

The Bourgeois Virtues: Ethics for an Age of Commerce

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University of Chicago Press
2006

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Contents (* = selected here)

*Preface

Acknowledgements

Apology: A Brief for the Bourgeois Virtues

*I. Exordium: The Good Bourgeois

II. Narratio: How Ethics Fell

III. Probatio A: Modern Capitalism Makes Us Richer

IV. Probatio B: And Lets Us Live Longer

V. Probatio C: And Improves Our Ethics

VI. Refutatio: Anti-Capitalism is Bad For Us

VII. Peroratio

Appeal

1 The Very Word "Virtue"

"Virtue ethics" says that acting well is not a matter of finding the most general ethical rule but of finding stories for a good character. Can a bourgeois person be virtuous?

2 The Very Word "Bourgeois"

"Bourgeois" is used here for the middle class: haute, petite, and the angry clerisy sprung from it, too.

3 On Not Being Spooked by the Word "Bourgeois"

"Bourgeois" need not be a term of contempt.

Part 1:

The Christian and Feminine Virtues 1: Love

- 4 **The First Virtue: Love Profane and Sacred**
Ethics comes from stories. Love stories, for example.
- 5 **Love and the Transcendent**
Love is for people; but it is love for Art, Science, Nature, God, too.
- 6 **Sweet Love vs. Interest**
Loving is not the same thing as "maximizing utility."
- 7 **Bourgeois Economists Against Love**
Some economists mistake this. Adam Smith did not.
- 8 **Love and the Bourgeoisie**
Capitalism requires love.
- 9 **Solidarity Regained**
The market has not eroded love.

Part 2: The Christian and Feminine Virtues 2: Faith and Hope

- 10 **Faith as Identity**
The other "theological virtues," besides love, also figure in any human society, even a commercial one. For instance, faith – who you are.
- 11 **Hope and Its Banishment**
Hope in a commercial society is mobility. Its transcendent version makes the clerisy uneasy.
- 12 **Against the Sacred**
Religious hope and faith were disdained by some, 1700 to the present. But other faiths and hopes expanded.
- 13 **Van Gogh and the Transcendent Profane**
Thus for example Vincent van Gogh, who was hopeful, not crazy.
- 14 **Humility and Truth**
Such "theological" virtues – faith, hope, and love – show themselves even in some economists, and in any good scientist.
- 15 **Economic Theology**
Economics needs a theology. In fact, it already is a theology

Part 3: The Pagan and Masculine Virtues: Courage, with Temperance

- 16 **The Good of Courage**
Courage is modeled by Achilles or Odysseus. The stories are myths, in the double sense: culturally important tales; and false in detail and sometimes in spirit. A bourgeois army is a contradiction, as at Srebrenica.
- 17 **Anachronistic Courage in the Bourgeoisie**
Yet bourgeois men have adopted the mythical histories of knights and cowboys as their definition of masculinity.
- 18 **Taciturn Courage Against the "Feminine"**

For example they have taken taciturnity as a marker of masculinity, against the talk-talk of the marketplace. Male bourgeois writers in America came to need a way of distinguishing themselves from women. Therefore they adopted a nostalgia for the silent, violent hero.

19 Bourgeois vs. Queer

And they needed to distinguished themselves from homosexuals, a big project in American literature and in English, German, and American law.

20 Balancing Courage

The outcome was some generations of courage-loving men, especially those of the Greatest Generation, modeling their behavior in business on myths of aristocracy. But Temperance is a virtue, too.

Part 4:

**The Androgynous Virtues:
Prudence and Justice**

21 Prudence is a Virtue

Prudence makes other virtues work, and is proper benevolence towards the self.

22 The Monomania of Immanuel Kant

The other, Kantian system that has replaced virtue ethics in the thinking of philosophers in the past two centuries was built on an excess of Justice: The Maxim.

23 The Storied Character of Virtue

We do good mainly by story and example, not by maxim.

24 Evil as Imbalance, Inner and Outer

Virtue ethics emphasizes balances in the soul and in the society: temperance and justice.

25 The Pagan-Ethical Bourgeois

The four pagan virtues, like the three Christian, can fit a commercial society, as in Amsterdam's City Hall.

Part 5:

Systematizing the Seven Virtues

26 The System of the Virtues

The virtues fit together, sacred to profane, feminine to masculine.

27 A Philosophical Psychology?

Modern positive psychology comes to the same conclusion, near enough.

28 Ethical Striving

The approach to good is like the approach to truth. The two depend on each other and on the characters we shape in our stories.

29 Ethical Realism

The ethical is "real," all right.

30 Against Reduction

Kantianism assumes identity is already formed, and utilitarianism ignores identity entirely. We need ethical identities, partly given, partly taken.

31 Character(s)

The identities for example can be aristocratic, peasant, priestly, or bourgeois.

32 Anti-Monism Again

Virtue ethics is better than Kantianism.

33 Why Not One Virtue?

Aristotelianism is better than Platonism.

34 Dropping the Virtues, 1532-1958

The West used the Seven Virtues until Machiavelli made an art of the state. Latterly even moralists like Jane Austen or George Orwell have disdained systems of the virtues.

35 Other Lists

Many other lists lack discipline.

36 Eastern and Other Ways

The Confucian discipline is similar to Western virtue ethics, though not identical.

37 Needing Virtues

The amoralism of the cynics Nietzsche, Holmes, Posner is a pose.

Part 6:

The Bourgeois Uses of the Virtues

38 P & S and the Capitalist Life

The Profane and the Sacred both work in capitalism.

39 Sacred Reasons

The sacred motivates the market for Art, of course; but it figures in most markets.

40 Not by P Alone

The Sacred is bigger than economists think.

41 The Myth of Modern Rationality

The novelty and extent of rationality in capitalism is usually exaggerated.

42 God's Deal

But the Sacred need not drive out Prudence.

43 Necessary Excess?

Greed is not necessary for a capitalist economy to prosper.

44 Good Work

Capitalistic work is consistent with religious values.

45 Wage Slavery

And capitalistic production is not dehumanization.

46 The Rich

Even successful capitalists can be virtuous.

47 Good Barons

Profit is good, not bad, for our persons and our souls.

*48 The Anxieties of Bourgeois Virtues

So the bourgeoisie can be good. Usually it is good. And yet it worries.

Postscript: The Unfinished Case for Bourgeois Virtues

List of Works Cited

Preface

While on an airplane reading John Casey's *Pagan Virtue: An Essay in Ethics* (1990), then recently published, it struck me suddenly that bourgeois virtue needed a similar treatment. Maybe it was the thinness of the air. I took out my primitive laptop and hammered away. The flight attendant asked me to quiet down. Out of the hammered notes came an essay, "Bourgeois Virtue" (1994), in *The American Scholar*.

Age fifty or so, my second education began. As Peter Dougherty put it in a book with a theme similar to mine, a few economists now understand the blessed Adam Smith's "lesser known, yet surpassingly powerful, civic, social, and cultural legacy, lodged in the phrase 'moral sentiments'."¹ We few – lagging many decades behind sociologists and social psychologists and literary folk – have finally noticed the ethical soil in which an economy grows. We came to the understanding through economic history (my own case) or game theory, through experimental economics or economic policy, through confrontations with personal faiths, political and religious. A theory of moral sentiments beyond utilitarianism requires stepping outside of economics. You can see it better there.

As you will soon realize, though, even an economist with some historical and rhetorical and philosophical interests is badly educated for moralizing the bourgeois life. I discovered that the story of the demoralization of our economic theories, and the hope for their remoralization, was about much more than the internal history of economics or of economists or even of the economy. To tell the Adam-Smithian story of bourgeois virtues required schooling in ethics, theology, classics, poetry, sociology, social psychology, literary history, art history, intellectual history, philosophy, and twenty other fields in which I am embarrassingly far from expert.

The present book tells what the "virtues" are and how they flourish – or wither – in a commercial society. The next, *Bourgeois Towns: How a Capitalist Ethic Grew in the Dutch and English Lands, 1600-1800*, will tell how in the 17th and 18th centuries the virtues fared theoretically and practically in northwestern Europe, and with what consequences for the 19th century, material and spiritual. *The Treason of the Clerisy: How Capitalism Was Demoralized in the Age of Romance* will tell of the sad turn after 1848 against the bourgeoisie by the artists and intellectuals of Europe and its offshoots. It too had consequences, among them August 1914 and October 1917. And *Defending the Defensible: The Case for an Ethical Capitalism* will tell how bourgeois values have on balance helped rather than hurt the poor and the culture and the environment. The four books propose a fresh start in our attitudes – or at any rate the clerisy's attitudes – towards how we earn a living.

¹ Dougherty, *Who's Afraid of Adam Smith?*, 2002, p. xi.

A wise historian said, "Study problems, not periods." All right: the present book asks, "How are the virtues relevant, if they are, to a bourgeois life?" The second asks, "How did Europe and its offshoots become pro-bourgeois yet anti-virtuous, 1600-1800?" The third, "How did the Europeans become anti-bourgeois, though still anti-virtuous, after 1848?" And the fourth, "How can we regain a virtuous respect for who we are, bourgeois and capitalist and commercial nowadays, all?"

To put it another way, using the vocabulary that we Americans have heard so much during recent elections, the project is to explain the Red States to the Blue. *Ad bellum purificandum*, as Kenneth Burke once put it, to make our differences less lethal. Or it is to explain the Midwest and South to the East and West, the Flyover States to the Coasties. The conservatives to the progressives. Or, in an older vocabulary, to explain America to Europe. Or still older, Rome to Greece.

I.) Exordium: The Good Bourgeois

I bring good news about our bourgeois lives. You will find here, in the vocabulary of Christianity, from the Greek for the defendant's side in a trial, an "apology" for capitalism in its American form.

I do not mean "I'm sorry." The book is an *apologia* in the theological sense of giving reasons, with room for doubt, directed to non-believers. It is directed towards you who are suspicious of the phrase "bourgeois virtues," pretty sure that it is a contradiction in terms. And the book is directed, with less optimism about changing your minds, towards you who think the phrase is worse: a lie.

"Bourgeois virtues" is neither. The claim here is that modern capitalism does not need to be offset to be good. Capitalism can on the contrary be virtuous. In a fallen world the bourgeois life is not perfect. But it's better than any available alternative. American capitalism needs to be inspirited, moralized, completed. Two-and-a-half cheers for the Midwestern bourgeoisie.

Of course, like an aristocracy or a priesthood or a peasantry or a proletariat or an intelligentsia, a middle class is capable of evil, even in a God-blessed America. The American bourgeoisie beginning in the late 19th century organized official and unofficial apartheid. It

conspired against unions. It supported the excesses of nationalism. It delighted in red baiting and queer bashing. It claimed credit for a religious faith that had no apparent influence on its behavior. The country club is not an ethical graduate school. Nowhere does being bourgeois ensure ethical behavior. During the Second World War Krupp, Bosch, Hoechst, Bayer, Deutsche Bank, Daimler Benz, Dresdner Bank, and Volkswagen, all of them, used slave labor, with impunity. The bourgeois bankers of Switzerland stored gold for the Nazis. Many a businessman is an ethical shell or worse. Even the virtues of the bourgeoisie, Lord knows, do not lead straight to Heaven.

But the assaults on the alleged vices of the bourgeoisie and capitalism after 1848 made an impossible Best into the enemy of an actual Good. They led in the 20th century to some versions of Hell. In the 21st century, please—dear Lord, please—let us avoid another visit to Hell.

I don't much care how "capitalism" is defined, so long as it is not defined a priori to mean vice incarnate. The pre-judging definition was favored by Rousseau—though he did not literally use the word "capitalism," still to be coined—and by Proudhon, Marx, Bakunin, Kropotkin, Luxembourg, Veblen, Goldman, Polanyi. Less obviously the same definition was used by their opponents Bentham, Ricardo, Rand, Friedman, Becker. All of them, left and right, defined commercial society at the outset to be bad by any standard higher than successful greed.

Such a definition makes pointless an inquiry into the good and bad of modern commercial society. I think this is what recent economic students of institutions such as Douglass North have been seeing: that there's something going on 1500 AD to the present beyond Maximum Utility on a narrow definition. That is what the middle ground of social thinking in the past three centuries, with which I associate myself, has believed: Montesquieu, Smith, Tocqueville, Keynes, Aron, Hirschman. If modern capitalism is defined to be the same thing as Greed—"the restless never-ending process of profit-making alone. . . , this boundless greed after riches," as Marx put it in Chapter 1 of *Capital*, drawing on an anti-commercial theme originating in Aristotle—then that settles it, before looking at the evidence.

There's no evidence, actually, that greed or miserliness or self-interest was new in the 16th or the 19th or any other century. *Auri sacra fames*, "for gold the infamous hunger," is from *The Aeneid*, Book III, line 57, not from Benjamin Franklin or Advertising Age. The propensity to truck and barter is human nature. Commerce is not some evil product of recent manufacture. Commercial behavior is one of the world's oldest professions. We have documentation of it from the earliest cuneiform writing, in clay business letters from Kish or Ashur offering compliments to your lovely wife and making a deal for copper from Anatolia or lapis lazuli from Afghanistan. Bad and good behavior in buying low and selling high can be found anywhere, any time.

You can see that I am wishy-washy and empirical, not pure and rationalist about "capitalism." As Kwame Anthony Appiah said about a similar messiness in the word "liberalism," it seems wise to use a "loose and baggy sense."² We can't do with philosophical definition a job that needs to be done with factual inquiry. Better stay baggy. Suppose we knew at the outset the Real Essence of capitalism. Then we would already have answered by philosophical magic the chief question of the social sciences – why is the world today so very different from that of our ancestors? And we would have answered too the chief question of the humanities – is our human life good, evil, or indifferent? I think we're unlikely to make progress in answering either question if we insist at the outset that "capitalism" just means Modern Greed.

To put the matter positively, we have been and can be virtuous and commercial, liberal and capitalist, democratic and rich, all these. As John Mueller said in a book in 1999 anticipating my theme, *Capitalism, Democracy, and Ralph's Pretty Good Grocery*, "democracy and capitalism, it seems, are similar in that they can often work pretty well even if people generally do not appreciate their workings very well."³

One of the ways capitalism works "pretty well," Mueller and I and a few other loony pro-capitalists such as Michael Novak and James Q. Wilson and Hernando De Soto and the late Robert Nozick claim, is to nourish the virtues. Mueller argues for the one direction of causation: "virtue is, on balance and all other things being equal, essentially smart business under capitalism: nice guys, in fact, tend to finish first."⁴ Max Weber had a century earlier written to the same effect: "along with clarity of vision and ability to act, it is only by virtue [note the word] of very definite and highly developed ethical qualities that it has been possible for [an entrepreneur of this new type] to command the indispensable confidence of his customers and workmen."⁵

Yes. Countries where stealing rather than dealing rules become poor and then remain so. The historical anthropologist Alan Macfarlane explains the "riddle of the modern world" in such terms. What was odd about Northwestern Europe in the 18th century, he says, is that it escaped from "predatory tendencies" common to every "agrarian civilization" since the beginning. Because of a change in the technology of war, Northwestern Europe escaped for a time external predation from the Steppe, "but equally important, [it escaped] internal predation . . . of priests, lords, kings, and even over-powerful merchant guilds."⁶

It doesn't matter what kind of predation/stealing it is – socialist stealing such as in Cuba, or private/governmental stealing such as in Haiti, or bureaucratic stealing such as in the

² Appiah, *Ethics of Identity*, 2005, p. xi.

³ Mueller, *Capitalism, Democracy*, 1999, p. 17.

⁴ Mueller, *Capitalism, Democracy*, 1999, p. 7.

⁵ Weber, *Protestant Ethic*, 1904-05, p. 69.

⁶ Macfarlane, *Riddle of the Modern*, 2000, p. 271.

Egypt of today or of ancient times, or for that matter stealing at the point of a sword in France during the Hundred Years' War or stealing at the point of a cross in Germany during the Thirty Years' War or stealing at the point of a pen by CEOs in America during the 1990s. By doing evil we do badly. And we do well by doing good.

But I go further. Capitalism, I claim, nourishes lives of virtue in the non-self-interested sense, too. The more common claim is that virtues support the market. Yes, I agree. Other economists have started to admit so. It's been hard, because it's against our professional impulse to reduce everything, simply everything, to prudence without other virtues.

But I say further that the market supports the virtues.⁷ As the economist Alfred Marshall put it in 1890, "man's character has been molded by his every-day work, and the material resources which he thereby procures, more than by any other influence unless it be that of his religious ideals; and the two great forming agencies of the world's history have been the religious and the economic."⁸ The two are connected. If one is persuaded a priori to find the economy wholly corrupting — "the restless never-ending process of profit-making alone" — then of course no virtues or religious influences can come of it. But such an opinion doesn't fit our experience.

A little farmers' market opens before 6:00 am on a summer Saturday at Polk and Dearborn in Chicago. As a woman walking her dog passes the earliest dealer setting up his stall, the woman and the dealer exchange pleasantries about the early bird and the worm. The two people here are enacting a script of citizenly courtesies and of encouragement for prudence and enterprise and good relations between seller and buyer. Some hours later the woman feels impelled to buy \$1.50 worth of tomatoes from him. But that's not the point. The market was an occasion for virtue, an expression of solidarity across gender, social class, ethnicity.

In other words, markets and the bourgeois life are not always bad for the human spirit. In certain ways, and on balance — and here I take up themes articulated by 18th-century theorists of capitalism, and in the late 20th century by Wendy McElroy, Daniel Klein, Paul Heyne, Peter Hill, Jennifer Roback Morse, and Tyler Cowen — they have been good. We have sometimes become good by doing well.

Are such propositions true? "What is truth?" asked jesting Pilate. Stay, I beg you, for an answer, the apology. In the early 1990s, a month before the presentation of an early version to the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton, the secretary of the School of Social Science telephoned me in far Iowa and asked me for the title. I replied, "Bourgeois Virtue." She paused — startled it seemed, and then. . . laughed. My purpose is to examine her laughter, with sympathy but with attention, to find where it is justified and especially where it is not.

⁷ Mueller disagrees: *Capitalism, Democracy*, 1999, p. 83ff.

⁸ Marshall's *Principles*, 1890 (1920), Bk. I, Chp. I in paragraph 1, p. 1.

Flocks of literate people East and West, left and right, would think her laughter very well justified. They are my implied readers, people who think that capitalism is probably rotten, and who believe that a claim to bourgeois "virtues," of all things, is laughable.

Such a laughing sophisticate would not be a Pakistani-British shop-owner, say, or a Norwegian-American electrical contractor. Such people have actually lived the bourgeois virtues, and some of the bourgeois vices, too. They would find an apology, or even an *apologia*, lacking in point. "What's to apologize for? What's to defend in our lives? We came to Bradford in Yorkshire or to St. Joseph in Michigan and made good livings, honestly."

My implied readers are instead the theoreticians and the followers of theoreticians, what Coleridge and I call the "clerisy," opinion-makers and opinion-takers, all the reading town, the readers of *The New York Times* or *Le Monde*, listeners to Charlie Rose, book readers, or at any rate book-review readers. My people. Like me.

Many of them—the people I am mainly anxious to chat with here—take it as given, undiscussably obvious, that "bourgeois virtues" is an oxymoron on the level of "military intelligence" or "academic administration." "Many persons educated in the humanities (with their aristocratic traditions)," writes Michael Novak of the problem, "and the social sciences (with their quantitative, collectivist traditions) are uncritically anticapitalists. They think of business as vulgar, philistine, and morally suspect."⁹ They have stopped listening to the other side. If a channel click accidentally gives them a glimpse, they wax indignant, and hurry away.

If politically speaking they are on the Hampstead-Village/Santa-Monica left wing the members of the clerisy believe that capitalism and profit are evil, that the American soul has been corrupted by markets and materialism, and that the enrichment of the West depends on stealing from the Third World or the poor or the Third-World poor. "We—the middle classes, I mean, not just the rich—have neglected you," confessed the economic historian and settlement-house pioneer Arnold Toynbee in 1883 to an audience of working men. "But I think we are changing. If you will only believe it and trust us, I think that many of us would spend our lives in your service. . . . You have to forgive us, for we have wronged you; we have sinned against you grievously."¹⁰

If by contrast the doubters are on the City-of-London/Wall-Street right they believe that capitalism and profit are good for business but have nothing to do with ethics, that the poor should shut up and settle for what they get, and that we certainly don't need a preacherly ethic of sin and service for a commercial society. They think Jesus got it all wrong in the Sermon on the Mount. They reply as the English businessman did when Friedrich Engels, also a

⁹ Novak, *Business as a Calling*, 1996, p. 7.

¹⁰ Jones, *Christian Social Revival*, 1968, p. 85f, n.2

businessman, harangued him one day on the horrors of an industrial slum: "And yet there is a great deal of money made here. Good morning, sir."

And if they are in the middle, bobos in paradise, nowadays the south-of-the-Thames clerisy, the Montgomery-County suburbanites, the Tokyo commuters, they believe moderate versions of both sides. Anyway they agree with the harder folk to the left or right about the laughably non-ethical character of capitalism. As Mort Sahl put it, "Liberals feel unworthy of their possessions. Conservatives feel they deserve everything they've stolen."

Thus from the left André Comte-Sponville, a teacher of philosophy at the Sorbonne, who doesn't really claim to know much about economics, feels confident in declaring without argument that "Western prosperity depends, directly or indirectly, on Third World poverty, which the West in some cases merely takes advantage of and in others actually causes."¹¹ This is mistaken, though I myself would not claim, understand, that every Western policy is ethical. Even a defender of capitalism thinks that protection for Western agriculture against Third-World farmers, for example, is decidedly unethical.

Or from the center-left James Boyd White, a teacher of law and literature at the University of Michigan, from whom I have been learning for decades, declares that "economic 'growth,' that is to say, the expansion of the exchange system by the conversion of what is outside it into its terms . . . is a kind of steam shovel chewing away at the natural and social world."¹² This too is mistaken – not that I think everything marketed, understand, is good. College term papers and Asian children are for sale, and shouldn't be. I told you I was wishy washy.

Or from the conservative right John Gray, a political philosopher at the London School of Economics, who doesn't really claim to know much about empirical sociology, yet from whom I have also learned a good deal, feels confident in declaring that recent neo-liberal theory "failed to anticipate that among the unintended consequences of its policy of freeing up markets was a fracturing of communities, and a depletion of ethos and trust within institutions, which muted or thwarted the economic renewal which free markets were supposed to generate."¹³ Mistaken again – not that all consequences of markets are desirable.

Or from another version of the right, the libertarian version, any one of my fellow Chicago-School economists who don't really claim to know much about philosophy or the Middle Ages – Friedman, Becker, Barro, step forward – would protest, "Philosophy? What scientist needs that? Ethics? Bosh. I'm a positive scientist, not a preacher. Capitalism is

¹¹ Comte-Sponville, *On the Virtues*, 1996, p. 89. The fount of such views in France was Merleau-Ponty. Compare Aron, *Memoirs*, 1983, p. 216: when Merleau-Ponty writes in 1947 "as though it were an obvious truth, that 'the moral and material civilization of England presupposes the exploitation of colonies,' he flippantly resolves a still open question."

¹² J. B. White, *Justice as Translation*, 1989, p. 71.

¹³ Gray, *False Dawn*, 1998, p. 36.

efficient, which is all I preach. Who needs faith? Put your faith in Prudence Only." Mistaken yet again – not that all philosophy is useful.

I suggest gently to such people, my good friends of the clerisy left, center, and right who believe bourgeois life must be unethical, that they might possibly be making a mistake when they attribute amorality to markets. I am attempting here a *Summa contra gentiles*, a treatise on the virtues of capitalism directed at people who believe it has very few. The book and its sequels will try to disestablish their pessimism, which since about 1848 has been the high orthodoxy of the West. "I do not welcome the fact that most people I know and respect disagree with me," said Robert Nozick in 1974, making as a philosopher a point similar to mine.¹⁴ But it is our duty nonetheless to give it the old college try.

Note well that some parts of the orthodoxy are shared by left and right and center. Each politics has its own special topics of dismay or celebration concerning capitalism. But they use topics in common, too. The left believes capitalism is a matter of Prudence understood as ruthless self-interest, and therefore is an ethical catastrophe. The right also believes that capitalism is a matter of Prudence understood as ruthless self-interest – but it believes on the contrary that capitalism therefore is a practical triumph. I claim in what follows that neither left nor right, neither the Department of English nor the country club – nor the center, eyeless in Starbucks, uneasily ruminating on morsels taken from both sides – is seeing bourgeois life whole.

Capitalism is not a matter of Prudence Only. It has not followed Prudence Only over its short history as the ruling ideology of our economies. Prudence Only is not how it actually works. Property is not theft – yet neither is property everything there is. Ruthless self-interest is not the life of capitalists – yet neither is every capitalist ethical. Bourgeois life has not in practice, I claim, excluded the other virtues. In fact, it has nourished them.

¹⁴ Nozick, *Anarchy, State, 1974*, p. x.

Chapter 26

The System of the Virtues

The principal ends of human acts are God, self, and others, since we do whatever we do for the sake of one of these.

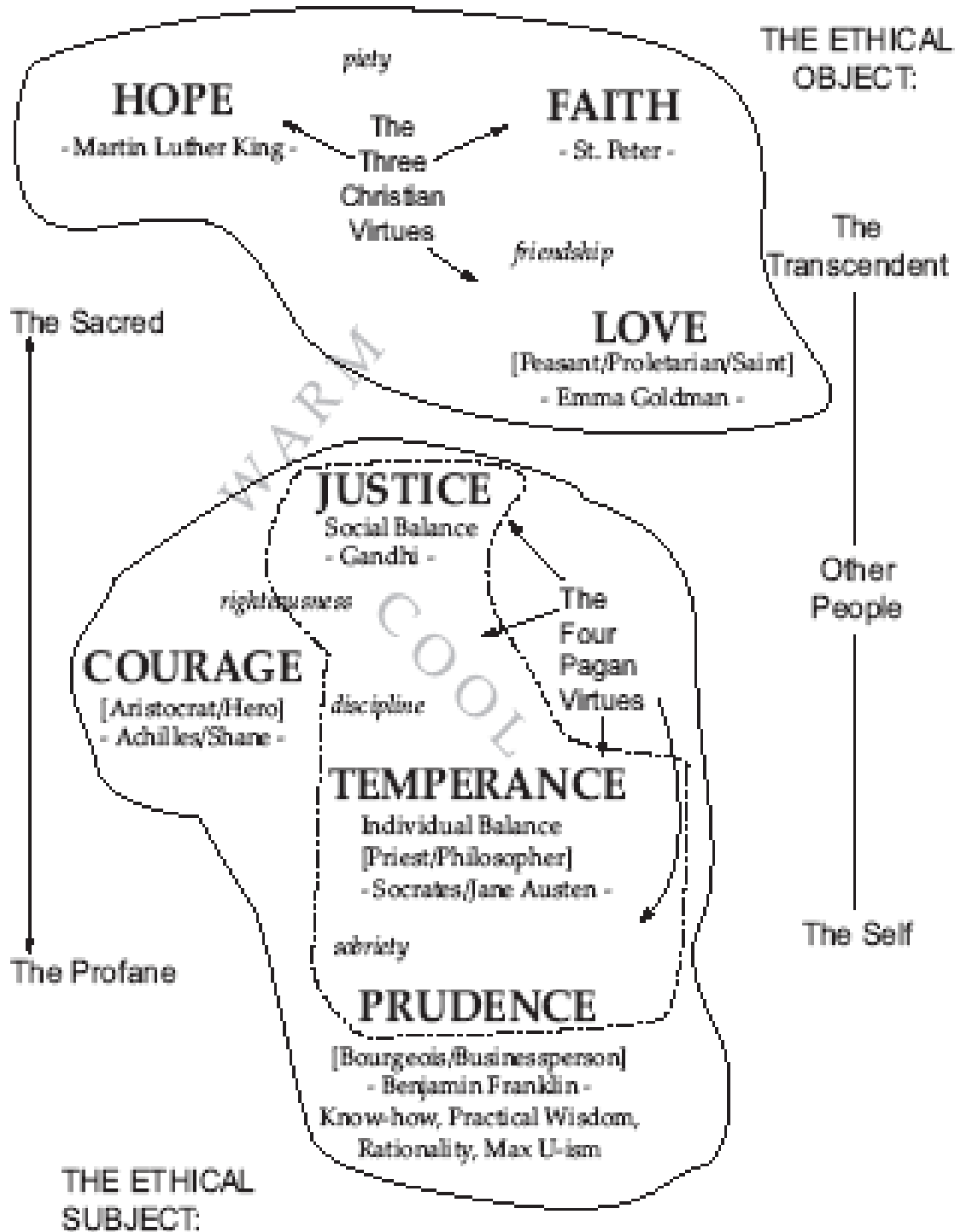
Aquinas, *Summa Theologia*, Ia IIae, q. 73,

art. 9, objection 3, "I answer that."

[O]ur life consists in this achieving of a pure relationship between ourselves and the living universe about us. This is how I 'save my soul.' . . . [If you view] love as the supreme, the only emotion worth living for, then you will write an immoral novel. Because . . . all emotions go to the achieving of a living relationship.

D. H. Lawrence,
"Morality and the Novel," 1936,
pp. 128-29.

The "moral universe within" has been described for 2500 years in the West, then, in terms of the Seven Virtues, containing hundreds of particular virtue, among which are the virtues for a bourgeois life:



SPIRIT	Autonomy	—	Connection
GENDER	Male		Female
POLITICS	Freedom		Solidarity
SOCIETY	Gesellschaft		Gemeinschaft

In ethical space the bottom is the realm of the Profane, where Prudence and Temperance rule, the top the realm of the Sacred—of spiritual Love, and Faith and Hope. Moving from bottom to top is moving from self-disciplining virtues whose main object is the Self through altruistic virtues whose main object is Others (Love of humans; Justice) to the transcendent virtues whose main object is God or Physics or the Nation. That is, bottom to top is the axis of wider and wider ethical objects.¹⁵

The essentially transcendent virtues of Faith and Hope, I have noted, are essentially verbal. The others can be silently yet fully expressed. Prudence and Justice are calculative and intellectual. They have been thought since Plato and the writers of footnotes to Plato to be the most characteristically human of virtues. Prudence or Justice could be seen in a god-haunted society as gifts or laws from the Creator to Man: "for which cause / Among the beasts no mate for thee was found." Animals were "dumb" in both senses.

By the grace of Darwin, however, we now see the calculative virtues in the least human of beings, in ants justly sacrificing themselves for the queen, or dandelions prudently working the cracks in the sidewalk. The terminology is figurative, note the scientists, a human attribution, not Nature's own way of putting it. But that is what we are discussing: human figures of speech. Natural history has taught us in the past three centuries to realize that the lion is not actually "courageous," ever, but merely prudent in avoiding elephants and just in acknowledging the pride's hierarchy. Courage and Temperance are emotion-controlling and will-disciplining, and therefore, we now realize, human. Faith, Hope, and Love, above all, provide ends for a human life. The rest are means, and prudence is not the highest, God-given Rationality but the lowest evolved strategies of these.

The triad of Temperance-Justice-Prudence near the bottom and middle is cool and classical, and therefore recommended itself to theorists of the bourgeoisie such as David Hume and Adam Smith. The others at the top and edges are warm and Romantic, and came into their own in the 19th century. Hume called Temperance-Justice-Prudence the "artificial" virtues, necessary for the artful making of any community whatever. They were of particular interest to men who had seen or vividly imagined communities collapsing in the tumult of religious war and dynastic ambition, of Jesuit and Presbyterian, of Habsburg and Bourbon and Stuart. Hume and Smith both, for example, had witnessed the Jacobite rising of 1745, and with nothing like sympathy—they were not wild Highlanders, and certainly not Catholics, but lowland Scots of a deist or atheistic bent who had made their peace with Englishry.

"Enthusiasm" was in the 18th century a term of abuse. Let us confine our discussion, most of the philosophes of France and Scotland agreed, to the cool, dignified, essential, and "artificial" virtues. Hume was using the categories and argument of Pufendorf, defending

¹⁵ Aquinas *Summa Theologiae*, c. 1270, Iae-Ia Q. 96, art. 3; and Q. 54 art. 2, to which he refers, quoted in Lisska, *Aquinas's Theory of Natural Law*, 1996, p. 285.

natural law against the intellectual and political chaos of the early 17th century. The categories became part of European classicism in the 17th and 18th centuries, reacting to the rhetorical charms of the Renaissance and the rhetorical excesses of the Reformation and Counter-reformation.

The other, "natural" virtues of Courage, Love, Hope, and Faith impart warmth and meaning to an artfully made community. Sometimes too much warmth and meaning. The Scottish followers of Hutcheson admitted Love, as benevolence, and admitted Courage, as enterprise, but rather off to the side of their main concerns. They certainly had no patience with Hope and Faith, and Hume was fierce against their religious forms, "celibacy, fasting, and the other monkish virtues." Imparting warmth and meaning was decidedly not what the Scots of the Enlightenment had in mind. That is a Romantic project, and these are not Romantics.

That Adam Smith was a virtue ethicist for a commercial age is pretty plain. He escaped, as Hume did not entirely, from the "prison," as Hayek puts it, of the Greek categories *phusei* (natural) and *thesei* (artificial). He emphasized a third category, the social interaction neither rock-like nor painting-like, the invisible hand.¹⁶ Hayek observes that the 18th-century learned the third category from the appalling Dr. Mandeville. But Smith used it to support rather than attack conventional ethics.

Smith made his virtue-ethic purposes clearest at the end of his life, in a Part VI added to *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* 31 years after its first publication. Section I of the new Part is an encomium on The Prudent Man. Section II is an analysis of love in an expanding circle outward from self to country. It concludes with a criticism of going still higher, to the faith and hope in transcendence that had been so troublesome to the Scotland of his grandfathers:

The administration of the great system of the universe, however, the care of the universal happiness of all rational and sensible beings, is the business of God and not of man. To man is allotted a much humbler department, but one more suitable to the weakness of his powers, and the narrowness of his comprehension: the care of his own happiness, of that of his family, his friends, his country. That he is occupied in contemplating the sublime can never be an excuse for neglecting the more humble department. . . . The most sublime speculation of the contemplative philosopher can scarce compensate the neglect of the smallest active duty.¹⁷

One can hear him including the theologian or other advocate for the Transcendent in that phrase "contemplative philosopher." Compare Hume's "divinity or school metaphysics."

And then Smith embarks on a concluding, climactic Section III, "Of Self-Command," the master virtue in his book. "The man who acts according to the rules of perfect prudence, of

¹⁶ See the discussion of this in Rudi Keller, *On Language Change*, 1990, for example p. 46.

¹⁷ Smith, *Moral Sentiments*, 1790, p. 237.

strict justice, and of proper benevolence [love, that is] may be said to be perfectly virtuous." That accounts for three of the seven virtues: Prudence, Justice, and Love. But suppose he knows he should so act, but can't bring himself to it? "The most perfect knowledge, if it is not supported by the most perfect self-command, will not always enable him to do his duty." "Extravagant fear and furious anger," to take one sort of passion, "[are] often difficult to restrain even for a single moment." The "command" of fear and anger was called by the ancients "fortitude, manhood, and strength of mind," which is to say Courage. "The love of ease, of pleasure, of applause, and other selfish gratifications . . . often mislead us." The command of these the ancients called "temperance, decency, modesty, and moderation," that is to say, Temperance.¹⁸

So: in Smith there are the five virtues, of Prudence, Justice, Love, Courage, Temperance. There is no room for Faith and Hope.

But this will not do. Alasdair MacIntyre—his name and Glasgow birthplace are not irrelevant, nor is his youthful Communism or his mature Catholicism—argues that the artificial and all the natural virtues including Faith and Hope are to be taken together:

The virtues that we need, if we are to develop from our initial animal condition into that of independent rational agents [viz., prudence, temperance, and justice], and the virtues that we need, if we are to confront and respond to vulnerability and disability both in ourselves [courage, hope] and in others [love, faith], belong to one and the same set of [seven] virtues, the distinctive virtues of dependent rational animals.¹⁹

All three regions of the diagram are drawn on for a full life. The Romantics after the 18th century understood this. The Christians before the 18th century did, too.

In particular, Prudence Only will not be a life worth living. As Ellen Charry observes, "the gratification of being a part of a larger reality [Tillich's 'the courage to be a part of'] that gives each experience a purpose beyond its momentary accomplishment buffers the soul against life's disappointments."²⁰ For "ye have your closes,/ And all must die."

It is an obvious secular truth, too. Enjoy the White Sox game, by all means, in the present—the ballgame, the show, the peanuts, the crackerjack, in the lower region of Prudence, sheer Utility. Live as Nature's son, not her bastard. But enjoy also your own little son's delight in being there with his father, at the middle region of Love. And at the higher regions take joy in "being part of a larger reality," Baseball or American Fatherhood or the Democratic Tradition.

¹⁸ Smith, *Moral Sentiments*, 1790, same place and page following. Compare pp. 268f, 271. He has a confusing discussion on p. 189 (an older section) in which he analyses Prudence as Temperance plus Wisdom, *Sophia*. But in the passage I quote he is adhering to Aquinian divisions.

¹⁹ MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*, 1999, p. 5; compare p. 155f.

²⁰ Charry, "Happiness," 2004, p. 28.

* * * *

The seven virtues illuminate other ethical systems. William Schweiker, for example, quotes with approval Tzvetan Todorov's characterization of humanists, believing that "freedom exists and that it is precious, but at the same time . . . [appreciating] the benefit of shared values [such as Hope and Faith], life with others [such as Love and Justice], and a self that is held responsible for its actions" [showing Temperance, Prudence, and moral Courage].

The philosopher Harry Frankfurt starts with the usual definition of "virtue" as "altruism," confined to the middle region of the diagram. The ethical object at the bottom is a self, I have noted, and at the top is a transcendent; in the middle the object of ethics is other people. Like Susan Wolf writing about her obnoxious moral saints, Frankfurt uses terms like "morality," "moral principles," and "moral philosophy" as though they did not include either the self or the transcendent as objects of ethical action.

Such a definition appears to be a convention in mainstream, Kant-derived ethical philosophy. "Morality is most particularly concerned with how our attitudes and our actions," Frankfurt writes, "should take into account . . . other people."²¹ Well, not in the view of Aristotle or the other virtue ethicists. Morality among them is about the good life for a human, which requires a character of prudence and temperance towards oneself, and faith, hope, and higher love towards the transcendent. And it requires justice and courage and lower love on behalf of other people—the Scots called it "benevolence." Thus *ethos*, character. Robinson Crusoe on his island can be said to have had a good or bad ethical life, even before Friday. So virtue ethics.

But Frankfurt comes to the same view in the end, concluding that love must have a transcendent object for a human life to have a point. "A person may legitimately be devoted to ideals—for instance, aesthetic, cultural, or religious ideals—whose authority for him is independent of the desiderata with which moral principles are distinctively concerned; and he may pursue these nonmoral ideals without having his personal interests in mind at all."²² The ideal of the transcendent, such as God or Baseball, are independent of altruism. The transcendent is defined as "nonmoral," namely, having in mind the self-interest of Prudence and Temperance. Frankfurt is saying that the transcendent, and in particular a notion of Love which includes what Christians would call *agape*, is necessary for a fully human life. In this way the ethics of the Enlightenment is sacralized.

He could have got to the conclusion by way of virtue ethics with less heavy lifting. "What we care about, what is important to us, and what we love" give point to a life, says

²¹ Frankfurt, *Reasons of Love*, 2004, p. 7.

²² Frankfurt, *Reasons of Love*, 2004, p. 8.

Frankfurt. But these, I note, are Faith, Hope, and Charity.²³ I expect that Frankfurt is well aware of all this, and is engaging in a crafty figure of argument necessary in a corner of the academic world dominated by Kant. He shares with Wolf and many other modern philosophers the job of clambering out of the rationalist hole that Kant dug so diligently.

Frankfurt here seems to be marshaling a *reductio ad absurdum*, to show that Kantianism or for that matter utilitarianism do not give a coherent account of an ethical life. The ethical life cannot in fact be reduced, Frankfurt is saying, to formulas for deciding ethical dilemmas, formulas applicable to any rational creature as such. On the contrary, "it requires us . . . to understand what it is we ourselves really care about."²⁴ It depends on *ethos*, on *agape* and *philia*, on character, on moral sentiments, on a philosophical anthropology and psychology, on being a particular woman in Chicago at a particular time, with particular loves and faiths and hopes. As Philippa Foot put it, Kant went wrong in not realizing that "the evaluation of human action depends . . . on essential features of specifically human life."²⁵

In fact, as I have noted, the Kantian program is self-contradictory, which among Kantians is judged the deadly sin. The character of ourselves that we care about, a caring denied in pure rationalism, is what makes a Kantian moralist – or for that matter, if he reaches beyond ice-cream hedonism, what makes a utilitarian moralist. You have to want to be good. You have to care about what Frankfurt calls "ideals" and I and the rest of the Western ethical tradition call "transcendentals." Only then will you have an interest in following, say, the categorical imperative or the true happiness of all people in your dealings with others. The ethical-theorizing "constructed self" that the social psychologist Timothy Wilson speaks of wants to work with the ethical-behaving "adaptive unconscious." Being good, in Frankfurt's account and in mine, is a consequence of "what we regard as important to ourselves," not itself derivable from Kantian or utilitarian maxims.²⁶

* * * *

Left to right in the diagram exhibits the gendered character of the virtues, masculine and feminine in the conventional tales. That is, left-right expresses the gender of the ethical actor. Women of course are supposed conventionally to think of the world from the perspective of right-side Love, or its corresponding vices, such as envy and jealousy. Men are supposed to think of the world from the perspective of left-side Courage, or cowardice, vainglory, self-absorption, and so forth.

²³ Frankfurt, *Reasons of Love*, p. 11.

²⁴ Frankfurt, *Reasons of Love*, p. 28.

²⁵ Foot, *Natural Goodness*, 2001, p. 14.

²⁶ The phrase from Frankfurt, *Reasons of Love*, is from p. 29.

Another name for the right side in the diagram is "connection"; and for the left, "autonomy." Knight believed that even ordinary desires could be reduced "in astonishingly large measure to the desire to be like other people, and the desire to be different."²⁷ Tillich called them "participation" and "individualization," and noted that there is a "courage to be as a part," that is, to participate. Michael Ignatieff called the one side "connection and rootedness" and the other side "freedom": "a potential contradiction. . . arises between our need for social solidarity and our need for freedom." We have rights, which is good, allowing us to achieve our left-side projects of hope and courage regulated by justice. But we need "love, respect, honor, dignity, solidarity with others," Ignatieff notes, on the other, upper-right-hand side, and these cannot be compelled by law.²⁸ Hence Hume's vocabulary of "natural" as against "artificial," law-enforced virtues.

Whether or not men in general do actually fall on the left, autonomous side, the male non-Scottish, non-virtue-ethics ethical philosophers of the 18th century certainly did. The Kantian and Benthamite men, for example, are just that, men deciding ethical issues without regard to connection, men fiercely autonomous, adults always in their primes, rational beings never dependent. So they believed. They are as the feminists put it with irritation and amusement "separative selves."

The third fresh option in 17th- and 18th-century ethical philosophy, contractarianism, is likewise gendered. A Hobbesian/Lockean/ Rousseauian "contract" is not the usual metaphor with which women describe their lives. Rather: love, caring, obligations of affection, "a view of the self as relational."²⁹ Women in fact find themselves with children and parents and friends and husbands and lovers to take care of. Men seem to think of such connections as optional, wholly contractual, even as relationships of exchange. Thus Marcel Mauss, a leading male anthropologist of the early 20th century, encouraged people to think of the gift, too, as a sort of exchange.

The feminists such as Carol Gilligan and Virginia Held resist. Annette Baier, following them, observes that not all male ethical philosophers take the side of autonomy. She gives passing grades on the matter to Aristotle (connection in the polis), Marx (class), Mill (progressive sympathy), and MacIntyre (dependent rational animals, and practices), and then she studies Hume from the feminine, connective perspective in detail. Hume is, she argues, "uncannily womanly" in emphasizing the role of sympathy as against higher law, having others to share experiences with, and the love of children as the exemplum for ethical theory. She finds in Hume a stress on "the inescapable mutual vulnerability and mutual enrichment . . . [of] the human conditions. . . [which] make[s] autonomy not even an ideal."³⁰

²⁷ Knight 1922, in Knight 1935, p. 22.

²⁸ Ignatieff, *Needs of Strangers*, 1984, pp. 17, 15.

²⁹ Held, *Feminist Morality*, 1993, p. 62.

³⁰ Baier, *Moral Prejudices* 1994, pp. 53, 62f.

A socialist like Paul Tillich would have viewed the right side of Love, Temperance, Justice, and Faith as commendably anti-capitalist, as against the left-side enterprise of Courage, Prudence, and Hope. Capitalism is, after all, the system supporting the virtue of enterprise, and that is the left-side virtues—though I have emphasized that in fact even capitalism depends of the loving right side, too. Tillich among others would have quarreled with placing Courage only on the left, masculine side.³¹

The pioneering feminist economist/philosopher Julie Nelson would argue that any left-right, top-bottom has the danger of privileging one over the other. Any one over any other. I've said why I think all the virtues work in any serious ethical life. So I am not saying that Hope and Faith are superior to Prudence and Temperance, or that Love trumps Courage every time. Nelson would use positive and negative versions of each virtue, deconstructing the geometry of a "top" thought superior to a bottom, or a "left" sinister.³² So Love of others can be negative as love of others only, without sufficient self-love: self-abnegation, the womanly sin.³³

And indeed the placement of the virtues in the diagram is that of mythical convention, not God's truth, or even science's. Thus upper-and-right pertains to the past, lower-and-left to the future: well . . . perhaps. The four virtues in bold are the signature virtues of the mythically ancient social classes: warrior (Courage, daring), peasant (Love, loyalty), merchant (Prudence, know how), and priest/brahmin (Temperance, wisdom). More mythical convention. But that is how we talk.

³¹ Tillich, *Courage to Be*, 1952, pp. 86-96

³² Nelson, *Feminism, Objectivity*, 1996, pp. 10-19, 28-34, 45.

³³ Nelson, *Feminism, Objectivity*, 1996, p. 136.

Chapter 48

The Anxieties of Bourgeois Virtues

I am recommending what might be thought of, philosophically speaking, as a libertarian version of Aristotelianism. Or perhaps, theologically speaking, a capitalist version of Pelagianism. Or an anti-Tillichian theological humanism with a dose of economics.

The always-present alternative to Kant and Bentham was Hobbes and Locke, that is to say, contractarianism, the third way in modern European ethical philosophy. But after Smith died his simple and obvious system of natural liberty to make a contract was unmoored from ethics. This was an ethical catastrophe. The theory of bourgeois virtues, almost complete in Smith, was abandoned by later exponents of contractarianism.

The result has been a long line of contractarian theorists trying to solve the Hobbes Problem – namely, "Can a group of asocial monsters, who have never been children and have never loved anything, be shown on a blackboard to create out of rational self-interest a civil society?" The Problem can be shown rigorously to be insoluble, at least under axioms of strict self-interest. But this has not stopped academic men from trying to solve it again and again and again, 1651 to the present. They want to do contract without ethics – morals by agreement, ethics within the limits of reason. I am recommending that we go back to Smith, and do both: both agreement and morals, both reason and ethics.

The case can be put in a little table:

Three Ethical/Political Philosophies: Hobbesian, Smithian, Socialist

Social theory:	Hobbesian	Smithian	Utopian socialist
Theology:	Augustinian	Pelagian, Aquinian	Liberation
Character	Max U	Embedded bourgeois	Hopeful cleric
Literary Victorian:	Mr. Moneybags in <i>Das Kapital</i> (1867)	Lapham in <i>The Rise of Silas Lapham</i> (1885)	Julian West in <i>Looking Backward</i> (1887)
Virtues:	P Only	P plus Temperance, Courage, Justice, Love, Faith, Hope	L & J & H Only
Sustaining equilibrium:	Can't cheat and survive	Wouldn't think of cheating	Sweetened nature of humankind under socialism
Last hope:	Other virtues supplied <i>ad hoc</i>	Not demoralized by the P-only theories	No Lenins or Maos or Shining Paths of the clerisy
	come to power		

It has been shown mathematically and experimentally, I claim, that the first column is in fact unsustainable without the last row, that is, unless virtues come down from the stage scenery miraculously. The life of man is solitary and poor unless miraculously the Max Us cooperate—as in fact experimental subjects do cooperate, because they have been children and have loved someone and are not monsters of P Only. They cooperate, that is, for reasons inconsistent with the assumption of P Only.

The P-Only science of economics has no place for what Smith called "the faculty of speech." Yet it is well known in experimental economics that "simply allowing individuals to talk with one another [and thereby arousing Love, Faith, Justice] is a sufficient change in the decision environment to make a substantial difference in behavior. . . . Individuals who start as strangers with no normative relationship to one another [in the style of P Only] may soon begin to discuss a problem . . . and eventually acquire a sense of community [Love, Faith] and moral responsibility [Justice]."³⁴

But in truth that last, saving, ethical row is necessary for any of the three columns to work. Even my beloved second column, which is the way capitalism actually operates, pretty much, can be undermined by Max-U ideologies. I stress that such ideologies are not only seen on the right, politically speaking. The hard left, too, with Marx, sees capitalism as a field for Mr. Moneybags and "endless accumulation" for its own sake, whatever that might mean. The hard

³⁴ Ostrom, Gardner, and Walker, *Rules, Games, 1994*, p. 320.

left's heaven, likewise, a communist society without private property, depends on Jesus rather than Satan being a member of the Politburo. In actually existing socialism Satan has had a more successful political career than Jesus.

The philosopher Edward Feser has usefully outlined three grounds for what he calls "principled libertarianism." The three Enlightenment philosophies show up once again. The libertarianism of Smith's "simple and obvious system of natural liberty" can be justified on utilitarian grounds, as maximizing national income. Or it can be justified, as Feser himself and Robert Nozick do, on natural rights and Kantian grounds: "the only system compatible with respect for individuals' natural rights to life, liberty, and property is a libertarian one."³⁵ Or it can be justified on contractarian grounds, as Rawls does, being what one would choose at the Creation.

By Feser's definitions I am not in fact a "principled" libertarian – which is not to say that I am unprincipled in the non-philosophical way of talking but that I am pragmatic in the philosophical way of talking. That's fine with me. Such libertarians, Feser puts it, "tend to appeal to empirical considerations, eschewing philosophical analysis in favor of economic arguments and historical and sociological studies comparing the results of free-market policies with those of government intervention."³⁶ That's right. As a mere economist and historian I am incapable of the fantasies that the people of principle are so gifted at. I keep being brought up short by the world as it is, at least as I can discern it through the fog.

But if I had to be principled I would reach back before the French Enlightenment, or back into the Scottish Enlightenment, and offer a fourth justification for the free society, namely, that it leads to and depends on human lives of virtue. My so-called principle shares some features with the "postmodernist bourgeois liberalism" of Richard Rorty, or the "agonistic liberalism" of Isaiah Berlin, or the "dystopic liberalism" of Judith Shklar, or the rhetorical pluralism of Stuart Hampshire, or the "biblical realism" of Reinhold Niebuhr and Michael Novak, or the "cooperation to mutual benefit" plus "light" of Robert Novick, or the feminist virtue ethics of Annette Baier or Carol Gilligan.³⁷

Such impure mixes have not been popular in the West after Kant and Bentham and Locke. But they are not therefore merely confused. One does not for example have to be an anti-market communitarian to be an Aristotelian, or have to be a socialist to be a Christian. Hursthouse quotes Daniel Statman as asserting that communitarianism "might turn out to be the political aspect of virtue ethics."³⁸ I hope you are persuaded by now that this aspect is not the only one that can be discerned. Bourgeois virtue is as plausible a political entailment of virtue ethics as is the Green Party.

Nor to be a libertarian does one have to be a egoist. The right wing, I have said, has too often embraced the analysis of its enemies that capitalism works only through a sociopathic egoism, à la Hobbes, with left and right therefore agreeing on the amoral character of markets. Quentin Skinner worried that "contemporary liberalism, especially in its so-called libertarian form, is in danger of sweeping the public bare of any concepts save those of self-interest and

³⁵ Feser, *On Nozick*, 2004, p. 14.

³⁶ Feser, *On Nozick*, 2004, p. 13.

³⁷ Shklar herself called her vision "bare-bones liberalism." See Benhabib, "Judith Shklar's Dystopic Liberalism," 1994.

³⁸ Hursthouse, *Virtue Ethics*, 1999, p. 6.

individual rights." I admit there is such a danger, in the form of a vulgar version of neo-liberalism advocated at the country club and in some classrooms and in some Cabinet rooms.

But as Skinner in turn admits, there is a path between MacIntyre's communitarianism and Ayn Rand's individualism. I would characterize the way as a positive duty to be a good bourgeois – many exemplars of which you and I know personally. As Skinner puts it, "unless we place our duties before our rights, we must expect to find our rights themselves undermined."³⁹ Placing duties ahead of rights comes naturally to a burgher of Delft or to a citizen of Rapid City.

A bourgeois version of the virtues deriving ultimately from Aristotle + Augustine = Aquinas is also called liberalism. The bourgeois moment is Smith, whom I have claimed as something like a secular Aquinian – though note that Aquinas and his generation were busy in the mid-13th century proving that "an honest, modest, charitable merchant was indeed able to lead a good, Christian life."⁴⁰ I have noted that Robert Nelson argued in detail in his first book on "economic theology" that "American economics follows . . . closely in the Roman tradition, associated with ideas of natural law as revealed through exercise of faculties of human reason, given a leading theological exposition by Thomas Aquinas."⁴¹ The darker "Protestant" tradition in economics, "seeing a sinful . . . world . . . where the powers of human reasoning have been fatally weakened by the . . . corruption of human nature" he detects in the line of Plato, Augustine, Luther, and Marx. Some liberal theorists would deny their heritage in virtue ethics, claiming that liberalism for example is at heart simply radical democratic thought – which itself, though, comes from the Augustinian part of the equation.⁴²

Other liberals claim, with Lockeans (if not with Locke), and quite contrary to the first group, that the trading of rights under contract suffices: no need to get entangled in the ethical tradition of the West. Thus David Strauss asserts that "importing a full Aristotelian vocabulary is not only unnecessary but incompatible with liberal premises."⁴³ He is correct if "full" means such things as having a free male Greek aristocrat's attitude towards institutions such as slavery, or placing at the head of all of them a virtue such as "great-souledness." But Strauss doesn't really show that the two virtues he identifies as necessary for liberalism – toleration of the views of others and a flexibility in life plans – "have nothing particularly Aristotelian about" them. He admits for example that flexibility in life is "a kind of moral courage, a willingness to face one's life without having its most important contours already determined."⁴⁴ And toleration can be viewed – and was in the debates over it in Holland in the 1620s, for example – as a species of humility, which is in turn composed, noted Aquinas, of temperance and justice, which were pagan, not only Christian, virtues.

The bourgeois vices reflect commonly the anxieties of the middleman, as in the many bourgeois characters of Molière straining for respectability. *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* is a joke in

³⁹ Skinner, "Republican Ideal," 1990, p. 309.

⁴⁰ Little, *Religious Poverty*, 1978, p. 179.

⁴¹ As summarized in the second book, Nelson, *Reaching for Heave*, 2001, p. xxi.

⁴² McCloskey, *American Conservatism*, 1951, pp. 5-7.

⁴³ Strauss, "Liberal Virtues," 1992, p. 197.

⁴⁴ Strauss, "Liberal Virtues," 1991, pp. 201, 199.

its very title, since in French as in English in 1670 such a phrase was an absurdity, meaning "the burgher m'lord."⁴⁵

Yet consider the bourgeois virtues contrasted with the earlier alternatives. The aristocratic virtues elevate an I. The Christian/peasant virtues elevate a Thou. The priestly virtues elevate an It. The bourgeois virtues speak instead of We, negotiating between I and Thou with reference to It, as civilized people must. Abram is renamed Abraham, the father of a multitude, when he enters into a covenant with the Lord, literally a property deal. Later Abraham bargains like a rug merchant to stay the Lord's hand over the City of Sodom: "Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked? Peradventure there may be fifty righteous within the city Peradventure there shall lack five of the fifty righteous: wilt thou destroy all the city for lack of five?" And so by mathematical induction to a mere ten. God at that juncture stays His hand. From the beginning Abraham shows the bourgeois virtues. A peasant prostrates himself before the gods; an aristocrat curses them; a priest organizes their worship. The bourgeois argues with his God and makes a little deal. I can get it for you wholesale.

The project is to revive such a beneficent ideology of deal-making for the middle class—or rather the project is to make it respectable again among the clerisy, since it does not need to be "revived" in capitalist practice. Vibrant ideologies of the aristocrat and the peasant still persist, I have argued, doing some good and a lot of evil. We need to revive a serious ethical conversation about middle class life, the life of towns, the forum and agora. We need to get beyond the project of damning a man of business because he is neither an exalted aristocrat nor an unassuming peasant-proletarian. The conservative program of handing things over to a class of pseudo-aristocrats trained at Andover and Yale or the radical program of handing things over to a proletariat-friendly Party of bourgeois-born young men have not worked out very well. We need an ethical bourgeoisie.

The point is that merely heroic Courage or merely Christian Love, at any rate in their vulgar forms, are not usefully complete accounts of the virtues appropriate to a commercial society. The two vocabularies are heard in the Camp and in the Common. Achilles struts the Camp in his Hephaestian armor, exercising his noble wrath. Jesus stands barefoot on the mount, preaching to the very least of the Commoners. Camp and Common.

And yet we live now in the Town, we bourgeois, or are moving to the Town and townly occupations as fast as we can manage. "Everyone nowadays," said Adam Smith so early as 1776, "becomes in some measure a merchant."⁴⁶ The prediction that the proletariat would become the universal class has proven to be mistaken. The nineteenth-century idea that the middleman stood for Capital against Labor looks wrong today, when the financial side of Capital is an anonymous fund from London and Tokyo, much of it pension funds owned by

⁴⁵ See Molière, *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, Act II, sc. v, for example: "If you walk about dressed like a burgher [habillé en bourgeois]," M. Jourdain notes, "no one will say to you, 'M'lord' [Mon gentilhomme]." The tailor's assistants, encouraged by his tips, go on to call him "my [feudal] master" [monseigneur] and then even "excellency" [votre grandeur]. The buying of honor was already common in France.

⁴⁶ Smith, *Wealth*, 1776, p. 37.

employees, and when over half the productive real capital stock in rich countries is in fact Human Capital, the skills of the machinist or the lawyer.⁴⁷

The historian Jürgen Kocka has written of the failure of embourgeoisment of the working class in 19th century Germany: "Lack of independence, market-dependent, the manual character of labor, small income, cramped living conditions, and the need for all members of the family to contribute to the family income – these were the factors which stood in the way of a real [embourgeoisment] of the workers in the nineteenth century."⁴⁸ That's right: and when the proletariat gets financial independence, college education, word-work, large income, the large suburban house, and late entry into the workforce it becomes. . . bourgeois. It happened first in America. The proletariat, an urban and secular version of the rural and religious peasantry, has been able when lucky to send its children to Notre Dame and thence to careers in plastics. The clerisy may lament, churchmen wail, bohemians jeer. Yet the universal class into which the other classes are slowly melting is the detested bourgeoisie.

Half of employment in rich countries is white collar, steadily rising. Thirty percent of the workforce qualifies in Richard Florida's opinion for the "Creative Class," as against 10 percent in 1900, the talkers and designers and managers. There are about 140 million employees in the United States now, but 19 million sole proprietorships and 2.5 million partnerships. Count them up in the telephone book; you will be amazed. Each proprietorship represents by definition 1.0 and each partnership at least 2.0 and each small corporation perhaps 2.0 or 3.0 little capitalists. Including small corporations that's perhaps a total of perhaps 25 million small businesspeople, out of 215 million people 20 or older.

Jobs for peasants, proletarians, and aristocrats are shrinking. Even soldiers are bourgeois. The production of things has become and will continue to become cheaper relative to most services. A piece of cotton cloth that sold for 70 or 80 shillings in the 1780s sold in the 1850s for 5 shillings.⁴⁹ The cheapening first led spinning out of the home, then weaving, men's clothing, women's clothing, baking, brewing, canning, and finally most other cooking. It then led peasants off the land: three-quarters of American workers in 1800 worked on farms; forty percent in 1900; eight percent in 1960; two-and-a-half percent in 1990. The two-and-a-half percent produced a lot more than the three-quarters had. Yet a barber or a professor was not much more productive in 1990 than in 1800. It still takes 15 minutes with a pair of scissors to do short back and sides; it still takes 50 minutes with a piece of chalk to convey the notion of comparative advantage to undergraduates. But the farmer has become more productive by a factor of 36. We cannot eat 36 times more food – I have tried: it doesn't work – and so the farmer's share in employment has fallen towards nil.

The making of things in factories will go the same way as the preparing of food in kitchens and the growing of crops on farms. Calculators that sold for \$400 in 1970 sold for \$4 in

⁴⁷ You can see the truth of this in the facts of the share of labor, including entrepreneurial labor, in national income, which was about 33% in 1800 in a place like England and is now about 90%. That is, the return to physical capital and especially land has fallen as a share of national income. It has been replaced by the 57% (90 minus 33) going to new skills over and above raw labor.

⁴⁸ Kocka, "European Pattern," 1988, p. 35 n 18. The German word is *Verbürgerlichung*.

⁴⁹ McCloskey, "Industrial Revolution," 1981, p. 110.

1990, and 4 cents now. Actually, by Moore's Law, the cost of the sheer calculating power of the machines – adding, multiplying, and carrying – fell in the ratio of \$100 at the beginning to now a tiny fraction of a cent. The joke is that if Maseratis had fallen in price 1970 to 2000 the way calculation did they would in 2000 have sold for 23 cents per car. The proletarian labor required to make a radio, a window pane, or an car is disappearing towards nil. Workers on the line in manufacturing peaked at about a fifth of the labor force after World War II in the United States and have since been disappearing, at first slowly and now quickly. What is left is bussing tables on the one side and bourgeois occupations on the other. In fifty years a maker of things on an assembly line in the United States will be as rare as a farmer.

That's not because the "jobs go overseas," as non-economists think. Even if they stay at home, fewer and fewer people push the buttons. And that's a good thing, whether accomplished through foreign trade or through automation, or both, because it is another way of saying that we can get more per person. There is no such thing in the moderately long run as technological unemployment. If on the contrary what you read in the newspaper about "losing jobs" were good economics, then practically no one would still be employed. There are no jobs nowadays for tens of thousands of canal-boat teamsters c. 1850 or tens of thousands of blacksmiths c. 1900. Understand: I advocate ample provision for those hurt by change. But I advocate, too, change. If the internet replaces professorial lectures I will retire gracefully, on an income earned from the great productivity of the American economy.

The change is making proletarian occupations fewer and the enlarged bourgeoisie richer. The Creative Class edges ever upward in size, to the benefit of the remaining poor. Engels wrote to Marx ("Dear Moor") in October 1858 that "the English proletariat is actually becoming more and more bourgeois, so that the ultimate aim of this most bourgeois of nations would appear to be the possession, alongside the bourgeois, of a bourgeois aristocracy and the bourgeois proletariat."⁵⁰

In 1933 a German writer declared that "The Bourgeois epoch is coming to an end. . . . Today it does not look as if the youth were of a mind to enter into [the inheritance of bourgeois life]. They have no feeling for the Bürgertum's particular virtues, its particular mix of commitment and humane moderation. The mixture has been a distinguishing feature of liberalism, which is much maligned today."⁵¹ So it has frequently been said. And yet – admitting the seriousness of the challenge to bourgeois virtues mounted in the 1930s and 1940s – afterwards, from the 1950s to the present, the bourgeoisie and its values and its liberalism has spread. The Good Germans of our era, for example, have precisely that mixture of commitment and humane moderation.

Nonetheless it is still routine to idealize a pagan or a Christian story of the virtues and then to sound a lament that in these latter days, alas, no one achieves the ideal. We live in a vulgar age of iron, or of plastic, it is said, not pagan gold or Christian silver. In the ethical accounting of artists and intellectuals since 1848 the townfolk are perhaps useful, even necessary; but virtuous? The aristocracy and peasantry-proletariat, it is reported by the clerisy,

⁵⁰ Marx-Engels Collected Works, Volume 40, p. 343, given at http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1858/letters/58_10_07.htm. "Most bourgeois of nations": Engels had not lived in the United States.

⁵¹ Rudolf Smend, quoted in Kocka, "European Pattern," 1988, p. 36 n 26.

join in disdain for the merchant, who has neither the martial honor of a knight nor the solidarity of a serf. The bourgeois virtues have been reduced to the single vice of greed.

Michael Novak reports on the Roman Catholic nostalgia for an imagined pre-capitalism of guilds and peasants, workers and beloved lords, warmly greeting each other on Sunday after mass. Catholic social thinkers, he writes,

fail to envisage the hundreds of millions of the world's Catholics who work in small businesses of their own. They ignore the barbers and beauticians, the tobacco shop owners, the storekeepers, the electrical contractors the plumbing and heating firms, the baker owners, the butchers, the restaurateurs, the publishers of ethnic newspapers, the rug merchants, the cabinetmakers, the owners of jewelry stores, the managers of fast-food restaurants, the ice-cream vendors, the auto mechanics, the proprietors of hardware stores and appliance shops, the tailors, the makers of ecclesiastical candles, the lacemakers. . . .⁵²

He continues his encomium on small business in terms that Montaigne or Montesquieu could have used:

Commerce requires attention to small losses and small gains; teaches care, discipline, frugality, clear accounting, providential forethought, and respect for regular reckonings; instructs in courtesy; softens the barbaric instincts and demands attention to manners; teaches fidelity to contracts, honesty in fair dealings, and concern for one's moral reputation.⁵³

Novak has the *petite bourgeoisie* in mind. But I would extend his encomium to the *grande* as well, with a rather different set of virtues. Neither class is perfect, because we live in an imperfect world. But both are pretty good, as John Mueller would put it – within the limits of original sin, as Novak and I would. And, Novak observes, "these qualities are, of course, ridiculed by artists and aristocrats, the passionate and the wild at heart."

* * * *

Thomas Mann was surely, as Amos Oz calls him, "the lover, mocker, elegist and immortalizer of the bourgeois age."⁵⁴ In his first successful novel *Buddenbrooks* (1901), which mocks and elegizes his own North-German merchant ancestors, the fortune-hunter Bendix Grünlich ("greenish") flatters Frau Consul for the hand of Antonie. Frau Consul's family is Duchamps, "of the field," expressing a nostalgia for the pastoral Aristocracy; compare Jack London's sarcasm about "Van Weyden." "This would be a better world if there were more families like them in it," declares the ingratiating Mr. Greenish. "They have religion, benevolence, and genuine piety; in short, they are my ideal of the true Christian spirit. And in them it is united to a rare degree with a brilliant cosmopolitanism, an elegance, an aristocratic bearing."⁵⁵ It would be a better world, in other words, with Christian aristocrats and no Third Estate. Later he "communicated the [false] fact that his father had been a clergyman, a

⁵² Novak, *Catholic Social Thought*, 1984, p. 179.

⁵³ Novak, *Catholic Social Thought*, 1984, p. 179.

⁵⁴ Oz, *Under This Blazing Light*, 1979, p. 45.

⁵⁵ Mann, *Buddenbrooks*, 1901, p. 74.

Christian, and at the same time a highly cosmopolitan gentleman" (p. 79), claiming Christian-peasant and pagan-aristocratic virtues in combination.

The combination of peasant and aristocratic virtues cannot be genuine in a bourgeois. And so it proves in Grünlich.

Christian rhetoric in *Buddenbrooks* is used as a mere instrument of ambition or pride, as when Johann diverts his daughter Antonie from her infatuation with an unsuitable young man, one in fact embodying the liberal ideals of 1848: "It is my Christian conviction, my dear daughter, that one must have regard for the feelings of others," namely, Father Johann's. The passionate Christianity of the bourgeoisie in the early nineteenth century, Mann implies, was a transient novelty, at least by the standard of religious sobriety in Germany after the Thirty Years War: "The deceased Consul's [Johann's father] fanatical love of God and of the Savior had been an emotion foreign to his forebears, who never cherished other than the normal, every-day sentiments proper to good citizens." Johan has drifted away from Enthusiastic religion, the bourgeois or even proletarian correlate of the Sentimental Revolution among the gentry and aristocracy, and uses the memory of it merely as a rhetorical trick.

Aristocratic rhetoric as well, Mann implies, is false in the bourgeoisie, and dangerous. Gerda, born Arnoldsen in Amsterdam, mother of future *Buddenbrooks*, is "an artist, an individual, a puzzling, fascinating creature," thinks bourgeois Tom, who marries her. Peter Gay notes that Mann never allows himself inside her head. She is seen ominously as "aristocratic" – though as a Dutch woman this is something of an absurdity at the outset.⁵⁶ She reinforces the bohemian strain in the family, evinced by Tom's brother, called Christian, who ends in a madhouse, and in Tom's only son and heir, called Hanno, who is like his "aristocratic" mother music-obsessed, and who dies at 15, ending the hopes for the firm.⁵⁷

In 1944 Sartre claimed with some justice that "most members of the middle class and most Christians are not authentic." The word "authentic" is a master term in Sartre, taken from Heidegger, meaning that *les bourgeois* without it "refuse to live up to their middle-class or Christian condition fully and that they always conceal certain parts of themselves from themselves."⁵⁸ As Ruth Benedict observed at about the same troubled time, "Men who have accepted a system of values by which to live cannot without courting inefficiency and chaos keep for long a fenced-off portion of their lives where they think and behave according to a contrary set of values."⁵⁹

I quoted Aristotle's sneering remark that the bourgeoisie have lives "ignoble and inimical to goodness/excellence." Aristotle's reasoning is that the polis required "men who are absolutely just, and not men who are merely just in relation to some particular standard," that is, their own particular bottom line, which is no justice at all.⁶⁰ In this he is correct. Adam Smith argued on similar grounds that landlords, not merchants, were the best representatives of the whole community. Prudence Only is not an ideal constitution. But Smith, unlike Aristotle, knew and loved actual bourgeois people. And so he knew, as the Western clerisy hostile to the bourgeoisie does not, that a good society can be founded on actually existing bourgeois virtues.

⁵⁶ Gay, *Savage Reprisals*, 2002, p. 130.

⁵⁷ Mann, *Buddenbrooks*, 1901, pp. 113, 202-203, 66, 227.

⁵⁸ Sartre, *Anti-Semite*, 1944, p. 90.

⁵⁹ Benedict, *Chrysanthemum*, 1946, p. 12.

⁶⁰ Aristotle, *Politics*, c. 330 BC, Barker trans., 1328b, p. 301.

Forgetting Smith in a commercial society has orphaned the virtues. It is the ethical tragedy of the modern West.

* * * *

What then are the bourgeois virtues? You ask me to preach. I'll preach to thee.

The leading bourgeois virtue is the Prudence to buy low and sell high. I admit it. There. But it is also the prudence to trade rather than to invade, to calculate the consequences, to pursue the good with competence – Herbert Hoover, for example, energetically rescuing many Europeans from starvation after 1918.

Another bourgeois virtue is the Temperance to save and accumulate, of course. But it is also the temperance to educate oneself in business and in life, to listen to the customer, to resist the temptations to cheat, to ask quietly whether there might be a compromise here – Eleanor Roosevelt negotiating the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights in 1948.

A third is the Justice to insist on private property honestly acquired. But it is also the justice to pay willingly for good work, to honor labor, to break down privilege, to value people for what they can do rather than for who they are, to view success without envy, making capitalism work since 1776.

A fourth is the Courage to venture on new ways of business. But it is also the courage to overcome the fear of change, to bear defeat unto bankruptcy, to be courteous to new ideas, to wake up next morning and face fresh work with cheer, resisting the despairing pessimism of the clerisy 1848 to the present. And so the bourgeoisie can have Prudence, Temperance, Justice, and Courage, the pagan four. Or the Scottish three – Prudence, Temperance, and Justice, the artificial virtues – plus enterprise, that is, Courage with another dose of Temperance.

Beyond the pagan virtues is the Love to take care of one's own, yes. But it is also a bourgeois love to care for employees and partners and colleagues and customers and fellow citizens, to wish well of humankind, to seek God, finding human and transcendent connection in the marketplace in 2006, and in a Scottish benevolence c. 1759.

Another is the Faith to honor one's community of business. But it is also the faith to build monuments to the glorious past, to sustain traditions of commerce, of learning, of religion, finding identity in Amsterdam and Chicago and Osaka.

Another is the Hope to imagine a better machine. But it is also the hope to see the future as something other than stagnation or eternal recurrence{,} to infuse the day's work with a purpose, seeing one's labor as a glorious calling, 1533 to the present. So the bourgeoisie can have Faith, Hope, and Love, these three, the theological virtues.

That is, the bourgeois virtues are merely the Seven Virtues exercised in a commercial society. They are not hypothetical. For centuries in Venice and Holland and then in England and Scotland and British North America, then in Belgium, Northern France, the Rhineland, Sydney, Cleveland, Los Angeles, Bombay, Shanghai, and in a widening array of places elsewhere, against hardy traditions of aristocratic and peasant virtues, we have practiced them. We have fallen repeatedly, of course, into bourgeois vices. Sin is original. But we live in a

commercial society, most of us, and capitalism is not automatically vicious or sinful. Rather the contrary.

"Bourgeois virtues" is no contradiction. It is the way we live now, mainly, at work, on our good days, and the way we should, Mondays through Fridays.

Contents of Vol. 2 in progress:

The Argument: How a Change in Talk Made the Modern World

Part 1

The Shifting Rhetoric of the Aristocratic and then Bourgeois English Needs to Be Explained

Chapter 1: Bourgeois Precursors Were Ancient

Chapter 2 But the Early Bourgeoisies Were Precarious

Chapter 3: The Dutch Bourgeoisie Preached Virtue

Chapter 4: And the Dutch Bourgeoisie Was Virtuous

Chapter 5: Yet Old England Disdained the Market and the Bourgeoisie

Chapter 6: And so the Bourgeoisie Could Not "Rise"

Chapter 7: But in the Late 17th Century the British Changed

Chapter 8: For Example, a Bourgeois England Measured

Chapter 9: The New Values Were Triumphant by 1848, or 1776, or even 1710

Part 2
The Bourgeois Virtues
Were Philosophized in the 18th Century

- Chapter 10: Adam Smith Shows Bourgeois Theory at Its Amiable Best
- Chapter 11: Ben Franklin Was Bourgeois, But not Prudence-Only
- Chapter 12: Bourgeois Theorizing Was in Fashion
- Chapter 13: Smith Was the Last of the Former Virtue Ethicist
- Chapter 14: Smith was No Reductionist, Economistic or Otherwise
- Chapter 15: “Hobbesian” Prudence is not Sufficient
- Chapter 16: Prudence-Only is Refuted by Experience and Experiment
- Chapter 17: The Left Should Acknowledge the Virtues
- Chapter 18: But So Should the Right

Part 3: Material Explanations
for the Subsequent Enrichment
Do not Work

- Chapter 19: Modern Growth is a Factor of at Least Fifteen
- Chapter 20: It Was not Thrift
- Chapter 21: Nor Was It Original Accumulation, or the Protestant Ethic
- Chapter 22: Foreign Trade Was Not It , Nor the Slave Trade, Nor Imperialism
- Chapter 23: Material Causes are thus Rebutted
- Chapter 24: Nor Was It Nationalism
- Chapter 25: Nor Institutions: Against North and Braudel

Part 4: Bourgeois Rhetoric Does the Work

- Chapter 26: It Was Unexpected Technology, and So We Need New Economic Models
- Chapter 27: Ideology is Rhetoric
- Chapter 28: Sweet Talk is How We Work
- Chapter 29: Sweet Talk is Virtuous
- Chapter 30: The Bourgeoisie Speaks Acts
- Chapter 31: Bourgeois Virtue is an Idealism of Ordinary Life
- Conclusion: How One Might See the Coming of a Bourgeois Rhetoric