[62] When several texts are added from Romans mentioning Adam’s inauguration of death (Rom. 5:12; 15:22), the conclusion is, for Locke at least, clear. Paradise was thereby the realm of immortality, but the disobedience of Adam led to banishment and death. But what does Locke mean by death? Adam does not die immediately; rather, he has been sentenced. He bides his time until the execution of the sentence. In this way, death has showed its face. However, death is very much the ontological state rather than the mere physical reality of the cessation of life: “I must confess by *Death* here we can understand nothing but a ceasing to be, the losing of all actions of life and sense.”^[63]

All the same, Locke is too careful a reader of the Bible not to deal with Gen. 3:17–19. How he does so is significant. After quoting the verses, he writes:

This shews that paradise was a place of bliss as well as immortality, without toyl, and without sorrow. But when man was turned out, he was exposed to the drudgery, anxiety, and frailties of this mortal life, which should end in the *dust*, out of which he was made, and to which he should return; and then have no more life or sense than the *dust* had, out of which he was made.^[64]

This interpretation is extraordinary both for its brevity and for what it elides. Apart from the obvious point that no mention is made of the serpent or of the woman,^[65] Locke is keen to emphasize mortality. In doing so, the obvious reference to labor becomes the “drudgery, anxiety, and frailties of this mortal life.” The King James Version he uses translates *‘iṣṣābôn* as “sorrow,”^[66] but the mention of the “sweat of thy face” can hardly be avoided. Yet avoid it Locke does. The absence of labor in paradise becomes a sign of bliss, where one does not toil or suffer sorrow. Therefore, banishment means death and the loss of that bliss, which brings the trials and troubles of mortal life. Of all the curses in Genesis 3, only the last (hard labor and death) actually counts for Locke.

At this point, the recently published note, “Homo ante et post Lapsum,” becomes important.^[67] It too is a reflection on the curses after the Fall, and it too begins by stressing that the primary curse was death. Put another way: the curse is now that Adam is unable to eat from the tree of life. Man may have been born mortal, but that tree would have enabled him to be clothed in immortality. But he sinned and was banished from the garden where the tree grew. Next, we come across this passage:

Upon their offence they were afraid of God: this gave them frightful ideas and apprehensions of him and

that lessened their love, which turned their minds to that nature, for this root of all evil in them made impressions and so infected their children, and when private possessions and labour, which now the curse on the earth made necessary, by degrees made a distinction of conditions, it gave room for covetousness, pride, and ambition, which by fashion and example spread the corruption which has so prevailed over mankind.^[68]

Private possessions and labor are the direct result of the curse of the earth. Social distinctions follow, with some people becoming richer and others poorer. These conditions lead to pride, ambition, corruption, not to mention evil that infects the children of the first parents. Clearly, Locke was aware of the other curses, so much so that in this note he states that labor and private possessions were outcomes of the Fall. Had he taken this line in the myth we analyze later, it would have been a very different myth indeed. It is telling, therefore, that the only place in Locke's written works where he entertains this rather obvious interpretation of the Fall is found in an unpublished note. The fact that it remained buried in his archives unpublished until a few years ago may be read as an allegory of his effort to bury that interpretation in his published work. It certainly does not appear in the interpretation of the Fall in *Reasonableness*, and it is far removed from his grand myth of the origins of property and labor.

To return to *Reasonableness*: the only outcome of the Fall that Adam passed onto his posterity is death. All of us remain banished from the garden, from the state of immortality and bliss. And so Christ's redemption overcomes that death, leading to resurrection and immortality. What then of sin? Adam did not pass on the guilt of sin, for that would involve removing responsibility and culpability for sin, thereby compromising the justice and goodness of God. Instead, each person bears the responsibility for his or her own sins and must account for them at the judgment seat.^[69]

This kind of interpretive narrowing—that is, focusing on death as the result of the Fall—leaves Locke plenty of room for his alternative myth. Now that the curse of labor and toil has been airbrushed from the account in Genesis 3, Locke is free to recast labor in his own way. Thus, even in paradise we encounter labor and private property, which naturally follow on from the commandment to subdue the earth. Or rather, the myth in the *Two Treatises* and the interpretation of the Fall in *Reasonableness* fit together rather neatly. The biblical interpretation may open up space for the myth, but the myth also determines how the Fall may be understood.

The Commons

With this license to rewrite, Locke is able to construct his myth. Using a simple narrative

sequence, he echoes Grotius in many instances: common property; labor and then use as the basis of private property, initially with food; the need for government to protect private property, which covers everything pertaining to human life, if not that life itself. Locke begins by posing a problem he seeks to solve by the use of both reason and revelation:

It is very clear, that God, as king David says, Psal. cvx. 16, “has given the earth to the children of men;” given it to mankind in common. But this being supposed, it seems to some a very great difficulty how any one should ever come to have a property in any thing . . . I shall endeavour to show how men might come to have a property in several parts of that which God gave to mankind in common, and that without any express compact of all the commoners.^[70]

How did private property arise if the created order was one of property in common, if God’s original gift was common property? Locke immediately rules out any “express compact” that may have given rise to private property, so he must find another answer. Before addressing his answer, we would like to note how Locke arrives at the initial proposal of common property, not in the myth itself but in the first treatise. The biblical text in question is Gen. 1:28: “And God blessed them, and God said unto them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.’” For Locke, the plural object of the opening sentence is telling. God spoke to and blessed “them,” not “him” (Adam). Thus, “it was not a private dominion, but a dominion in common with the rest of mankind.”^[71] As with Noah and his sons after the flood,^[72] the gift from God—the ultimate owner of all—was an original community with all things in common among human beings.^[73]

Use and Appropriation

Up to this point, we have property in common but not yet private property. In order to account for that step in his myth, Locke rolls out the old idea of use: “God, who hath given the world to men in common, hath also given them reason to make use of it to the best advantage of life and convenience.”^[74] More specifically, it is use for sustenance, for food. Not surprisingly, both points—use in general, and use in particular, for food and raiment—appear in the first treatise.^[75] So far, Locke follows in Grotius’s footsteps, but now his narrative veers in another direction. Grotius, at this point in his reasoning, had introduced a sleight of hand. He argues that the ingestion of food provided the first

instance of private property and concludes that all other property is similar in kind. Locke avoids this deceptive piece of logic, only to insert another. He asks:

He that is nourished by the acorns he picked up under an oak, or the apples he gathered from the trees in the wood, has certainly appropriated them to himself. Nobody can deny but the nourishment is his. I ask then, when did they begin to be his? when he digested? or when he ate? or when he boiled? or when he brought them home? or when he picked them up? and it is plain, if the first gathering made them not his, nothing else could.^[76]

When exactly does an item of food become private property? The initial movement of picking a piece of fruit removes it from the common pool and makes it one's own property. In other words, use has a prerequisite—namely, the moment of appropriation.^[77] The moment when Eve takes the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil immediately comes to mind. By that act, she made the fruit her own. Locke dare not use this example, for it would introduce too many complications. He prefers an alternative to Adam and Eve—the “wild Indian,” who takes fruit and venison from the common pool before it can benefit him. (Throughout the myth, “Indian” serves as code for Adam.)^[78] This replacement of the Garden of Eden with “America” soon becomes a standard motif in Locke's myth, so much so that at one point, he exclaims, “Thus in the beginning all the world was America.”^[79] Thereby, Locke makes his own distinct contribution to the myth of the Trans-Atlantic Eden and, in the process, avoids some of the more prickly parts of the story—in particular, the fact that Adam and Eve were permitted to eat the flora of the garden but not the animals (Gen. 1:29; 2:16). That permission was granted only to Noah (Gen. 9:3). Locke's “wild Indian” can do both.

Labor

We mentioned earlier that Locke's move to define private property as an appropriation from the commons constitutes a sleight of hand—or, rather, a sleight of interpretation, for it locates the first act that marks private property in the garden itself, before the Fall. Private property has, in other words, been smuggled into the garden. The importance of this furtive act becomes clear in the next segment of the myth:

Though the earth, and all inferior creatures, be common to all men, yet every man has a property in his own person: this nobody has any right to but himself. The labour of his body, and the work of his hands, we may say, are properly his. Whatsoever then he removes out of the state that nature hath provided, and left it in, he hath mixed his labour with, and joined to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his property.^[80]

Not everything is held in common at the moment of creation! A man's person is already

his own property, which means that his labor is also his own. Therefore, if he picks a piece of fruit or a wild vegetable, he has engaged in labor. Once he has done so, the item picked mysteriously attains the same status as that labor, without requiring consent from anyone else. Locke struggles to find the terminology to express this transformation: it may be like a magical potion or an infection (“mixed with”); or perhaps arithmetic, in which private property is “added to” the piece of fruit; or perhaps it is “annexed” or “joined to,” like a piece of territory that has been conquered.^[81] In all this, the somewhat mystifying nature of labor as private property is clearly stronger than common property; everything labor touches turns to private property. Despite the importance of this point, Locke provides no coherent reasons apart from the assertion that labor is “unquestionable property.” Why is labor private property? Why can it not be common property as well? If it is private, why does labor not become common when it comes into contact with the piece of fruit? Macpherson astutely identifies the reason why Locke asserts that labor is private property: it means that “his labour, and its productivity, is something for which he owes no debt to society.”^[82] As we see in a moment, resorting to labor as private property—given and commanded by God—reinforces this assertion. Even so, it is highly questionable that reaching out and picking a piece of fruit constitutes labor. If this is the case, any movement of the human body is also labor – walking, sitting, snoring, or defecating. Does the earth walked upon, the log sat upon, the air snored in, or even the hole into which feces drops, become private property?

These problems conceal the most significant feature of Locke’s proposal: he has smuggled yet another item into the garden. In the story of Genesis 3, labor is clearly the result of the curse given to the man: “Cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life” (Gen. 3:17). In the garden there was no toil, no labor, for everything was provided; outside the garden, life abounds with hard labor. As we suggested earlier, Locke negates this reading of the Fall by arguing (in *The Reasonableness of Christianity*) that the initial act of disobedience resulted only in death as a punishment; the other curses seem to have been neutralized.^[83] Now Locke can sneak labor surreptitiously into the garden, perhaps while the angel at the gate is distracted, lighting a cigarette with his flaming sword. As if to justify his dabbling in the black market, Locke strenuously asserts, especially in the first treatise, that these matters were divinely ordained. God created human beings with the natural desire to care for themselves; in order to do so, they needed to appropriate and use what God had created. It follows that God, too, had ordained private property: by the “will and grant of God . . . man’s property in the creatures was founded upon the right he had to make use of those

things that were necessary or useful to his being.”^[84] It would not be the first time someone has called upon God to justify a dubious position. The advantage for Locke’s own myth is that it means labor is of the created order, but the disadvantage is that he has not as yet faced up to the Fall. It will continue to trip him up.

Locke’s path to this point may be somewhat different from Grotius’s, but the result is the same. Once Locke has told his story of the paradigmatic process of private property, he can extend it to just about everything. It may be “the grass my horse has bit; the turfs my servant has cut; and the ore I have digged in any place”;^[85] it may be the pitcher of water I have drawn from the fountain;^[86] or it may be the fish from the ocean, the ambergris from a whale’s digestive system (once used for perfume), or the deer caught in the hunt.^[87] No consent from others is required, for this is both a supposedly obvious process, and—as if to shore up what may not be so obvious after all—one ordained by God when he created human beings and gave them the nature they have.

Nonetheless, with this collection of examples, Locke has moved from the state of nature to that of government with its laws. His initial suggestion is that much still remains in the commons, such as oceans and forests. Thereby, we witness the process of appropriation through labor in our own day. But he also slips in a crucial sentence: “And amongst those who are counted the civilized part of mankind, who have made and multiplied positive laws to determine property, this original law of nature, for the beginning of property, in what was before common, still takes place.”^[88] At first read, Locke seems to be speaking of the survivals of commons and of the original process of property. A second look at the sentence reveals an assumption of continuity. The beginning of property is, for Locke, an original law of nature, which unfolds smoothly into the civilized laws of “mankind”—laws that add more laws concerning property. It appears that original law has found its true home amongst the myriad laws of property in his own day. Innocent enough—or at least it appears to be so.

However, the Fall rears its head once again, precisely through Locke’s deft efforts to sidestep it. Since he has smuggled labor and private property into the garden before the Fall (the state of nature) and thereby made them basic to human nature, it follows that subsequent laws concerning property are simply an unfolding of this original law. The passage from one to the other is smooth rather than bumpy, untroubled rather than beset with curses and banishments. It is as though Adam (signaled once again by the “Indian”) has strolled out of the garden, taking with him his labor and property, with the fond farewells from God and the muscled bouncer at gate still ringing in his ears.

Tilling the Earth

With this comfortable transition established, Locke can tackle the more contentious issue of tilling the earth:

But the chief matter of property being now not the fruits of the earth, and the beasts that subsist on it, but the earth itself; as that which takes in, and carries with it all the rest; I think it is plain, that property in that too is acquired as the former. As much land as a man tills, plants, improves, cultivates, and can use the product of, so much is his property. He by his labour does, as it were, enclose it from the common . . . God, when he gave the world in common to all mankind, commanded man also to labour, and the penury of his condition required it of him. God and his reason commanded him to subdue the earth, *i.e.* improve it for the benefit of life, and therein lay out something upon it that was his own, his labour. He that, in obedience to this command of God, subdued, tilled, and sowed any part of it, thereby annexed to it something that was his property, which another had no title to, nor could without injury take from him.^[89]

Initially, Locke extends his earlier argument to include land, for it also becomes private property through labor, which then produces what can be of use.^[90] Land, too, is drawn from the common, although here Locke compares this process with the long and contentious history of enclosures in England and the rest of Western Europe. Through this comparison, Locke implicitly connects the primal man with the landlord rather than the peasant, who is banished from the land so enclosed. However, the most significant moment in this text is the linking of Gen 1:28 and Gen. 3:17-19. While the former speaks of subduing the earth and having dominion over it, the latter concerns labor and the sweat of one's brow in tilling a recalcitrant earth for crops and bread. By comparison, note Locke's formulations, which proceed in three stages. Initially, the man "tills, plants, improves, cultivates." He is in his post-lapsarian state, banished from the garden and working himself to the bone. Next, Locke suddenly realizes the implication of what he has written, for he mentions labor as the "penury of his condition." Now he is in dangerous territory: according to Gen. 3:17-19, labor—and therefore private property—must be the result of the Fall, a punishment for sin. But Locke catches himself and immediately includes a direct reference to Gen. 1:28, in which God commands man to "subdue the earth." In case the term *subdue* is at all unclear, Locke explains: it means engaging in labor to improve the earth for one's own property and benefit. A momentous move, this distinction makes the labor of tilling the ground a natural result of subduing the earth. In other words, Gen. 3:17-19 is merely a logical outcome of Gen. 1:28. The Fall has almost tripped Locke up at this point, but he regains his feet and skips past it yet again. Finally, he has found a way to connect the two items in one list: the man has "subdued, tilled and sowed," and any piece of earth so worked becomes his private property.^[91] Even more stunning is Locke's assertion that this is "in obedience to

this command of God.” Not disobedience that leads to agricultural labor, but obedience to the command to subdue results in private property. The Fall has been effaced once more.^[92]

Adam and the Plot Lines of the Fall

Private property is therefore the will of God! Locke sums up: Although “God gave the world to men in common,” he cannot have meant it to remain so since it was for the benefit of “man.” Therefore, God “gave it to the use of the industrious and rational (and labour was to be his title to it).”^[93] Here, two problems arise, both of Locke’s own making: the role of Adam and the tensions between plot lines. As for Adam, the implication of the whole story until now is that Adam too is one who labors, thereby acquiring private property and the title of landholder. If his very act of reaching out to take some fruit or grain is defined as work, then he, too, possesses private property. If he follows God’s command to subdue the earth—given in the garden—then he too is a tiller of the soil. Locke seems to be aware of the problem, for the commons begin to dissolve in the primal act of private property. Was Adam then given private dominion and property at creation, especially since his person and labor were already his own? Belatedly, Locke reasserts his narrative opening: “And thus, without supposing any private dominion and property in Adam, over all the world, exclusive of all other men, which can no way be proved, nor any one’s property be made out from it; but supposing the world given, as it was, to the children of men in common.”^[94] Only *after* Adam did human beings, through labor, make parcels of land their property.^[95] Of course, myths are not meant to be watertight, for they manifest contradictions in their very efforts to resolve them.^[96] But this assertion adds a sufficiently jarring note to the story thus far.

Second, Locke plays with three different plot lines in his strenuous efforts to counter the implications of the Fall: the path from commons to private property is either one of smooth continuity, of degradation, or of improvement.^[97] Locke entertains the first possibility in his suggestion that private property was the result of obeying God’s command, already in the garden, to subdue the earth. The second appears earlier in the treatment of freedom, in which those in the state of nature seem to have greater freedom than those in bodies politic. In this same discussion, the third plot line—which stresses improvement—also makes an appearance, particularly in terms of the suggestion that freedoms and property are enhanced under government. At this point in the myth, Locke makes a similar effort. A man who appropriates land from the common and cultivates it

actually increases the value of the common. Consider again, Locke suggests, indigenous peoples (with America plainly in mind) who have little idea how to cultivate, for all they do is gather fruits and hunt venison. Now compare our old friend, the Devonshire farmer, who improves his land and produces much higher yields. At a minimum, he might gain from ten acres what the wild native gains from one hundred. That leaves ninety more acres still in the common for others to acquire, labor upon, and use.^[98] Once again, glimpses of the fortuitous Fall peek out from behind Locke's story: the Fall benefits everyone, he suggests, not merely the one who seized land for himself. A better apologia for the long pattern of enclosures in Western Europe could not have been written.

The clear improvement provided by labor and private property remains the dominant plot line for most of the remainder of the myth. Locke waxes forth about the benefits of labor, offering extended comparisons with the poor natives of America and the industrious English farmers. Labor, he asserts, adds value to the land worked—not in a ratio of one to ten, but of one to ninety-nine hundreds. Bread is clearly better than acorns; wine far preferable to water; cloth or silk more desirable than skins, moss, or leaves (surely a reference to apocryphal stories of Adam and Eve clothing themselves with leaves). Indeed, one can only wonder at the amount of labor that goes into a loaf of bread:

It is not barely the ploughman's pains, the reaper's and thresher's toil, and the baker's sweat, is to be counted into the bread we eat;^[99] the labour of those who broke the oxen, who digged and wrought the iron and stones, who felled and framed the timber employed about the plough, mill, oven, or any other utensils, which are a vast number, requisite to this corn, from its being seed to be sown to its being made bread, must all be charged on the account of labour."^[100]

Smitten by the wonder of such a process, Locke asserts that what is produced by nature—in the realm of the commons—is well-nigh worthless. Of course, if only labor produces value, then the earth and its products are valueless. Needless to say, the lives of those who labor are immeasurably greater than those in the state of nature, who merely rely upon a valueless earth for their sustenance. Those poor American indigenes simply have no idea, so much so that “a king of a large and fruitful territory there feeds, lodges, and is clad worse than a day-labourer in England.”^[101] The Garden of Eden has begun to look like a decidedly undesirable place.

Downcast Ending

The remainder of the myth passes rather quickly through the gathering together of communities into territories, the development of industry, states and their positive laws

for the protection of property,^[102] leagues of states, and finally, money—that great imperishable, which leads to commerce and greater expansion of property (albeit through a necessarily unequal distribution of the earth).^[103] A rousing finale, is it not, with which to end such a grand myth? But Locke does not end here. He adds a curious qualification, one that he has already repeated in various forms throughout the myth. Initially, he repeats the main point that labor produces property out of the common things of nature. But then he adds:

So that there could then be no reason of quarrelling about title, nor any doubt about the largeness of possession it gave. Right and conveniency went together; for as a man had a right to all he could employ his labour upon, so he had no temptation to labour for more than he could make use of. This left no room for controversy about the title, nor for encroachment on the right of others; what portion a man carved to himself was easily seen: and it was useless, as well as dishonest, to carve himself too much, or take more than he needed.^[104]

Dishonesty, greed, encroachment, excessive acquisition – these produce a sober and downcast tone at the close. A glorious, triumphant myth he spins no longer.^[105] We would suggest that two traces of the banished Fall recur in this curious ending. The first concerns the obsessive repetition of his concern over excessive appropriation.^[106] Early on in the myth, Locke feels he must deal with the unwelcome implication of his suggestion that property involves, through a simple act of labor, the appropriation of items from the natural commons. How does one prevent someone from taking too much, beyond the needs of everyday subsistence? His answer alludes to the story of manna in the wilderness (Exodus 16), in which some of the people took more than they needed—so much so that it rotted and bred worms. The same is true with fruit and grains and venison: if it spoils, too much has been taken. In the case of land, not much is needed to provide for the necessities of life. Take only what is necessary; this, too, is a law of nature (and a biblical command). Again and again, Locke returns to this problem, nearly always mentioning the rotting and spoiling of the excess—fruit, meat, even the pasture on excess land can perish.^[107] Why repeat this point? On one level, he is keen to block an obvious implication of his story. But at another, formal level, we would suggest that this pattern betrays his failed effort to resolve precisely what he wants to do with the Fall. Does it count at all in the untrammled passage from Adam to all human beings? Does it actually mean a boon for the whole earth, giving rise to labor, property, value, states, money, and commerce? Or is there a darker note, the one on which the story ends? With that ending dwelling on rampant greed, encroachment, and dishonesty, the Fall seems to have had the last word.

Conclusion: On Human Nature and Biblical Limitations

God hath woven into the principles of human nature.^[108]

We have emphasized that the central biblical text upon which Locke's myth of property constantly threatens to dash itself is that of Genesis 1–3. Clearly, we have focused on this myth because of its direct economic concerns. However, this particular myth is but one element—albeit a crucial one—within the larger context of the two treatises. For this reason, we explored the ways in which Adam provides Locke with his positions on freedom, reason, and self-interest, positions developed in the specific debates of the first treatise and then elaborated upon in the second. Ultimately, Locke's concentration on Adam is due to Locke's obsessions concerning human nature. Since Adam was, for Locke and so many others at the time, the first human being created by God, his nature becomes the paradigm for all human nature. The paradox is that the intense debates over human nature, the search for its essence, actually indicate profound changes in human nature itself. The search for an eternal nature was a response to, and thereby an indication of, the way capitalism was reshaping what it meant to be human. The means and relations of production so distinctive to capitalism had already begun and would continue to produce such a shift.^[109] Of course, the dialectical point to be made is that human beings create new modes of production, so the changes in human nature are the products of human activity. As for Locke and his contemporaries, they were, perhaps, more aware of the changes being wrought, unlike our own situation, in which capitalism seems like an untranscendable horizon beyond which it becomes difficult to imagine any other reality. And so they argued over that human nature: what is the true nature of human beings? Are they free or not? Are they rational or passionate? Are they self-interested or concerned for others? Is agricultural labor the natural task of "man"? And is that labor, if not his body and its freedom, his personal property?

One of the clearest, albeit unexpected, symptoms of that shift appears in Locke's biblical interpretation. He sought to reinterpret the accounts of Adam and the Fall in a way that would justify a new theory of human nature. Are human beings enslaved to a sinful nature and condemned to hard labor in the fields as a result? Or are they free and equal, with labor as personal property that turns all it touches into private property? God may have created a world in which there was no private property, in which all was held in common, but he also created industrious Englishmen, ready to work hard. He commanded them to subdue the earth, which means working, tilling, and improving the soil. That is, he created a mechanism for the appropriation of private property from

that commons. Obviously, this interpretation requires a drastic rereading of the Fall, which is evident in our detailed analysis of Locke's myth. But just as obvious is the way he reinterprets the Fall in *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, where only the curse concerning death has any teeth. From dust you have come and to dust you shall return—nothing more. With the result of the Fall narrowed down in such a fashion, Locke gives himself plenty of room to reinterpret the remainder of the narrative, to the extent that labor, appropriation, and private property are not merely prelapsarian, but actually untouched by the Fall. Yet, despite Locke's best efforts, the resolution is not quite so easy. At various points, the banished Fall troubles his myth: in the equivocation concerning the plot line from the state of nature to civilized government; in the obsessive repetition of his worry that people may appropriate too much; and in the oddly downcast note with which the myth closes.

Throughout these struggles, Locke assumes that human nature is eternal, as God had created it. So he sought long and hard in the biblical texts concerning that first created being for an idea of that eternal essence. The problem is that the conclusions he reaches are highly specific. The human in question was a man in a colonial country, ethnically distinct from those in peripheral zones ("America" and elsewhere), and, above all, a man being reshaped by the web of capitalist economic social relations everywhere more apparent. Locke's designation of the "Devonshire" farmer or day-laborer is no accident, for this throws into sharp relief the very particular form of human nature in Locke's purview. We suggest that the particularity of Locke's idea of human nature is signaled by his resolute biblical focus. This should not be seen as a relic of a more religious age, in which the Bible and differences concerning it determined every aspect of life in a place like England, if not Europe as whole. According to this line of argument, later economic theorists would shed these rather quaint and external concerns in order to get on with the real issues at stake. Instead, we argue that the ubiquitous nature of the Bible and its interpretation reveals the specific situation in which that economic theory arose. Without the Bible, the theory could not arise; indeed, it needed these engagements to emerge at all. Thus, when it became fashionable a little later to dispense with biblical engagement, it seemed possible to efface the particularity of that theory and assert its universality. Adam Smith certainly tried to do so, but in the process, he accentuated Locke's ethnocentrism.

1. John Locke, *The Reasonableness of Christianity: As Delivered in the Scriptures*, ed. John C. Higgins-Biddle (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999 [1695]), 9.↵

2. Hugo Grotius did not survive his last shipwreck more than a few days. After spending more than a decade as ambassador for the Swedish king, his ship was wrecked off the coast of Pomerania in August 1645. He died a

few days later in Rostok as a result.↵

3. Locke did spend some time in exile in the Netherlands—the country from which Grotius himself was exiled—but even the risk-averse Locke could not avoid such a holiday in turbulent times.↵
4. Both were initially published anonymously. John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government and A Letter Concerning Toleration*, ed. Ian Shapiro (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003 [1691]); Locke, *The Reasonableness of Christianity: As Delivered in the Scriptures*.↵
5. Here, we differ considerably in scope from Kim Ian Parker, *The Biblical Politics of John Locke* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier, 2004). Parker's study on Locke and the Bible focuses on the use of the Bible to point out "the ideological centrality of the biblical perspective to liberalism in its formative period" (p. 3). A champion of liberalism, Parker promotes Locke as an egalitarian thinker and conveniently excludes Locke's ethnocentrism (especially his characterization of North American indigenous peoples) and ruling class location, a fact that becomes clear when one focuses on his economic thought.↵
6. Reventlow has usefully offered an analysis of Locke as biblical interpreter, but he remains locked in the narrow concerns of biblical criticism and does not engage with the role of the Bible in Locke's epistemology. Henning Graf Reventlow, *History of Biblical Interpretation*, vol. 4, *From the Enlightenment to the Twentieth Century*, trans. Leo Perdue (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010), 51–65.↵
7. "Clod" is not so much a slight on the mythical first human being as it is an effort to render the word-play in English: 'adam is connected—no matter how spuriously—with 'adamah, earth or soil. At the levels of both form and content, Gen. 2:7 reads, "then the Lord God formed 'adam from the dust of the ground"; and to that soil he must return (Gen. 3:19).↵
8. Except to show that women are naturally subjugated to their husbands. As Carole Pateman argues, marriage is an exception to the civil society established by the social contract. Since it retains its original nature, marriage exists in the private sphere rather than the civil sphere. Marriage cannot be regarded as a civil relation because the marriage contract is not entered into by two individuals, but rather by an individual and a "natural subordinate." Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 55. See also Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context* (London: Routledge, 1995), 177–78.↵
9. Robert Filmer, *Patriarcha and Other Political Works* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1949).↵
10. John Locke, "A Letter to the Right Reverend Edward, Lord Bishop of Worcester Concerning Some Passages Relating to Mr Locke's Essay of Human Understanding in a Late Discourse of His Lordship's, in Vindication of the Trinity," in *The Works of John Locke*, vol. 3, 1–96 (London: Rivington, 1697 [1824]), 96.↵
11. Locke, *The Reasonableness of Christianity: As Delivered in the Scriptures*, 165–70.↵
12. See discussion of assent, communication, and Scripture in J.T. Moore, "Locke's Analysis of Language and the Assent to Scripture," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 37, no. 4 (1976): 707–14. See also the presentation of Locke as one out of several thinkers who approached the Bible as a moral text in Jonathan Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 118–47.↵
13. William Chillingworth was the other.↵
14. See especially Philipp van Limborch, *Institutiones theologiae christianae, ad praxin pietatis et promotionem pacis, christianae unice directae* (Amsterdam: 1686); see also Philipp van Limborch, *De veritate religionis Christianae amica collatio cum erudito Judaeo* (Gouda: 1687). ↵
15. John C. Higgins-Biddle, Introduction to John Locke, *The Reasonableness of Christianity: As Delivered in the Scriptures*, xv–cxv, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999 [1695]), xxvi.↵
16. Of course, Locke's most well-known statement in this respect is "An Essay Concerning Toleration." Locke, *Two Treatises of Government and A Letter Concerning Toleration*, 211–54.↵
17. Many miss this feature of Locke's biblical and theological concerns. For instance, Parker suggests that Locke was influenced by the Jansenist theologian Pierre Nicole, whose work he translated in 1675–76. Nicole

emphasizes the role of humans in achieving grace and human self-interest as a great motivator for a prosperous society. Parker, *The Biblical Politics of John Locke*, 53. He follows the lead of John Marshall, *John Locke: Resistance, Religion, and Responsibility*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).↵

18. Locke, *Two Treatises of Government and A Letter Concerning Toleration*, I.87.↵
19. Locke scholars usually take one or the other position on Adam. For Ian Harris, Adam is the exception. Ian Harris, *The Mind of John Locke* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 238–39. By contrast, Mitchell holds that Adam is the paradigm. Joshua Mitchell, *Not By Reason Alone* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 80–89. Parker attempts to argue that Locke incorporates both “the differential model” and “the integrative model.” Parker, *The Biblical Politics of John Locke*, 104–7.↵
20. Locke is partly to blame. His summary of the first treatise (in the opening to the second) provides a misleading list of conclusions: Adam had no dominion over his children or over the world and neither did his heirs. Moreover, the heir could not be easily determined, and even if it could, the line has been lost. Locke, *Two Treatises of Government and A Letter Concerning Toleration*, 2.1. (References provide the treatise number from *The Two Treatises* and the respective numbered paragraph.)↵
21. The catalyst for the writing of the treatises was Robert Filmer’s attempt to find an argument for absolute monarchy in the first chapter of Genesis rather than in 1 Kgs. 9:1–9 (God’s promise to Solomon) or 1 Sam. 8–10, where earlier justifications had been found. Since Genesis marks the beginning of the world and human existence, Filmer sought to show that God created the first man as an absolute monarch (with dominion and paternity), making it possible for despots with unhealthy high opinions of themselves to claim that their authority originated in the created order. This argument was appealing at the time largely due to the recent turmoil of civil war (1640s), the experience of the Puritan Revolution (1649–58), the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, the radicalization of politics in the 1680s, and the so-called “Glorious Revolution” (the invasion by Holland’s William III) in 1688. Tired of these disruptions, some preachers were keen to take up Filmer’s arguments as a way to return to some semblance of order. Filmer located the cause of much of this disruption in the dangerous thinking of people like Grotius, Milton, and Hobbes, because they threatened his patriarchal political system from a contractarian position. For Filmer, Gen. 1:28 provided evidence that the first form of government was monarchical, making political society natural and revealed by God. Furthermore, property was a private matter, for God gave the whole world to Adam. Thus, everything belonged to the sovereign, and only the sovereign had the power to grant or take away property. Locke disagreed and set out to show that the biblical texts supported none of Filmer’s loose conclusions. Filmer, *Patriarcha and Other Political Works*. See also Parker, *The Biblical Politics of John Locke*, 80–92, 103–19; Peter Laslett, Introduction to *Locke: Two Treatises of Government*, 3–126, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 67–79, 93–103.↵
22. Most of the references come from Genesis, especially its early chapters, and not without some discussion of specific Hebrew and Septuagint Greek words. The reader also encounters other texts from Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, Psalms, Proverbs, Ezekiel, Matthew, and Ephesians, among others. Apart from Adam (and very occasionally Eve), the work overflows with biblical characters. We meet Cain and Abel, Noah and his sons, Nimrod, Abraham and various offspring, Moses, David, Solomon, and many more. In short, when we enter the two treatises, we enter the world of the Bible relocated in England of the late-seventeenth century. All this makes the argument of Strauss rather specious. Strauss suggests that Locke wants to subvert the Bible’s political teachings and that he falsifies biblical texts to prove the sufficiency of reason over revelation. Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 207. See also Michael P. Zuckert, *Natural Rights and the New Republicanism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Michael P. Zuckert, *Launching Liberalism* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002).↵
23. In his introduction to the two treatises, Laslett discusses this image of Locke. Laslett, Introduction to *Locke: Two Treatises of Government* 42–44, 106–107.↵

24. Locke, *Two Treatises of Government and A Letter Concerning Toleration*, 1.67.↵
25. Ibid., 2.4. Note also: “There can be no reason why naturally one man should have any claim or pretence of right over that in another.” Ibid., II.33, 52.↵
26. “The freedom then of man, and liberty of acting according to his own will, is grounded on his having reason, which is able to instruct him in that law he is to govern himself by, and make him know how far he is left to the freedom of his own will.” Ibid., 2.63; see also 2.6; 2.61.↵
27. Ibid., 1.15; see also 1.3; 1.11; 1.13; 1.43.↵
28. Ibid., 1.13; 1.14.↵
29. Ibid., 1.51.↵
30. Parker is seduced by the liberal slogan of freedom for everyone, even for the women that Locke systematically excludes. Parker, *The Biblical Politics of John Locke*, 101, 111–12, 178–79, fn. 27. Waldron’s painful effort to “disprove” Pateman, MacPherson, and others, reveals despite his efforts the fact that Locke’s range of persons included within “freedom” was rather small. Waldron’s proposals are twofold: first, establish that Locke held a position on human equality on theological grounds; second, show that this commitment to basic equality is an important working premise of his entire political theory and that its influence is pervasive in his arguments concerning property, family, slavery, government, politics, and toleration. He spectacularly fails to show that Locke does not denigrate women, criminals, Native Americans, slaves, Roman Catholics, and atheists (including Muslims). His argument runs aground with admissions such as, “I wish this [i.e., a difference in authority stemming from a difference in the capacities of human beings] wasn’t what Locke said and meant: it would make my life easier as an exponent of his theory of basic equality. But there is no way round it.” Jeremy Waldron, *God, Locke, and Equality: Christian Foundations of Locke’s Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 32. For those who show tellingly that the “all” is limited in terms of gender, race, and class, see Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*; Charles W. Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke*. Our focus on children, society, and ethnocentrism may be seen as additions to those arguments.↵
31. Locke, *Two Treatises of Government and A Letter Concerning Toleration*, 2.56.↵
32. Ibid., 2.55–57; 2.61.↵
33. Although at times Locke admits that slavery may happen, with war captives for instance, he generally and rather strenuously refuses the obvious logic of Grotius, in which freedom as a property may be surrendered voluntarily. For Locke, subservience does not entail slavery. This forces him to undertake some swift-footed exegesis of the numerous biblical texts where slavery appears. Ibid., 1.30; 1.43; 1.56; 2.23–24; 2.85. See Waldron, *God, Locke, and Equality: Christian Foundations of Locke’s Political Thought*, ch. 7, for examples of Locke’s swift-footed exegesis.↵
34. “Men living together according to reason, without a common superior on earth, with authority to judge between them, is properly the state of nature.” Locke, *Two Treatises of Government and A Letter Concerning Toleration*, 2.19.↵
35. Ibid., 2.6.↵
36. “If man in the state of nature be so free as has been said; if he be absolute lord of his own person and possessions, equal to the greatest, and subject to nobody, why will he part with his freedom, why will he give up this empire, and subject himself to the dominion and control of any other power? To which it is obvious to answer, that though in the state of nature he hath such a right, yet the enjoyment of it is very uncertain, and constantly exposed to the invasion of others; for all being kings as much as he, every man his equal, and the greater part no strict observers of equity and justice, the enjoyment of the property he has in this state is very unsafe, very unsecure. This makes him willing to quit a condition, which, however free, is full of fears and continual dangers: and it is not without reason that he seeks out, and is willing to join in society with others, who are already united, or have a mind to unite, for the mutual preservation of their lives, liberties, and estates, which I call by the general name property.” Ibid., 2.123; see also 2.127.↵

37. In the canonical narrative of the Bible, it is quite some time before an actual state and government appear – perhaps in the wilderness wanderings of Exodus through to Deuteronomy, but definitely with the judges and the kings after the mythical conquest of Canaan.↵
38. As we show later, Locke repeats this move on a number of occasions, smuggling items into the garden that actually appear outside it. These include private property and labor.↵
39. Locke, *Two Treatises of Government and A Letter Concerning Toleration*, 1.81. Plenty of statements to this effect appear in the second treatise, but the text we have quoted actually comes from the first. Ibid., 2.11; 2.15; 2.87; 2.95. Consent to government is a major theme in the myth concerning the rise of politics. Ibid., 2.101–112.↵
40. Macpherson is particularly useful here, pointing out that Locke in many ways expressed the ambivalence of emerging bourgeois society, which simultaneously demanded formal equality and freedom while requiring a substantive inequality and lack of freedom. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke*, 238–57, 261–62.↵
41. In other words, human beings always act for their own advantage. This slogan will come into its own with Adam Smith and David Ricardo, although Locke is still guarded (see below). He seems to be aware that human beings more often opt for the worst rather than the best, degrading their own condition in the ill-fated belief that it may improve or even knowing full well that it is to their detriment.↵
42. Locke, *Two Treatises of Government and A Letter Concerning Toleration*, 2.131.↵
43. This ethnocentrism functions as another signal of the specificity of classical economic theory, a specificity we discuss in full in relation to Adam Smith.↵
44. Locke, *Two Treatises of Government and A Letter Concerning Toleration*, 2.37.↵
45. Ibid., 1.57.↵
46. Ibid., 2.14.↵
47. In his study of racial and state theory, Goldberg argues that Charles Mills has misunderstood Locke as naturalizing the indigenous populations of Africa and North America and condemning both to an eternal state of nature. Goldberg sees Hobbes as espousing such a position but understands Locke as advocating a historicist position, which he sees as much more in line with Locke’s anti-essentialism. Such a position entails that Native Americans and Africans, like children, are not yet historically ready for the self-rule enabled by contractual states. David Theo Goldberg, *The Racial State* (London: Blackwell, 2002), 43–44.↵
48. Locke, *Two Treatises of Government and A Letter Concerning Toleration*, 2.19.↵
49. Ibid., 1.57.↵
50. Ibid., 1.30.↵
51. Ibid., 1.60. For a full treatment of the limitations of reason in relation to revelation, see book 4 of John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999 [1690]), 515–718. See also Parker, *The Biblical Politics of John Locke*, 38–45. Waldron is seriously mistaken in his assertion that, for Locke, revelation and reason are basically equivalent. Jeremy Waldron, *The Right to Private Property* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), 143.↵
52. Robert E. Brown offers a different emphasis and a good discussion of the problem of “revelation and reason” in “Edwards, Locke, and the Bible,” *The Journal of Religion* 79, no. 3 (1999): 361–384, 366–70. The article deals with the reception of Locke in the work of Jonathan Edwards.↵
53. Locke, *Two Treatises of Government and A Letter Concerning Toleration*, 2.6.↵
54. Ibid., 1.88; see also 1.42; 1.56.↵
55. Note especially, in relation to the commandment to honor one’s parents: “For we are not now speaking of that reverence, acknowledgment, respect, and honour, that is always due from children to their parents; but of possessions and commodities of life valuable by money.” Ibid., 1.90.↵
56. Ibid., 1.88.↵
57. Ibid., 2.49.↵

58. A comparable myth concerning the origin of government and states (beyond our concern with economics), which includes a means to overcome the inconveniences of the state of nature, may be found in Locke, *Two Treatises of Government and A Letter Concerning Toleration*, 2.101–112. Although we have learned much from Macpherson’s reading of Locke, he misses the crucial role of Locke’s wrestling with the Bible, as well as the mythical nature of Locke’s proposal. Waldron also miss the mythmaking here, preferring to see it as a series of philosophical propositions. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke*, 197–221; Waldron, *The Right to Private Property*, 137–252.↵
59. Locke, *The Reasonableness of Christianity: As Delivered in the Scriptures*, 320–21; John Locke, *Political Essays*, ed. Mark Goldie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).↵
60. Locke, *The Reasonableness of Christianity: As Delivered in the Scriptures*, 7; see also 104, 113–15, 198–200, 207.↵
61. Ibid., 6, quoting from Gen. 2:17. He glosses the same text on the next page: “That in the day that thou eatest of the forbidden Fruit, thou shalt die.” Ibid., 7.↵
62. Ibid., 6, glossing Gen. 3:22.↵
63. Ibid., 8.↵
64. Ibid., 9.↵
65. In the first treatise, the curse given to Eve is mentioned, but only to make the point (against Robert Filmer) that it means Adam had “accidentally a superiority over her.” Locke, *Two Treatises of Government and A Letter Concerning Toleration*, 1.44.↵
66. The root is ‘šb, with the sense of pain and toil.↵
67. Parker also gives some attention to this text. While noting the emphasis on mortality, he misses the crucial point concerning labor and property. Parker, *The Biblical Politics of John Locke*, 59–61.↵
68. Locke, *Political Essays*, 321.↵
69. In “A Third Letter for Toleration,” Locke raises doubts concerning the doctrine of original sin: “The doctrine of original sin, is that which is professed and must be owned by the members of the church of England, as is evident from the XXXIX articles, and several passages in the liturgy: and yet I ask you, whether this be ‘so obvious and exposed to all that diligently and sincerely seek the truth,’ that one who is in the communion of the church of England, sincerely seeking the truth, may not raise to himself such difficulties, concerning the doctrine of original sin, as may puzzle him though he be a man of study; and whether he may not push his inquiries so far, as to be staggered in his opinion?” John Locke, “A Third Letter for Toleration: To the Author of the Third Letter Concerning Toleration,” in *The Works of John Locke*, vol. 5, 139–548 (London: Rivington, 1824 [1692]), 411.↵
70. Locke, *Two Treatises of Government and A Letter Concerning Toleration*, 2.25.↵
71. Ibid., 1.29; see also 1.24; 1.84. The exegesis of Gen. 1:28 covers eighteen paragraphs of the first treatise. Ibid., 1.23–40.↵
72. Ibid., 1.32; 1.39. Parker becomes rather excited about this shared position concerning original common ownership, to the point of letting his syntax slip: “No one person had any more natural rights to those things that God provided than had anyone else . . . it is essential to see in Locke’s discussion of property that the difference that Locke evokes concerns humans and other created things. It is not, as Filmer argues, a difference between human beings themselves, an original natural inequality.” Parker, *The Biblical Politics of John Locke*, 133.↵
73. Locke even entertains the possibility that, should a man not have any kin to whom he can pass his property at death, it would revert to the commons. In political states, this means the magistrate, but in the state of nature, it would be to the original form of commons. Locke, *Two Treatises of Government and A Letter Concerning Toleration*, 1.90.↵
74. Ibid., 2.26.↵

75. Ibid., 1.39; 1.41; 1.86–87; 1.92; 1.97. The idea of raiment is a slip, because Adam and Eve were naked.↵
76. Ibid., 2.28.↵
77. Ibid., 2.26.↵
78. Parker simply ignores Locke’s constant evocations of “Indians” and North America—an extraordinary omission, particularly in light of the brutal history of Newfoundland, where Parker was located. Parker, *The Biblical Politics of John Locke*, 132–38. In light of such ignorance, one can understand Charles Mills’s manifesto. Mills, *The Racial Contract*.↵
79. Locke, *Two Treatises of Government and A Letter Concerning Toleration*, 2.49.↵
80. Ibid., 2.27.↵
81. Ibid., 2.27; 2.28.↵
82. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke*, 221.↵
83. At two other points in the first treatise, Locke mentions Gen. 3:19, though both instances are curiously muted and serve another purpose. In the first case, the text simply means that Adam is a day laborer rather than the universal monarch. In the second, the text offers an example of the simplicity of labor. Adam was a simple laborer like most of us. Locke, *Two Treatises of Government and A Letter Concerning Toleration*, 1.44–45. Waldron completely misreads Locke here, suggesting that Locke saw labor as a curse. Waldron, *The Right to Private Property*, 147.↵
84. Locke, *Two Treatises of Government and A Letter Concerning Toleration*, 1.86.↵
85. Ibid., 2.28.↵
86. Ibid., 2.29.↵
87. Ibid., 2.30.↵
88. Ibid., 2.30.↵
89. Ibid., 2.33.↵
90. For Locke, plenty of land can be found throughout the earth, especially since he disregards the “wretched” indigenes in his favorite point of comparison, North America. Just as it was in the time of Adam and Noah, if not Abraham, Lot, Jacob, and Esau, so it is in America today. Ibid., 2.36; 2.38.↵
91. Locke betrays some nervousness concerning his creative exegesis of Genesis, repeating the same point a little later: “And hence subduing or cultivating the earth, and having dominion, we see are joined together. The one gave title to the other. So that God, by commanding to subdue, gave authority so far to appropriate: and the condition of human life, which requires labour and materials to work on, necessarily introduces private possessions.” Ibid., 2.35.↵
92. Parker swallows this proposal, hook, line, and sinker. Parker, *The Biblical Politics of John Locke*, 134.↵
93. Locke, *Two Treatises of Government and A Letter Concerning Toleration*, 2.34.↵
94. Ibid., 2.39.↵
95. Neal Wood, *John Locke and Agrarian Capitalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 57.↵
96. Boer, *Political Myth: On the Use and Abuse of Biblical Themes*.↵
97. Earlier, we discussed the latter two in relation to the passage from the state of nature to society. We now have the path of calm continuity.↵
98. Locke, *Two Treatises of Government and A Letter Concerning Toleration*, 2.37; 2.38.↵
99. Note the allusion to “sweat of your brow” from Gen. 3:19.↵
100. Locke, *Two Treatises of Government and A Letter Concerning Toleration*, 2.43. As we will see, Adam Smith deploys this tale for his assertion of the wondrous importance of the division of labor.↵
101. Ibid., 2.41.↵
102. Note also: “The great and chief end, therefore, of men’s uniting into commonwealths, and putting themselves under government, is the preservation of their property. To which in the state of nature there are many things wanting.” Ibid., 2.124; see also 2.3; 1.92.↵

103. Ever the creative biblical interpreter, Locke now challenges the validity of Matt 6:19-21, with its comparison between treasures on earth, which moth and rust consume, and treasures in heaven that do not decay so. To be added here is 1 Tim. 6:10, in which the love of money is the root of all evil. For Locke, money is the great protection against both perishability and the threat of lands falling back into the commons. Once again, Locke uses the example of native America—the only point where Parker explicitly mentions “the New World,” in Parker, *The Biblical Politics of John Locke*, 137. Without the incentive of money and commerce, even the greatest estates would be useless. One could not exchange perishable for imperishable, and thereby increase his property. As a result, land would fall back into the commons. Locke, *Two Treatises of Government and A Letter Concerning Toleration*, 2.48.↵
104. Ibid., 2.51.↵
105. Parker attempts to show that Locke is the dutiful Christian moralist, aware of the pitfalls of money. Parker, *The Biblical Politics of John Locke*, 137–38. Barrera curiously finds Locke useful in developing a moral theological argument against the excesses of capitalism. Barrera, *Market Complicity and Christian Ethics*, 224.↵
106. Locke, *Two Treatises of Government and A Letter Concerning Toleration*, 2.31; 2.33; 2.37.↵
107. Ibid., 2.36–38; 2.46; 2.51.↵
108. Ibid., 2.67.↵
109. We assume here Marx’s astute point that what he calls “species essence” is not eternal but shaped and reformed in different modes of production. In this respect, Marx is both an essentialist and an anti-essentialist. Human nature exists, but it is by no means eternal, for human nature changes. Karl Marx, “Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844,” in *Marx and Engels Collected Works*, vol. 3, 229–346 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1844 [1975]).↵

Adam Smith the Storyteller

The desire of being believed, or the desire of persuading, of leading and directing other people, seems to be one of the strongest of all our natural desires. ^[1]

Adam Smith's skill was as a storyteller, a mythmaker of the first order. We must admit it took us a while to realize where his appeal lies. His claim to fame, *Wealth of Nations*, is badly written, deeply contradictory,^[2] strikingly lacking in originality and insight,^[3] full of rampant polemic, cavalier with evidence, and rambling to the point of distraction—from its intricate detail on herrings to the inner workings of the Bank of Amsterdam, from lengthy discourses on turnpike tolls to the dreadful state of universities.^[4] These contradictions sit strangely with the popularity of his writing, both then and now.^[5] How to understand that appeal? We suggest it may be found in his ability to construct myths, to tell stories in a way that draws in the reader. His work is brimming with vignettes, moral tales, parables, and grand myths. In this way, he was able to make accessible various ideas concerning economic thought at the time, offering not so much a synthesis that captured the imagination as a vast and imaginative narrative. For this reason, our interest focuses on Smith the storyteller.

To be sure, many of these myths are recycled versions of those that had preceded him, not least the travelers' tales of which he was so fond and from which he drew much of his ethnocentric material. We have analyzed already the myths of Grotius and Locke, but Smith lifts those stories to a whole new level. Before we examine his tales, we discuss his approach to human nature, focusing on his assertion that human beings naturally truck, barter and exchange, and then on that contested category of self-interest, or self-love as he tended to call it, in relation to the much-debated "invisible hand." The bulk of our

analysis concerns the types of story Smith deploys, including sayings, moral tales, vignettes, and parables. Above all, we devote considerable attention to his two key myths—the foundation myth and the grand narrative. We conclude with reflections on the nature of myth as it pertains to Smith’s mythopoesis, to his projected utopia and the transitional position he occupies in economic theory.

Human Nature

Adam Smith hardly seems to have been troubled by the struggles over human nature that beset John Locke and his contemporaries. In part, this may be due to the fact that the significant changes taking place in human nature a century or so earlier—marked by intense arguments over that nature—had been somewhat consolidated and become the norm.^[6] That is, the changes effected by the gradual spread of capitalism were coming to seem normal in their own right. Therefore, Smith could assert without argument that liberty was natural and private property sacred.^[7] With property at least he does make passing reference to the myth that Locke constructed, according to which everything was held in common until it became private property. However, the reference comprises, at most, a sentence or two, providing the assumed backdrop to treatments of land rent, which arose only after land became private property.^[8]

Truck, Barter, and Exchange

Nobody ever saw a dog make a fair and deliberate exchange of one bone for another with another dog.^[9]

Beyond these two items, Smith adds an observation that has since become a slogan of the ideologues of capitalism: there exists, he writes, a “certain propensity in human nature,” namely “the propensity to truck, barter, and exchange one thing for another.”^[10] Aware that this may be a contested suggestion, he offers not detailed argument to back it up but a fable concerning dogs. First, however, he tosses a decoy. In passing, he suggests that this propensity may be either a primary principle of human nature or the consequence of reason and speech. With the feint made, he can quickly move to his real point: “It is common to all men.”

We would like to make three observations concerning this slogan. To begin with, it is obviously a universalizing move, made from Smith’s assumed position as advisor to the ruling class. If one assumes that such a time-bound feature of capitalism is a universal feature of human nature, the story of humanity may be rewritten. History thereby

becomes a vast account of the unfolding of capitalism, and Smith himself attempts precisely such a retelling. Second, the statement reveals the naivety of Smith's approach to human nature. Left to themselves, human beings seek no more than to exchange and barter with one another. Gone is any notion of evil and human propensities to do ill to themselves and to one another. Instead, we calmly get on with the business of life, all of which is ultimately for our good. This feature emerges frequently in Smith's various tales and myths. To be sure, villains also appear in his stories, but they are interfering governments, greedy medieval proprietors, and the like. Leave man to himself with his propensity to truck, barter, and exchange, and the world hums along rather nicely.

Such naivety may seem strange for one who was, after all, a Professor of Moral Philosophy at the University of Glasgow (where he took the chair of a man he admired, Francis Hutcheson). Yet, a quick look at his earlier *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* reveals an equally naïve view of human nature.^[11] In this work, Smith offers a rather detached view of human engagement from an elite perspective, drained of anything that makes life interesting. According to his theory, we can show an interest in the fortunes and misfortunes of others only through what he calls sympathy—"our fellow-feeling with any passion whatsoever."^[12] We can do so only through the impressions made upon us and the way we respond to them, through the ability to imagine what it would be like to experience what the other person is experiencing. Pleasure is therefore dependent on being able to sympathize successfully, discomfort from being unable to do so. Where is sex, one wonders, or political passion?^[13] These are notably absent in a pale and passionless work—not surprising for a man who lived with his mother and whom his contemporaries found decidedly creepy. But we would like to ask: What are the implications for self-improvement, for bettering ourselves? Initially, the answer is that we seek public approval—an approval that is marked by status and the esteem of others. Yet, given the detached nature of this process and the uncertainty of knowing precisely how other people function, Smith then seeks to internalize this other person, this spectator, as the man or demi-god "within the breast." Always well-informed of our motives, this ideal spectator takes the position of one who is, theoretically, fully aware of what is going on. This is hardly an original position, for it is a variation on the old and unremarkable idea of conscience—the voice within that supposedly ensures we tread the path of virtue.^[14] The same can be said of economic activity: "It is the consciousness of this merited approbation and esteem which is alone capable of supporting the agent in this tenour of conduct."^[15] In other words, the drive to self-improvement is due to the desire to improve our social status. Furthermore, we can understand what the esteem of others might be by

internalizing the response of the other whose approval we seek. This process unwittingly, but fortunately, results in social acceptability: “The habits of œconomy, industry, discretion, attention, and application of thought, are generally supposed to be cultivated from self-interested motives, and at the same time are apprehended to be very praiseworthy qualities, which deserve the esteem and approbation of everybody.”^[16] And just in case we might imagine that self-improvement and status are mere intangibles, Smith makes it clear that it is actual fortune that achieves such status.^[17]

Finally, let us return to the text in *Wealth of Nations*, immediately following the assertion that human beings naturally truck, barter, and exchange. As we indicated earlier, Smith offers not an argument but a cute fable of the dogs. The dogs stand in for all animals, whose nature is said to be different from that of human beings. Do animals also exchange with one another? Two greyhounds may appear to act together when chasing a hare—turning to each other from time to time—but that movement is only a coincidence brought about by their common passion. After all, “Nobody ever saw a dog make a fair and deliberate exchange of one bone for another with another dog.” Indeed, “Nobody ever saw one animal by its gestures and natural cries signify to another, this is mine, that yours; I am willing to give this for that.”^[18] A dog can obtain something it wants only by currying favor with its master. Exchange or barter simply does not enter into the equation. Obviously a fable like this is no replacement for argument. Nevertheless, such a story is certainly readable (perhaps even entertaining), designed to appeal at another and more persuasive level.

Self-Love and the Invisible Hand

Self-love may frequently be a virtuous motive of action.^[19]

Two other linked features of human nature appear in Smith’s work—self-interest and the invisible hand. In the long-running philosophical contest between self-interest and benevolence, Smith sides more firmly with the former. Or rather, through the exercise of self-interest, one unwittingly benefits the social whole. Already in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* he argues against the likes of Hutcheson—who asserts self-love to be a rather sordid business that never produces virtue—and against Bernard Mandeville, for whom self-interest is a vice that paradoxically contributes to social goodness.^[20] On the contrary, suggests Smith: this common feature of our nature may very well “appear virtuous, or deserve esteem and commendation from any body.”^[21] This suggestion becomes a full-blooded position in *Wealth of Nations*, where he opines: “It is not from the

benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest.”^[22] In other words, we appeal in vain to the benevolence of others, for we will gain much more by appealing to their self-interests. It is really a case of that initial principle of exchange: you get what you want, and, in the process, I get what I want.

Yet Smith goes a step further, suggesting that self-interest is the true mode by which society benefits. Natural to human beings, it also (like medicine) “frequently restores health and vigour to the constitution.”^[23] This contribution to progress and increased wealth is not only a by-product of self-interest but also a part of a larger project. The individual is actually led to choose the pursuit that best suits the advantages of society at large.^[24] At this point, Smith is closing in on his passing observation concerning the invisible hand. Before we discuss that benevolent member, a couple of observations need to be made. To begin with, any theological concern with greed is well and truly gone. And once that happens, greed itself may be morally recoded as beneficial, as a crucial element of human nature that lifts not only the individual but also the entire social fabric. Or rather—and this is the second point—Smith relocates the moral opposition.^[25] In opposition to this benign form of self-interest, another negative form appears. It may be the medieval proprietors of Europe or the opulent courts that sucked the economic life out of whatever place they happened to occupy. It may be the man of fortune, who spends his wealth on “frivolous objects, the little ornaments of dress and furniture, jewels, trinkets, gewgaws,” who is guilty not only of a trifling disposition, but also a “base and selfish” one.^[26]

This type of moral recoding runs throughout Smith’s work, so much so that *Wealth of Nations* may be seen at one level as a sprawling morality play, full of evil villains and virtuous heroes. Thus, the industrious merchants who compete with one another in the free market, as well as those who understand the value of agriculture, are the good guys: they pursue their own interests and in the process contribute to the social whole. By contrast, the evil characters are a motley collection of interfering governments, monopolies, guilds, prodigal individuals and groups, and opposing economic theorists (Mercantilists, for instance). Governments enact detrimental regulations such as the Corn Laws; monopolies and guilds stifle competition; prodigals spend rather than practice frugality; and erroneous theorists do more bad than good. Thankfully, like the one who lends to a man so that he may spend, sometimes such an evil character may “have occasion to repent of his folly.”^[27]

Let us return to the overworked idea of the “invisible hand,” for under its benevolent

sway, self-love works for the greater glory of wealth and social wellbeing, which is really a code for capitalism. This concealed appendage has received more than its fair share of attention, given that Smith refers to it only three times in his written work, once as the curious “invisible hand of Jupiter”^[28] and then in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* and *Wealth of Nations*. In the former, the rich engage in their natural selfishness and rapacity. Thereby:

They are led by an invisible hand to make nearly the same distribution of the necessaries of life, which would have made, had the earth been divided into equal proportions among all its inhabitants, and thus without intending it, without knowing it, advance the interest of the society, and afford means to the multiplication of the species. When Providence divided the earth among a few lordly masters, it neither forgot nor abandoned those who seemed to have been left out in the partition.^[29]

It may be possible to read this text in terms of the opposition of individual vice and social virtue that Smith inherited from Mandeville. Here, the rapacity of the ruling class works inexorably for the good of society. Yet, it is by no means clear that Smith saw such rapacity as a vice, for this is what the rich do naturally. By contrast, the specific use of the term in *Wealth of Nations* is to bolster Smith’s favored domestic industry over foreign trade:

As every individual, therefore, endeavours as much as he can both to employ his capital in the support of domestick industry, and so to direct that industry that its produce may be of the greatest value; every individual necessarily labours to render the annual revenue of the society as great as he can. He generally, indeed, neither intends to promote the publick interest, nor knows how much he is promoting it. By preferring the support of domestick to that of foreign industry, he intends only his own security; and by directing that industry in such a manner as its produce may be of the greatest value, he intends only his own gain, and he is in this, as in many other cases, 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.^[30]

The phrase, as it appears in *Wealth of Nations*, has become rubbed and worn by passing through too many hands. Many have extracted the invisible hand from the particular concern of this passage with domestic industry and extended it to become an image of how the possessive individualism of capitalism works to spread capitalism as a whole.

But we are interested in another feature of this concealed appendage, namely, the debates that continue concerning its theological tenor. Some argue that it is a secular concept, a mere metaphor shorn of any theological or teleological outer layer and thereby expressing a deeper truth of capitalism.^[31] Others assert, somewhat vociferously, that it is a comprehensively theological concept, relying on the thoroughly theological idea of

Providence.^[32] Taking sides is hardly the issue here, for by doing so one buys into the submerged threshold that shapes the horizon of the debates over theology and economics, a horizon that we try to illuminate in this work. In this light, we suggest that the debate itself is symptomatic of Smith's own ambivalent and transitional position. By casually dropping in the phrase, he could both nod to the assumed understanding of the invisible hand as providential, as part of the greater plan of a rather distant deity, and he could join the increasingly secular trajectory of thought at the time. This ambiguity is what enables the diverging readings of the gargantuan "hand" waving over the mundane self-interest of the little creatures below.^[33] One can hardly expect otherwise, given Smith's own version of what is best called Stoic-inspired Deism. An abstract God may have created the universe at some point in the dim and distant past, but that God has since retired or, perhaps, taken a long Sabbath rest. This is not so much a "hidden theology," as Lisa Hill and others have argued, but a case of God abandoning the world, to borrow a phrase from Lukács.^[34] This abandonment is the mark of modernity, which must find a new form of cohesion and a new source of meaning. Smith appears at the transition to that modernity, trailing in the dust of past theological debates that continue to swirl around him but also peering through the dust to a world that God has left to its own devices.^[35] In this context, Deism is the appropriate position to take, for it is really a decompression chamber from the concerns of theology and the church.

We would like to close this engagement with the invisible hand on another note. In the Hebrew Bible, *yad* (hand) is occasionally used as a euphemism for penis. For instance, in the Song of Songs 5:4, one of the lovers puts his "hand" to the hole.^[36] In Ezek. 2:9, the phallic and engorged scroll festooned with writing is given to the prophet by a "hand stretched out."^[37] Given the phallic propensities of the god of the Hebrew Bible, it takes little imagination to see the mighty hand of God (Exod. 32:11, Deut. 4:34) as also an assertion of seminal masculine power.^[38] Given the unremittingly masculine concerns of Adam Smith especially, and of males of ruling class propensities generally, we would suggest that the invisible or hidden hand may also be seen as a subconscious allusion to the member concealed in his pants. After all, Smith is certainly not averse to the occasional biblical allusion.

Tall Tales

Smith was *the* great eclectic.^[39]

He may have been a little lacking in philosophical acumen and a little dependent on

others (especially Mandeville, Hutcheson, and Hume) for his economic thought, but Smith certainly made up for these shortcomings with his ability to spin a yarn. *Wealth of Nations* is a veritable anthology of fables, sayings, vignettes, moral tales, parables, and, above all, myths. The items we discussed earlier—freedom of the market, the propensity for human beings to barter and exchange, self-love, and the “invisible hand”—find their true home in the stories that crowd *Wealth of Nations*.^[40] We devote most of our attention to the grand myths, but we would like to set the scene with some comments on Smith’s formulae of introduction and the types of story that appear in his work. Smith’s vignettes and moral tales tend to begin with “let us suppose,”^[41] while his grand narrative opens with “in ancient times.” A little like “once upon a time,” the latter transports us back to ancient Greece and Rome, or perhaps the history of England in the dim and distant past. The myths themselves are usually introduced by “in the rude state of society,” when we are taken to the earliest moments of human existence in order to trace the origins of economic activity.

Sayings, Moral Tales, and Vignettes

We have already mentioned his liking for fables,^[42] so let us provide a taste of his sayings by offering a couple of morsels—one concerning a water pond, and the other a shaky inn:

The project of replenishing their coffers in this manner may be compared to that of a man who had a water-pond from which a stream was continually running out, and into which no stream was continually running, but who proposed to keep it always equally full by employing a number of people to go continually with buckets to a well at some miles distance in order to bring water to replenish it.^[43]

The house is crazy, says a weary traveller to himself, and will not stand very long; but it is a chance if it falls to-night, and I will venture, therefore, to sleep in it to-night.^[44]

Apart from a notable lack of humor, both examples maintain a rather earnest moral tone. Indeed, the crazy house appears in the midst of a moral tale concerning the practice of dubious bills of exchange, which one moves perpetually about in order to delay repayment.^[45] Other moral tales include (to name but a few): the folly of the Ayr Bank of Scotland, which opened in 1769 and folded soon after, in 1772; the dangers of lotteries; the risk inherent in searching for new mines; and the juggling trick of reducing precious metals in coinage.^[46] In order to gain a sense of these syrupy tales, we quote an example concerning the merchant and the country gentleman:

Merchants are commonly ambitious of becoming country gentlemen, and when they do, they are generally the best of all improvers. A merchant is accustomed to employ his money chiefly in profitable projects; whereas a mere country gentleman is accustomed to employ it chiefly in expence. The one often sees his money go from him and return to him again with a profit: the other, when once he parts with it, very seldom expects to see any more of it. Those different habits naturally affect their temper and disposition in every sort of business. A merchant is commonly a bold; a country gentleman, a timid undertaker . . . Whoever has had the fortune to live in a mercantile town situated in an unimproved country, must have frequently observed how much more spirited the operations of merchants were in this way, than those of mere country gentlemen. The habits, besides, of order, economy and attention, to which mercantile business naturally forms a merchant, render him much fitter to execute, with profit and success, any project of improvement.^[47]

The moral coding of Smith's work emerges here in all its glory, a moral coding reinforced time and again through stories such as this. The industrious merchant is of course the virtuous one, full of spirited energy, order, economy, and boldness. He is able to generate profit and thereby improve the condition of the land itself. By contrast, the country gentleman simply has not a clue. A timid person, he lacks the discipline needed for real improvement.

Parables

The moral tale we just quoted spills into the dominant form of the parable, although the demarcations between various types are never firm. Parables exist in abundance, especially when Smith wishes to persuade readers concerning an initial assertion. Forget any extended analysis of empirical data, of tables and calculations, or factory reports, and so forth. When he needs to make a point, a parable is far more useful. As we cannot tackle them all, we have selected a few of the better examples.^[48]

The first needs only a brief mention, for it is nothing less than a comprehensive gloss of the parable of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15:11-32. Smith sets up an initial opposition between the prodigal and prudent (or frugal) man, and develops a tale of the growth of capitalism in England in light of the opposition. However, the whole account reconfigures the relationship between the two, for the prodigal becomes the reprehensible figure in the story, while the frugal character is praised. When the prodigal (a king, government, or landlord) dominates, economic growth is threatened, but when the frugal and sober son comes to the fore, the story begins to sound more cheerful.

However, the second parable is more typical of Smith's storytelling. It concerns the borrowed parable of the pin:

To take an example, therefore, from a very trifling manufacture; but one in which the division of labour has

been very often taken notice of, the trade of the pin-maker; a workman not educated to this business (which the division of labour has rendered a distinct trade), nor acquainted with the use of the machinery employed in it (to the invention of which the same division of labour has probably given occasion), could scarce, perhaps, with his utmost industry, make one pin in a day, and certainly could not make twenty. But in the way in which this business is now carried on, not only the whole work is a peculiar trade, but it is divided into a number of branches, of which the greater part are likewise peculiar trades. One man draws out the wire, another straightens it, a third cuts it, a fourth points it, a fifth grinds it at the top for receiving the head; to make the head requires two or three distinct operations; to put it on, is a peculiar business, to whiten the pins is another; it is even a trade by itself to put them into the paper; and the important business of making a pin is, in this manner, divided into about eighteen distinct operations, which, in some manufactories, are all performed by distinct hands, though in others the same man will sometimes perform two or three of them. I have seen a small manufactory of this kind where ten men only were employed, and where some of them consequently performed two or three distinct operations. But though they were very poor, and therefore but indifferently accommodated with the necessary machinery, they could, when they exerted themselves, make among them about twelve pounds of pins in a day. There are in a pound upwards of four thousand pins of a middling size. Those ten persons, therefore, could make among them upwards of forty-eight thousand pins in a day. Each person, therefore, making a tenth part of forty-eight thousand pins, might be considered as making four thousand eight hundred pins in a day. But if they had all wrought separately and independently, and without any of them having been educated to this peculiar business, they certainly could not each of them have made twenty, perhaps not one pin in a day; that is, certainly, not the two hundred and fortieth, perhaps not the four thousand eight hundredth part of what they are at present capable of performing, in consequence of a proper division and combination of their different operations. [49]

An apology must be offered for quoting the text in full, but it reveals Smith's penchant for verbosity. For Smith, the parable seeks to drive home the crucial role of the division of labor, with which he opens *Wealth of Nations*. Not content with one parable, he soon offers another ("The Course Coat"), although the point is largely the same.^[50] Smith was evidently fond of the parable of the pin, for it also appears in his *Lectures on Jurisprudence*.^[51] He was also quite possessive of it, accusing Adam Ferguson, a former friend, of plagiarizing the parable in the latter's *Principles of Moral and Political Science*.^[52] It takes one to know one: Smith seems to have drawn the parable from the entry under "Épingles" in the French *Encyclopaedie* of 1755, in which eighteen steps in the process of pin-making also appear, even though the English pin-makers used twenty-five. Be that as it may, the apparently wondrous process of the division of labor was by no means new to Smith, for it recalls Locke's account of the making of bread in his *Two Treatises of Government*.^[53]

One further example, "Daedalian Wings," foreshadows our treatment of myth. Smith begins by noting the operations of a judicious bank, which uses paper money as a substitute for a significant portion of its gold and silver, thereby making available productive stock.

The gold and silver money which circulates in any country may very properly be compared to a highway, which, while it circulates and carries to market all the grass and corn of the country, produces itself not a single pile of either. The judicious operations of banking, by providing, if I may be allowed so violent a metaphor, a sort of waggon-way through the air; enable the country to convert, as it were, a great part of its highways into good pastures and corn fields, and thereby to increase very considerably the annual produce of its land and labour. The commerce and industry of the country, however, it must be acknowledged, though they may be somewhat augmented, cannot be altogether so secure, when they are thus, as it were, suspended upon the Daedalian wings of paper money, as when they travel about upon the solid ground of gold and silver.^[54]

Suspensions of paper money emerge here—suspensions that Smith would voice on more than one occasion. Compared to the solid ground of gold and silver, one may travel on a wagon-way through the air or perhaps fly like Daedalus high into the heavens. Daedalus, of course, flew a little too close to the sun, melting the wax that held the feathers to his arms. One must therefore be careful with such an unreliable thing as paper money, for with its enabling possibilities come the risks of crashing to the ground. However, what intrigues us here is Smith's deployment of metaphors typical of myths.^[55] Roadways through the sky and the paper wings of money evoke not only the Greek myths that Smith—given his elite education—knew well, but also the myths he sought to rewrite.

Myths

By this legendary tale . . .^[56]

The parables may be crucial for the purpose of making a particular point, but the most powerful of Smith's literary devices is myth. It provides an over-arching framework, a comprehensive story that claims the reader's assent. In comparison with Grotius and Locke, the absence of the struggle with the biblical specificities of the myth is immediately apparent. Or rather, the struggle has been excised from the explicit content of Smith's construction and transposed to a deeper level. And that is the tension between a narrative of difference and identity, according to which the myth either narrates a transition from a very different past or tells a story of how those mythical forebears were identical to us. Yet, even as he attempts to construct a myth, Smith enters a zone where the Bible reigns supreme. We hardly need to point out that the success and influence of the biblical narratives is their mythic nature, their ability to produce a story by which one may live. At a formal level, Smith follows in their wake.

Two distinct myths appear in *Wealth of Nations*, although they seep into one another through their porous edges. The first we have titled "The Rude State of Society," the

formula that opens his initial account of this myth and then signals its return at later moments in the text. As the title suggests, Smith imaginatively retells the story of the first human societies in a way that suits his purposes. The second myth, usually introduced with the phrase, “In ancient times,” serves as the grand narrative that details the trek from ancient Greece and Rome, briefly through Europe, and then to England. Once our intrepid marchers-of-progress have arrived on England’s fair and pleasant shores, they must often endure long-winded accounts of England’s dim and distant past before emerging in the smog of its present glory.

In the Rude State of Society: The Foundation Myth

In its first appearance in *Wealth of Nations*, the foundation myth seeks to “prove” Smith’s initial assertion that human beings naturally engage in trucking, bartering, and exchanging. In fact, it follows hard on the tail of that assertion:^[57]

In a tribe of hunters or shepherds a particular person makes bows and arrows, for example, with more readiness and dexterity than any other. He frequently exchanges them for cattle or for venison with his companions; and he finds at last that he can in this manner get more cattle and venison, than if he himself went to the field to catch them. From a regard to his own interest, therefore, the making of bows and arrows grows to be his chief business, and he becomes a sort of armourer. Another excels in making the frames and covers of their little huts or moveable houses. He is accustomed to be of use in this way to his neighbours, who reward him in the same manner with cattle and with venison, till at last he finds it his interest to dedicate himself entirely to this employment, and to become a sort of house-carpenter. In the same manner a third becomes a smith or a brazier, a fourth a tanner or dresser of hides or skins, the principal part of the clothing of savages. And thus the certainty of being able to exchange all that surplus part of the produce of his own labour, which is over and above his own consumption, for such parts of the produce of other men’s labour as he may have occasion for, encourages every man to apply himself to a particular occupation, and to cultivate and bring to perfection whatever talent or genius he may possess for that particular species of business.^[58]

In place of Adam and Eve we find a tribe; instead of strife and conflict, we see calm diligence in a particular kind of business; in lieu of rupture and banishment are cultivation and perfection. Idyllic, even Edenic, the opening of this myth is at some remove from the biblical account with which Locke and Grotius had to struggle. The key components of this peaceful tribe include self-interest, dedication, cultivation, and mutual exchange. Smith goes on to suggest that the different skills and trades already mentioned arise not from nature but from “habit, custom, and education.”^[59] What does come from nature is the disposition to truck, barter, and exchange—a disposition that leads to the different talents and thereby professions people pursue. Even more, that same disposition

ensures that the vastly different professions are actually of some use to one another, brought “into a common stock, where every man may purchase whatever part of the produce of other men’s talents he has occasion for.”^[60]

Thus far, we have followed the myth in the second chapter of the first book of *Wealth of Nations*.^[61] It continues in the fourth chapter:

When the division of labour has been once thoroughly established, it is but a very small part of a man’s wants which the produce of his own labour can supply. He supplies the far greater part of them by exchanging that surplus part of the produce of his own labour, which is over and above his own consumption, for such parts of the produce of other men’s labour as he has occasion for. Every man thus lives by exchanging, or becomes in some measure a merchant, and the society itself grows to be what is properly a commercial society.^[62]

Our primitive forebears were capitalists at heart, it seems—natural merchants in the business of specialization, producing surpluses, and constantly exchanging them with one another. Smith can be long-winded, so we will summarize the remainder of the myth. Once our primitives have all busied themselves with their natural propensity to produce and “truck,” they soon find that others have enough of whatever is on offer: “this power of exchanging must frequently have been very much clogged and embarrassed in its operations.”^[63] For example: I may have made plenty of toe ticklers, but now that the tribe or village is full of toe ticklers, I have nowhere to hawk my wares and get what I want. The solution: stockpile items that I am sure everyone will want—salt, sugar, dried cod, dressed leather, sex toys—so that when I want something, I can simply use these items in exchange. Given the cumbersome nature of these items, someone hits on the idea of using precious metals for such a purpose, at first weighed, but then standardized, and minted as coins. Eventually, in our wisdom, we come up with credit, or virtual money.

Adam Smith repeats this favored myth on numerous occasions. Or rather, he invokes it with minor variations whenever he wishes to introduce a new topic, such as the question of stock, labor and its produce, fishing, the produce of land (meat and corn), land rent, wood,^[64] or even a complete reiteration of the initial form of the myth concerning the division of labor.^[65] Smith may have begun with the division of labor, but on each occasion, he adds yet another item to what gradually becomes quite a collection. The net effect is to reinforce the basic postulate that those economic primitives are at heart the same as us, for human nature is universal.

If the myth is good enough for Smith to repeat, it is good for enough for the economists following in his wake to do so. Even David Ricardo, who disagreed with so

many of Smith's proposals, quotes the myth and turns it into a grand tale of the origins of exchange value.^[66] In economics textbooks, online forums, and classes on economics, "the most important story ever told"^[67] has been retold again, and again, and again. The problem is that it is a pure fantasy-land. Where is this mythical village or tribe? Does it exist among North American Indians, Asian pastoral nomads, African tribes, Pacific Islanders, Greenlandic hunters, Australian Aborigines, or a small Scottish town of shopkeepers? Is it limited to the past, or does it appear in some remote place today? Often in the same myth it moves from one place or time to another, producing an ethnic other as it does so.^[68] But the simple fact is that this tribe or village never existed. No such community has ever been found, nor will it be, for it is only the product of Smith's imagination.

While it is necessary to point out the mythical status of this story and counter it with empirical evidence, such an approach is insufficient and ineffective with regard to myth. No amount of "facts" will dent the power of myth, as Sorel showed so well many years ago.^[69] Instead, it is more worthwhile to ask what truth the myth expresses, given that a myth is always split between fiction and a deeper and not always pleasant, truth (part of the mixed heritage of the very sense of myth).^[70] We suggest the function of this myth is to create a new entity, a projection that that must gain an existence all to itself. This is "the economy," or more specifically "the market." Here the epithet "free," attached to "market" is a crucial signal, for the market should be—as a pure project—free from any ties. And the reason why such a projection was needed was because a relatively new discipline needed an object of study.

We will return to this question concerning the nature of myth in the conclusion, but now we would like to close this discussion of the foundation myth of Adam Smith on another note: the question of the struggle between narratives of difference and identity. Thus far, the content of the myth seems to reflect the process of its creation. Just as those early villagers or tribal members become entrepreneurs with remarkable ease, so also does the myth itself unfold on the pages of *Wealth of Nations* without tension and struggle. But is this really the case? Could Smith also have struggled—like Grotius and Locke—to produce his foundation myth as it appears in *Wealth of Nations*? Struggle may be too strong a word, for there is evidence of confusion, of a lack of clarity concerning plot lines. For that, we must turn to the *Lectures on Jurisprudence*, unpublished during his lifetime but delivered before *Wealth of Nations* was published. In those lectures Smith observes:

If we should suppose 10 or 12 persons of different sexes settled in an uninhabited island, the first method

they would fall upon for their sustenance would be to support themselves by the wild fruits and wild animals which the country afforded. Their sole business would be hunting the wild beasts or catching the fishes. The pulling of a wild fruit can hardly be called an employment. The only thing amongst them which deserved the appellation of a business would be the chase.^[71]

Contrasted with the inhabitants of the foundation myth, the primitives in this Robinsonade can hardly be said to truck, barter, and exchange. Indeed, one can barely say that they are engaged in any employment or business whatsoever, apart perhaps from the chase. Those activities appear later, with the phase of agriculture in ancient Greece and Rome, and then in medieval Europe. In other words, Smith here opts for a narrative of difference rather than identity. The hunters and their ilk are *not* like us, so a transit of difference is needed, an account of how we came to be who we are from such contrary origins. The four stages proposed in the *Lectures on Jurisprudence* attempt precisely such a transit as they move through hunters, shepherds, agriculture, and commerce.^[72] Smith's adherence to this structure in the lectures is neither particularly concise, nor is it entirely free from contradiction; but its over-arching plot is a narrative of difference.

However, towards the close of those lectures, his tone changes:

By this disposition to barter and exchange the surplus of ones labour for that of other people, in a nation of hunters, if any one has a talent for making bows and arrows better than his neighbours he will at first make presents of them, and in return get presents of their game. By continuing this practice he will live better than before and will have no occasion to provide for himself, as the surplus of his own labour does it more effectually.^[73]

Clearly, Smith now begins to adopt a narrative of identity, offering a rudimentary form of the foundation myth familiar from its dominance in *Wealth of Nations*. Apart from attributing the tension between these two plots, between a narrative of difference and one of identity,^[74] to Smith's own obvious limitations, we would like to suggest that the tension may also be read at another level, namely as a formal manifestation of the struggles that beset Grotius and Locke.

These were of course the struggles that centered on the biblical narrative of the Fall. With its rupture between the garden and the postlapsarian state—between an existence free of labor and private property within the garden and a situation outside the gates of the garden fueled by labor and private property beyond the garden—the story of the Fall is clearly a narrative of difference. The problem for Grotius and Locke is that they want a narrative of identity and continuity, through the biblical text itself. To solve the problem, they situate private property and labor before the Fall, as an unfolding of created human nature, indeed as the outcome of the divine command to subdue the earth. In order to

achieve this shift, they displace the Fall to a later point in the biblical narrative, delve into the tradition of the Fortuitous Fall, smuggle items into the garden from biblical texts outside the gates, or they simply attempt to sidestep the account of disobedience and banishment. Of course, we hardly find the particularities of such struggles in the myth of Adam Smith. What we do find is a deeper, structural struggle over narratives of difference and identity. At this level, the battles that beset Grotius and Locke show their continued influence on Smith's own efforts. Yet, the very fact that we have had to dig deeper also indicates that biblical and theological concerns are more distant from Smith's immediate concerns and more deeply sublated within the structure of his writing.

In Ancient Times

With the grand narrative, which is often introduced (to cite Smith's spelling) with "In antient times . . .," we encounter endless discourses on various features of ancient Greece and Rome, or perhaps ancient England or parts of Europe. It may be a speculative story concerning seafaring and river navigation, an account of prices, the story of education, a narrative of agriculture in Europe after the fall of the Roman Empire, or a story concerning profits and interest extending into continental Europe.^[75] One of the most notable examples is the grand narrative of the slow development of free markets in Europe. Like a history of salvation, it includes sins and hindrances and regresses (such as feudal proprietors and ham-fisted government efforts at regulation), followed by repentance, then liberty and independence. Eventually, the free market emerges despite, or perhaps because of, these hindrances: "It is that through the greater part of Europe the commerce and manufactures of cities, instead of being the effect, have been the cause and occasion of the improvement and cultivation of the country."^[76]

A couple of hints of an even grander narrative appear, especially via the four stages of hunters, shepherds, agriculture, and commerce. They turn up in the disorganized *Lectures on Jurisprudence* and then several times in the fifth book of *Wealth of Nations*.^[77] In Smith's time, such periodic schemas were common fare in works on economics, social forms, government, and law—disciplines we now call the social sciences. Yet, it would be somewhat futile to attempt to knit together all of Smith's historical and ethnographic imaginings of *Wealth of Nations* into these stages, for at least three reasons. First, Smith does not (or perhaps is unable to) do so; his flights of thought spill outside these stages, particularly in the construction of the foundation myth we discussed earlier. Second, Smith restricts the use of the four stages in *Wealth of Nations* only to the development of

warfare and partially to law, but not to questions of economics, social development, and government. The third problem is the most telling. Smith attempts to assert a narrative of identity in *Wealth of Nations* at odds with the narrative of difference embodied in the four stages as they appear in the *Lectures on Jurisprudence*. As we argued earlier, the narrative of identity is the core of the foundation myth, which takes on a life of its own to include elements of what formerly belonged to the hunters, shepherds, and agriculture, in a way that makes distinctions between these stages difficult.

The most important features of the grand narrative lie elsewhere, in its chronic ethnocentrism and false universalism. The consummate mythmaker and consummate racist, Smith constructs his grand narrative through the constant production of ethnic others and continual ethnic slurs. In the opening sentences of *Wealth of Nations*, he offers this general contrast between the “savage” and “civilized” nations:

Such nations, however, are so miserably poor, that, from mere want, they are frequently reduced, or, at least, think themselves reduced, to the necessity sometimes of directly destroying, and sometimes of abandoning their infants, their old people, and those afflicted with lingering diseases, to perish with hunger, or to be devoured by wild beasts. Among civilized and thriving nations, on the contrary . . . the produce of the whole labour of the society is so great, that all are often abundantly supplied, and a workman, even of the lowest and poorest order, if he is frugal and industrious, may enjoy a greater share of the necessaries and conveniences of life than it is possible for any savage to acquire.^[78]

We begin with this text because it introduces a leitmotiv of the almost endless pages that follow in this work. Indeed, it structures the work as a whole, seeking reasons why those “civilized” nations have achieved wealth, while the “savage” nations have not. It is worth noting here that the final contrast between the lowliest of the civilized and the savage already appears in Locke: “A king of a large and fruitful territory there feeds, lodges, and is clad worse than a day-labourer in England.”^[79] Locke locates his “savage” king among the indigenous people in North America, but the point is the same. Later, Smith too moves the “savage” about, finding him also as a king in Africa. Now the accommodation of “an industrious and frugal peasant . . . exceeds that of many an African king, the absolute master of the lives and liberties of ten thousand naked savages.”^[80]

Racial insults flow thick and fast throughout the book. The ancient Peruvians and Mexicans were “in arts, agriculture, and commerce . . . more ignorant than the Tartars of the Ukraine are at present.” After all, “the ancient arts of Mexico and Peru have never furnished one single manufacture to Europe.”^[81] Or, in “unfortunate” countries, where people are afraid of violent superiors, they bury a greater part of their goods: “This is said to be a common practice in Turkey, in Indostan, and, I believe, in most other

governments of Asia.”^[82] (The “I believe” is a crucial signal, to which we return in a moment.) The list is already long, including Peruvians, Mexicans, Tartars of Ukraine, Turkey, Indostan, and the whole of Asia. To these he adds ancient Egypt, “Mahometan” nations, the Arabs, Africa, the West Indies, Persia, Bengal, Siam, China,^[83] and, of course, North American indigenous peoples, who comprise “the lowest and rudest state of society.”^[84] As a result, nearly the entire world apart from Europe is characterized as “savage” and “barbaric.” Even then, he often characterizes the otiose French or brutal Dutch in less than glowing terms.^[85]

Nonetheless, China presents a problem for Smith, as it did for his contemporaries (such as Malthus). They were under the impression that China was still more populous, powerful, and wealthy than Europe, so it seemed to escape the category of “savage” or “barbarian.” What to do? While Smith occasionally pays lip service to this impression,^[86] he also partakes of the general pastime of showing that China is not as good as it seems. China is actually stagnant, he suggests. Its great age is no longer seen as a benefit, a source of wisdom and wealth far deeper than that of Europe. Now stability becomes what is dull, boring, and melancholy.^[87] Others voiced similar sentiments, in which China was seen with a “broadly shared (if not unanimous) disdain” as static.^[88] A little later, Hegel opined that China was weighed down with unbearable despotism, an absence of free spirit and of high ethical standards.^[89] In short, China lacked any sense of progress or modernity.^[90] Yet Smith goes a step further:

The poverty of the lower ranks of people in China far surpasses that of the most beggarly nations in Europe. In the neighbourhood of Canton many hundred, it is commonly said, many thousand families have no habitation on the land, but live constantly in little fishing boats upon the rivers and canals. The subsistence which they find there is so scanty that they are eager to fish up the nastiest garbage thrown overboard from any European ship. Any carrion, the carcase of a dead dog or cat, for example, though half putrid and stinking, is as welcome to them as the most wholesome food to the people of other countries. Marriage is encouraged in China, not by the profitableness of children, but by the liberty of destroying them. In all great towns several are every night exposed in the street, or drowned like puppies in the water. The performance of this horrid office is even said to be the avowed business by which some people earn their subsistence.^[91]

The echo of the opening ethnocentric bifurcation is strong, except that now it is raised to an even more horrifying degree—the streets and rivers are full of dead babies, since some people earn their living through this practice. In Smith’s estimation, China is not only “savage,” but brutally so.

From where does Smith gain all this information? Travelers’ tales are a major source, with their lurid and overblown creations of excess. But when he is short of even this unreliable material, he simply makes it up. Earlier we flagged a telling comment, “I

believe,” when Smith is speaking of the governments of Asia. At another point, when writing of Bengal and the eastern provinces of China, Smith admits that he has little evidence to support his claims, since “the great extent of this antiquity is not authenticated by any histories of whose authority we, in this part of the world, are well assured.”^[92] Does this prevent him from proceeding, from writing of the waterways and prevention of commerce in such places? Not at all, for he builds a picture purely from what even he regards as unreliable material, spiced up with a healthy dose of imagination. “Not authenticated” and “not well assured” soon become rather well assured certainties as Smith’s pen continues across the page.

Like the foundation myth with its movable village of hunters and shepherds, the grand narrative needs to produce an ethnic other to be a myth at all. As we discovered with Locke, that other may exist in an imagined past or as a contemporary of a somewhat distant place. Indeed, in the full flush of the myth, the ethnocentrism of Smith’s work characterizes the whole world apart from England. But now we face an apparent paradox: the very same grand narrative that requires the production of inferior ethnicities is also the one that makes universal claims. The paradox is apparent only, for his universalism requires the racism that it produces. Without the chronic ethnocentrism that structures Smith’s work, the universalism of the grand narrative would not be possible. We have mentioned this feature of his work briefly in relation to his opinions on human nature as well as the foundation myth that seeks to support those opinions. Next, we will explore how it becomes constitutive of his grand narrative.

Smith attempts to develop certain general categories of economic activity: the “most perfect freedom of trade” is good; regulations and obstructions by governments and rulers are bad (they restrain free competition); wherever capital appears, it leads to industry; progress is enlivening, stagnation is deathly; “natural liberty” is the task of law to support, not to hinder, that curious creation known as the “market”; and of course it is human nature to truck, barter, and exchange.^[93] All this is now standard ideological fare for proponents of the “free market,” for whom Smith is the preeminent ideologue. As an example of the extremity of Smith’s polemic, we offer his suggestion that government intervention produces famines and that the free market can solve them. What is the real cause of a famine? A bad season perhaps, or greedy grain speculators? No, for Adam Smith, “a famine has never arisen from any other cause but the violence of government attempting, by improper means, to remedy the inconveniencies of a dearth.” In fact, those stupid farmers and wasteful workers who complain of bad seasons are not making the best use of their resources: “The scantiest crop, if managed with frugality and

economy, will maintain, through the year, the same number of people that are commonly fed in a more affluent manner by one of moderate plenty.” But if you have a real famine, then the solution is simply to let the grain merchants and speculators loose: “The unlimited, unrestrained freedom of the corn trade, as it is the only effectual preventative of the miseries of a famine, so it is the best palliative of the inconveniencies of a dearth.”^[94] These merchants and speculators, he opines, face the same odium as witches had not so long ago. But this is irrational, for they really are our saviors during famine.^[95]

Needless to say, these apparently universal criteria were developed in the particular context of England’s late blooming as a capitalist center, in the early years of that surge in industrialization erroneously called the “industrial revolution.”^[96] This was the moment of emergence of the British Empire, and Smith viewed that emergence as an ideologue of the ruling class at three overlapping levels: as a scribe of the domestic ruling class; as a member of a perceived global ruling class, of which England is the head; and as a male intellectual. However, Smith embodied Marx’s dictum that the ruling ideas of an age are the ideas of the ruling class.^[97] As a matter of course, the ideas of that particular class in that particular location are universal, not merely at that time and place, but for all times and places. And if one applies those criteria to an imaginative grand narrative, then it soon becomes apparent that people elsewhere and in earlier ages have often not lived up to those criteria.

How does one account for these shortfalls? The selfish interventions of governments and rulers might be blamed. Likewise, the recalcitrance of landholders and proprietors, who allow men to behave “naturally.” Maybe the ethnic peculiarities that hold back people in other parts of the world from manifesting these “universal” principles could be condemned. Those Chinese, Arabs, and Africans are simply too barbaric and savage to have yet realized their true nature as economic beings. After all, opines Smith, do they not lack the most basic of human virtues? Do they not engage in exposing their children, banning commerce with other nations, and desiring stagnation rather than progress? The immediate problem here is that these racist characterizations run up against Smith’s assertions that it is human nature to truck, barter, and exchange. If most of history and most of the world actually do not exhibit such behavior, do they not reveal that human nature is somewhat different than what Smith imagined? He will not concede, so he must opt for what may be called a *universal by exclusion*. All human beings naturally engage in trucking, bartering, and exchanging; all human beings thrive under capital and the free market. If a person does not fit within these parameters, that person is

not human. “All” is thereby an exclusive and elite term, a universal that can be a universal only by excluding the majority from the universal.

Conclusion: On Myth, Utopia, and Transitions

He became one of the sights of Edinburgh, where he was given to rambling the streets in a trance, half-dressed and twitching all over, heatedly debating with himself in a peculiar affected voice and careering along with his inimitable “worm like” gait.^[98]

Throughout this study of Smith, we have used the terminology of *myth*, in particular of his foundation myth and grand narrative. Although we earlier (and somewhat briefly) introduced the senses in which we understand myth, here we would like to expand on that discussion by exploring what myth means and how it functions. In popular parlance, myth means a fabrication, a fiction that has little connection with empirical evidence. This sense of the word has much to do with the history of the terminology of myth, in which the old myths of areas subsequently Christianized became fairy stories and folktales, fit for children in a way that indirectly signaled that those stories themselves derive from the “childhood” of humanity.^[99] Yet *myth* bears another sense, in which it expresses a deeper truth, one that cannot be conveyed in conventional scientific terms of cause and effect. At this level, myth deploys metaphor and image; it evokes deeper responses through the ability to provide a story to which one assents. Again, this sense has its own particular history. In the northern European search for “authentic” traditions (having to do with notions of the *Volk*), the ancient myths became sources for an alternative knowledge of imagined and purer historical origins.^[100] This search was originally focused on historical traces embodied in the metaphoric language of myth, but it has since become the idea that myth embodies a deeper truth that expresses the hopes and fears of a story by which one may live. However, this dimension of myth also requires a perpetual exercise of suspicion and discernment. We should not forget that this awareness of the deeper truth of myth arose out of a reactionary project with rather dire consequences.

How do these—fictional story and deeper truth—relate to Smith’s work? To begin with, his myths are largely fictional—creations based on ideological assertions, dubious resources, and often his own imagination. Even the editors of *Wealth of Nations* admit this point, albeit somewhat guardedly: “Smith’s objective was to delineate an ideal account of historical evolution, which did not need to conform to any actual historical situation, so historical evidence, while playing a central part in his thought, was

supplementary evidence of secondary importance.”^[101] As we mentioned earlier, myth is usually impervious to facts, for facts speak a different language than myth. Thus, it should come as no surprise that the disciples of Smith’s free market simply ignore or, at best, feebly explain away the regularity of financial crashes and depressions, the chronic economic dependence of the majority of the world on an over-developed minority, and the stupendous death toll that results from war waged at the hands of capitalism. The myth itself is far stronger than the facts.

At the same time, these myths give voice to a deeper truth, a problematic truth that it was Smith’s ability to put into a persuasive narrative form. In resuscitating and refining the myth, Smith had a distinct agenda: to assert the existence of a relatively new being, “the economy.”^[102] The definite article is crucial, for “the” economy was to be a distinct entity, with its own rules and its own dynamic that is distinct from politics, the state, and above all religion. What better way to do so than reconstruct a myth in which “the” economy emerges as a natural expression of human nature? This is perhaps the strangest result of Smith’s mythmaking, one that would eventually be seen as a self-regulating, equilibrium generating object that somehow has a life of its own. One is reminded of Marx’s point that the gods are created by human beings—that they exist as projections not of the best of human virtues (as Feuerbach would have it) but as the result of the alienated conditions of human existence. So too is the market or economy a projection. But why did Smith wish to create such a being? As we pointed out earlier, a new field of study was emerging from the swamp of capitalism—the discipline of economics.^[103] In order to ensure that this discipline was not bereft of an object of study, “the economy” was created. For our purposes, it is important to note precisely what this “economy” designates: for Smith and those who follow, it is already reduced to the domain of huckstering and trading, of profit gained from a daring and innovative transaction (albeit not without the occasional bending of the rules). Crucial to this constructed realm—and indeed a signal of its status as a projection—is the claim that it is ideally free from any “interference” by the state, let alone social relations and forces.

Two additional features of myth are relevant here. Myth entertains profound contradictions, which are needed for it to work in the first place. That is to say, myth gives voice to tensions, explores dead ends, and recounts threats that may undermine the organizing agenda of the myth.^[104] The dialectical nature of myth shows its face now at a different level, for in the very effort to indicate how certain options are not viable, it preserves those alternatives. Here, we find the moral coding of heroes and villains, of good and bad, in Smith’s work. Industrious entrepreneurs, merchants, capitalist

agriculturalists, proponents of free trade, even that mythical village full of primitives who cannot help themselves in trucking and exchanging are all virtuous characters in Smith's stories. Pitted against them are the evil kings, rapacious landlords, greedy governments, lazy and stupid workers, and of course "savages" of pretty much any ethnicity besides the English.^[105] These villains constantly attempt to hijack the free market's slow emergence, but are in the end punished or won over. In spite of their condemnation and punishment, the myth preserves their wide-ranging and alternative options.

The simultaneous damnation and preservation of these evil people lead to the final point concerning myth. It constructs an ideal toward which one strives, a utopia that remains just out of reach. We offer but one example (out of many depictions) of this utopia: "Were all nations to follow the liberal system of free exportation and free importation, the different states into which a great continent was divided would so far resemble the different provinces of a great empire."^[106] Imagine the world as one great empire of capital, Smith dreams, in which trade is truly free. Then instead of individual nations with their troublesome rules and restrictions, we would have a global free market. Even today this remains a vision, a utopia to which the disciples of Adam Smith strive. What is preventing its full realization? Innumerable are the obstacles that remain, whether old-fashioned trade unions and state regulation, or the newer green groups ("green tape"), the crusaders for social conscience, the pesky anti-capitalist movement, the resurgence of socialism, and the interests of common people alarmed at the loss of what they have. All the free market advocates need to do is devise ways to overcome these annoying hindrances, and the utopia will be achieved. The catch is one characteristic of myth: it is not that the obstacles prevent the realization of the utopia in question; rather, the utopian myth requires those obstacles to be a myth at all. Remove the obstacles, and the myth will lose its power. Give free market ideologues their dream, and they would simply not know what to do with it, for the very reason for the existence of the myth would be gone. In other words, full realization is not what the utopia of the free market wants; instead, it wants and needs those "obstacles" (*objet petit a*), the constant enemies against which the myth can be mobilized. Smith inadvertently admits as much: "To expect, indeed, that the freedom of trade should ever be entirely restored in Great Britain, is as absurd as to expect that an Oceana or Utopia should ever be established in it."^[107]

Finally, what do we make of this effort at mythmaking, in all its mediocre verbosity? Putting aside its ruling class apologia, the way its particularity masquerades as a universal, and the sheer jumble of its content, we have argued that the power of *Wealth of Nations* lies in its ability to construct a myth or two. But why Smith and not one of the

many others writing on political economy at the time? Smith marks a moment of transition, no matter how limited or temporary what follows may be. He is caught between the explicit theological engagements of those who came before and after (Malthus especially) and the “secular” theorists who sought to set a new path for economic theory (such as David Ricardo and J. S. Mill). However, the transition was only partial and temporary, for theology was never banished completely; it continues to exist as the dialectical other of economic thought. We have already suggested this in relation to Smith’s supposed “hidden” theology. It was hardly a theology worthy of the name, for his Stoic-inspired Deism served as a classic decompression chamber from theology, a halfway house between theology and its secular other. Therefore, we should not be surprised that his references to the Bible are few and far between^[108] and that his concerns with religion relate only to matters of the clergy and their roles in state and society. Furthermore, the ambiguity of the much-abused “invisible hand” marks the transitional phase for which Smith is the prime example. That hand may be read as a cipher for Providence, as many of his contemporaries did and as some scholars do today. But it may also be read as a metaphor, a fully secular assertion concerning the internal workings of that projection, the market. Both are perfectly true. As is characteristic of transitional ideologues, they straddle both worlds, enabling alternative readings. Yet, in doing so, they open up a passage from one to the other, for those who wish to understand and operate in the new way. It is not for nothing that Smith is so often seen as both the culmination of economic theories that went before and as the originator of proper economic theory that came after.

A similar point applies to his polemic in favor of that projection, the “free market” or “the economy.” Even though *Wealth of Nations* is coded in moral terms between good and evil actors, even though it is full of discussions of the roles of government, of jurisprudence, warfare etc. etc. etc, Smith assumes^[109] that the study of political economy is distinct from the moral and social sciences. Again, one may read him in both ways, either by stressing the embedded nature of political economy or by gleaning from his work the ideas that would evolve into the staples of neoclassical economics: the free market as an entity unto itself, with its own dynamic, all of which expresses the fundamental features of human nature. Indeed, this is what the slogan “Adam Smith” stands for today, rather than the dross with which his work is filled. More precisely, this is what the myth of Adam Smith was able to achieve.

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1. Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976 [1759]), VII.iv.25.↵
 2. One of the more glaring contradictions concerns his suspicion of foreign trade and even domestic

manufacturing; he clearly prefers agriculture. Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979 [1776]), II.v.31; III.i.3; III.iv.24; IV.ix. But immediately following, he argues strenuously for a “perfectly free market” precisely in foreign trade (IV.ii). Note also his description of any new manufacture as speculation (I.x.b.43; II.iii.26) and that the rate of profit is reduced by speculative traders (V.i.e.10). Even the sympathetic Viner notes the “absence of complete coordination and unity” in his philosophy. Viner, *Essays on the Intellectual History of Economics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 101. ↵

3. Apart from his lack of awareness of steam power (no parables of steam appear) or of James Watt’s other inventions—let alone the nature of the cotton industry or of new ways of making beer—Smith also fails to see the internal dynamic of monopolies and competition. Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, I.vi.28; I.xi.p.10.↵
4. Smith gives the impression of having assembled a compendium of his opinions on anything that comes to mind. We fail to see, for instance, what a long and potted account of the roles of the clergy from the Roman Empire onwards, or a diatribe on dissolute youth, has to do with the causes that lead to the “wealth of nations.” Ibid., V.i.f.18–45. Many of these features are noted by Murray Rothbard, who asks many of the right questions but then offers woeful answers from his perspective of capitalist anarchism. Murray N. Rothbard, *An Austrian Perspective on the History of Economic Thought*, vol. 1, *Economic Thought Before Adam Smith* (Auburn: Ludwig von Mises Institute, 2010 [1995]), 435–74. The ever polite Ricardo offers a back-handed compliment: “If the comprehensive mind of Adam Smith had been directed to this fact, he would not have maintained . . .” David Ricardo, *The Works and Correspondence of David Ricardo*, vol. 1, *On the Principles of Political Economy and Taxation*, ed. Piero Sraffa (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2004 [1817]), 329.↵
5. For an indication of the immediate impact and popularity of his work among the ruling class, see the brief survey in Roy Harold Campbell and Andrew Skinner’, general introduction to Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, 1–60 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979 [1776]), 41–43.↵
6. In the western parts of Europe, the recalibration of human nature which took place in capitalism was different in pace and nature in the areas east of the Elbe, due to the different implementation of capitalism in these areas.↵
7. Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, I.x.c.12; IV.ii.24.↵
8. “As soon as the land of any country has all become private property, the landlords, like all other men, love to reap where they never sowed, and demand a rent even for its natural produce. The wood of the forest, the grass of the field, and all the natural fruits of the earth, which, when land was in common, cost the labourer only the trouble of gathering them, come, even to him, to have an additional price fixed upon them.” And again: “As soon as land becomes private property, the landlord demands a share of almost all the produce which the labourer can either raise, or collect from it. Ibid., I.vi.8; I.viii.6. A poor echo of Locke may be found in the *Lectures on Jurisprudence*, where Smith opines that the seizing of something—his example is an apple—constitutes the origins of private property. Yet, private property does not really begin until the age of agriculture in Greece and Rome, and then medieval Europe. At least that seems to be his main point, for he contradicts himself later and suggests it appears with the previous stage of shepherds. Adam Smith, *Lectures on Jurisprudence* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1982 [1976]), 55–56, 59–71, 191, 393–94.↵
9. Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, I.ii.2.↵
10. Ibid., I.ii.1. Elsewhere he speaks of the “the natural inclinations of man,” assuming this initial slogan (III.i.3; see also II.i.2).↵
11. Our argument need not examine the interminable debates over *das Adam Smith Problem*, that is, whether Smith changed his mind between *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* and *Wealth of Nations*, or whether his

thought is consistent between the two. Debate turns on whether the former is more socially oriented (with its theory of sympathy), or whether they both promote self-interest.↵

12. Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, I.i.5.↵
13. Schumpeter notes drily: “No woman, except for his mother, ever played a role in his existence: in this as in other respects the glamors and passions of life were just literature to him.” Joseph Schumpeter, *A History of Economic Analysis* (London: Routledge, 2006), 177. As for sex, we have been able to find only these references in *Wealth of Nations*: “Poverty, though it no doubt discourages, does not always prevent marriage. It seems even to be favourable to generation. A half-starved Highland woman frequently bears more than twenty children, while a pampered fine lady is often incapable of bearing any, and is generally exhausted by two or three. Barrenness, so frequent among women of fashion, is very rare among those of inferior station. Luxury in the fair sex, while it enflames perhaps the passion for enjoyment, seems always to weaken, and frequently to destroy altogether, the powers of generation”; “The chairmen, porters, and coalheavers in London, and those unfortunate women who live by prostitution, the strongest men and the most beautiful women perhaps in the British dominions, are said to be, the greater part of them, from the lowest rank of people in Ireland, who are generally fed with this root. No food can afford a more decisive proof of its nourishing quality, or of its being peculiarly suitable to the health of the human constitution”; “Mercantile stock is equally barren and unproductive with manufacturing stock.” The final quotation may, perhaps, be taken as a comment on Smith’s own approach to sex. Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, I.viii.37; I.xi.41; IV.ix.11.↵
14. Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, III.2.32–33; VI.iii.18. See the excellent analysis in Mika Ojakangas, *The Voice of Conscience: A Political Genealogy of Western Ethical Experience* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 122, 129–30.↵
15. Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, IV.i.2.8; see also VI.i.11.↵
16. *Ibid.*, VII.ii.3.16.↵
17. *Ibid.*, II.iii.3.3. In this light, we should read the rather lofty questions: “First, wherein does virtue consist? Or what is the tone of temper, and tenour of conduct, which constitutes the excellent and praise-worthy character, the character which is the natural object of esteem, honour, and approbation? And, secondly, by what power or faculty in the mind is it, that this character, whatever it be, is recommended to us? Or in other words, how and by what means does it come to pass, that the mind prefers one tenour of conduct to another?” *Ibid.*, VII.i.2.↵
18. Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, I.ii.2.↵
19. Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, VII.ii.4.8.↵
20. Francis Hutcheson, *A System of Moral Philosophy* (London: Foulis, 1755); Bernard Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees: Or, Private Vices, Public Benefits* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1924 [1729]). See Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, VII.ii.3.12.↵
21. Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, VII.ii.3.18; see also VII.ii.3.16. Viner argues most strongly for the benign, if unwitting, social function of self-interest in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Viner, *Essays on the Intellectual History of Economics*, 88–92.↵
22. Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, I.ii.2. Ricardo, in particular, stresses this point. Ricardo, *On the Principles of Political Economy and Taxation*, 133–34.↵
23. Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, II.iii.31.↵
24. *Ibid.*, IV.ii.4.↵
25. Sedlacek and Foley miss Smith’s effort at recoding. They mistakenly assume that Smith always saw self-interest as an evil that resulted in social virtue. This assumption enables Foley to argue that Smith suggests, but does not prove, that the concrete evil of self-interest results in the abstract good of social benefit. However, at a deeper level, we remain profoundly suspicious of ethics and moral philosophy as components

- of ruling class ideology. Sedlacek, *Economics of Good and Evil: The Quest for Economic Meaning from Gilgamesh to Wall Street*, 193–210; Foley, *Adam's Fallacy: A Guide to Economic Theology*, 3, 11, 42–43; Boer, *In the Vale of Tears: On Marxism and Theology V*, 245–86.↵
26. Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, II.iii.12; see also III.iv.17.↵
 27. *Ibid.*, II.iv.2.↵
 28. *Lectures on Astronomy* III.2, in Adam Smith, *Essays on Philosophical Subjects* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 49.↵
 29. Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, IV.1.10.↵
 30. Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, IV.ii.9.↵
 31. Tony Aspromourgos, *The Science of Wealth: Adam Smith and the Framing of Political Economy* (London: Routledge, 2009), 46–48, 336–37 n. 15. See the references in Peter Harrison, “Adam Smith and the History of the Invisible Hand,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 72, no. 1 (2011): 29–49, 29–30.↵
 32. Lisa Hill, “The Hidden Theology of Adam Smith,” *European Journal for the History of Economic Thought* 8 (2001): 1–29, 1–3; Paul Oslington, ed. *Adam Smith as Theologian* (London: Routledge, 2011); Viner, *The Role of Providence in the Social Order: An Essay in Intellectual History*, 80–84; Viner, *Essays on the Intellectual History of Economics*, 86–100.↵
 33. Only Sedlacek notes the ambivalence of Smith’s deployment of the “invisible hand,” although he mistakenly attributes the origin of the term to Smith himself. Sedlacek, *Economics of Good and Evil: The Quest for Economic Meaning from Gilgamesh to Wall Street*, 198–99.↵
 34. Hill, “The Hidden Theology of Adam Smith”; Georg Lukács, *Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay in the Forms of Great Epic Literature*, trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1971 [1920]), 88.↵
 35. As we will argue later, this transition is by no means inexorable and permanent, for a modern secular world abandoned by God is tentative, ambivalent, and often short-lived. God may at any time reappear—to extend Lukács’s mode of speech.↵
 36. Marvin H. Pope, *Song of Songs: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1977), 517–19; Roland Boer, *Knockin' on Heaven's Door: The Bible and Popular Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 64–70.↵
 37. Roland Boer, *The Earthy Nature of the Bible: Fleshly Readings of Sex, Masculinity, and Carnality* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 68; see also David J. Halperin, *Seeking Ezekiel: Text and Psychology* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), 131–34. One may add here Isa. 5:8, “you have looked on a hand” as the Hebrew literally says it, and Lam. 1:10, in which the adversary puts his “hand” on “all her precious things.”↵
 38. Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, *God's Phallus and other Problems for Men and Masculinities* (New York: Beacon, 1993), 131–34; Ilona Rashkow, “What’s in a Name? That Which We Call a Rose by Any Other Name Would Smell as Sweet,” in *Psychology and the Bible: A New Way to Read the Scriptures*, eds. J. Harold Ellens and Wayne G. Rollins, vol. 2, 237–66 (Westport: Praeger, 2004); Boer, *The Earthy Nature of the Bible: Fleshly Readings of Sex, Masculinity, and Carnality*, 59–69.↵
 39. Viner, *Essays on the Intellectual History of Economics*, 86.↵
 40. Needless to say, critics simply miss the mythic nature of Smith’s work. For instance, Aspromourgos does not see that the comprehensive “framework” produced by Smith is a result of his mythic production, within which neoclassical and neoliberal economists remain in thrall. Aspromourgos, *The Science of Wealth: Adam Smith and the Framing of Political Economy*.↵
 41. For a few examples (among many), see Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, I.vi.6; I.viii.4; II.ii.30; II.ii.46; IV.v.a.8; IV.v.b.13; V.ii.i.1. The habit was rather infectious, for it appears throughout the work of Ricardo as well. Ricardo, *On the Principles of Political Economy and Taxation*, 30–38, 44, 273.↵

42. The dogs return later, to be joined by breeding animals, the chicken, the hog, and the cow. Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, I.ii.5; I.viii.39; I.xi.l.8-9; I.xi.l.11.↵
43. *Ibid.*, II.ii.76.↵
44. *Ibid.*, II.ii.67.↵
45. *Ibid.*, II.ii.67-72.↵
46. *Ibid.*, I.x.b.27; II.ii.73-78; IV.vii.a.18-19; V.iii.60.↵
47. *Ibid.*, III.iv.3. It is worth noting here the tension between this moral tale and the parable of the industrious farmer: “Not only the art of the farmer, the general direction of the operations of husbandry, but many inferior branches of country labour require much more skill and experience than the greater part of mechanick trades. The man who works upon brass and iron, works with instruments and upon materials of which the temper is always the same, or very nearly the same. But the man who ploughs the ground with a team of horses or oxen, works with instruments of which the health, strength, and temper are very different upon different occasions. The condition of the materials which he works upon too is as variable as that of the instruments which he works with, and both require to be managed with much judgment and discretion. The common ploughman, though generally regarded as the pattern of stupidity and ignorance, is seldom defective in this judgment and discretion.” *Ibid.*, I.x.c.24.↵
48. Others include: “The Coarse Coat,” “Linen Manufacture,” “The Cotter,” “The Delightful Vegetable Garden,” “The Potato,” “The Vineyard,” “Equipage,” “Types of Metals,” “Stone and Silver Mines,” “Dwellings, Clothes, and Rents,” “The Talents,” “The Guinea,” “One Million Pounds,” “The Labor of Nature,” “The Tailor and the Shoemaker,” “Scottish Wine,” “The Army,” “The Ale-House,” “The Witch and the Corn Merchant,” and “The Lace-Maker.” *Ibid.*, I.i.11; I.ix.24; I.x.b.49; I.xi.b.25; I.xi.b.27; I.xi.b.39-42; I.xi.c.7; I.xi.c.31; I.xi.d.2; II.i.12; II.i.17; II.ii.18-19; II.ii.30; II.iii.39; II.v.12; IV.ii.11; IV.ii.15; IV.ii.33; IV.iii.c.8; IV.v.b.26; IV.ix.12. Ricardo too was fond of the occasional parable, such as “The Turnip.” Ricardo, *On the Principles of Political Economy and Taxation*, 80-83.↵
49. *Ibid.*, I.i.4.↵
50. *Ibid.*, I.i.11.↵
51. Smith, *Lectures on Jurisprudence*, LJ(A) vi.29-30, 51; LJ(B) 213-14, 329.↵
52. Adam Ferguson, *Principles of Moral and Political Science* (London: G. Olms, 1975 [1792]).↵
53. Locke, *Two Treatises of Government and A Letter Concerning Toleration*, 2.43.↵
54. Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, II.ii.86.↵
55. Other mythical language appears from time to time in his writing, such as money as the “the great wheel of circulation” or a bank as the “great engine of state.” *Ibid.*, II.ii.23, 39; II.ii.85.↵
56. Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, III.iii.33.↵
57. Thus, the myth follows on rather smoothly from the fable of the dogs, which seeks to “prove” the same point (see our earlier discussion). It is quite feasible to read that fable as embedded within the myth.↵
58. Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, I.ii.3.↵
59. *Ibid.*, I.ii.4.↵
60. *Ibid.*, I.ii.5.↵
61. *Ibid.*, I.ii.3-5; I.iv.1-11.↵
62. *Ibid.*, I.iv.1.↵
63. *Ibid.*, I.iv.2.↵
64. *Ibid.*, I.vi.1-5; 1.viii.1-6; Ix.b.3; I.xi.b.6-8; I.xi.c.2-4; I.xi.c.16; I.xi.e.27; I.xi.k-m; I.xi.n.10; IV.vii.b.1; V.i.f.51; V.iii.9.↵
65. *Ibid.*, II.1-4.↵
66. Ricardo, *On the Principles of Political Economy and Taxation*, vol. 1, 12-13, 22-29, 112.↵
67. Graeber, *Debt: The First 5,000 Years*, 24.↵
68. Thus, it may suddenly appear in Buenos Aires, Mexico, Peru, or even among the “Tartars of Ukraine.” Smith,

- An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, I.xi.b.7; I.xi.g.26.↵
69. Georges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, trans. T. Hulme and J. Roth (New York: Collier, 1961).↵
70. Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology, and Scholarship*; Boer, *Political Myth: On the Use and Abuse of Biblical Themes*.↵
71. Smith, *Lectures on Jurisprudence*, 53.↵
72. *Ibid.*, 53–54, 59, 189–93, 351–53. It is worth noting that Smith makes a half-hearted attempt to apply these four stages late in *Wealth of Nations*, in the rambling treatments of war and law. Apart from contradictions with the foundation myth, the economic features of the stages that appear in the *Lectures on Jurisprudence* have been excised. Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, Vi.a–b. Therefore, efforts to identify a four-stage theory throughout *Wealth of Nations* forces the text into places it does not wish to go.↵
73. Smith, *Lectures on Jurisprudence*, 421.↵
74. The shift is by no means complete in the *Lectures on Jurisprudence*, for a little later he reasserts his initial position: “A rude and barbarous people are ignorant of the effects of the division of labour, and it is long before one person, by continually working at different things, can produce any more than is necessary for his daily subsistence . . . in a nation of hunters or shepherds no person can quit the common trade in which he is employed, and which affords him daily subsistence, till he have some stock to maintain him and begin the new trade . . . Bare subsistence is almost all that a savage can procure, and having no stock to begin upon, nothing to maintain him but what is produced by the exertion of his own strength, it is no wonder that he continues long in an indigent state.” Smith, *Lectures on Jurisprudence*, 444.↵
75. For examples, see Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, I.v.26–27; I.x.c.39; I.x.c.62; I.xi.4–10; I.xi.b.26; I.xi.e–g; I.xi.o.7–15; II.ii.79–85; II.iii.33–37; III.ii; IV.vi.22–32; IV.ix.47; Vi.f.39–45; V.iii.13–34.↵
76. *Ibid.*, III.iv.18; see the whole of III.iv; see also Smith, *Lectures on Jurisprudence*, 244–53.↵
77. Smith, *Lectures on Jurisprudence*, 53–54; Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, IV.i.a–b.↵
78. Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, intro., 4.↵
79. Locke, *Two Treatises of Government and A Letter Concerning Toleration*, 2.41.↵
80. Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, I.i.11.↵
81. *Ibid.*, I.xi.g.26.↵
82. *Ibid.*, II.i.31.↵
83. For an example among a multitude of references, see *ibid.* I.iii.5–8; I.ix.15–17; I.x.c.24–25, 36; I.xi.g.27–28; II.v.22; III.iv.16; IV.i.2, 30; IV.ix.43–46; Vi.d.17.↵
84. *Ibid.*, Vi.a.2; see also Smith, *Lectures on Jurisprudence*, 119. The Edenic nature of North America that Locke constructed appears in Smith’s work only when he speaks of English colonies. Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, I.ix.11; IV.vii.b.↵
85. For an example, see Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, I.viii.26; IV.vii; Smith, *Lectures on Jurisprudence*, 459.↵
86. Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, IV.ix.41.↵
87. “It deserves to be remarked, perhaps, that it is in the progressive state, while the society is advancing to the further acquisition, rather than when it has acquired its full complement of riches, that the condition of the labouring poor, of the great body of the people, seems to be the happiest and the most comfortable. It is hard in the stationary, and miserable in the declining state. The progressive state is in reality the chearful and the hearty state to all the different orders of the society. The stationary is dull; the declining, melancholy.” *Ibid.*, I.viii.40. For an example of the many references to China, see *Ibid.*, I.iv.20; I.viii.24–25, 40; I.ix.15; I.xi.e.34; I.xi.n.1; II.v.22; IV.vii.b.53; Vi.d.17; IV.ix.41.↵

88. Gregory Blue, "Ginau on China, Race Theory, the 'Yellow Peril,' and the Critique of Modernity," *Journal of World History* 10, no. 2 (1999): 218–36, 92.↵
89. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1991 [1837]), 111–15, 224–40. In Herder's opinion, China was dated, petrified and embalmed. Ernst Rose, "China as a Symbol of Reaction in Germany, 1830–1880," *Comparative Literature* 2, no. 1 (1951): 57–76, 58–59.↵
90. Even for those who took another approach, such as de Gobinau, China's despotism and democratic masses provided a sure path to mediocrity, slavery and eventual doom. Blue, "Ginau on China, Race Theory, the 'Yellow Peril,' and the Critique of Modernity," 134. For comparably crude and racist opinions on India at the time, see James Mill, *A History of British India* (London: Baldwin, Cradock and Joy, 1818).↵
91. Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, I.viii.24.↵
92. *Ibid.*, I.iii.7.↵
93. For example, see *ibid.*, I.x.c; II.ii.13; II.ii.94; II.ii.100; II.iii.12; IV.ii.30; IV.vii.b.39; IV.vii.c; IV.ix.12,25.↵
94. *Ibid.*, IV.v.b.5–7.↵
95. *Ibid.*, IV.v.b.26.↵
96. This surge was only one of a number of such surges that had been taking place since the sixteenth century. It is the peculiar claim to originality of English exceptionalism that has made this surge the real basis of capitalism. For an excellent analysis that debunks the peculiarity of English industrialization, see Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System III: The Second Era of Great Expansion of the Capitalist World-Economy, 1730s–1840s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011 [1989]), 1–54.↵
97. Smith makes no effort to conceal his class affiliation, as his characterizations of workers make clear. We offer a couple of examples among many: "The torpor of his mind renders him, not only incapable of relishing or bearing a part in any rational conversation, but of conceiving any generous, noble, or tender sentiment, and consequently of forming any just judgment concerning many even of the ordinary duties of private life." Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, Vi.f.50. "It is remarkable that in every commercial nation the low people are exceedingly stupid. The Dutch vulgar are eminently so, and the English are more so than the Scotch." Smith, *Lectures on Jurisprudence*, 459. Compare those comments with his depiction of a ruling class intellectual: "The contemplation of so great a variety of objects necessarily exercises their minds in endless comparisons and combinations, and renders their understandings, in an extraordinary degree, both acute and comprehensive. Unless those few, however, happen to be placed in some very particular situations, their great abilities, though honourable to themselves, may contribute very little to the good government or happiness of their society. Notwithstanding the great abilities of those few, all the nobler parts of the human character may be, in a great measure, obliterated and extinguished in the great body of the people." Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, Vi.f.51; see also V.ii.k.7. He shared this class position with nearly all political economists, apart from Marx. Ricardo, of course, follows suit and is even harsher on the working poor. Ricardo, *On the Principles of Political Economy and Taxation*, 106–9.↵
98. Norman Davies, *Europe: A History* (London: Pimlico, 1997), 604.↵
99. For what is still the most astute analysis of this process, see Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London: Verso, 1998).↵
100. Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology, and Scholarship*.↵
101. Campbell and Skinner, general introduction to Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, 56. Or, as Viner observes: "If Smith at times showed more catholicity than scientific discrimination in what he accepted as supporting evidence, if some of this evidence appeared on closer scrutiny to be conjectural, contradictory, irrelevant, or inconclusive, the rightness of his argument, the power

- of his exposition, the attractiveness of his conclusions served to overwhelm the captious critic and to postpone closer scrutiny to a later day.” Viner, *Essays on the Intellectual History of Economics*, 86.↵
102. This point is made astutely by Hauerwas, who suggests it is both problematic and error-ridden. Aspromourgos, by contrast, regards this development as one of Smith’s many grand “achievements.” Stanley Hauerwas, “Economics and Antagonisms,” *History of Political Economy* 43, no. 2 (2011): 413–16. Aspromourgos, *The Science of Wealth: Adam Smith and the Framing of Political Economy*.↵
 103. In *The Order of Things*, Michel Foucault analyses the shift from the analysis of wealth to political economy, which took place in the seventeenth century. Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York, Vintage Books, 1994), chapter 6. He returns to this topic briefly in the lecture series, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977–78*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2009), e.g. pp. 106–107. Foucault’s analysis is focused on the epistemic shifts that took place across the fields of linguistics, biology and economics, thus placing developments in economy at the same level as changes within linguistics and biology, which is one of his many moves away from a proper Marxist analysis.↵
 104. Boer, *Political Myth: On the Use and Abuse of Biblical Themes*.↵
 105. At this point, another contradiction emerges in Smith’s work, namely, between the autonomous universal of the market hindered by national governments and the nationalism of his negative characterization of any place that is not England.↵
 106. Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, IV.v.b.39.↵
 107. Ibid., IV.ii.43. For a more detailed analysis of this dialectical dynamic of myth in relation to Milton Friedman and Friedrich von Hayek, see Boer, *Political Myth: On the Use and Abuse of Biblical Themes*, 169–74.↵
 108. One finds a handful of passing biblical allusions, occasional comments on theology, a brief narrative on the history of the clergy, and observations that the Corn Laws are like dogmatic religion. Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, I.iv.8; I.vi.8; I.x.c.34; III.ii.13; III.iv.13; IV.v.b.30; V.i.f.19–25; V.i.g.1–39.↵
 109. This bifurcation between the two approaches is explicitly identified by J. S. Mill’s observation: “In so far as the economical condition of nations turns upon the state of physical knowledge, it is a subject for the physical sciences, and the arts founded on them. But in so far as the causes are moral or psychological, dependent on institutions and social relations, or on the principles of human nature, their investigation belongs not to physical, but to moral and social science, and is the object of what is called Political Economy.” John Stuart Mill, *Principles of Political Economy*, vol. 2–3, *Collected Works* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1963 [1848]), I: 20–21.↵

The Lust and Hunger of Thomas Malthus

The temptations to evil are too strong for human nature to resist. ^[1]

Of the two possible readings of Adam Smith—the theological or the secular—the Reverend Thomas Malthus clearly opts for the former.^[2] At least he does so in his central text, *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, which will be our focus in this chapter. Here is an overtly theological thinker, a pious man, and a priest in the Church of England, who possesses a strong doctrine of evil, a melancholy view of human nature, and a foreboding sense of apocalyptic doom.^[3] To this impressive list of attributes must be added spurious calculations, suspicions of manufacturing as unproductive labor,^[4] and profound ethnocentrism, as well as conservative and anti-revolutionary politics.^[5]

This should be reason enough to focus on Malthus, but we are also perversely fond of him, since he challenges the conventional narrative of secularization. According to this narrative, classical economic theory gained its footing by turning away from the quaint dabbling with the Bible and theology that we find in Locke and others. It may have begun to take place with Adam Smith, or it may have happened after the temporary alliance between theology and economics in the Cambridge School of economics, to which Malthus himself contributed, but ultimately the former partners of theology and economics went their own separate ways. Not so Malthus, for he is resolutely theological in a way that harkens back to the time of Locke. Rather than regarding Malthus as a man born (1766) a century too late, we interpret his contribution as a clear problematizing of that supposedly inexorable path of secularization.

Our analysis begins in an unexpected place, with one of Malthus's sermons. Given on a Good Friday, it focuses on the atonement of Christ, thereby providing an excellent

insight into Malthus's theological understanding. Here he cuts through the dross of moralizing (common elsewhere in his work) and identifies propitiatory atonement as the key to Christ's act of salvation. However, we are not interested in that theory of atonement as such (one of a number of possible approaches to the death and resurrection of Christ), but rather in the way it reveals a profound doctrine of evil.^[6] With this in mind, we tackle (in some detail) *An Essay on the Principle of Population*. We focus on the first edition, since in the five later editions Malthus desperately backpedaled from the stark implications of the first.^[7] In this work, the matter of human nature looms large, as a fallen nature torn between the conflicting forces of lust and hunger, with the stronger lust channeled into misery and vice when it encounters the limiting force of hunger and the need for subsistence. From there we turn to Malthus's reshaping of the myth that we analyzed in regard to Grotius, Locke, and Smith. The difference is that Malthus offers not one but five versions of the myth. Of these, only one vainly attempts a plot of progress, while the remaining four present variations on regress, on the grimmer outcomes of the Fall. We have already traced the tension between the two plot lines in relation to Locke, but with Malthus regress eclipses progress—and that with a decidedly theological tone.^[8]

A Melancholy Hue: On Human Nature

Violence, oppression, falsehood, misery, every hateful vice, and every form of distress, which degrade and sadden the present state of society, seem to have been generated by the most imperious circumstances, by laws inherent in the nature of man.^[9]

A “free, equal, and reciprocal society”^[10] is surely the most desirable, is it not? For those like Malthus, who appear to champion that curiously new construct known as the autonomous economy, it seems that it should be. Yet, Malthus paid only lip service to this position on human nature, a position that Locke had wrought from his biblical interpretation and Smith had asserted with polemic insistence. The irresistible presence of evil—that tendency of human beings to do the worst to themselves and to others—overwhelms Malthus's fleeting assertions of human freedom and equality. The same applies to self-love (or self-interest), the leitmotif of Smith. Malthus may have occasionally opined that self-love is a positive force, one that leads to the betterment of the human condition,^[11] but he asserted it only half-heartedly. In truth, Malthus interprets self-interest as greed and selfishness, the “general occasion of injustice, fraud, oppression and iniquity.”^[12] In a society without laws governing property, anarchy would reign, so much so that everyone would fearfully guard with force what little they

have.^[13] The great virtue of benevolence turns weak in the face of such selfishness, fading all too readily when confronted by hardship and want. When self-love is the “main-spring of the great machine,” everyone suffers.^[14]

Fallen Creatures

The original sin of man is the torpor and corruption of the chaotic matter in which he may be said to be born.^[15]

We are all fallen creatures, sinning despite ourselves. This indicates not so much a jaundiced view of human nature or the expostulations of a grumpy man but rather a strong doctrine of evil, which might be regarded as the most refreshing feature of Malthus’ otherwise woefully inadequate collection of writings. In order to witness Malthus’s understanding of evil in its full glory, we turn to a sermon he delivered on Good Friday in 1827 (and again in 1832).^[16] Not surprisingly—given the situation—Malthus speaks about the death of Christ and his act of atonement. We should understand Christ’s work, he suggests, not as mere instruction and example but as propitiation, a vicarious and propitiatory sacrifice. Of all the Christological themes in the New Testament—prophet, messiah, victor against Satan, wisdom teacher, model to emulate—sacrifice is the starkest. Malthus draws on the New Testament for this position,^[17] but its roots lie in the sacrificial ideology of ancient Southwest Asia, in which the wrath of the gods had to be appeased by the offering of sacrifices. While the wrath may have been manifested in fire, pestilence, famine, or a marauding army, it was generated by wrongs committed by the people. And so, to ameliorate divine anger for a wrong committed, a sacrifice was made. It may have been a sheep, goat, ox, or pig, as well as the occasional human sacrifice. So it is with Christ, according to Malthus: he stands in our place in order to take the full brunt of God’s wrath. This is the “greatest and most important event to mankind recorded in the Scriptures.”^[18]

The contours of the doctrine of propitiatory sacrifice are known well enough, but we would like to stress the point that a strong and stark understanding of the function of Christ’s death assumes an equally strong doctrine of sin. Christ’s death constitutes “a remission of sins,” or even more forcefully, in the words of John’s first letter: “If any man sins, we have an advocate with the father Jesus Christ the Righteous; and he is the propitiation for our Sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.”^[19] That is, the efficacy of the Christ’s satisfaction is even greater than what it

overcomes—namely, the collective sin of the entire human race, if not the whole of nature. Malthus sums up his position on sin and Christ’s death as follows:

The language of the inspired writers then is, “that Christ suffered for our sins, the just for the unjust”, that he gave himself as a ransom; that he redeemed us by his blood, redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us; that he is our advocate, intercessor and propitiation; that he was made perfect through sufferings, and being made perfect became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.^[20]

Evil is powerful indeed. “Real and essential,” it reveals a deep-seated cause of impurity^[21] and demands that none less than Christ himself suffer and die in order to avoid the punishment God would mete out to all human beings.^[22] The punishment fits the crime; or, rather, the mitigation of the punishment fits the crime. But how are human beings to respond? At times, Malthus slips into earnest moralizing, urging that we should strive to live virtuous lives.^[23] Yet at other times, he realizes that the appropriate response is to repent and wisely to accept the benefit (escaping future punishment and obtaining future happiness) without asking exactly how it was achieved. Consequently, the only response to God’s grace is to love God and one’s neighbor in return. In addition, we wish to emphasize one more response: Christ’s propitiation should make us acutely aware of how heinous our sins truly are and of how much suffering they produce.^[24] After all, we are “miserable sinners” lying in “darkness and the shadow of death.”^[25] This awareness of the pervasiveness and persistence of sin is found throughout Malthus’s economic works.^[26]

Misery, Vice, and Perfectibility

To prevent the recurrence of misery, is, alas! beyond the power of man.^[27]

In light of this soberly realistic assessment of human nature, it should come as no surprise that Malthus identifies the two basic human drives as lust and hunger. As might be expected, he uses politer terms (euphemisms perhaps), calling them population and subsistence. Human beings need sex and food not only to survive but also to prosper. However, the two are not equal; lust is the more powerful, pushing human beings to copulate and bear offspring. By contrast, hunger is the weaker force, quailing before the onrush of lust. What Malthus means is that people respond to the urge to have sex without thinking of the consequences. Can we feed the children? Is there enough land to grow crops and tend herds? These questions often occur later, when large broods of children come crying for want of sustenance. The reason is that although people need food, the earth does not possess sufficient resources to feed ever more mouths. We will

return to this grim tension and its many twists in more detail below, when we deal with the various forms of Malthus's myths. Here, we wish to point out that the struggle between lust and hunger is one of the manifestations of the fallen nature of human existence.

Close on the heels of sex and food comes another pair: misery and vice, the "bitter ingredients in the cup of human life."^[28] Quite literally, they follow close behind. Given the tension between lust and hunger and the resultant overpopulation, one encounters all manner of misery: unwholesome manufactures, unhealthy cities, poverty, war, sickness, deformities, epidemics, pestilence, plagues, and premature death. And if one seeks to check the desire for sex, then it diverts into vice. The desire for sex cannot be stopped, so it is inevitably rechanneled. Being a polite, if somewhat conservative vicar, Malthus does not dare say what type of vice, but it would seem to concern sex. Fornication, adultery, prostitution—perhaps also anal sex, felching, bestiality, formicophilia^[29]—these and more are the vices generated by checks on the act of lust.

It should come as no surprise that Malthus was not enamored with the various mildly radical proposals, current at his time concerning the perfectibility of human beings and society. A significant portion of his essay on population attacks the work of the Marquis de Condorcet and William Godwin.^[30] It is a stretch, however, to suggest that these liberal utopians were seriously radical, for they were very much part and parcel of the polite circles of ruling class debate. The old order, of the Church of England and the aristocracy, may have felt that "Philosophic Radicals" led by Jeremy Bentham and James Mill threatened all that was good and just, and they may have regarded Godwin as a dangerous Jacobin, but they spoke the same language and shared the same assumptions. The working poor—the true radicals who organized and challenged the system—always remained outside the circle, to be criticized, denigrated, and patronized.^[31] For eight chapters,^[32] Malthus systematically questions the overconfidence in human progress expressed in such works. The gradual but inevitable improvement of society, the transformation of the earth into a vast garden of delights, the shedding of the constraints of institutions and government, the freedom of sexual expression with the abolition of marriage, the advance of truth and virtue, the dominance of reason over the baser passions, even the prolongation of human life through science to the point of immortality—Malthus sees all these as "little better than a dream, a beautiful phantom of the imagination."^[33] Instead, the true situation of human beings on earth is one of the impossible struggles between lust and hunger, and of the misery and vice that result. We suggest that Malthus's attacks evince not only his doctrine of evil but also an anti-

Edenic theme. If we understand the Garden of Eden (following the line of Ernst Bloch) as a utopian myth, one that expresses a desire for the future rather than a conservative wish for a confectioned Golden Age, then Malthus pours a few buckets of cold water on any such hope.

Retelling and Retelling the Myth

The vices and moral weakness of man can never be wholly eradicated.^[34]

Thus far, Malthus seems rather straightforward on the matters of sin, evil, and human nature. But crouching at the door are many twists, contradictions, and dialectical turns, all of which stem from the narrative of the Fall. Immediately they appear, for Malthus offers not one version of the myth but five.^[35] Of these, a forlorn and solitary version attempts a narrative of progress, which might be expected in relation to the other political economists. However, the attempt comes across as feeble and out of character with Malthus's perspective on human nature. So the remaining versions – four of them – present various narratives of regress, albeit with a twist that comes straight out of the biblical account of the Fall. Like the flawed crystal in the biblical account—in which goodness turns into evil through its very goodness—Malthus's accounts track the way divine gifts end up producing the evils of misery and vice. We begin with his initial effort at a narrative of progress before assessing a melancholy feast of disaster stories.

From Savagery to Civilization

Man as he really is, inert, sluggish, and averse from labour, unless compelled by necessity.^[36]

Savage hunters, barbarian shepherds, industrious civilization: through these three (somewhat) contrived stages, Malthus narrates the emergence of the wonders of commerce and diligent agriculture. Although he rolls out the story early in his essay on population, it is by no means original to Malthus.^[37] This version of the myth seems a half-hearted effort by Malthus to locate his proposals within an agreed story of how we arrived here in the present. At times, his phrases echo Adam Smith—"in the rudest state of mankind"—and he assumes that the moment and place in which he lives is the great culmination of a historical process that began in ignorance, darkness, and animal-like existence. Nonetheless, Malthus tries to give this story a twist of his own, identifying the

efforts of people to overcome hunger and the growth of population as the root causes of their misery.

Drawing upon North America—the beloved source of nearly all those we consider in this book, and later a host of others—Malthus finds his evidence for the first phase of hunters and savages. In this “infancy of man in the simplest state,” he sees no liberty or equality. Tyrannical men lord it over women, who must suffer the brunt of providing food from meager resources in slave-like conditions. Denigrating semi-nomadic life, which he regards as a further burden on the delicacy of women, Malthus simply cannot envision the agency of women as a means of ensuring that the population remains optimal rather than maximal under a subsistence survival economic mode. Instead, he attributes the low population to the rigors of life, to the apathy of sexual appetite, and to the practices of exposing infants and leaving the elderly to die—“thus violating the first feelings of nature.”^[38] This brutal existence is nothing more than a “blot of misery.”^[39]

Malthus shares the deep ethnocentrism that we also found in Locke and Smith, although, in Malthus’s case, this imaginary depiction is exacerbated by his assumption that settled life is far preferable. People engage in nomadism only because of dire necessity and misery. Thus, if indigenous people have the option, they will obviously settle down (witness the way they gather around European settlements). Similar to Locke and Smith, this ethnocentrism is both spatial and temporal.^[40] Spatially, plenty of these constructed savages live still in this day and age, only far from civilization. Temporally, one can project this image into the past and speculate concerning the grim origins of human society. Yet, as we argued earlier, this production of the savage reveals the profound specificity of classical economic theory, its location in a particular time and place, and thereby its structural limits.

The first phase of human existence constitutes the lowest of the low. The only way from here is upward, if ever so slightly. So it is with the next phase, which consists of the barbarian shepherds. Malthus extends his ethnographic coding by locating this phase in an easterly direction, which incorporates the Scythians, the Huns under Attila, and the Mongolian hordes under Genghis Khan. Life was somewhat better for the women, and the men were able to find pasture for their cattle and families. But with greater resources, their populations burgeoned, soon surpassing local capacities. As a result, they pushed out, warriors on the move, seeking new pastures and putting to the sword all those in their path. Hunger drove them

from their native haunts, like so many famished wolves in search of prey. Set in motion by this all powerful cause, clouds of Barbarians seemed to collect from all points of the northern hemisphere. Gathering fresh

darkness and terror as they rolled on, the congregated bodies at length obscured the sun of Italy and sunk the whole world in universal night.^[41]

The disadvantages of this stage clearly outweigh the benefits. From China, through Europe, to Egypt, vast exterminations were the order of the day, with populations springing up again only to be distressed and angry from hunger, setting out for yet more conquest, rape, and mayhem. Surely, a better way than this “natural carelessness of the barbaric character” could be found.^[42]

So we come to the third stage—pasture and tillage. Characteristic of “civilized” nations (especially those in northern Europe), this way of life could be perused by Malthus’s own eye. The industriousness of the peoples has been able to raise the population to greater levels than in ancient times. At this point, Malthus’s narrative of progress slowly begins to unravel. In his hands, the story faces two snags. The first is caused by that constant bugbear of the classical economists—China. As we saw with Adam Smith, China constituted a distinct problem: How could China be the most fertile, most populous, most assiduous with its cultivation, and the most powerful of nations? Does that not mean China is at the apex of the path to civilization, that it outstrips Europe, if not England itself? Malthus is called upon to produce evidence that discounts China’s preeminence. From “specialists” such as David Hume and Adam Smith, Malthus reads that China’s people marry at a young age and that its population is stable. How can this be? The only explanation is that they must expose excess children so that they die.^[43] Thus, on the basis of pure speculation, China is categorized as barbarian rather than civilized, indeed no better than the primitive savages of the first stage.

The second snag undermines the narrative of progress, producing a grimmer ending than one might expect. The treatment of the final stage begins well enough, especially with the threat from China dispatched. Malthus turns to England as the best example of the way in which a civilized country keeps its population in check. Far from exposing children, the English of modest means use cautious reason. In order to illustrate his point, he provides four rather cute vignettes, one of an educated man with just enough resources to be a gentleman (an autobiographical note creeps in here), one of the son of a farmer, one of a laborer, and finally one of a servant. Facing the prospect of marriage (for sex and offspring can occur only in that context), they consider carefully the money available to support not one child but four or five. Realizing the difficulty and injustice of procreating without sufficient funds, they put off reproducing until a more favorable time.

An excellent way to finish this version of the myth, is it not? Reason and moral

impulse prevent possible misery and disaster. Although Malthus would fall back on moral sanction in subsequent revisions of *An Essay on the Principles of Population*, in this stark first edition that option is decidedly muted. So in this version of the myth, he closes by writing:

If this sketch of the state of society in England be near the truth, and I do not conceive that it is exaggerated, it will be allowed that the preventive check to population in this country operates, though with varied force, through all the classes of the community. The same observation will hold true with regard to all old states. The effects, indeed, of these restraints upon marriage are but too conspicuous in the consequent vices that are produced in almost every part of the world, vices that are continually involving both sexes in inextricable unhappiness.^[44]

Prudence has given way to vice, modest happiness to unhappiness. Reasoned and calm planning in light of one's limited circumstances is no match for the rampaging forces of lust, sex, and procreation. With no mate upon which to vent one's lust, the man in question (these examples are always of men) must find other outlets.

The Basic Postulata: The Reverend's Lust and Hunger

The cravings of hunger, the love of liquor, the desire of possessing a beautiful woman, will urge men to actions, of the fatal consequences of which, to the general interests of society, they are perfectly well convinced, even at the very time they commit them.^[45]

A narrative of progress, culminating with the most civilized country on earth and in history, could never be sustained in light of Malthus's overarching framework. Not surprisingly, the narrative of progress unravels at the close, pushed to its dire conclusion by the other versions of the myth that crowd Malthus's text. Earlier, we mentioned the basic tension in Malthus's theory, between lust and hunger. However, since it is the key to the remaining versions of the myth, we expand on that tension now (not least because it reveals the Reverend squirming over matters of sex).

Let us begin with his bald statement:

I think I may fairly make two postulata.

First, That food is necessary to the existence of man.

Secondly, That the passion between the sexes is necessary and will remain nearly in its present state.

These two laws, ever since we have had any knowledge of mankind, appear to have been fixed laws of our nature, and, as we have not hitherto seen any alteration in them, we have no right to conclude that they will ever cease to be what they now are, without an immediate act of power in that Being who first arranged the system of the universe, and for the advantage of his creatures, still executes, according to fixed laws, all its various operations.^[46]

Once again, human nature is the issue—now reinforced with the curious assertion concerning laws laid down by none other than God. As we mentioned earlier, this is a somewhat dourer view of human nature than the sunny proposals of Grotius, Locke, and especially Smith, with their prattle about freedom and equality. But laws? The very assertion that one’s philosophical hypotheses are laws of the universe seems to have been a fashion among economists and philosophers of the time—a mark of their bounded specificity, we would suggest, but also a rhetorical device to give weight to their arguments. To bolster his scientific credentials, Malthus soon deploys mathematical terms. The availability of food may increase in an “arithmetical ratio,” he opines, but population does so in a “geometrical ratio.”^[47] One presumes he means addition and multiplication, or perhaps “exponential” for the latter, as is the fashion today.

Unperturbed, Malthus later speaks of the algebra of lust: “The passion between the sexes has appeared in every age to be so nearly the same that it may always be considered, in algebraic language, as a given quantity.”^[48] His quirky approach to matters of sex notwithstanding, the effect is to provide a scientific aura to his ponderings. That God —“the Being who first arranged the system of the universe”—should make an appearance here seems an effort to add weight to a rather thin argument full of dubious calculations and moral earnestness.

Of these two “scientific laws,” lust is the stronger, no matter how much geometry and algebra is involved. More precisely, the mathematical nature of the two laws weighs the equations in lust’s favor. Given the geometrical nature of lust, “A slight acquaintance with numbers will shew the immensity of the first power in comparison of the second.”^[49] One cannot help but wonder what a Malthusian pick-up line might be: “In light of the irresistible geometrical power of my libido, would you care to . . .?” Perhaps, he would hold forth on magnets and the map of Madagascar:

One feature of an object may be as distinct, and excite as different emotions, from the aggregate as any two things the most remote, as a beautiful woman, and a map of Madagascar. It is “the symmetry of person, the vivacity, the voluptuous softness of temper, the affectionate kindness of feelings, the imagination and the wit” of a woman that excite the passion of love, and not the mere distinction of her being female. Urged by the passion of love, men have been driven into acts highly prejudicial to the general interests of society, but probably they would have found no difficulty in resisting the temptation, had it appeared in the form of a woman with no other attractions whatever but her sex. To strip sensual pleasures of all their adjuncts, in order to prove their inferiority, is to deprive a magnet of some of its most essential causes of attraction, and then to say that it is weak and inefficient.^[50]

Yet before the power of lust overwhelms him, Malthus desperately reaches for reason, which assists him in preventing the “abuse” of sensual pleasures.^[51] Passion, virtue, and

reason must ideally operate as a team. This is not to say that sensual pleasures can be entirely extinguished, for that would undermine his whole argument. In the end, however, Malthus evinces an abhorrence of sex unchained. In reply to William Godwin's proposal that the strictures of marriage would free people up to have sex as they choose, Malthus recoils in moral disgust. How shameful, undignified, and animal-like!^[52] After all, does not lust unchained lead to countless problems, which go by the name of numerous offspring?

But is lust really the more powerful? If it comes to a question of either sex or food, what would one choose, a romp or a hearty meal? Malthus avers that lust always triumphs, but his own account suggests that hunger is at least its equal. Populations may grow in advantageous circumstances, but they run up against the limits of the food available.^[53] If lust were the greater, would it not be able to overcome hunger? Malthus may seek a way of keeping population down to the level of the means of subsistence, even suggesting that no one has, as yet, found a way to do so.^[54] Here, we encounter classic Malthusian scaremongering, according to which population is the cause of our ills. Control population and you have the formula for happiness, sustainable lives, workable economies, and ecological stability. Yet, despite his assertions concerning the superior power of lust, he offers a series of means by which that limitation is already achieved.

Malthus discusses natural disasters, famines, and epidemics at some length and concludes that the latter two supposedly are caused by overpopulation.^[55] War also gains a mention, as does reason. A man may feel the need to procreate and may seek a woman with whom to do so, but if he is of limited means he will sit down and reason that it would be wise to wait a while. Who would want to bring into the world children one could barely feed, let alone support a wife?^[56] Besides, if our man is feeling hot and bothered, a spot of vice is always available to let off some steam. Malthus mentions one more limitation: the condition of the poor. Malthus speaks of the inadequate and cramped accommodation, of the insufficient and inferior quality of the food, and of the simple fact that significant numbers of the poor starve to death. Indeed, these conditions are more consistently powerful than the periodic effects of epidemics.

These various checks seem to be stronger than Malthus is prepared to admit. Or perhaps he does realize their strength, for he falls back on the proposal that they constitute forms of misery—the inevitable outcome of lust. In order to drive home his argument, Malthus resorts to apocalyptic imagery, not only of a distinctly biblical feel but also in tones that remind one of Malthusians in our own day:

The power of population is so superior to the power in the earth to produce subsistence for man, that premature death must in some shape or other visit the human race. The vices of mankind are active and able ministers of depopulation. They are the precursors in the great army of destruction; and often finish the dreadful work themselves. But should they fail in this war of extermination, sickly seasons, epidemics, pestilence, and plague, advance in terrific array, and sweep off their thousands and ten thousands. Should success be still incomplete, gigantic inevitable famine stalks in the rear, and with one mighty blow levels the population with the food of the world.^[57]

Would it not be better to find a more humane way to curb the effects of lust? Are not foresight and planning better inhibitors than the want and sickness that follow in the train of excess population?^[58] This argument led some of Malthus's early critics to suggest that he had provided a perfectly good argument for prostitution, as a necessary safety valve for the sake of population control, or at least that vice had a useful social function (in the vein of Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees*^[59]) and was preferable to misery.^[60] Malthus's desperate efforts at answering this charge in the subsequent editions of the essay—urging moral restraint and sanction, even temporary celibacy^[61]—constitute a weak and moralizing retreat. We will argue later that these moves were actually theological, for Malthus desperately wanted to avoid a dialectical understanding of evil, an understanding to which his argument inexorably leads.

This is the framework of the remaining four versions of the Malthusian myth, versions that depart notably from the conventional one that he inherited from Grotius and Locke, only to be retold by Smith, Ricardo, and J. S. Mill. Before we turn to Malthus's efforts at further storytelling, we would like to note the Marxist point that population is never greater than the dominant mode of production. To be sure, Malthus draws nigh to such a point, only to fall away as a result of the inadequate method he uses. The basic proposal that population cannot increase without the means of subsistence is wide open to the next step, namely, that the mechanisms of subsistence are determined by the mode of production in question. Each mode enables certain methods and technologies while stymieing others. The same is true with population, in which each mode enables a certain number beyond its predecessor and then allows no more.^[62] Malthus offers further hints and possibilities: he mentions the futility of furthering happiness in the desire for fine silks, cottons, and laces, without asking the obvious class question as to the detrimental effects of a ruling class; he opines that a rise in working class wages has no material benefit in the long run, without inquiring into the exploitive nature of the wage relation itself; he laments the deleterious effects of current structures on the poor, without asking why they are poor; he wishes for a history of the working class, while writing so comprehensively from the perspective of the ruling class.^[63] On each occasion, his

argument would be strengthened immeasurably by asking the real, deeper questions. But he cannot, as the second and subsequent editions of the essay on population show so well with their stress on moral sanctions (perhaps even chastity for the unmarried). The problem is not merely that Malthus lacked the ability to engage in such analysis but also that to broach such questions would bring his whole argument crashing down. Stay with his framework he must, for it enables his obsessive retelling of the myth, now in a form that is both grimmer and closer to his heart.

The Traps of God's Good Gifts

Those deeper seated causes of impurity that corrupt the springs and render turbid the whole stream of human life.^[64]

Four of these versions appear at various points, and each one turns on a paradox: what initially appears to be good turns out to be evil. Indeed, the command of God to subdue the earth and multiply (Gen 1:28), along with the gifts that spur men to improve their lot, end up causing misery and suffering. Goodness is itself a trap, one that cannot avoid evil. Implicit in Malthus's retellings of these myths is what can only be called a dialectical understanding of good and evil. We will return to this matter in the conclusion; at present, we focus on the myths.

Our discussion begins with the last of the four myths of regress, for it is the most theological of all. It appears in the eighteenth chapter of *An Essay on the Principle of Population*. Here the contradiction of the Fall is the narrative key, although it is present in two forms. In the first, good comes from evil: the evils of hunger and cold (in general, the wants of the body) act as spurs to action from inaction. Given that human beings are lazy and sluggish by nature, we improve ourselves only when spurred to do so. A cold winter forces us to seek ways to become warm—to hunt animals for skins perhaps, or to raise sheep and plants for wool and fiber. Hunger forces us to seek food, whether by gathering wild plants and hunting animals or through the more “civilized” approaches of tilling the earth and herding sheep, goats, pigs, and bovines. If these annoying spurs (we might even call them sufferings) did not exist, “the savage would slumber for ever under his tree unless he were roused from his torpor by the cravings of hunger or the pinchings of cold.”^[65] They also help to ignite the spark of intelligence out of the inert clay from which we were created (Gen 2:7), if not to invent that other spark which produces fire. This plot line serves a number of purposes in Malthus's theory, some more benign than others. Thus, it provides the rudiments of an epistemology, the ultimate source of

the deep thoughts of a philosopher, the arresting reconstructions of the historian, or the imaginary flights of a poet. But it also underlays Malthus's criticisms of any form of welfare—whether it be for the old, single mothers, or the poor through the rudimentary poor laws. Such measures remove the incentives of acute suffering and want, if not of the perpetual threat of death, for without such “incentives,” people would lapse into their natural listlessness and fail to seek their own improvement.^[66]

Evil, of a more benign or vicious form, produces good, all due to the wise Providence of our creator. Yet the spur of evil also provides Malthus with his initial theory of the origins of labor (he will contradict himself soon enough, as we show in a moment). Like Grotius and Locke before him, Malthus seeks to avoid Gen. 3:17-19, in which labor is the punishment for the disobedience of the first human beings. Unlike Locke's convoluted attempts to work his way around this biblical text, Malthus breezily observes that the “Supreme Being has ordained that the earth shall not produce good in great quantities till much preparatory labour and ingenuity has been exercised upon its surface.”^[67] Obviously, the hunger that ensues from this apparently inadequate provision is part of the creator's larger plan. In order to eat, one must clear the land and plow it, collect seeds and sow them, nurture and reap crops, thresh and prepare food.^[68] Adam and Eve become tillers of the soil as a result of the divine plan, not as a punishment.

Thus far, Malthus's retelling seems to be a narrative of progress, spurred on by the evils that give rise to good. But now he introduces a twist, which we suggest is the return of the Fall that has been erased so easily from the story thus far. The twist begins with a fourth spur to activity, which is none other than lust, or, more politely, the “unremitted excitements” needed to populate the earth.^[69] Initially, this twist is also part of the divine plan, if not the command to subdue the earth and multiply (Gen. 1:28). Or rather, the act of Providence ensures that the drive to reproduce is greater than the earth's ability to sustain the many fruits of men's loins. As a result, increasingly more of the earth becomes cultivated in order to meet the demand, and the vast numbers of people ensure that war or famine or disaster will not wipe out the population completely. But is this not a problem, given Malthus's framing of the tensions between lust and hunger, between the stronger drive to populate and the weaker need for sustenance?

Now he voices his doubts: “But it is impossible that this law can operate, and produce the effects apparently intended by the Supreme Being, without occasioning partial evil.”^[70] The evil he mentions is embodied in the misery and vice that result from lust as it runs up against hunger. Now Malthus is caught: he has constructed a story based upon the outworking of Providence, but he bumps into the obvious problem that

Providence causes evil. This is of course the key to the biblical story of the Fall, for God creates a garden, a paradise that contains the mechanism for its own undoing. Indeed, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is the narrative device that turns good to evil, thereby explaining the punishment and banishment of the first human beings from the garden. Yet, as with Grotius and Locke, the tree and its implications may also be read in a fortuitous manner. By eating from the tree, the first human beings are able to get on with their real lives; ultimately, they enable Christ to descend to earth for the sake of salvation. So good may also come from evil.

Malthus seems to want it both ways. Or rather, he quickly attempts to use the fortuitous reading to escape the implications of the negative one. Thus, evil may be generated by the desire for sex, “but a little reflection may, perhaps, satisfy us, that it produces a great overbalance of good.”^[71] “Overbalance” may be read in a stronger or weaker sense: either an overbalance of good leads to evil, or the partial evil is outweighed by the good. Malthus seems to mean the second, weaker version, but he leaves open the possibility of the stronger. Perhaps fearful of this line of thought, he soon opines: “It seems, however, every way probable that even the acknowledged difficulties occasioned by the law of population tend rather to promote than impede the general purpose of Providence.”^[72]

The lameness of this assertion is evident in the concluding reflections of the myth, which curiously urge the importance of the “middle regions of society.” Malthus makes a grand and uncharacteristic defense of the importance of the middle class, which is likened to the temperate zones of the earth or the solid timber in the middle of an oak tree. To be sure, the sun also shines on the tropics and the polar regions, and an oak tree certainly needs its roots and foliage. These extremities are necessary, just like the idle rich and the suffering poor. On them do the evils occasioned by lack of incentive (the rich) and of excess misery and vice from uncontrollable lust (the poor) descend—hence, the “partial” evil. Yet, the middle regions are best positioned to benefit from the command of the Divine Creator: “If no man could hope to rise or fear to fall, in society, if industry did not bring with it its reward and idleness its punishment, the middle parts would not certainly be what they now are.”^[73]

This stunningly mediocre and hastily penned conclusion cannot conceal the problem Malthus has broached: God creates a good that leads to evil. The suggestion that evil afflicts only some outside the middle regions or that it is a law of nature that inadvertently cuts down some in its path (much like the unwanted consequences of gravity for the one who falls from a height) cannot sidestep the problem. No matter how

hard Malthus tries to skip past this stark theological point, he must deal with it elsewhere. The much-debated excision of the last two chapters from subsequent editions of the essay on population constitutes, we suggest, one of his efforts to avoid this theological conclusion. Of course, these deletions are comprised of the overtly theological chapters where this myth is found, and their removal has led critics to propose several theories: that Malthus gave up on his theological pretensions thereafter; or that he realized the unorthodoxy of the chapters' theological views (immortality as conditional, denial of original sin, and of life as a trial); or that the deleted sections contain bad theology, largely due to his training at Cambridge, and that he subsequently learned a "better" theology under the influence of William Paley,^[74] namely, that life in this world is a testing ground for the next world; or finally, that it indicates the extraneous nature, specifically for analysis and public policy, of his theology precisely because his theological approach is coterminous with a proposed utilitarianism.^[75] None of these interpretations capture the theological problem that the urbane vicar had uncovered: God is the source of both good and evil. In fact, we suggest that his repeated efforts to retell and reshape the myth function as signals of his desperate effort to avoid the conclusion that God's goodness leads to evil. Yet this is the direction to which his entire argument tends.

Facing up to Evil

On the contrary, it must certainly be considered as an evil, and every institution that promotes it is essentially bad and impolitic.^[76]

We examine the remaining three versions of the myth together,^[77] for they exhibit the same plot line: an initial moment of ostensible paradise faces internal contradictions that lead inevitably to suffering, in response to which systemic inequality must be instituted in order to offer at least a semblance of order. The social condition that results is a far cry from the ideal state with which we began. An obvious narrative of regress, this story follows more closely the canonical presentation of the biblical story of the Fall and thereby undoes Malthus's dabbling with narratives of progress elsewhere. Paradise is lost through the inveterate evil of human beings, which must then be checked by tough sanctions. In these accounts, Malthus does not so much locate a moment at which everything comes crashing down, but an internal contradiction in paradise itself. That is, freedom, equality, happiness, innocence, and prosperity enable a people to grow without restraint. Yet, this very goodness leads to overpopulation and thereby misery and vice.

Two alternative depictions of this initial paradise appear in Malthus's text, the one drawn from the English colonies of North America and the other from the proposals of William Godwin. The former may be Malthus's own depiction, but it segues smoothly into that of Godwin. This connection produces a fold-back effect, for the harsher criticisms of Godwin's perfectible society become criticisms of Malthus's idyllic image of North America. As we indicated earlier, Godwin proposes an Eden to come, which is full of food and happiness, free of institutions and the shackles of marriage, and fostered by the advance of reason and benevolence over passions and self-interest. Yet Malthus positions this Godwinian paradise in the past and explores the mechanisms of its undoing—mechanisms that also appear in his depiction of the North American garden. We will dwell with that depiction for a while, before returning to the criticisms of Godwin.

“Thus in the beginning all the world was America,”^[78] wrote Locke some decades before Malthus. North America did seem to provide a laboratory experiment for how to begin again, to retrace one's steps from the earliest, Edenic moment to the present. It goes without saying that the English colonies provided the ideal model, so Malthus opens his account by disparaging the Spanish and Portuguese colonies in the Americas, as well as the Dutch and French colonies in the East Indies. By contrast, the English colonies operated in liberty and equality.^[79] With favorable government, the absence of primogeniture and tithes, plenty of cheap land, and the healthy activities of agriculture, these colonies were able to double the population every twenty-five years—a paradise, indeed. “These facts,” writes Malthus, “seem to shew that population increases exactly in the proportion that the two great checks to it, misery and vice, are removed, and that there is not a truer criterion of the happiness and innocence of a people than the rapidity of their increase.”^[80] Or, as he puts it a little earlier:

In a state therefore of great equality and virtue, where pure and simple manners prevailed, and where the means of subsistence were so abundant that no part of the society could have any fears about providing amply for a family, the power of population being left to exert itself unchecked, the increase of the human species would evidently be much greater than any increase that has been hitherto known.^[81]

The true mark of happiness is then the unrestricted growth of population, where the food produced is able to keep up with that growth. However, this happiness is precisely the cause of its own undoing—a dialectical trap contained within what is essentially good. The vast reservoir of food cannot forever keep up with a burgeoning population; soon enough, it begins to run short, even with the use of better agricultural techniques. Malthus fast-forwards by crossing the Atlantic back to England, thereby predicting the

troubles soon to face North America. Here, the want of room and food—together with the unwholesome towns to which people are drawn for work—lead to the double traps of misery and vice. The population must be checked (usually in brutal fashion) by famine, war, starvation, or by the wariness of people to produce more children.

At this point, we return to the critiques of Godwin that seek to show how any Eden, whether of North America or of the imagination of Godwin, must inevitably come undone. Like a prophet of doom who gains perverse pleasure from repeating his predictions of dire events to come, Malthus tells not one but two grim stories in reply to Godwin. The plot of each may be stated succinctly:

When these two fundamental laws of society, the security of property, and the institution of marriage, were once established, inequality of conditions must necessarily follow.

It has appeared that a society constituted according to Mr Godwin's system must, from the inevitable laws of our nature, degenerate into a class of proprietors and a class of labourers.^[82]

On three counts, life becomes worse: in relation to property, to marriage, and to labor. One may desire a society—whether a golden age in the past or a utopia to come—with property in common, the free availability of sex, and without the need for labor. Dream on, says Malthus, wagging his finger. For instance, free sex without the constraints of marriage would soon lead to unwelcome situations, such as broods of children roaming the earth seeking scarce food. With no recognizable fathers to provide for them, women—or perhaps society at large—would be left to care for them (not to mention the shame that attends women in this condition—Malthus cannot quite free himself from his prudish assumptions). Before long, men would realize they needed to care for their wives and children. Laws of marriage would follow so that the men could ensure that their children had sufficient food and their vulnerable wives could be protected even if they are subservient to their husbands. Readers familiar with the story of the Fall will immediately detect the presence of the curse to Eve: “your desire shall be for your man, and he shall rule over you” (Gen. 3:16, our translation).

Or take property: it is all very well to have property in common, but soon enough the inveterate greed of human beings would lead to theft, especially as food becomes scarce and people begin to hoard it. Measures would need to be instituted for the sake of public safety (measures that one happens to find in “civilized” societies of the present). These include the clear demarcation of land as private property and ensuring the inviolability of every one's property. Malthus imagines a council of wise, sober leaders who suggest precisely this solution. Yet with this account, he swiftly tosses out the hard-earned

conclusion of Locke. Property is no longer the natural outcome of God's command to subdue the earth but a direct outcome of the Fall (Gen. 3:17-19).

Or take labor: it may indeed be desirable to have no need for labor, with the whole earth and its resources allocated equally to all. However, consider for a moment what happens to the children of those to whom it is allocated. There would hardly be enough to go around once the population increased. Some people would inevitably starve: "It has appeared, that from the inevitable laws of our nature some human beings must suffer from want," opines Malthus. Indeed, these "are the unhappy persons who, in the great lottery of life, have drawn a blank."^[83] Naturally, some people would be able to appropriate more, some less. In this situation, it would—naturally—be far better if those with nothing had the opportunity to work for a pittance. The poor man has no property but his labor, so that is all he has to sell. But at least he would be able to have some access to the surplus of the proprietors, thereby surviving rather than starving.^[84] This is a rather grim account of the origins of labor, as also its division into classes. Not only does he thoroughly undermine his hollow and solitary myth of progress, as well as his suggestion that labor is the result of divine Providence, but he also spectacularly reasserts the biblical narrative of the Fall. The back-breaking labor of producing food is, like property, a punishment for disobedience.

This is an impressive achievement, for three of the six curses of Gen. 3:14-19 have been returned to economic analysis. Only the amputated limbs of the snake, its enmity with the seed of the woman, and the woman's pain in childbirth have been left aside—although one assumes that had Malthus found a way to include them, he would have done so. But is this outcome an improvement? Faithful to the dominant ideological position of the biblical narrative, Malthus is clear that it is not. Initially, he suggests that this outcome is the lesser of two evils, an evil that bears "no comparison to the black train of distresses that would inevitably be occasioned by the insecurity of property."^[85] However, he goes a step further when it comes to the division of labor and the inequalities of class:

It should be observed that the principal argument of this Essay only goes to prove the necessity of a class of proprietors, and a class of labourers, but by no means infers that the present great inequality of property is either necessary or useful to society. On the contrary, it must certainly be considered as an evil, and every institution that promotes it is essentially bad and impolitic.^[86]

Evil, bad, impolitic—it is clearly less than desirable. Malthus is obviously rather taken with this proposal, repeating it on a number of occasions.^[87] Yet, the repetitions do advance his position in a crucial direction. Let us quote him again:

And thus it appears, that a society constituted according to the most beautiful form that imagination can conceive, with benevolence for its moving principle, instead of self-love, and with every evil disposition in all its members corrected by reason and not force, would, from the inevitable laws of nature, and not from any original depravity of man, in a very short period degenerate into a society constructed upon a plan not essentially different from that which prevails in every known state at present; I mean, a society divided into a class of proprietors, and a class of labourers, and with self-love the main-spring of the great machine.^[88]

Even the most Edenic form of society, the most beautiful form that imagination can conceive, would soon fall into a far lesser state. This is a society of class differences, of haves and have-nots, of capitalists and laborers—all driven by the curse of self-interest—precisely the society we have now! England is no better than any other modern state; all share the same dire situation.^[89] Here is the flaw in the crystal: equality leads inevitably to inequality; freedom to unfreedom; happiness to unhappiness. The perpetual dialectic of progressive and retrograde movements continues,^[90] and the narrative of the Fall has the last, grim chuckle.

Conclusion: On Good and Evil

Being a staunch member of the Established Church of England [. . .].^[91]

We suggested at the beginning that Malthus is a clear example of a more theological direction out of the work of Adam Smith and troubles a now outmoded narrative of secularization. On the latter point, we suggest a more dialectical approach to the relation between secularization and religion, one that derives ultimately from Marx's observation concerning the secular state. For Marx, that state is actually the fullest realization of the Christian state, for the contradictions of the latter lead to the futile effort of resolving those contradictions in the secular state.^[92] This yields two implications for Malthus. First, Malthus's overtly theological reading presents one dialectical outcome of the drive to distance economic theory from the Bible and theology, for the two sides are inseparable. The second implication presents a more conflicted view of what may be called phases (or bursts) of secularization and then religion,^[93] which is germane to a particular Western history of the tense relationship between the two.

We return to this issue in the conclusion to the book, but here, we would like to deal with two final matters—universals and the dialectic of good and evil. Earlier, we noted the curious tendency of Malthus (and other classical economists) to speak of laws. We suggest that—apart from seeking to bolster shaky proposals—recourse to the terminology of laws indicates a universalizing move. The myths do the same, projecting grand stories of human development according to the same capitalist criteria as they see

operating in their own day. The implication is that all human beings are capitalists at heart, operating according to invariable and (for Malthus) divinely ordained “laws.” In these efforts at universalizing lie yet more seeds of the economics imperialism that plagues economic analysis today.

We close with an implication of Malthus’s argument that he seems unwilling to pursue. At various points, we have emphasized what may be called a dialectic of good and evil, in which goodness itself leads to evil. It may be God’s gift of sexual desire that leads to overpopulation and thereby misery and vice. It may be the bleak view of human nature, according to which we are fallen creatures, torn between lust and hunger, and with misery and vice as our lot. It may be the divinely ordained laws of nature that cause some to suffer more than others, bringing about a “partial evil.” It may be the institutions of modern society that seek to protect property, the partners and children in marriage, or to ensure class distinctions. The theological implication is that evil itself may be the outcome of God’s goodness—that God is responsible for both good and evil. Gone is any notion of an evil being, a Satan, or even free will as the cause of evil (Malthus barely contemplates free will, except fleetingly for the rational man). He is left with a deeply biblical and often unpalatable conclusion that the good God is not always so good. However, we would like to read this position in another way: it enables a robust doctrine of evil, a doctrine that is missing from most classical and neoclassical economists, let alone the historical materialist tradition in which we are interested. For the former, the naïve proposal that human beings seek their own advantage by whatever means possible collapses before the reality that we more often opt for what is to our detriment. Evil is often as stronger than the good, undermining the best laid plans and highest hopes. As for historical materialism—if such a political project does not account for the power of evil, it will be forced to do so at some point, often to its own detriment.

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1. Thomas Robert Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (London: J. Johnston in St. Paul’s Church-Yard, 1798), 60.↵
 2. Ricardo would pursue the latter, arguing for an even more unbridled form of capitalist accumulation.↵
 3. Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, 44, 60.↵
 4. *Ibid.*, 105.↵
 5. *Ibid.*, 87; Thomas Robert Malthus, *Principles of Political Economy Considered with a View to Their Practical Application* (Boston: Wells and Lilly, 1821), 336–38. Waterman makes this the main drive of Malthus’s infamous essay on population, targeted against supposed Jacobin radicals, such as Godwin. While helpful to a certain extent, it neglects the fact that this idea was still very much within the circles of ruling class intellectuals, a context that Waterman buys into without criticism. The real radicals among the working poor never gain a voice. Anthony Waterman, *Revolution, Economics and Religion: Christian Political Economy, 1798–1833* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).↵

6. While Foley's point that Malthus was skeptical of unbridled laissez-faire is well taken, he fails to see the sharpness of his theological position. Foley, *Adam's Fallacy: A Guide to Economic Theology*, 45–55.↵
7. Thomas Robert Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population, or a View of Its Past and Present Effects on Human Happiness; with an Inquiry Into Our Prospects Respecting the Future Removal or Mitigation of the Evils which It Occasions*, 2nd ed. (London: Johnson, 1803); Thomas Robert Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population, or a View of Its Past and Present Effects on Human Happiness; with an Inquiry Into Our Prospects Respecting the Future Removal or Mitigation of the Evils which It Occasions*, 3rd ed. (London: Johnson, 1806); Thomas Robert Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population, or a View of Its Past and Present Effects on Human Happiness; with an Inquiry Into Our Prospects Respecting the Future Removal or Mitigation of the Evils which It Occasions*, 4th ed. (London: Johnson, 1807); Thomas Robert Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population, or a View of Its Past and Present Effects on Human Happiness; with an Inquiry Into Our Prospects Respecting the Future Removal or Mitigation of the Evils which It Occasions*, 5th ed. (London: Hunter, 1817); Thomas Robert Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population, or a View of Its Past and Present Effects on Human Happiness; with an Inquiry Into Our Prospects Respecting the Future Removal or Mitigation of the Evils which It Occasions*, 6th ed. (London: Hunter, 1826).↵
8. The effort by some to negate Malthus's consistent theological concerns in favor of a utilitarian perspective is particularly unpersuasive. Salim Rashid, "Malthus' Theology: An Overlooked Letter and Some Comments," *History of Political Economy* 16, no. 1 (1984): 135–38; Lionel Charles Robbins, *The Theory of Economic Policy in English Classical Political Economy* (London: Macmillan, 1952); Samuel Hollander, *The Economics of Thomas Robert Malthus* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997). By comparison, others recognize the centrality of theology in his work. Donald Winch, "Higher Maxims: Happiness Versus Wealth in Malthus and Ricardo," in *That Noble Science of Politics: A Study in Nineteenth-Century Intellectual History*, eds. Stefan Collini, Donald Winch, and John Burrow, 63–90 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Donald Winch, *Malthus* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Donald Winch, "Robert Malthus: Christian Moral Scientist, Arch-Demoralizer or Implicit Secular Utilitarian?" *Utilitas* 5, no. 2 (1993): 239–53; J. M. Pullen, "Malthus' Theological Ideas and Their Influence on His Principle of Population," *History of Political Economy* 13 (1981): 39–54.↵
9. Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, 66.↵
10. *Ibid.*, 20, 39.↵
11. "It is to the established administration of property and to the apparently narrow principle of self-love that we are indebted for all the noblest exertions of human genius, all the finer and more delicate emotions of the soul, for everything, indeed, that distinguishes the civilized from the savage state." *Ibid.*, 91; see also Malthus, *Principles of Political Economy Considered with a View to Their Practical Application*, 2.↵
12. Thomas Robert Malthus, *The Unpublished Papers in the Collection of the Kanto Gakuen University*, eds. John Pullen and Trevor Hughes Parry, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 4.↵
13. Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, 57.↵
14. *Ibid.*, 65. Note also: "The mighty law of self-preservation expels all the softer and more exalted emotions of the soul . . . The corn is plucked before it is ripe, or secreted in unfair proportions, and the whole black train of vices that belong to falsehood are immediately generated. Provisions no longer flow in for the support of the mother with a large family. The children are sickly from insufficient food. The rosy flush of health gives place to the pallid cheek and hollow eye of misery. Benevolence, yet lingering in a few bosoms, makes some faint expiring struggles, till at length self-love resumes his wonted empire and lords it triumphant over the world." *Ibid.*, 60; see also 62, 64, 65, 91, 93.↵
15. *Ibid.*, 111.↵
16. On Malthus's career in the church, see Waterman, *Revolution, Economics and Religion: Christian Political Economy, 1798–1833*, 83–87. Waterman erroneously claims: "Save for the last two chapters of the first *Essay*

- no other writing by Malthus attests to any special interest in or competence at theology. Unlike others among his clerical colleagues at the East India College he published no volume of sermons.” Ibid., 96.↵
17. Malthus links the legal notion of ransom with propitiatory sacrifice, citing Matt. 20:28, Mark 10:45, and 1 Tim. 2:6.↵
 18. Malthus, *The Unpublished Papers in the Collection of the Kanto Gakuen University*, vol. 2, 12.↵
 19. Matt. 26:28 and 1 John 2:1–2, quoted by Malthus, *The Unpublished Papers in the Collection of the Kanto Gakuen University*, vol. 2, 13.↵
 20. Ibid., vol. 2, 13–14.↵
 21. Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, 20, 56; see also 80, 84.↵
 22. Malthus is not always consistent. Elsewhere, he takes a much weaker line, suggesting that evil and sin act as trials or spurs to human action, action that may well lead to the betterment of the human condition. Without such spurs, people would languish in torpor and laziness. Ibid., 111, 113.↵
 23. Malthus, *The Unpublished Papers in the Collection of the Kanto Gakuen University*, vol. 2, 10–11, 15, 23–24.↵
 24. “It is not easy to conceive in what manner the attention of mankind could be so strongly and so constantly directed to the evil of sin and disobedience as by the conviction that the almighty God has thought it necessary that his only begotten Son, should take our nature upon him, and suffer death upon the Cross, in order to avert those consequences which would otherwise naturally and unavoidably have followed as the wages of sin.” Ibid., vol. 2, 15.↵
 25. Ibid., vol. 2, 17.↵
 26. Pullen, “Malthus’ Theological Ideas and Their Influence on His Principle of Population.” A sermon such as this renders efforts to see Malthus as an optimist somewhat empty. Hollander, *The Economics of Thomas Robert Malthus*, 880–81, 917–48.↵
 27. Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, 31.↵
 28. Ibid., 11; see also 5, 9, 31.↵
 29. If interested, one may seek the meaning of these terms elsewhere. It is not clear whether Malthus had such refined activities in mind, but they fit his category of vice.↵
 30. Marquis de Condorcet, *Esquisse d’un tableau historique des progrès de l’esprit humain* (Paris: Masson et fils, 1795); William Godwin, *An Enquiry concerning Political Justice, and its Influence on General Virtue and Happiness* (London: G. G. & J. Robinson, 1793).↵
 31. Edward P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 2nd ed. (New York: Vintage, 1966). Waterman’s otherwise useful work makes the mistake of assuming this ruling class context and seeing the liberal reformers as “revolutionary.” Waterman, *Revolution, Economics and Religion: Christian Political Economy, 1798–1833*.↵
 32. Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, 45–95.↵
 33. Ibid., 55.↵
 34. Ibid., 84.↵
 35. Perhaps even six, if we include the brief reiteration of Smith’s foundation myth in Malthus’s *Principles of Political Economy*. However, given its derivative nature, we prefer to focus on the versions in the essay on population. Malthus, *Principles of Political Economy Considered with a View to Their Practical Application*, 41–43, 51.↵
 36. Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, 113.↵
 37. Ibid., 12–22.↵
 38. Ibid., 13.↵
 39. Ibid., 13.↵
 40. Alongside North America, the reader finds frequent comparisons and productions of the ethnic other in Central and South America, Greece, Spain, Portugal, Holland, and China. Ibid., 6–7, 12–13, 18–19, 31–33,

41, 101–2. In the later editions of the essay, expanded to three volumes, ethnocentrism is exacerbated, with attempted surveys of “checks to population” among the “lowest stages of human society,” including the North American “Indians,” the Pacific Islands, Africa, Siberia, Turkestan, “Indostan,” Persia, Tibet, China, and the “nations” of Europe. See also Malthus, *Principles of Political Economy Considered with a View to Their Practical Application*, 191, 278, 294–310. This chronic ethnocentrism is simply ignored in works on Malthus. For examples, see Hollander, *The Economics of Thomas Robert Malthus*; Waterman, *Revolution, Economics and Religion: Christian Political Economy, 1798–1833*. ↵

41. Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, 13–14.↵
42. *Ibid.*, 15.↵
43. *Ibid.*, 19.↵
44. *Ibid.*, 21–22.↵
45. *Ibid.*, 80.↵
46. *Ibid.*, 4; see also 44.↵
47. *Ibid.*, 6.↵
48. *Ibid.*, 40.↵
49. *Ibid.*, 4.↵
50. *Ibid.*, 67.↵
51. *Ibid.*, 68.↵
52. *Ibid.*, 58, 62–63.↵
53. In his very effort to frame what he calls a law of necessity, Malthus indicates the real power of the need for food: “The increase of the human species can only be kept commensurate to the increase of the means of subsistence by the constant operation of the strong law of necessity acting as a check upon the greater power.” *Ibid.*, 8.↵
54. *Ibid.*, vii, 5.↵
55. *Ibid.*, 32–44.↵
56. “In the present state of society, other considerations occur. Will he not lower his rank in life? Will he not subject himself to greater difficulties than he at present feels? Will he not be obliged to labour harder? And if he has a large family, will his utmost exertions enable him to support them? May he not see his offspring in rags and misery, and clamouring for bread that he cannot give them? And may he not be reduced to the grating necessity of forfeiting his independence, and of being obliged to the sparing hand of charity for support?” *Ibid.*, 8–9.↵
57. *Ibid.*, 44.↵
58. *Ibid.*, 29.↵
59. Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees: Or, Private Vices, Public Benefits* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1924 [1729]).↵
60. Hollander, *The Economics of Thomas Robert Malthus*, 928–29.↵
61. Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population, as it Affects the Future Improvement of Society with Remarks on the Speculations of Mr. Godwin, M. Condorcet, and Other Writers*; Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population, or a View of Its Past and Present Effects on Human Happiness; with an Inquiry Into Our Prospects Respecting the Future Removal or Mitigation of the Evils which It Occasions*, 2nd ed.; Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population, or a View of Its Past and Present Effects on Human Happiness; with an Inquiry Into Our Prospects Respecting the Future Removal or Mitigation of the Evils which It Occasions*, 3rd ed.; Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population, or a View of Its Past and Present Effects on Human Happiness; with an Inquiry Into Our Prospects Respecting the Future Removal or Mitigation of the Evils which It Occasions*, 4th ed.; Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population, or a View of Its Past and Present Effects on Human Happiness; with an Inquiry Into Our Prospects Respecting the Future Removal or Mitigation of the Evils which It Occasions*, 5th ed.;

Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population, or a View of Its Past and Present Effects on Human Happiness; with an Inquiry Into Our Prospects Respecting the Future Removal or Mitigation of the Evils which It Occasions*, 6th ed. ↴

62. Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, 11, 18. ↴
63. *Ibid.*, 9–10, 98, 101, 103–5. ↴
64. *Ibid.*, 56. ↴
65. *Ibid.*, 112. ↴
66. For Malthus, the only result of such measures is to increase poverty. Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, 24–38, 46–47. Adam Smith and David Ricardo follow the same line, which reads very much like the free market advocates in our own day, who oppose welfare on the same grounds. Elsewhere, Malthus opines that the danger of distributing the wealth of the rich among the poor would result in the inveterate laziness of the poor manifesting itself once again. *Ibid.*, 92. Give them a little extra, and they spend it on drink: “Even when they have an opportunity of saving they seldom exercise it, but all that is beyond their present necessities goes, generally speaking, to the ale-house . . . It is a general complaint among master manufacturers that high wages ruin all their workmen, but it is difficult to conceive that these men would not save a part of their high wages for the future support of their families, instead of spending it in drunkenness and dissipation.” *Ibid.*, 27–28. As Marx notes, “The parson Malthus . . . reduces the worker to a beast of burden ‘for the sake of production’ and even condemns him to death from starvation and to celibacy.” Karl Marx, *Economic Manuscript of 1861–63 (Continuation): A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, in *Marx and Engels Collected Works*, vol. 31 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1863 [1988]), 349. ↴
67. Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, 113. ↴
68. Momentarily, the Garden of Eden has almost slipped from the picture, becoming an item of mere speculation: “The Supreme Creator might, undoubtedly, raise up plants of all kinds, for the use of his creatures, without the assistance of those little bits of matter, which we call seed, or even without the assisting labour and attention of man.” *Ibid.*, 113–14. ↴
69. *Ibid.*, 114. ↴
70. *Ibid.*, 115. ↴
71. *Ibid.*, 114. ↴
72. *Ibid.*, 115. ↴
73. *Ibid.*, 116. ↴
74. William Paley, James Paxton, and John Ware, *Natural Theology* (Boston: Gould and Lincoln, 1854). ↴
75. Pullen, “Malthus’ Theological Ideas and Their Influence on His Principle of Population”; Waterman, *Revolution, Economics and Religion: Christian Political Economy, 1798–1833*, 58–150; Winch, “Higher Maxims: Happiness versus Wealth in Malthus and Ricardo”; Winch, *Malthus*; Winch, “Robert Malthus: Christian Moral Scientist, Arch-Demoralizer or Implicit Secular Utilitarian?”; Hollander, *The Economics of Thomas Robert Malthus*, 921–48. Hollander suggests that Malthus was at heart a “theological utilitarian” of the same ilk as John Gay, Francis Hutcheson, Thomas Rutherford, and William Paley. The true source of virtue, they argued, was to appeal to “man’s” selfishness, including the idea of rewards in heaven, for “man” was certainly not virtuous in and of himself. See also Viner, *The Role of Providence in the Social Order: An Essay in Intellectual History*, 70–75. ↴
76. Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, 91–92. ↴
77. *Ibid.*, 33–35, 61–65, 91–94. ↴
78. Locke, *Two Treatises of Government and A Letter Concerning Toleration*, 2.49. ↴
79. For Malthus, the only comparable situation in old societies occurs after the devastation of pestilence, war, or natural disaster. The population may be drastically reduced, but this enables them to take on paradise-like

- features, for a time, in which the happiness of a rapidly expanding population may be found. Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, 34–35, 39–40.↵
80. Ibid., 34. Note also: “The happiness of a country does not depend, absolutely, upon its poverty or its riches, upon its youth or its age, upon its being thinly or fully inhabited, but upon the rapidity with which it is increasing, upon the degree in which the yearly increase of food approaches to the yearly increase of an unrestricted population.” Ibid., 42.↵
81. Ibid., 63, 91.↵
82. Ibid., 63, 91.↵
83. Ibid., 64.↵
84. Lest one entertains the idea that the rich proprietors should give away their surplus and live at the same level of the rest of society, Malthus sagely warns that the rich are so few that such an act would make little difference, except to impoverish the rich. Perhaps aware of the somewhat shaky logic of such an argument, he adds that it would also take away the incentive to work (hunger) and thereby lead to idleness. Ibid., 92.↵
85. Ibid., 62. And again, it is “the best, though inadequate, remedy for the evils which were pressing on the society.” Ibid., 62.↵
86. Ibid., 91–92.↵
87. Ibid., 64–65, 91.↵
88. Ibid., 64–65. See also: “It has appeared that a society constituted according to Mr Godwin’s system must, from the inevitable laws of our nature, degenerate into a class of proprietors and a class of labourers, and that the substitution of benevolence for self-love as the moving principle of society, instead of producing the happy effects that might be expected from so fair a name, would cause the same pressure of want to be felt by the whole of society, which is now felt only by a part.” Ibid., 91.↵
89. His passing comment that this state of affairs is not due to an innate depravity contradicts his overall position on human nature. It may simply be due to a contradiction (not uncommon in Malthus), a desire to distance his own Church of England sensibilities from Calvinist English Puritans, or perhaps to a desire to accept—for the sake of argument—Godwin’s emphasis on the laws of nature. Waterman observes: “Either because he really believed it or simply for purposes of argument, Malthus agreed with Godwin to ignore ‘original depravity’ and to focus attention upon the ‘inevitable laws of nature.’” Waterman, *Revolution, Economics and Religion: Christian Political Economy, 1798–1833*, 42. ↵
90. Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, 9.↵
91. Marx, *Economic Manuscript of 1861–63 (Continuation): A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, 345.↵
92. Marx, “On the Jewish Question,” in *Marx and Engels Collected Works*, vol. 3, 146–74 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1844 [1975]). For the full argument, see Roland Boer, “Marx and the Christian Logic of the Secular State,” in *Secularisations and Their Debates: Perspectives on the Return of Religion in the Contemporary West*, eds. Matthew Sharpe and D. Nicholson (Heidelberg: Springer, forthcoming).↵
93. At a rather basic level, Bateman begins to see what is at stake here, but he lets it pass. Bateman, “Presidential Address: Reflections on the Secularization of American Economics”; Bateman, “In a Space of Questions: A Reflection on Religion and Economics at the Beginning of the Twenty-First Century,” 390.↵

Conclusion

We have focused on four key figures in the development of what eventually became classical economic thought: Hugo Grotius, John Locke, Thomas Malthus, and Adam Smith. Rather than engage in a grand survey of the genre known as the “History of Economic Thought,” we have chosen to dig a little deeper into the work of these four. As we began this project, we had a reasonable idea of certain key developments: that the Bible was important for Grotius and Locke, perhaps even Malthus; that debate swirled around the ambiguities of “theology” in the work of Adam Smith; that theology was sublated at a particular (although debated) moment, a sublation that set in motion a troubled period of secularization; and that the economics imperialism of today relies on a dialectical process of individualization, de-socialization, and de-historicization, a process that enables a curious imperialist universal precisely because of this reductionism.

However, we were genuinely surprised at the unexpected features revealed through close readings of their texts. To begin with, classical economic theory turns out to have been wrested from the Fall. This biblical narrative is a crucial component in the thought of Grotius, Locke, and Malthus; it even troubles Smith at a deeper, formal level. More precisely, strenuous efforts to negotiate the more troublesome aspects of the Fall take center stage in their work. These were the curses of Gen. 3:14–19, which contain the clear statements that as a result of disobedience the first human beings were made to labor for their daily bread. In the case of Grotius and Locke, they tried to sidestep the obvious implications of these texts, seeking ways to justify private property and then labor, especially the use of labor by others, as parts of the divine will, as results of the command in Gen. 1:28 to be fruitful and multiply. The reason is obvious: it would hardly be appropriate if the cornerstones of a still nascent mode of production—capitalism—were the results of a divine curse, a manifestation of the fallen nature of human beings. Only Malthus, for all his faults, was willing to face up to that sinful nature, although he saw it as a paradox of goodness. Through the divine and therefore good gifts of sexual desire and the need for subsistence, the paradox of evil emerges: misery and vice seem to be a result of divine goodness. Here, Malthus skirts risky theological territory: he has glimpsed the stark theological position in which evil is itself the dialectical outcome of goodness, of God’s gifts to the world. Despite his desperate efforts at back-pedaling, at

falling back on moral sanctions in his later revisions of the essay on population, Malthus presents in spite of himself a strong doctrine of evil. It comprises a fresh breeze in the stifling and banal assumptions of the innate goodness of human beings. And this from the one whom Marx called the sycophant of the aristocracy!

Closely related to the concern with the Fall, another surprise awaited us, namely, the obsessive concern with human nature. We should have expected this, for these writers were philosophers for whom jurisprudence (Grotius) and theology (Grotius, Locke, and Malthus) were necessary adjuncts. In addition, they found themselves part of larger debates that ranged between Hobbes's grim view and the breezily positive position of a natural benevolence characteristic of Hutcheson and others. Yet here we found a contradictory situation, for the more they asserted the universality of human nature, the more they indicated the extent to which human nature was changing. In particular, Grotius and Locke resorted to, and struggled with, the very same biblical text (Genesis 1–3) as they wrestled with the question of human nature. Since God had created human beings, the sure indication of human nature was to be found in the biblical account of that first man (but implicitly not the woman). The catch was that the image of the man presented there did not suit their agendas, so they scratched about for other texts that did. Genesis 1:28 became important, for in carrying out God's command to subdue the earth and fill it, the realities of labor and property naturally ensued. As we argued, this obsessive stress on human nature may be seen as a signal of the changes under way in that nature. The tendrils of what would come to be called capitalism were spreading ever further into daily life, with the reorganization of time, the spread of the wage relation, and the need to foster widespread acquisitiveness. In this light, avarice and greed had to be recoded as self-interest or self-love (initially balanced by beneficence); labor had to be reconceived as "free" rather than bonded; and the usury and acquisition of the ruling class had to become interest and profit. Interpreting the human condition as fallen was unacceptable, as was the idea that the results of the Fall—labor, property, interest, and profit—needed to be overcome with redemption. Another feature of this emphasis on human nature was its universalizing logic. For Grotius and Locke, what God had ordained was by definition universal. So they sought to reconfigure God's will in creation. Adam Smith was then able to pick up this universalizing logic and drop the struggle with biblical texts, infamously asserting that it is human nature to truck, barter, and exchange. Once again, Malthus represents the most intriguing figure on the matter of human nature, for he reasserts the fallen nature of human beings and thereby troubles the more benign approaches of Grotius, Locke, and Smith.

The third surprise was a consistent reworking of what can only be called the foundation myth of capitalism. To our knowledge, this myth has been analyzed in a rudimentary fashion only with regard to Adam Smith,^[1] but it has not received sustained attention in the writings of the others. So we found Grotius at work in constructing the myth, as also Locke, both of them doing so in their struggle with Genesis 1–3.^[2] In the hands of Adam Smith, the myth appears to lose its biblical sparring partner, but the very act of producing a myth, as also in the tensions between narratives of difference and of identity, places him in the same tradition. In its Smithian formulation, that myth recurs in the work of others at the time, including David Ricardo, J. S. Mill, and Malthus (in his *Principles*).^[3] More than that, myth becomes a necessary generic feature, appearing early in often voluminous studies, thereby attempting to set the scene with some “historical” narrative. We also discovered Smith to be the great storyteller, who resorts to a vignette, moral tale, saying, parable, and above all myth in the place of actual argument. Rarely, if ever, does critical work deal with such myths. By failing to do so, the narrative structures, the plot lines, and the function of myth are overlooked in the development of their theories. We defined myth’s function in terms of its capacity to foreground and attempt to resolve contradictions, to create opponents (usually racial, but also gendered and class-based), and to express a deeper truth. On that last point, the dialectical tension of myth is that it bears the conflicting senses of fiction and alternative truth, both of which are evident in the continually reworked myth of capitalism and its economic theory. As we argued, the truth in this case is the need to create a new and autonomous entity—“the economy” or “the market”—in a manner comparable to the method by which theology creates its objects of analysis.^[4] Another truth lies in the production of the market-utopia, which finds its fullest expression in Smith’s work. Or rather, the truth here is that the myth never really seeks the realization of that utopia, but prefers to focus on the necessary opponents it creates—those who continue to hinder the supposed realization and may, therefore, be sacrificed for the sake of a condition that will never exist. But this myth also offers an account that is thoroughly resistant to empirical counters; in its very language of metaphor, image, and in its narrative patterns, it provides a foundation story, a story to live by that continues to provide the ideological glue for capitalism. No matter how many economic crashes ensue, how many wars are fought for the sake of capital gain, how many environmental disasters are wrought, how many deaths follow in its wake, how many societies and cultures are destroyed—the myth sustains the enterprise. All for the sake of a market utopia whose proponents would run in terror should it ever be achieved.

A fourth feature of our analysis was the consistent presence of what we call the universal by exclusion. This false universal is already found in the struggles and assertions concerning human nature, but it also turns up in Grotius's blunt logic concerning subjective rights (as private property) and slavery; in Locke's limitations of freedom in relation to children, society, race, and women (as Pateman argued); and in the increasing racism of the ethnocentric proposals of Smith and Malthus. In each case, the logic is inescapably similar: a claim concerning "all" must define the boundaries of that "all," must exclude the majority from the universal claim. On this matter, we drew from Domenico Losurdo's analysis of liberalism. It is not merely the case that nascent liberalism imperfectly claimed freedom and equality for all; that it asserted human beings naturally engage in trucking, bartering, and exchanging; and that it claimed private property was a natural right of all. According to this understanding, the slogans were correct, but they still await their full realization. They are, if you will, ideals to which human society strives. For Losurdo, liberalism must exclude the majority, even if it needs to shift the location of that majority. In the cases of Grotius, Locke, Smith, and Malthus, the "all" is limited to the men of a certain class in European colonial centers. Women need not bother—nor need slaves, children, and the "savage" and "barbarian" people that swarm over the globe. In all this, Locke inadvertently reveals this necessary logic of liberalism in his struggles over the relationship between the state of nature and civilized society. As we argued, it is difficult to find anyone in Locke's analysis who is completely free and equal, with full rights to private property. Like the mythical serpent, the Egyptian and Greek Ouroboros, liberalism ultimately consumes itself.

All this should reveal the lie of economics imperialism—the claim that the basic principles of economics determine the actions of all human beings. That is, how do human beings seek to better their own condition in a situation of scarcity? Here self-interest as an unwitting social good comes into play, as do comparative advantage in decision making and the ultimate rationality of the choices we make. Here, too, we encounter the assertion of the basic principle of equilibrium when that curious creation, the market, is left to itself. Ultimately, all decisions are economic decisions, or so the economics imperialists would have us believe. These basic criteria can then be applied freely to just about anything, including psychology, culture, and religion. Thus, religion becomes a marketplace that influences individual choices and institutional developments. The problem with this imperialism should be clear: the chronic specificity of the creation of these theories indicates that they are far from universal—that they are anything but human nature for all.

We would like to add another dimension to this argument. As we indicated in the introduction, it derives from the dialectical process explored in the work of Fine and Milonakis. Thus, the necessary precursor to economics imperialism was the gradual process in classical and neoclassical economic theory of focusing on the private individual by removing not only the social and historical conditions of such an individual, but also by denying the conditions of that theory itself—in short, individualization, de-socialization, and de-historicization. This means not merely that the initial social, political, and juridical concerns of the classical economists were gradually stripped down to produce a “scientific” discipline festooned with mathematical formulae that studied the given data of economic life—or, as Wallerstein puts it, economics took the form of a university discipline in which “the Western world studied itself, explained its own functioning, the better to control what was happening.”^[5] It also means that the process of reductionism was necessary for the claim to universal status of its propositions, a tendency already noticeable in Adam Smith. Only when one has suppressed all the signs of the specificity of one’s discipline does it become possible to claim a universal status. That is, reductionism is the prerequisite of this type of universalism. It may also be called an imperialist universal: all the world is the same as us, since we control that world.

Our contribution to this sharp analysis of economics imperialism—which Fine and Milonakis see emerging in full form only in the 1980s with the supposed “rolling back” of communism—is to indicate that economics imperialism also required an apparent de-biblicization. While the Bible was central for Grotius and Locke (as well as Pufendorf, Hobbes, and a host of lesser lights), it hardly appears in the works of Smith, Ricardo, or J. S. Mill. Biblical authority seemed to lose the hold it had on earlier thinkers, to the extent that one no longer needed to engage with the Bible in developing positions on economics, law, government, and so on. There is nothing remarkable about this, for the formation of distinct intellectual disciplines initially involved an adolescent rebellion against the tutelage of biblical authority, mediated by the church, followed by a maturity in which the disciplines in question claimed their independence.^[6] The forms of analysis may still contain traces of that earlier dependence, but the content has been well and truly discarded. We would add that in the place of God—or of the church that had abandoned the child on its path to maturity—each discipline found it necessary to project another being in its place, a topic of analysis that claimed to be the world as it is. For economics, this was “the economy.” However, pushing this analysis further, we would like to point out that the process of de-biblicization was another dimension of the

long process of reduction, to be added to the process of individualization, de-socialization, and de-historicization traced by Fine and Milonakis. The Bible, too, once formed a distinctly specific mark of the emergence of classical economics, a clear signal of the particular social, historical, and ideological moment. When the particular biblical nature of those earlier debates had been excised from analysis, as so many quirky concerns of the critics in question, the specific conclusions they had attained could gradually be universalized with a calm and rather astonishing ignorance concerning the nature of that origin. In other words, de-biblicization contributed in its own way to provide the basis for the economics materialism of today. So we find it rather ironic that economics imperialism claims to provide ways of analyzing religion, theology, and the Bible (among many other targets) with supposedly universal questions that actually arose in struggles over biblical texts.

Yet, it would be a mistake to see this reading as yet another version of the narrative of secularization. We have Malthus to thank for troubling such an effort, which is one of the reasons we ended our discussion with him. He is less a relic of an earlier age and more of reminder that the conventional and linear model of secularization does not stand up to scrutiny. What does Malthus mean for the conventional understanding of secularization, especially considering the strong doctrine of evil embodied in his Christological emphasis on propitiatory atonement? We suggest that his specific contribution may be seen as a signal that any moment of secularization is partial and tentative, impermanent, and dialectically related to its religious other. The tentative nature of the secularization of economic theory may easily be seen in the conflicting efforts to identify precisely when it took place. Did it begin somewhere between Locke and Smith, only to be fully realized at some point between the early-nineteenth-century and the end of the First World War?^[7] The impermanence of the process shows up in the constant tendency of religion to reassert its presence in debates. It may surface in Malthus, who comes after the transitional work of Smith, or even in Viner in the 1970s, or in the recent spate of looser efforts to analyze the religious dimension of economic theory. Each manifestation leads to a more dialectical approach in the patterns of secularization and desecularization (following the inspiration of Marx), in which the former is an effort to deal with the contradictions generated by a religious framework, only to produce a new set of problems at another level that, in turn, require a period in which religion returns in an effort to deal with those problems. So we find waves of secularization that may wash over a culture for a time, only to recede once again in the face of explicit engagements with religion in a way that indicates neither process is irreversible. A dialectical reading

also indicates that the religious and secular modes of economic theory are inseparable from one another. In other words, secularization by its very definition, requires another that it seeks to drive from the field. The catch is that the apparent enemy is never entirely defeated, for it bides its time only to storm back again whenever the opportunity arises. Malthus usefully reminds us of this pattern in relation to economic theory, whether classical or neoclassical.

We close on a slightly different note. As we indicated in the introduction, we found much of the material on classical economics, as well as the secondary literature written on the relations between religion and economics, quite dreadful. It is with a sense of relief, then, that we turn once again to Marx. It is no wonder he became exasperated with so much of the material we have discussed; no wonder he found it opaque and lacking in depth; no wonder he swore and cursed (as his notebooks indicate) while puffing on yet another cigar. For some serious economic theory, in which religion is transformed to become a core feature of the analysis of capitalism, we need to turn to Marx's detailed and profound analysis.



1. David Graeber, *Debt: The First 5,000 Years* (New York: Melville House, 2011), 23–28.↵
2. Grotius himself was probably drawing on strands of earlier material, especially among the classical authors of whom he was so keen. Yet, his construction from those strands is unique.↵
3. Thomas Robert Malthus, *Principles of Political Economy Considered with a View to Their Practical Application* (Boston: Wells and Lilly, 1821), 41–43, 51; David Ricardo, *The Works and Correspondence of David Ricardo*, vol. 1, *On the Principles of Political Economy and Taxation*, edited by Piero Sraffa (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2004 [1817]), 12–13, 22–29, 112; John Stuart Mill, *Principles of Political Economy*, in *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, vol. 2–3 (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1963 [1848]), 11–20, 25–26.↵
4. Stanley Hauerwas, "Economics and Antagonisms," *History of Political Economy* 43, no. 2 (2011): 413–16. To an extent, Foley also puts forward this argument. Duncan K. Foley, *Adam's Fallacy: A Guide to Economic Theology* (Cambridge: Belknap, 2006).↵
5. Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System IV: Centrist Liberalism Triumphant, 1789–1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 264.↵
6. Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 175–76.↵
7. So we find proposals that it was completed after the Cambridge School of the early-nineteenth-century or with Alfred Marshall at the close of the century, or possibly after 1918. Critics are not quite sure. Anthony Waterman, *Revolution, Economics and Religion: Christian Political Economy, 1798–1833* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Alfred Marshall, *Principles of Economics* (London: Macmillan, 1890); Bradley Bateman, "Presidential Address: Reflections on the Secularization of American Economics," *Journal of the History of Economic Thought* 30, no. 1 (2008): 1–20.↵

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