Decolonizing Moral Visions: Christian Political Economic Ethics, Latino/a Religiosity, and Postcoloniality

Rodolfo J. Hernandez-Diaz
University of Denver

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DECOLONIZING MORAL VISIONS: CHRISTIAN POLITICAL ECONOMIC ETHICS, LATINO/A RELIGIOSITY, AND POSTCOLONIALITY

A Dissertation

Presented to

the Faculty of the University of Denver and the Iliff School of Theology Joint PhD Program

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Doctor of Philosophy

by

Rodolfo J. Hernández-Díaz

November 2011

Advisor: Miguel A. De La Torre
ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines moral visions of the political economy of mainstream Christian social ethics through a liberationist and postcolonial analysis of the work of three leading political economic ethicists, Daniel Finn, Max Stackhouse, and Philip Wogaman. Constrained by their subject position within modernity/coloniality and a commitment to a neoclassical understanding of the political economy, mainstream Christian ethicists have stopped short of condemning the inextricable complicity of the capitalist political economy to colonialism and its racist, patriarchal, and oppressive power relations. This dissertation argues that the moral visions of mainstream Christian social ethicists must be decolonized and points to Latina/o thinking and heterodox economic thought as two starting points for such a decolonization of the moral imaginary.

The project makes contributions to both Christian social ethics and Latina/o religious cultural studies. It contributes to Christian social ethics by examining the underlying commitment to neoclassical economic thought of mainstream Christian social ethics, deploying postcolonial hermeneutics to construct ethical frameworks that move beyond collusion with colonialism and complicity with empire, and offering a more careful analysis of political economy than is generally found within the liberationist strand of Christian social ethics. In applying the insights of Latina/o thinking to political economic ethics, it contributes to Latina/o religious cultural studies by moving beyond the stagnated discussions of identity politics, self-determination, and minority rights. It also contributes to the field by empowering Latina/o
religious cultural scholars to engage in non-capitalist economic theorizing by providing new analytical tools to combat the hegemonic conceptualization of capitalism as co-terminus with the political economy.

Mainstream Christian moral visions of the political economy must be decolonized to remain Christian and moral. Christian social ethics must draw on economic analyses that acknowledge the exploitative record of capitalism and its inextricable complicity with the modern/colonial complex. It must also avoid the hegemonic suppression of subjugated knowledges by theorizing from multiple places at once, taking on a subaltern perspective in addition to its unavoidably modern/colonial perspective.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Finally, and importantly, the author wishes to express his love and gratitude to Rachel Y. Lei for her generosity and patience during the long months of drafting and revising and for helping to sharpen the ideas and improve the arguments contained herein by listening and responding with wit, wisdom, and grace.
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## ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ATF</td>
<td>Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLUE</td>
<td>Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOM</td>
<td>Départements d'Outre Mer</td>
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<tr>
<td>GDP</td>
<td>Gross Domestic Product</td>
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<tr>
<td>IDB</td>
<td>Inter-American Development Bank</td>
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<tr>
<td>IPE</td>
<td>International Political Economy</td>
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<tr>
<td>JDP</td>
<td>Joint Doctoral Program</td>
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<tr>
<td>MNC</td>
<td>Multi-National Corporations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAFTA</td>
<td>North American Free Trade Agreement</td>
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<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCE</td>
<td>Society of Christian Ethics</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Programme</td>
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INTRODUCTION: SITUATING MYSELF

As a work of a religious researcher with liberationist leanings, this project takes seriously the ways in which social location is profoundly epistemologically relevant to the scholarship of any individual. Some might consider this introduction a manifestation of the project’s capitulation to identity politics. While identity politics usually refers to theorizing from a place of shared injustices, it has as its goal the greater self-determination of the group in question. This project is not interested in the goal of gaining Latina/os a seat at the table of modernist/colonial oppression. The attention given to social location in this introduction and the rest of the project is not based on belief of a one-for-one correspondence between one’s social location and scholarship. Social location is but one of the factors that influence what can be known. Social location is crucial to the extent that it limits one’s intellectual conversation partners, those who the scholar “knows with.”¹ The acknowledgment of social location issues forth from the recognition that a scholar unaware of the effects of one’s social location and the power dynamics embedded in one’s intellectual history/genealogy will replicate the same power dynamics in their own intellectual production. This introduction highlights some of my own

experiences as a way of acknowledging the conversation partners that I know with and making explicit the power dynamics embedded in my own social location.

**Growing up in Miami, Cuba**

My identity as a person and a scholar has been shaped by the years I spent in Miami in working class neighborhoods of immigrant families from various parts of Latin America (Nicaragua, El Salvador, Colombia, Puerto Rico, Venezuela, among others) as part of a Cuban family. My brother, sister, and I were raised by our abuelo/as. None of our abuelo/as spoke English because they had no need to speak it, except for a few words and phrases which always surprised me when I heard them. As anyone who has been to Miami knows, Cubans have managed to retain Cuban life, language, and customs in diaspora, though of course constant exposure to gringos has made its impact. Miami Cubans like to chatter about Cuba, about what went wrong, about when “Fidel” would be toppled, and about the possibility of returning to the island one day, even though as the years (and decades) went by that possibility seemed ever more remote. Partly as a result of living in a large Cuban community and partly because of the periodic arrival of more relatives from the island—tío abuelo/as, primo/as, and the like—stories, memories, and dreams about Cuba deeply influenced my development, even though my abuelo/as had fled from la isla years before I was born. Thus, it was jarring when abuelo Luis insisted that I was estadounidense cubano, not cubano estadounidense. Later I realized that abuelo Luis was right: I was a child between worlds, or between islands, since “Cuba es una isla y Miami también.” While I had never stepped foot on the island of Cuba, my identity was shaped

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2 Growing up I considered myself to be Cuban, sans qualifier.

through an U.S. experience grafted onto a communal remembrance that grew within me an exilic Cuban imaginary.⁴

An Education in Economics

My exilic Cuban imaginary expressed itself in various ways throughout my education. I became enamored with economics as espoused by Milton Friedman in *Capitalism and Freedom.*⁵ The close link Friedman makes between democracy and capitalism, political freedom and economic freedom, fanned my intellectual interests. I had heard of Marx, of course, but I had been taught that he was the founder of communism and thus his writings were not worth studying. My own social location seemed to serve as evidence for this dismissal. For a son of exilic Cubans who fled in search of economic opportunities and political freedom, Friedman’s arguments were quite powerful and persuasive.

I continued to study economics, in particular in the context of global politics, law, and international cultures, at the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania. In our discussions it was taken for granted that the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries had largely solved the problems of slow growth, low efficiency, substantial economic fluctuations, and an unfair distribution of income and were therefore to be taken as models of how to help emerging economies do better. It would be too simplistic to say that I was being trained in the Washington consensus, the basic logic of which is the improvement in economic efficiency (and thus social welfare) through the mechanism of free-

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⁴ For Lacan, the imaginary is a mode of representation that makes the self and world intelligible. See Jacques Lacan and Bruce Fink, *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2006 [1970]). The imaginary will be discussed in more detail in chapter one.

The economic crises in Latin America and in East Asia during the mid and late 1990s that shook the confidence in the Washington consensus was also felt by my professors. But there was no abandonment of the consensus. Rather, the question at hand was: how should the consensus be adjusted?

At the same time I was also exploring the cultures, politics, and history of Latin America and among U.S. Latina/os. Todorov helped me make the connection between the activity of language and the activity of conquest. The vastly outnumbered expedition of Spaniards were able conquer the empires of the Americas, Todorov argues, not through superior technology or military skills but through language. The Spanish would linguistically and symbolically exploit what they knew of the Aztecs’, Incas’, and Mayans’ cyclical codes and beliefs to subjugate them. Studying Walter Mignolo further underscored for me the relationship between language history and the practice of colonization. Alternate forms of knowledge and structures of power were created through the practice of reading and ideology of cultural hierarchies.

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6 John Williamson was the first to coin the phrase “Washington Consensus.” Williamson included 10 principles that made up the consensus:

Principle 1: Fiscal discipline
Principle 2: Concentration of public expenditure on public goods including education, health, and infrastructure
Principle 3: Tax reform toward broadening the tax base with moderate marginal tax rates
Principle 4: Interest rates to be market determined and positive
Principle 5: Competitive exchange rates
Principle 6: Trade liberalization
Principle 7: Openness to foreign direct investment
Principle 8: Privatization of state enterprises
Principle 9: Deregulation or abolishment of regulations that impede entry or restrict competition, except for those justified on safety, environmental, and consumer protection grounds, and prudential oversight of financial institutions
Principle 10: Legal security for property rights

After graduating from Penn, I worked briefly at the World Bank before taking a position as a consultant at the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). The IDB was founded in order to encourage economic and social development and reduce poverty and inequality in Latin America. During my tenure there, I noticed that many of the IDB’s past projects were similar to the sorts of projects that were currently under review. Despite the IDB’s diligent and long-standing efforts, high unemployment persisted in the region and the reforms that the Bank had initiated did not seem to have improved the lives of the poor much at all. I began to question whether the diagnosis of neoclassical theory and the medicine it offered were adequate to respond to the needs of people in the Majority World.

While I was living in DC, I continued to cultivate my interest in Christian theology and spirituality. It was clear that I had a passion for and fascination with Christian theology and with development work.\(^7\) In my own mind, these two interests were united by the theme of change. I was interested in thinking deeply about and helping to enact social and personal change.

**A Fuller Gospel: Christian Social Ethics of Corporate Life**

It was at Fuller Theological Seminary that I began to integrate my faith and theological convictions with my concern for social change. Under the tutelage of Glen Stassen, I recognized that there are few issues more thoroughly addressed in the Bible than political economic life. Jesus came not just to preach the good news but to preach the good news *to the poor* (Lk 4:18-21). I became convinced that the center of Jesus’ teachings is a prophetic judgment on riches accumulated through the exploitation of the poor and a challenge to the dominant economic and political practices of the world. While evangelicals have often reduced the moral values of

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\(^7\) Later, I found that the academic study of theology—a critical, rigorous, and systematic enterprise—is quite different from the more speculative and spiritual forms of theology I had read up to that point.
Christianity to concerns for abortion and gay marriage, literally hundreds of verses in the Bible discuss God’s concern for poverty, the environment, and the mistreatment of the least in society.

In the summer following my first year of seminary, I had the good fortune to take a class with Ada María Isasi-Díaz at Drew University. It was in that class, entitled La Justicia y El Amor Se Abrazan (Love and Justice Embrace), that I was first exposed to liberation theology. We read and discussed five theologians: Jean B. Metz, Gustavo Gutiérrez, Leonardo Boff, Juan Luis Segundo, and Jon Sobrino. I was immediately attracted to liberation theology’s ethos and premises. Theology and politics imply one another. God is on the side of the poor. In articulating a theology, one must be in solidarity with those who suffer and are oppressed. As a theology of conscientization it involves unmasking false explanations given by a privileged class to explain why things are the way they are. It is theology that reminded me about the connections between power and a telling of history, between language and conquest. Praxis precedes theology: theology is dependent on beings involved in the struggle for liberation. If a theology refuses to condemn the oppressive structures of the world, it remains a theology of the status quo, which always works to maintain the privilege of the privileged.

**Working with Workers at CLUE**

Shortly after graduating from seminary, I put my new convictions about liberation theology to work. As an associate pastor at an urban Latina/o church in Los Angeles, Iglesia Unidad de la Comunidad, I represented our congregation at the Religious Leaders Committee meetings for Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice (CLUE), an interfaith association committed to responding to the crisis of the working poor. I had the opportunity to meet with low-wage workers, including grocery workers, janitors, and hotel workers, and accompany them
in prayer and spiritual reflection at worker meetings and in street demonstrations in front of their workplaces. The workers were largely women of color and immigrants, who faced mistreatment of various forms, including uncompensated injuries on the job, unpaid overtime, harsh working conditions, and for undocumented workers, employer threats to contact immigration authorities when they complained about working conditions. They represented only a fraction of the working poor of Los Angeles, an entire impoverished community surrounded by communities in which wealthy Christians lived in extravagant homes and worshiped in lavish church buildings. The incongruity made clear to me, emotionally and spiritually, that any theology worthy of the name must involve praxis.

Theology and Economics Reexamined: Postcolonialism and Economic Heterodoxy

I was confronted with a different sort of challenge when I entered the JDP. Through my experiences with CLUE, I saw Christianity as a force for justice. A major charge I encountered early and often in my doctoral studies was that Christianity has often been the motivation of injustice. More specifically, the charge was that Christianity is complicit with the impact of modernity/colonialism on the lives of the majority of the world. I thought carefully about this charge and with the help of Kwok Pui-lan, Joerg Rieger, and Mayra Rivera Rivera considered how one might parse out the elements of Christianity that are complicit with empire from those that are not: I reflected on how to develop a postcolonial Christian theology and ethics.

In line with this charge is the critique that liberation theology, because it relies on the concept of human dignity and the ability of human beings to shape their own destinies, Marxist analysis in the critique of capitalist societies, and metanarratives about the mobilization of the masses towards a utopian kingdom of God, is complicit with modern/colonial complex. These critiques have forced me to examine my own liberationist sympathies. While liberation
theologians have responded in various ways to this critique, my own view is that liberation theology has evolved in the face of these criticisms. The Latin American theology that was born in the late 1960s is not the last word on liberation theology. Many second and third generation liberation theologians have undergone the paradigmatic shift from modernity to postmodernity, from coloniality to postcoloniality. My project has liberationist leanings, but it should not be understood through the lens of late 1960s Latin American liberation theology. It is a project in Christian social ethics that responds to and uses the tools of postmodern and postcolonial theorizing to extend liberation theology’s basic insights.

My own social location, including the exilic Cuban imaginary, had prevented me from engaging in any serious way with Marx. I was resistant on the grounds that it was Marx’s ideas that gave rise to the oppressive regime that threatened by family and forced us from our edenic island. My interest in social change helped me overcome my reticence and I enrolled in Alan Gilbert’s class on *Marx and Social Change*. It was in that class that I was given space and time to read and digest large portions of *Capital, Vol 1*. This was my first real exposure to something other than neoclassical economic thinking. Subsequently I learned that Marxism and Neo-Marxism are just one of many heterodox schools of economic thought, all of which critique neoclassical thought and reject its rationalist, individualist, and reductionists approach to economic life.

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8 For a study on the various ways these liberation theologians have responded see Joerg Rieger, *Opting for the Margins: Postmodernity and Liberation in Christian Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

9 Here I have in mind figures like Marcella Althaus-Reid who embraces the liberationist concern for the poor, but critiques liberation theologians for imitating the homogenizing tendency of much of modernist thinking. For example, she argues that liberationists construct the subject of the poor as a male, heterosexual peasant but have remained silent on patriarchal and sexual liberation that their theology implies. Althaus-Reid is one of many liberationists who challenge and extend liberation theology’s basic insights by adopting postmodern and postcolonial tools. See Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Teologia Indecente* (Barcelona: Bellaterra, 2005).
I began to wonder how heterodox economic thought would change the construction of Christian moral visions of political economic life. I had read mainstream Christian ethicists on the issue of the political economy, but now I read with a different focus: with an interest in the underlying social and economic assumptions in their ethical reflections. In what ways are Christian moral visions challenged by what I had learned about language and conquest, about social location and a particular historical narrative? In what ways does mainstream Christian social ethics uphold the neoclassical understanding of economics and what are the relevant insights that heterodox, postmodern, and postcolonial theory can bring to bear on the construction of a moral vision of the political economy? It was these sorts of questions that led me to this project.
CHAPTER 1: CHRISTIAN POLITICAL ECONOMIC ETHICS FROM A LATINA/O AND POSTCOLONIAL PERSPECTIVE

Defining the Topic: The Problem, Research Questions, and Thesis

The U.S. and world economy grew steadily in the Post-War era. Some have taken this effectiveness in bringing about productivity growth as a vindication of the prevalent capitalist political economic system. Yet, increases in GDP have been accompanied by a downward pressure on social mobility, persistent poverty, and increasing inequality. Growth-centric capitalism has moved people from middle class to the working class and has transferred wealth from the working class to the wealthy. While poverty rates have stagnated since the late 1970s, the 13.2 percent poverty rate in 2008 was the highest rate since 1997. From 1979 to 2009, productivity in the U.S. increased 80 percent, but real wages—that is, nominal wages adjusted for inflation—rose less than 10 percent. The result is that increasingly skilled and educated workers are producing wealth more effectively for their firms than ever before and being paid comparatively less. This effect of downward social mobility, poverty, and inequality is magnified when one examines the data broken down into categories defined by difference: gender,

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10 From 1946-73, U.S. GDP rose on average 3.8% per year. That growth rate has since slowed to only 2.7% per year. From 1965-99, the average rate of growth was steady across income levels: 4.1 percent in low-income countries, 4.2 for middle-income countries, and 3.2 percent in high-income countries. Tatyana P. Soubbotina, Beyond Economic Growth: An Introduction to Sustainable Development, 2nd ed. (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2004).

race/ethnicity, age, and national origin.\textsuperscript{12} Many women continue to make cents on the dollar to men in comparable positions. One-third of African American adult males will at some point in their lifetimes be incarcerated. White families are twice as likely to own a home as Latina/o families. The members of dominant group(s) maintain their privilege by extracting wealth from marginalized individuals and communities. The idea that when the elite prosper the rest will follow has yet to be evidenced.

The response of mainstream Christian social ethics to the problems of increasing inequalities of wealth, income, and opportunity and persistent poverty begins with an insistence that the capitalist political economy has substantially improved the condition of all people, both in the U.S. and around the world.\textsuperscript{13} The task of Christian social ethics from the mainstream perspective is, therefore, to uncover what is redeemable about capitalist political economics while denouncing that which is irredeemable. Christian moral visions are constructed accordingly: they envision a reformed capitalism tempered of its grossest excesses.

The problem with mainstream Christian moral visions of the political economy is that they fail to deal with the host of ways in which the structures of capitalism are complicit with the modern/colonial complex. While mainstream Christian social ethicists lament the situation of the poor and stubborn inequalities, their efforts to bring religious and moral commitments to bear on political economic practices stop short of condemning the ways in which the capitalist

\textsuperscript{12} Or really any category of difference. Beverly Tatum identifies seven commonly cited categories of difference: race/ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status (or class), religion, sexual orientation, age, and physical and mental ability. The privileged or dominant group within each of these categories tends to subsume or ignore the characteristics of difference. See Beverly D. Tatum, "The Complexity of Identity: Who Am I?," in \textit{Readings for Diversity and Social Justice}, ed. Maurianne Adams, et al. (New York ; London: Routledge, 2000).

\textsuperscript{13} For example, “All the jokes about economists aside, increasingly over the past decades applications of mainstream market economics on both the macro and micro levels have substantially improved economic conditions within the United States and around the world, and for persons from all levels of society.” John E. Stapleford, \textit{Bulls, Bears & Golden Calves: Applying Christian Ethics in Economics} (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 33.
political economy has strategically and dangerously reconfigured colonialism and its racist, patriarchal, and oppressive power relations. The destructive and death-dealing effects of these social structures on members of subordinate groups show such a pro-status quo response to be utterly inadequate.

Two questions naturally emerge from the above discussion. First, why does mainstream Christian political economic ethics fail to address capitalism’s neocolonial configuration? Second, is it possible to construct decolonized Christian moral visions of political economy, visions that attend to the plight of racial/ethnic minorities, women, and the most vulnerable members of society and that function in anti-hegemonic and anti-colonial ways? These are the central, driving questions of this project.

In this dissertation, the answers to these questions are shaped by liberationist and postcolonial theory and methodologies. With the liberationists, it takes on the perspective of the socially, politically, and economically oppressed in analyzing Christian moral visions of the political economy articulated by mainstream social ethicists.

14 Fanon was one of the first to articulate the logic of capital in the context of what he called the problem of colonialism. See Frantz Fanon and Richard Philcox, The Wretched of the Earth, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004 [1965]).

15 Some liberationist theorists have argued that continuing to focus on work of the mainstream thinkers directs attention on the center and distracts from the project of articulating theologies and ethics from marginalized perspectives. The author agrees, as far as this goes. But there is something wrong-headed about this critique: it assumes that liberationist theorizing exists in isolation from the broader tradition, as if it arrived on the scene fully formed. Concepts much celebrated among liberationists, such as human dignity or even liberation, have a long history in the western tradition. It seems at best disingenuous to proceed as if the first usage of these terms occurred in the second half of the 20th century.

Both liberationist and mainstream perspectives are branches of the same trunk of the Christian theological tree. Moreover, given that liberationist views continue to be sidetracked and seen as only about and for the communities from which they are written, it is both appropriate and relevant to critique mainstream perspectives. While liberation theologians have excelled at scrutinizing in exquisite detail how oppression operates within sinful social structures, their analysis of the political economy usually ends there. The liberationist ethicist’s summative dismissal of society as it nowstands falls short of critical engagement with the mainstream theorists which may be vital to achieving social change.
extent that these Christian moral visions fail to address the communities of the oppressed, they cease to be Christian or moral.\textsuperscript{16} Thus, methodologically the analysis proceeds by pressing the liberationist question: does mainstream Christian ethics envision a political economy substantively different than the \textit{status quo}? It is axiomatic that if a moral vision supports the \textit{status quo} or some gently modified version of it, it has failed to advocate for the oppressed and marginalized of society. With postcolonial theorists, this project engages in a reading strategy and method of critical analysis focused on the dynamics of power, resistance, and identity.\textsuperscript{17} The question of epistemic privilege which lies at the heart of the liberationist critique receives further and fuller articulation in the discourses of postcoloniality. The postcolonial theoretical backing is most clearly expressed in suggesting a way forward for Christian political economic ethics, since any moral vision that remains complicit with modern/colonial structures could never constitute a decolonized moral vision.

Enrique Dussel’s approach to ethics, which combines postcolonial thought and liberation theology, has been particularly influential to the project. In Dussel’s view, the current political economy is a result of a succession of systems of exploitation and expropriation of value that originates with the creation of modernity and coloniality, when Europe organized the

\textsuperscript{16} Cone’s actual words: “Theology ceases to be a theology of the gospel when it fails to arise out of the community of the oppressed. For it is impossible to speak of the God of Israelite history, who is the God revealed in Jesus Christ, without recognizing that God is the God of and for those who labor and are over laden,” James H. Cone, \textit{A Black Theology of Liberation}, 20th anniversary ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990 [1970]), 1.

\textsuperscript{17} The term postcolonial refers to a complex and interdisciplinary series of discourses that employ varied and sometimes contradictory concepts to theorize the (post)colonial period, condition, and/or thinking. One way to understand postcolonial theory is as an attempt to reveal relationship of colonizer and colonized as an instantiation of the dynamic of power-resistance-identity in Hegel’s master-slave dialectic. See Leela Gandhi, \textit{Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction} (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 16-17.
initial world system and placed itself at the center over and against the periphery. Approaches to political economic ethics that focus solely on poverty, as defined by measures of income, occlude the imperial nature of the capitalist system of production and accumulation of wealth. In short, in order to speak about the problems of wealth and poverty one must also speak of global capitalism, colonialism, and the historical patterns of wealth accumulation which enriches the minority while impoverishing the majority.

The central argument of the project is twofold. First, mainstream Christian ethicists have constructed their moral visions of the political economy according to modern/colonial logics. Second, decolonizing mainstream Christian moral visions requires theorizing from the

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19 Dussel’s anti-imperial political economy coincides with the critiques developed by Immanuel Wallerstein.

perspective of Latina/o thinking and disrupting Christian social ethics’ operative understanding of economics. The first part of the argument explains the problem while the second offers a dual solution.

Theoretical and Methodological Concerns

The Social Embeddedness of Ethical Systems and the Moral Imagination

A crucial theoretical basis for the project is the social embeddedness of ethical systems and the moral imagination. Various societies have evolved embedded ethical systems—rules, principles, narratives, basic convictions—intended to guide moral behavior. It is worth noting that ethics is derived from the same Greek root as the English word ethos,\(^\text{21}\) which refers to what is habitual, a way of life, or what Bourdieu refers to as “habitus.”\(^\text{22}\) Ethos belongs to a people, a culture, a group; it is the characteristic or prevalent existential tone, the immediate world of human works under the horizon of meaningful action.\(^\text{23}\) From this embedded ethic and ethos arises philosophical ethics, which tries to methodically and explicitly analyze what is already being lived out at the level of the ethos and to elucidate the embedded ethical systems—the beliefs and patterns of acceptable behavior—of a given human community.\(^\text{24}\) Greece gave birth to philosophical ethics, but despite claims that their reflections are universally

\(^{21}\) Ethos, with an eta.

\(^{22}\) In *The Logic of Practice*, Bourdieu defines habitus as “The conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence . . . system of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations.” See Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 53.


\(^{24}\) Ibid.
valid, it was necessarily a Greek philosophical ethics; it could not have been otherwise. The
Greeks, critical of their own world, could not apply their critique beyond the horizons of the
Hellenistic world. That is, the horizon of their ethical imagination was already historically,
culturally, and socially bound and determined.\(^\text{25}\)

Ethics analyzes and interprets the embedded moral imagination of a historically
bounded and determined people, community, or society, even when an ethicist does not
acknowledge her or his subject position within the habitus. Despite insistences of some,
Aristotle’s discussion of *eudaimonia* (“happiness” or “flourishing”) and *arête* (“virtue”) in his two
ethical treatises, disseminated under the titles *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Eudemian Ethics*, do
not deal with an ethic valid for all human beings at all times, but only for the Greeks of his
time.\(^\text{26}\) Although he lacked the critical self-consciousness to recognize it, Kant’s *Critique of
Practical Reason* reflects the ethos of the Prussian people at the end of the 18\(^{th}\) century and
beginning of the 19\(^{th}\) century.\(^\text{27}\) Despite Kant’s Enlightenment presumption of universality, his
ethics are socially situated and only comprehensible on those terms. This does not mean that
the reflections of Aristotle or Kant are to be abandoned wholesale, only that their ethics must
be examined in the context of their ethos, of their habitus.

The focus of this dissertation is on Christian social ethics, not with Greek or
Enlightenment philosophers directly. They are meant only to illustrate that even the figures that
loom largest in the moral imagination are bounded by their own time and space. If that is true
for Aristotle or Kant, then it is certainly true for the contemporary figures examined in this

\(^{25}\) Ibid., 8-9.

\(^{26}\) Perhaps even for a much narrower group than that: the privileged upper classes of his

\(^{27}\) Ibid.
dissertation. Since ethics is correlated to habitus, it is clear that social ethics evokes questions of epistemology, ontology, and existentialism; questions about what and how human beings know, what reality is, and the identity and place of human being in that reality. Like all forms of ethics, then, Christian social ethics imaginatively constructs moral visions conditioned and limited by the ethos and habitus of the theorists.

Core Theoretical Concepts

Decolonizing

The focal point of the dissertation lies at the intersection of three core theoretical concepts: decolonization, moral visions, and the political economy. Each of these offers a way to understand the project. The first way of understanding the project is as a performance in decolonizing mainstream Christian social ethics. Decolonizing is necessary because any attempt to construct an unmodified form of Christian ethics, a universality valid ethics, is already an ethnocentric and colonizing act in at least in two ways. First, tensions and connections with empire and colonization have been part of Christianity from its earliest beginnings and have been part of the context of Christianity, in a variety of ways, since then. Nonetheless, Christian thinkers have rarely reflected on these tensions. In the modern period,

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28 The decolonizing framework attempts to do more than deconstruct texts, tell the horror stories of the past, and recover marginalized epistemologies. It is part of a much larger effort to stop the mechanism of death operative in marginalized communities. For more on decolonization, see Emma Pérez, *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History*, Theories of Representation and Difference. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999); Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed*, Theory out of Bounds (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2000); Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London; Dunedin, N.Z.; New York: Zed Books; University of Otago Press; Distributed in the USA exclusively by St. Martin’s Press, 1999).

29 There are only handful of works currently available that have taken on the task of interpreting Christianity within the context of empire and even fewer which have attempted to disentangle Christianity and empire. Sharon Betcher, Kwok, Rieger, and Rivera Rivera are among the few postcolonial
Christian (or sometimes “civilizing”) mission as part of the rationale for empire building, has until recently seldom been critiqued. To take one example, within the massive amount of research dedicated to the 19th century theologian Schleiermacher there are hardly any investigations into the colonial context of his work. Although empire/colonialism has been the context for Christianity, and Christianity has often been co-opted by empire and colonizing power, these connections have been considered only infrequently. Christian social ethics that ignores the involvement of colonizing and imperial forces becomes an ethic synonymous with the projects of colonization and empire.

Second, the ethnocentrism is expressed through a colonial mindset which warps and distorts the personal identities and intellectual endeavors. Edward Said and Walter Mignolo have identified this phenomenon whereby efforts to describe the other, of the (Near or Middle) East or (American) West, transmute into a reflection and serves the purposes of the one describing. Through the transmutation of Said’s Orientalism and Mignolo’s Occidentalism, the other is created to expand the power and boost the self image of the colonizer. One important implication of the Orientalism/Occidentalism interpretation is that there is no such thing as theologians. See Sharon Betcher, “Monstrosities, Miracles, and Mission: Religion and the Politics of Disablement,” in Postcolonial Theologies: Divinity and Empire, ed. Catherine Keller, Michael Nausner, and Mayra Rivera (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2004); Pui-lan Kwok, Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology, 1st ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005); Joerg Rieger, Christ and Empire: From Paul to Postcolonial Times (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007); Mayra Rivera, The Touch of Transcendence: A Postcolonial Theology of God, 1st ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007). The number of scholars who deploy postcolonial methodologies are on the rise, though on the whole postcolonial discourse still remains on the periphery of Christian ethical discourse. For an attempt engage in this project more generally see Don H. Compier, Pui-lan Kwok, and Joerg Rieger, eds., Empire and the Christian Tradition: New Readings of Classical Theologians (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007).


unqualified Christian ethics. There can be only African-American Christian Ethics or Latina/os Christian Ethics or Euro-American Christian Ethics. Writing under the rubric of (unmodified) Christian Ethics marks either a refusal to recognize the ethos and habitus already present in one’s work or a ethnocentric, hegemonic, and social-cultural colonial move that claims superiority over other forms of Christian ethics (even if it is unconsciously made). Constructing a Christian social ethic that is more than a colonizing act requires a critical examination of the ethnocentricism and colonial mindset and searching for those insights that can move the conversation beyond the horizon of empire.

The little work that has been done in the field usually falls under the rubric of postcolonialism, which gives the mistaken impression that the colonial period, has come to an end. Positing a strong pre/post binary assumes amorphous and porous elements can be somehow separated. While some formal colonial relationships have ended, others have remained. Guam and Puerto Rico, both acquired under the Treaty of Paris after the Spanish-American War, for example, continue to function as U.S. colonies, despite the end of official colonialism. The French Départements d'Outre Mer (DOM) of French Guiana, Guadeloupe, Martinique, and Réunion, although official integrated regions, are considered by many to be the contemporary colonies of France. One might consider this quibbling—after all, the U.S. refers to these as organized territories, not colonies; the French consider these “departments.” Yet the power differentials characteristic of colonizer/colony still exist: Puerto Ricans are subject to U.S. laws even though they are excluded from participation in electing officials who create them. Guam finds itself under similar circumstances. And although the residents of DOM colonies officially enjoy the same status of European French, they are often relegated to the status of
second-class citizens. Thus, the term postcolonial thus fails both in terms of historical accuracy and in signifying the end of power differentials that have not come about.\footnote{Rieger, "Christian Theology and Empires," 11.}

Since post-colonialism signals the end of colonialism in only a limited way, the term deployed in this project is decolonizing, which recognizes that there is no easy escape from modern/colonial powerful differentials, structures, and mindset. And yet these must be faced head on. Instead of the perhaps unrealizable, utopic dream of a postcolonial world, this dissertation proposes a realistic utopia, one that acknowledges the modern/colonial context of our world.\footnote{Some of the author’s colleagues have insisted the appeal here to “realistic” utopias has more than a hint of Nieburian odor to it. Niebuhr’s construction of “Christian realism” was an attempt to deflate the utopias of his own era, between WWI and the Cold War. He believed that all utopias were the seed of totalitarianism (See Reinhold Niebuhr, An Interpretation of Christian Ethics (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1963 [1935]). In contrast, this dissertation understands utopias as a method of unleashing the moral imagination. For Niebuhr, “the highest social obligation is to guide the social struggle in such a way that the most stable and balanced equilibrium of social forces will be achieved” (Niebuhr, An Interpretation of Christian Ethics, 175–76). The appeal here to “realism” points to a strategy for social change and not as a method of maintaining equilibrium. The attempt is to combine realism and utopianism, as the best of Marxism and Christianity does (See Gary J. Dorrien, Social Ethics in the Making: Interpreting an American Tradition (Chichester, U.K.; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 238 on this point. One wonders why these colleagues do not make mention of the secular realism of a Machiavelli or Weber or even Rawls. Rawls in particular defended a “realistic utopia” as the motivation behind a political liberalism (John Rawls, The Law of Peoples; with, the Idea of Public Reason Revisited (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999). Their myopia concerning realism may result from having given Niebuhr much more importance than he deserves, a condition also exhibited by the mainstream Christian social ethicists in chapter two. For a comparison on Niebuhr and Rawls on the question of realism, see Edmund N. Santurri, "Global Justice after the Fall: Christian Realism and the ‘Law of Peoples’," Journal of Religious Ethics 33, no. 4 (2005); and Eric Gregory, "Before the Original Position: The Neo-Orthodox Theology of the Young John Rawls," Journal of Religious Ethics 35, no. 2 (2007).}

Moral Visions

Social ethics, as noted above, must always be both descriptive and prescriptive. It attempts empirical description of the social context as well providing practical proposals for...
social change. The role of social ethics is to use the critical tools of social science, philosophy, and the natural sciences in the direction of pragmatic reinterpretation necessary for the prescribing norms for regulation of social life. This pragmatic reinterpretation forms a moral vision of Christian social ethics. The range of practical proposals constitutes a spectrum of the Christian moral imagination; it is the spectrum of the possible. Chapter two takes on the task of mapping the spectrum of the Christian moral imagination on the political economy. What follows is a theoretical grounding and methodological justification for exploring moral visions and moral imagination.

Moral visions, as the pragmatic reinterpretation of critical social analysis, are the culmination or apex of ethical formulations. They are also the starting point of ethical reflections. Moral visions shape social ethics and ethical methodologies which in turn influence moral visions. In this sense, moral visions work in analogous ways to physical vision; human beings do not pay attention to everything they see. Magic tricks work because when the human eye detects motion, the brain tracks the movement and actively suppresses the visual stimulus around it. In a similar way, ethicists who expound moral visions attend to what is in motion, the segment of society they consider most important, and actively suppress the concerns of other segments. The ethicist’s moral vision always already delimits the range of what is seen before they begin theorizing.

The construction and deconstruction of moral visions is one of the main activity of social ethics, and indeed all practical and critical social theory. Theorizing alternative worlds or articulating moral visions requires, among other things, activating the imagination. Imagination is the power to enact a mental image of what society might be, whether one envisions a world

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in which most abide by the rules or principles of an ethical system (a focus on behavior), or
embody the virtues/character of the same (a focus on a communal and individual ethos), or in
which institutional and social evils have been transformed into just ones (a focus on structural
realities). That is, ethical reflection, regardless of the mode of operation—deontological,
teleological, responsible, virtue, narrative, character, etc.—even if it describes merely a task or
mechanism or quest for self-knowledge, \(^{35}\) depends on the faculty of the imagination and the
articulation of moral visions. Following Satre, imagination refers to the mechanism by which
mental images of the world manifest themselves as objects to the consciousness, rather than
merely a bridge between sense and cognitive faculties. \(^{36}\) Thus, Christian moral visions reveal as
much knowledge about the subjective mental states of the ethicists as they do ontological
knowledge. Stated differently, moral visions provide a basic framework that externalizes the
internal conception of reality of ethical theorists.

### Political Economy

Social theorists, including ethicists, have often deployed the terms political economy,
global political economy, globalization, etc., but have seldom used these terms as more than

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\(^{35}\) As certain strands of existential ethicists, such as Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Beauvoir, and to
some extent H. Richard Niebuhr have argued is the purpose of ethics. See Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and
Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals* (New York: Dover Publications, 2003); Simone de Beauvoir and

\(^{36}\) See Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Imaginary: A Phenomenological Psychology of the Imagination*
imagination as a mental image that indicates “only the relation of consciousness to the object.” That is,
imagination belongs to the domain of nothingness rather than reality; it is of “the unreal.” Sartre
identifies the imagination with the imaginary, which he defines as the form of action that treats the
imagination as real.
fashionable buzzwords. The reader is to understand that these terms refer to something like “the current state of things” but otherwise is left to guess what these terms might mean. This imprecision or lack of analytical rigor concerning “political economy” and/or related terms is perhaps unsurprising since it reflects the imprecise use of the term in popular discourse. Recent social theory has not done much better in formulating a more precise concept of political economy despite insistences by some to the contrary. All of which begs the question: what is the political economy?

On a basic level, political economy refers to the relationship between politics and economics, between public and private spheres, between nation-states and markets. But in a sense this definition is too limited: political economy refers to a synthesis of any form of political authority and economic activity, both from above (regional, international, the global) and below (the local, state, and provinces). Moreover, defining political economy as the relationship between politics and economics assumes the ability to separate politics from economics. Pioneers of International Political Economy (IPE), such as Susan Strange, have stressed that the political economy involves the inseparability or mutual influence of the economic (resource mobilization and wealth-creation) and the political (authority, power, and control). For Strange, IPE is concerned with the “social, political, and economic arrangement affecting the global systems of production, exchange and distribution, and the mix of values reflected therein.”37 In short, political economy is concerned with the nature and exercise of power, be it economic or political or both, within the material social context in which human beings live.

Having defined political economy as the exercise of power within a material context, implies that the particular sort and practice of power known as western democratic-capitalism is by no means inevitable. A market-oriented political-economic system as the single possible

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solution to human want is a product of the modern/colonial imagination. The mechanism
undergirding the system of democratic-capitalism, the unchecked pursuit of self-interest so
vigorously defended as an omnipresent and timeless part of human nature, is an historically
contingent socio-cultural product.  

Those with more economistic leanings might object, arguing that the capitalism cannot
be considered a cultural product since, as Karl Marx noted, culture is a superstructure with only
a derivative relationship to economics. According to Marx, the capitalist economy sets the tone
for culture, which changed in order to accommodate it. The concern here is not simply to turn
the explanation around, as Max Weber did, to argue that culture is the formative influence on
the development of a capitalist market economy. The debates in western social science, split
along the lines of economistic and culturalist ways of thinking about the origins of the modern
market economy, are less relevant than the acknowledgement that regardless of which came
first, the economy or culture, the capitalist economy represents a decidedly modernist/
colonizing way of organizing the material world.

It is important to note that a modernist/colonizing way of looking at the world is not
equivalent to a Euro-American or European way of looking at the world. The adoption and
legitimization of market oriented capitalist system among Europeans took centuries. Mercantile
feudalism categorized the European political economy for over 1,000 years during the Middle
Ages. Certainly there were markets: traveling fairs and places where agricultural producers sold
their goods. The idea of a market as more than a place of exchange, however, as the driving
force for sustaining an entire society, was unthinkable. There was good reason why medieval
Europe could not conceive of a market system. It had not abstracted the elements of production

38 Chapter four examines more thoroughly this claim about the social, cultural, and historical
contingency of capitalism.
necessary to conceive of a market system: land, labor, and capital. In the feudal way of life, lands formed the core of social life. They were the basis of status and prestige, of military, juridical, and administrative organization. A medieval nobleman would no more sell part of his land than the governor of Connecticut would sell adjacent counties to the governor of Rhodes Island.\textsuperscript{30} Serfs were not free agents contracting out their services for pay. Serfs, like apprentices and journeymen, labored but their labor never entered into a market to be bought and sold. There was no more of a labor market than is provided by hospital interns.\textsuperscript{40} While capital existed in the sense of private wealth, there was no impetus to put it to use as leverage for more efficient production methods. The slowest and most labor intensive process was preferred to the fastest and most efficient.\textsuperscript{41}

The dread of change and innovation gave way very slowly over the course of centuries. Several movements gave rise to the change: the rise of nation-states, conquest and colonialism (of the Holy Land, within Europe, of the Americas, and then Africa and Asia), changing religious ideas (acquisitiveness construed as a virtue by Protestant Reformers), changes in infrastructure and increasing international trade (spurred on by events like the drive to build Gothic Cathedrals), the rise of humanism, the rediscovery of ancient learning via Arabs, and scientific curiosity (and creation of sub-industrial inventions).\textsuperscript{42} It was not until the late 18\textsuperscript{th} century that the economic ideology of liberalism emerged. Liberalism advocates for broader political participation, free economic markets, maximum amount of individual liberty possible, and that


\textsuperscript{40} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 28-29.

\textsuperscript{42} A case can be made that the medieval world did not come to an end until the period between 1750-1850. See John H. Van Engen, ed., \textit{The Past and Future of Medieval Studies} (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994).
individuals should pursue their own economic self-interest unapologetically because in doing so they will raise the standards of living for everyone. This ideological position was important in the break with medieval European notions and the creation of modern ones.

Increasing global integration based on commercialization and commodification—of land, labor, and capital—is not inevitable, even for Europeans. The political economic principle that each person acting in their own self-interest will yield the greatest social well-being is not a discovery of an eternal timeless truth, but an imaginative invention of a people within a particular historical and socio-cultural framework. It is an invention that attempts to legitimize the current social configuration as the best of all possible worlds.
Nature and Scope of the Project

The second half of the twentieth century marked a shift in concerns for normative ethics towards meta-ethics. Questions such as “what is the good?” or “what are one’s duties to others” tended to fade into the background of ethical discussions, supplanted by meta-ethical questions such as “what does the good mean?”; “how are goodness and rightness related?”; “what purpose does moral language serve?”; and “how is it possible to know what is ethical at all?” Meta-ethical questions such as these are not new—Socrates asked them more than two thousand years ago—but they occupied a greater part of the attention of professional ethicists in the twentieth century than in any time in the past.

This research project is a work of meta-ethics. The distinction is an important one. Normative ethics has as its subject matter the human conduct. Meta-ethics, in contrast, has the discipline of normative ethics as its subject matter: it is the systematic study of normative ethics. While normative ethics is once removed from moral practice, meta-ethics is twice removed. As a twice-removed inquiry, it stands apart from normative ethics proper, asking questions about ethical theories and the problems of meaning, method, and knowledge. The project undertakes an analytical and meta-ethical examination of Christian moral visions of the political economy.

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44 This paragraph borrows heavily from Oliver A. Johnson, Ethics: Selections from Classical and Contemporary Writers, 8th ed. (Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace, 1999), 311.

45 Oliver A. Johnson is just one who makes this classic distinction between normative and meta-ethics. See Ibid., 9-11.

46 The project only examines the moral visions articulated by professional Christian social ethicists. Christian advocacy groups, grass-roots resistance movements, and the like are not in view. These no doubt would provide rich sources for analysis, but they do not represent fully articulated moral vision of the political economy.
It is not an attempt to elaborate a Christian moral vision of the political economy; instead it is an attempt to provide methodological guidance for decolonizing Christian moral visions of the political economy.

Outline of the Dissertation

The discussion of the dissertation proceeds along the lines suggested by the thesis. Chapter one sets the parameters of the study and laying some of the theoretical groundwork for what follows. The second half of the chapter examines decolonizing, moral visions, and political economy—three concepts central to the discussion. The chapter concludes with some thoughts about the nature and scope of the project and an outline of the dissertation. Chapter two maps the discourse of mainstream Christian social ethics of the political economy. It focuses on the work of three leading ethicists writing in this area—Daniel Finn, Max Stackhouse, and Philip Wogaman—who represent the mainstream perspective.  

Chapter three and four constitute...

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47 These authors are influential representatives of the mainstream perspective of Christian political economic ethics. Over the last few decades, there have been a number of publications in this area, though in the mind of the author there are reasons to exclude them from the analysis at hand. One such work is the often cited Herman E. Daly, John B. Cobb, and Clifford W. Cobb, For the Common Good: Redirecting the Economy toward Community, the Environment, and a Sustainable Future, 2nd ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994 [1989]). Cobb and Daly’s work is more of a critique of mainstream economic concepts than it is a thoroughgoing Christian ethical analysis of the political economy. Two related works, which aim to introduce economic concepts to the “theologically minded” non-specialist are Samuel Gregg, Economic Thinking for the Theologically Minded (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2001); and Walter L. Owensby, Economics for Prophets: A Primer on Concepts, Realities, and Values in Our Economic System (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988).

Another work is Hans Küng’s sweeping A Global Ethic for Global Politics and Economics (Hans Küng, A Global Ethic for Global Politics and Economics (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998)). While Küng’s work surveys a wide range of ethical issues in politics and economics—driven by the conviction that the world’s religions are capable of supplying the basis for his “global ethic”—it is not a theological examination of the political economy. Küng’s is a pluralist moral vision: he draws almost not at all on the Christian tradition in his reflections on politics and economics.

An excellent critique of the liberal tradition’s attempts to reconcile theological ethics and economics can be found in P. Travis Kroeker, Christian Ethics and Political Economy in North America: A Critical Analysis, Mcgill-Queen’s Studies in the History of Religion (Montreal ; Buffalo: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1995). Kroeker examines the work of Rauschenbush, R. Niebuhr, and the pastoral letters by the Canadian and U.S. conferences of Roman Catholic Bishops and ultimately concludes that they fail...
to rise above their faulty theological assumptions. While it is a compelling critique and useful in thinking about attempts to articulate a political economic ethics of previous generations, Kroeker only provides a sketch of his own proposal based on a return to Augustinian realism, as opposed to the sustained treatment of the views in the works of the authors chosen. Moreover, Kroeker’s call to return to the theological foundations of an earlier area is voiced earlier and more powerfully by Stackhouse.


the solution portion of the discussion, taking each of the two-fold suggestions cited above in turn. Chapter three deconstructs the epistemic limitations of Christian social ethics that universalizes the subject position of its author and explores the ethical and epistemic potential of Latina/o thinking. Chapter four exposes the neoclassical economic framework which undergirds Christian moral visions and offers an analysis using the tools of heterodox economics. Chapter five revisits the argument of the dissertation, states its contributions to Christian social ethics and Latina/o religious-cultural studies, and suggests prospective lines of research and theorizing to further the project of decolonizing moral visions.

Since talk about globalization has become commonplace, a number of works have been published that critically examine globalization, such as Pamela Brubaker, *Globalization at What Price?: Economic Change and Daily Life*, Rev. and updated. ed. (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2007 [2001]); Cynthia D. Moe-Lobeda, *Healing a Broken World: Globalization and God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2002); and Rebecca Todd Peters, *In Search of the Good Life: The Ethics of Globalization* (New York: Continuum, 2004). These works address the issue of globalization which is a broader concern than the just political economy.


Lastly, there are two books, published by the current co-chairs of Economic Ethics group of the SCE, James P. Bailey, *Rethinking Poverty: Income, Assets, and the Catholic Social Justice Tradition* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010); Kathryn D’Arcy Blanchard, *The Protestant Ethic or the Spirit of Capitalism: Christians, Freedom, and Free Markets* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books). The themes covered in these two books are thoroughly represented in works addressed in chapter two. Bailey’s book applies Catholic social thought to the issues of economic poverty, and his solution, to empower the poor by building assets, adds little to the discussion among mainstream Christian ethicists. Blanchard, along with Finn, is part of the “markets rightly-conceived” camp. That is, they both argue that markets can become “moral” (Finn) or “other-interested” (Blanchard) if conceptualized correctly. Moreover, Finn, Stackhouse, and Wogaman have a much larger corpus related to the issues of ethics and political economy, each having written on the topic for decades.
CHAPTER 2: MAINSTREAM CHRISTIAN ETHICS OF THE POLITICAL ECONOMY

For as long as the universe contains conscious beings whose willed actions cause themselves and each other many kinds and degrees of suffering and joy, moral questions will remain inescapably important.
—Christopher Clausen

Envisioning a Moral Political Economy

Religious and non-religious thinkers alike are interested in envisioning a moral political economy. Many of these theorists have concluded that capitalism—the prevalent form of political economy currently operative in the world—is violent, discriminatory, dominating, and exploitative. Most wars have underlying economic causes, usually about access to resources. For example, it is now widely accepted that the U.S. invasion of Iraq was motivated primarily by a quest for oil. The widespread U.S. consumer demand for any and all types of drugs has led directly to the increase in violence, drug dealing, and arms trade in Latin American and other developing countries. Income and wealth flow to a select few at the expense of the vast majority. Social categories of race/ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation are used to maintain privilege and oppress individuals not because of anything they have done or not done, but on

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50 A topic under discussion at a recent meeting between Honduras’s Minister of Public Security Oscar Alvarez and his U.S. counterparts in the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF). The ATF operation called Operation Fast and Furious was meant to track the guns and then take into custody those involved in drug cartels. The operation went badly and allowed as many as two thousand guns to flow illegally into Mexico, Honduras, and other Latin American countries. As reported on Univison’s *Al Punto*, broadcast on July 24, 2011.
the basis of difference. Lack of access to clean water in many places has led to the spread of preventable diseases, chronic illnesses, and sometimes death. Climate change attributable to industrial activities of humans is leading to desertification, decimation of food sources, and starvation. While it may be somewhat difficult to accept, there is little doubt that the present capitalist political economy deals death every day.

One would expect that the moral vision articulated by Christian social ethicists, who have the prophetic Biblical tradition to draw from, would take the lead in critiquing a system that encourages human beings to trample on each other, the Earth, and all life in the name of economic gain. On the contrary, Christian social ethical discourse, while ostensibly concerned about injustice, inequity, and the poor, defends the basic framework of the world-capitalist system. This chapter argues that mainstream Christian ethics of the political economy endorses the status quo and affirms the virtues of the prevalent free-market system. The argument is not that those who write in the field of Christian ethics are maliciously intent on designing ways for

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51 There are relatively inexpensive and quickly implementable water purification systems, such as the H2O Tech 2 system installed in the community of Aceituno, Guatemala through partnership of Central Presbyterian Church and the author’s local church, Presbyterian Church of the Covenant. For incredibly low cost (the entire system cost $10,000, has a life span of 10 years, and purifies more than 120 gal of water per day) the system reclaims contaminated water (the only available water in the community) into safe, potable water.

52 Biblical scholarship reveals a Jesus who said and did a great deal relevant to the political economy. One can make a good case that promoting a moral economy was a pivotal project for Jesus. See Blomberg, Neither Poverty nor Riches. The prophetic social role of Jesus’ ministry has been identified as a key aspect of Jesus’ brief public ministry. Marcus Borg identifies five key roles of Jesus’ ministry. He was a person a mystic, healer, wisdom teacher, social prophet, and founder of a movement. See “Jesus Before and After Easter: Jewish Mystic and Christian Messiah,” in Marcus J. Borg and N. T. Wright, The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions, 1st ed. ([San Francisco]: HarperSanFrancisco, 1999), 53-76. A social prophet, Jesus followed in a line of earlier prophets who protested a system of domination, the economic and political arrangement that oppressed and exploited, and announced that it was God’s will for a very different system. Jesus promoted an alternative moral vision of an inclusive and egalitarian society, a vision that challenged the social boundaries of his day. That is, Jesus challenged the systems of domination of his day. One could make the argument that Jesus was killed for his economic and political policy suggestions, which challenged the wealthy and powerful of his day. This line of reasoning is pursued in the small pamphlet Tom Head, Envisioning a Moral Economy, ed. Chel Avery, Pendle Hill Pamphlet 405 (Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill, February 2010).
privileged groups to maintain their power. Nor is it that they fail to condemn some violations of human dignity and ecological integrity. What is being argued is that mainstream Christian ethicists understand these injustices as occasional exceptions to a system that generally yield good economic and political outcomes.

This chapter examines mainstream Christian social ethics’ moral visions of the political economy. In order to examine these moral visions in some detail, the discussion is limited to the work of three prominent Christian social ethicists—Daniel Finn, Max Stackhouse, and Philip Wogaman. All three have written extensively on the issues of political economic ethics and have served as Presidents of the Society of Christian ethics (2009, 1986-87, 1976-77, respectively). Finn has Catholic roots while the other two draw on the Protestant theological heritage: Stackhouse is ordained in the United Church of Christ while Wogaman is an ordained United Methodist minister. Together they represent mainstream Christian social ethics of the political economy. Their work reveals the various configurations of the political economy Christian ethicists imagine are possible and what they believe to be “unimaginable,” or outside the boundaries of the possible.

Each section begins with a brief biographical sketch of the thinker under discussion, with a focus on his intellectual history, before proceeding to an analysis of his work. The biographical data offers a way of locating each thinker within his social location. It is not an attempt to reinscribe the trope of the narrative identity of the great white man, who self-sufficiently speaks to all times and places. On the contrary, it serves as an acknowledgement that identities and social locations are relevant features of epistemic assessments and are important in the construction of moral visions. Acknowledging the social embeddedness of knowledge is a crucial step in decolonizing moral visions.
Finn’s Trade and Free Markets, Correctly Understood

Daniel Finn began his academic career in Mathematics, earning a B.S. in 1968 from St. John Fisher College, a liberal arts Catholic college located near Rochester, NY. After college, Finn did not move far: he stayed in and around Rochester for the next five years. Influenced by his Catholic upbringing and training, he worked first for Project REACH, an organization dedicated to youth advocacy in Perkinsville located just south of Rochester, and then as a High School teacher of Calculus and Algebra. Finn moved to Chicago in 1973 where he earned an M.A. in Economics (1975) and a Ph.D. in Religious Social Ethics (1977), both at the University of Chicago. The University of Chicago’s economics department of the 1970s was well-known for its uncompromising faith in neoclassical macroeconomics and its advocacy of economic liberalism and free markets. Thus, Finn was trained in the sort of economy theory advocated by Milton Friedman, George Stigler, and Arnold Harberger, all of whom taught in the economics department at Chicago during that time. As a newly minted Ph.D., Finn received a joint appointment in Theology and Economics at College of Saint Benedict/St. John’s University in Minnesota, an appointment he has held to this day.

Finn’s research interests on the intersection of ethics and economics dates back to his dissertation which explores the normative basis of economic decision making in policy. Since

53 Much of the information in this paragraph is drawn from Finn’s faculty page at College of Saint Benedict/Saint John’s University, "Daniel Rush Finn," http://www.csbsju.edu/Theology/Faculty/Daniel-Finn.htm (accessed July 24, 2011).


55 It is interesting to note that Finn never earned a degree in theology a Catholic institution or otherwise.

then his publications, from his first, “Norm and Method in Normative Economics,” to his most recent, “The Unjust Contract: A Moral Evaluation,” have all had an almost single-minded focus on the Christian social ethics and political-economic life. Moreover, Finn has experience in structuring conversations across disciplinary boundaries, annually attending professional meetings in both economics and Christian ethics for decades, and serving as the president of Association for Social Economics (1986) and well as the SCE (2009), as noted above. As one of the most widely published and well-known Christian political economic ethicists, Finn is a particularly appropriate theorist to examine in the current project.

In Toward a Christian Economic Ethics, Finn’s first monograph, co-authored with Prentiss L. Pemberton, Finn notes the consistent theological demand of God throughout history to care for the “economically downtrodden.” The economically downtrodden includes what they euphemistically call economically “unsuccessful” individuals, those living at or below 125 percent of the poverty level, meeting some minimum standard of living, yet facing “significant deprivation” and economic hardship. The problem with the U.S. economy is that it produces a large and increasing ratio of such economically unsuccessful individuals. For example, in 1982 in the U.S. the economically unsuccessful numbered 46.5 million or one in six individuals. In the face of this worrisome trend, Pemberton and Finn questioned whether a harsher form of capitalism, that has little to do with economic justice, was developing. For Pemberton and


59 Pemberton and Finn, Toward, 96-101.
Finn, the problems of poverty and unemployment have a structural rather than just an individual basis. Christian economic ethics demands an obligation towards all who are economically unsuccessful, which means creating “counter-structures that effectively challenge unjust social structures.”

These counter-structures must be built on a Christian moral vision of the political economy, which must include six crucial elements:

1. The just entitlement of the poor
2. Constraints on the right of ownership (as far as it concerns obligations to towards the poor)
3. A reorientation of personal lives
4. A transformation of social structures
5. A commitment to individual and social transformation through “countervailing power”
6. A reliance on democratic processes.

The first two general principles affirm a prophetic devotion to the poor, the infirm, and the outcast as well as the counter-cultural idea that not everything in God’s creation ought to be owned. The last four principles stress individual, communal, and structural transformation. Taken together, the six principles represent a good starting point for conversation in Christian communities concerned with economic injustice. It is in the application of these general elements to particular problems that it becomes clear how Pemberton and Finn’s work supports the basic structure of the capitalist political economy. They concretized these principles into five

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60 Ibid., 3.

61 The just entitlement of the poor means that the poor “have a valid claim on those goods possessed by the rich over and above the necessities of life,” Ibid., 169.

62 Ibid., 167-77. On this last element of their moral vision, democratic decision making, they are careful to point out that it is a fallacious idea that preferences of the majority will solve all ethical questions or even that it will make decisions that promote justice. Having pointed out this possible failing, they express confidence that the “prophetic stance” of the church has the power to act as a structural safeguard against the “excesses of democracy.” This caveat itself challenges their assurances that a robust democratic process is the means to implement a moral vision of the political economy.
“operative norms”: 1) strengthen social welfare programs for the poor; 2) regulate energy costs so they are lower for poor and subsidize renewable energy costs to support a reduction in the use of nonrenewable energy; 3) resist market failures by enforcing true competition since competition is “the guarantor against injustice in capitalism”\(^{63}\); 4) limit the influence of large economic interests (corporations) on government; 5) transform the inner operations of the firm.\(^{64}\) All of the operative norms they suggest are, in some fashion, already in place. From prophetic and counter-cultural principles they have derived a position that is neither. They affirm some important reforms to capitalism and capitalist institutions, but their work falls safely within the structures of U.S. capitalism.

Moreover, by being narrowly focused on poverty, defined as being “locked out of career employment and locked into menial, dead-end jobs or into sheer joblessness,” Pemberton and Finn ignore the broader matrix of oppression operative within the political economy.\(^{65}\) They suffer from a limited range of moral vision. Within the framework they have adopted, Christian political economic ethics deals with social justice issues as it relates to poverty and employment. For them, the intersection of politics, economics, and ethics is concerned only with income, wealth, and employment. They do not see beyond these narrow parameters towards the ways in which capitalism is implicated in various forms of oppression.\(^{66}\) Ironically, Pemberton and Finn warn their readers that too narrow a focus on any one form of injustice “tends to splinter the

\(^{63}\) Ibid., 188.

\(^{64}\) Ibid., 177-202. This has some resonance with Stackhouse’s view of the transformation of the spirit of the corporation.

\(^{65}\) Ibid., 7.

\(^{66}\) Iris Marion Young, a leading feminist and political philosopher, in her brilliant essay parses out the “five faces” of oppression: economic exploitation, socio-economic marginalization, lack of power or autonomy over one’s work, cultural imperialism, and systematic violence. See Iris Marion Young, “Five Faces of Oppression,” in *Rethinking Power*, ed. Thomas E. Wartenberg (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 183-92.
overall effort.” They note that in focusing on racial/ethnic injustice, black and Hispanic groups might miss the way that their actions oppress women, or middle-class whites focusing on the poor might fail to see their own racism/ethnic prejudice and sexism. Yet, they themselves fall into the trap that they warn their readers about. Simply put, their assault on the current political economic structures does not go far enough. Rather than challenging oppressive structures Pemberton and Finn propose an ethic that is a far cry from the prophetic and counter-cultural norms in biblical, patristic, and medieval sources they excavate.

*Toward a Christian Economic Ethic* concentrates on the U.S. political economy. *Just Trading*, published nine years later, focuses on the morality of international trade.\(^67\) The basic framework for Finn’s thinking survives the intervening years. Economic ethics is still primarily about economic welfare as defined by income, buying power, and wealth. As in *Toward*, Finn engages in a review of the relevant biblical and theological themes, now in relationship to international trade, but the review in *Just Trading* seems much more cursory and less focused (less than 15 pages of the 269 page book). Surprisingly, Finn concludes that the biblical and theological data provides limited guidance for an ethic of international trade. The tone is dismissive, as if the relevant biblical and theological themes are anything but relevant.

Finn argues that even if one is clear on the theological norms that should guide adjudication between trade policies, a great deal of moral flexibility exists in the choice of any particular policy. The realities of international trade are such that they create a psychic and geographical distance between environmental and social costs of production and economic

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benefit enjoyed by consumers. Even a “modest” lifestyle by the standards of developed Western nations—driving a car, using a dishwasher, taking a plane to travel either for business or vacation—threatens the integrity of creation and does little to address the grinding poverty of so many inhabitants of the globe. After reviewing the arguments for and against trade, Finn highlights the extension of the “welfare-enhancing” exchange of the domestic market to the globe. His position is that international trade can be just if it is correctly understood. International trade must be bound by carefully constructed laws and regulations to prevent the most serious abuses and injustices.

Finn’s pro-trade position and his Christian convictions seem to be at odds. Yet, the contradictions and inconsistencies between what Finn describes as the relevant biblical and theological insights and the arguments against increasing trade remain unexamined. The love of neighbor, the preferential option for the poor, the commitment to the integrity of creation (environmental stewardship), a concern for foreigners as well as fellow citizens, are all inconsistent with the downward pressure on wages, protections for workers, and environmental safeguards that critics argue are characteristic of international trade. He partially resolves this incongruity by noting that moral convictions should not be allowed to trump “scientific understanding of causal relationships.” Citing “the world capitalist system,” Finn claims, is not

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68 Ibid., 193.

69 Ibid., 193-94.

70 See Ibid., chapter 2.

71 Ibid., 268.

72 Ibid., 77.
in itself an explanation for why rising inequalities, environmental problems, etc, happen. Finn, however, ignores the data that support the causal relationship with the current system of international trade and ill effects on people and the environment.

In 1993, the notorious Catholic defender of markets Michael Novak published *The Catholic Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism*, in which he argues for the moral necessity of market economy as the proper economic system for creative beings made in God’s image. Since then, others have closely paralleled Novak’s arguments. Markets, under certain conditions, are moral because they allow individuals to act freely and with dignity and respect. This sort of argument is just one degree away from stating that capitalism is the divinely sanctioned form of political economy. It rejects the view that capitalism necessarily leads to the exploitation of labor and discounts the idea that it concentrates resources in the hands of the wealthy and privileged. On

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73 Finn’s insistence that references to “global capitalism” as a causal agent explains nothing at all is based on the work of Karl Popper. Popper observed that if a theory explains everything, then it says nothing at all of substance. See Karl R. Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge*, 5th ed. (London; New York: Routledge, 1989 [1962]). Every good scientific analysis must be “falsifiable” in the sense that particular events can be identified that would disprove the theory. For Finn, a political economic theory that explains phenomena as arising from “global capital” is enormously uninformative because it is not falsifiable. Finn critiques Mary E. Hobgood’s structural analysis of the causes of poverty in the U.S. on exactly these grounds. See Mary E. Hobgood, “Poor Women, Work and the U.S. Catholic Bishops: Discerning Myth from Reality in Welfare Reform,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 25, no. 2 (Fall 1997); and Daniel Finn, “Monologue and Dialogue in Christian Economic Ethics,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 25, no. 2 (Fall 1997). Yet, there are some serious problems with Popper’s falsification theory that Finn so readily embraces. As Grover Maxwell observed, the statement “all human beings are mortal” is a perfectly sound scientific assessment which is not falsifiable (in the massive Karl R. Popper and Paul Arthur Schilpp, *The Philosophy of Karl Popper*, 1st ed., The Library of Living Philosophers (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1974). Indeed, many illustrious philosophers agree that Popper’s falsifiability critical theory does not work, including William. C. Kneale, Imre Lakatos, and Hilary Putnum (see the volume cited above). For a more recent article subjecting Popper’s Critical Rationalism to more detailed criticism see Nicholas Dykes, ” Debunking Popper: A Critique of Karl Popper’s Critical Rationalism,” *Philosophical Notes*, no. 65 (2003).


the contrary, it celebrates capitalism as a system that allows human beings to express their innate creativity, thereby “improving and adding to God’s bounty on Earth.” Forgetting the adage “there is no divinely sanctioned human economic system,” Novak and his ilk must minimize or discount the evidence that refuses to fit their thesis. The loud cheers for capitalism drown out the caution (even hostility) towards capitalism expressed in by Paul VI in *Populorum Progressio*. At the very least Novak’s analysis is incomplete, as far as Catholic social teaching is concerned. Worse, the injustices that capitalism leaves in its wake are minimized or ignored.

A more moderate position insists on the value of markets while still maintaining a critical spirit towards the injustices of *laissez-faire* capitalism. Finn’s *Moral Ecology of Markets* expresses this more moderate position, though it has much in common with Novak’s arguments. In *Moral Ecology of Markets* Finn argues that markets, understood as a mechanism for distributing resources, are value neutral. Only when markets are assessed within their context, to their “moral ecology,” can moral evaluations of the market be made. He insists that markets, correctly understood as voluntary interactions of individuals and businesses functioning under the pursuit of self-interest, can be considered moral under the right conditions, within an appropriate legal framework and a system that guarantees to provide essential goods and services.

The first part of *Moral Ecology* focuses on the market as a moral issue, reviewing the unsuccessful attempts of Friedman, Buchanan, and Hayek to defend markets without reference to moral argument, the defense and critique of markets and self-interest, and the four

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fundamental problems of economic life. Finn’s primary claim is that there is an ethically sound “economic defense of self-interest” in markets, but that “this argument is often misunderstood, especially by those who most frequently make it.”\(^79\) In Finn’s view, everyone agrees—even proponents of liberty and free markets like Nozick and Friedman—that government should enforce some limits on people’s actions. In Finn’s language, the market should have fences, or laws that restrict what is allowed within the market.\(^80\) Finn’s central discussion revolves around the nature and number of these fences. The book concludes with a warning that the economic defense of self-interest cannot be extended to governmental process because lobbying efforts change the rules of the game.

Finn’s vision of the political economy is a world in which advocates and critics of markets, those from the right and the left, can sit down and have dialogue about the strengths and weakness of markets in their own context.\(^81\) In this dialogue, both sides would take the other’s point of view seriously, critically examine their own assumptions, and engage in a genuine conversation about how to address the “four problems of economic life” which are allocation, distribution, scale, and quality of relations.\(^82\) According to Finn, the goal of each of these factors is, respectively, increasing efficiency, reducing inequality, sustainability, and community.\(^83\) In his discussion about allocation, Finn reinscribes the neoclassical definition of

\(^{79}\) Ibid., 6.

\(^{80}\) For an illustration of this jagged, fenced-off market, see Ibid., 115.

\(^{81}\) Ibid., 5.

\(^{82}\) Finn examines each of these in turn, addressing the strengths and weaknesses of markets in delivering solutions, Ibid., 79-99.

\(^{83}\) As we will see in chapter four, heterodox economics has made the case that on all four of these criteria, neoclassical economics has largely failed.
economics as “the study of the allocation of scarce” resources and stresses the effectiveness of self-interested activity. 84

In adopting this schema, Finn reveals that his understanding of economics and his moral vision of the political economy falls within the narrow spectrum of orthodox economics. Finn’s search for a common framework to discuss the merits and faults of markets is an attempt to discredit the arguments of libertarians and critics on the left. According to Finn, libertarians do not really believe in unrestricted market mechanisms and critics on the left who assume that markets and the pursuit of self-interest are axiomatically amoral are wrong. He is saying, in essence, “if everyone would simply be reasonable, and have a real discussion, they would see that markets are an essential part of solving the problems of economic life.” In arguing that markets and the pursuit of self-interest, under certain conditions, is ethically defensible, Finn has provided fodder for proponents of the status quo.

On his starting assumption, Finn is correct: formally speaking, the market refers to the economic activity in which buyers and sellers, through the forces of supply and demand, agree

84 Finn, The Moral Ecology, 79, 98. In defining economics this way, Finn forgets his challenge to scarcity in Toward. In Toward, Pemberton and Finn critique economists’ use of scarcity for treating all consumers’ preferences (needs and wants) equally. The scarcity of poverty, of lacking the means to afford a balanced diet, is treated the same as the scarcity of the well-to-do family that wishes it could afford a yacht (Pemberton and Finn, Toward, 124.). Similarly, economists’ use of efficiency overlooks costs and benefits not readily measurable in dollars and takes current definitions of property rights as given. Objections to federal regulation by agencies such as FDA and OSHA have been repeatedly made on the basis that they force firms to incur unnecessary costs and increase inefficiency. But such repeated demands for efficiency amounts to a covert way of promoting individual ‘justice’ for corporations at the cost of social justice (Pemberton and Finn, Toward, 165.). In the case of regulating drugs and work place safety, the social cost can be measure in the form of dismemberment, illness, and lives lost. This, from the perspective of Christian ethics, is “an evil that all in the community have the responsibility to eliminate” (Pemberton and Finn, Toward, 124.). Christian economic ethics calls into questions both of the assumptions and would generate alternative ways to structure economic life (Pemberton and Finn, Toward, 137.).
Finn argues that markets cannot be understood apart from their context, but he does not take his own argument far enough. Markets imply market economies, and in an age of increasing economic integration, the context of markets is free market economics, the reduction or elimination of international trade barriers under conditions that favor the wealthy, Western nations at the expense of nations in the global South. Where Finn’s argument fails is in pretending that context is waiting to be discovered; the current global political economy is the context and from the perspective of the poor, markets are anything but moral. Finn insists that markets and the exertion of self-interest can “receive a conditional moral approval” if markets have defined legal boundaries and certain essentials are provided. Yet in making this claim he has ignored actual historical insistences in which his proposed solution has been applied and yet falls short of any meaningful definition of morality.

Yet, Finn attends to this distinction of perspectives in considering the question “are markets just?” He points out that those who advocate for markets presume the context of the prosperous nations of the West and those who are critical of markets present the context of the majority of the world, where most live in poverty. Having noted how much context matters in

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85 Finn’s formal definition of “the market”: “that form of economic organization which allows individuals the freedom to do what they wish, to freely make and respond to offers, provided they avoid a list of abusive behaviors forbidden by law,” Finn, The Moral Ecology, 116.

86 For example, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) serves as a case in point. Mexico signed the NAFTA treaty in good faith, hoping that it would indeed bring the promised prosperity and increase in economic activity. However, the flood of cheap, subsidized U.S. food stuffs (such as corn) into the Mexican markets bankrupted small farmers and forced them to abandon their independence, dignity, and land in search of jobs. Many of them now formed part of an expanding shanty town around Mexico City. Small landowners, who could at least feed themselves and their families on the produce of the land, now live in squalor, without food, without work, and sometimes without hope all because of free markets. See Saul Landau, "Globalization, Maquilas, Nafta, and the State," Journal of Developing Societies 21, no. 3/4 (2005).


88 Ibid., 108.
developing conditions under which market outcomes can be considered just, Finn proceeds to elaborate two examples, one involving buying cans of green beans and secondly a throw rug. Both of these examples describe a decidedly bourgeois activity: having purchasing power and choices among various goods. From these two illustrations, Finn draws the conclusion that it is a serious mistake to think it is always morally wrong to act out of one’s self-interest and that moral evaluations of narrowly self-interested actions in the market “depend on the context and the result that eventuate.”

It is troubling that Finn feels the need to defend markets as a moral, albeit within, as he puts it, a “properly structured context.” He does so, one suspects, because he is concerned about getting the thinking about markets right. While Finn stops to get his thinking right, the majority of the world’s people continue to live in misery and squalor. While Finn is right to insist that markets must be understood in their context before they can be evaluated as just (or unjust), his work does very little by way of disrupting or challenging the status quo. As we have seen, Finn’s political economic ethics is limited to thinking about the economy as neoclassical economists do. Since economic life can be conceptualized concisely as allocation, and markets do very well in efficiently allocating, then market capitalism must be considered the best configuration for solving the problems of economic life. Finn sets the boundaries of what is morally conceivable and economically desirable within the basic configuration of the contemporary world and advances this as a Christian moral vision of the political economy.

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89 Ibid., 113. The examples are found in the section “Self-Interest and Market Morality” on 109-113.

90 Ibid., 145.

91 For Finn, allocation is shorthand for economic life. Ibid., 88.

92 Surprisingly, there is little in Finn’s analysis to suggest he’s interested in a distinctly Christian moral vision. Given his insistence on context, it begs the question of what commitments, religious or
Stackhouse’s Metaphysical-Moral System

Stackhouse studied philosophy of religion at DePauw University in Greencastle, IN (B.A. 1957). In the 1950s he spent a summer working on a railroad while reading Marx and Sartre in the evenings. He found their radical and existentialist ideas so appealing that the next fall he began to write a column for the campus paper, “The Ax by Max.” Stackhouse spent a year at a Dutch institute on a scholarship arranged by one of his professors, where his conversations with other students who had experienced Marxist regimes in action began to curb his enthusiasm for radical political economics.

Stackhouse returned to the U.S. to begin his seminary education at Harvard Divinity School. At Harvard, he studied under James Luther Adams, a ethicist of democratic socialist leanings well known for translating and interpreting the work of German theologians Paul Tillich and Ernst Troeltsch. Fifteen years after receiving his M.A. and B.D. (1961), he edited a series of Adams’s articles collected in an anthology billed as the “first comprehensive collection of his ideas and work.” During his time as a seminarian, Stackhouse first encountered Reinhold Niebuhr who was at Harvard as a visiting professor. Stackhouse describes himself as being “puzzled” at hearing Niebuhr lecture for the first time. He became fascinated with Niebuhr and

otherwise, Finn brings to his work. As I have implied, his commitments are to legitimizing the economic mechanisms that ensure those with power and privilege maintain their positions. This is discussed in more detail in chapter three.


chose to write his dissertation on the intersection of eschatology and ethics in the work of Rauschenbusch and Niebuhr (Harvard University, 1965).  

Over the years, Stackhouse moved has moved far to the right of the Marxist and existentialist socialism he advocated for as an undergraduate. During the 1970s while teaching at Andover Newton Theological School, he critiqued the military-industrial complex, calling instead for a counter complex of just peace. Then during the 1980s he drifted further to the right of the democratic socialist influence of his teacher, Adams. He critiqued any form of Christian theology formulated from a particular cultural or social context (one presumes that includes Black, Feminist, and Latina/o theologies) for lacking a trans-cultural logic and failing to critically assess local cultural realities. He also expressed serious concern with “radical” Christians who identify with the oppressed and who see liberation as the primary locus of God’s activity.

In 1991, Stackhouse co-authored an essay with Dennis P. McCann an essay trumpeting his decisive move rightward. “A Postcommunist Manifesto” announced that with the death of Soviet communism, the prophetic witness of “the Protestant Social Gospel, early Christian

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96 Max L. Stackhouse, "Eschatology and Ethical Method in W. Rauschenbusch and R. Niebuhr" (Harvard University, 1965).

97 Described in Stackhouse, "What Tillich Meant to Me."


100 Ibid., 101-03. In his chapter on orthodoxy, Stackhouse further explains what he has in mind. For theological education to be valid, theology must be an “ordered discipline rooted in reliable knowledge of that which is ultimately and universally read (God), although different from both material reality and human invention and accessible to reasoned discourse (logos).” Stackhouse, Apologia, 162-63. Theology must adhere to a metaphysical-moral vision that already underlies the global political economy.
realism, much neo-orthodoxy, many forms of Catholic modernism, the modern ecumenical drive for racial and social inclusiveness, and contemporary liberation theories” were proven wrong about socialism.101 Stackhouse (along with McCann) criticizes religious leaders for clinging to the belief that capitalism is “greedy, individualistic, [and] exploitative” and that socialism is “generous, community affirming, [and] equitable.”102 The authors proclaimed a new era for social ethics in which socialism and socialist ideas have no ground on which to stand: “everyone who holds to a ‘preferential option for the poor’ must now embrace capitalism.”103 Theologians and ethicists who advocate for socialist institutions and programs (even if they never argue for a


What is lost in this interpretation is that there are many versions of socialism. The socialist democracies of the developed world long ago rejected Soviet-style socialism. Differences in the socialist camp are lost on Stackhouse, though Finn is aware of them. Indeed he critiques the editors of *On Moral Business* for failing to address the varieties of socialism. “No matter how dead socialism looks to most U.S. citizens, a volume such as this would have done well to invite some debate over the issue rather than simply to presume that the (socialist) party’s over” (Daniel Finn, "Thinking Religiously About Economic Life," *Christian Century* 113, no. 14 (1996): 458-61).

The proclamation of capitalism’s vindication is a variation of the Francis Fukuyama’s argument that capitalism has triumphed and society has reached the “end of history.” See Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York; Toronto: Free Press; Maxwell Macmillan Canada; Maxwell Macmillan International, 1992). For one response to Fukuyama from a liberationist perspective, see Daniel M. Bell, *Liberation Theology after the End of History: The Refusal to Cease Suffering*, Radical Orthodoxy Series (London; New York: Routledge, 2001). Bell’s book begins strong, with a stinging critique of capitalism, which relies heavily on Franz Hinkelammert’s analysis. His conclusion, however, that forgiveness is the remedy for desire misdirected by capitalism, is inadequate at best. Forgiveness alone is clearly an insufficient defense against the unjust and complex machinations of the capitalist system.


103 Ibid.
full-blown socialism) are misguided. Christian pastors and teachers on the left of the conventional spectrum—including those of socialist, liberationist, and ecologist variety—are confused about the nature and character of economic life. Socialism and socialist programs are “regressive, superficial, [and] demonically destructive of morality.” Any theologian with socialist leanings or sympathies with the socialist leanings of the great figures of the Protestant theological heritage, including W. Rauschenbush, Karl Barth, R. Niebuhr, Paul Tillich, Martin Luther King, Jr., must abandon those ideas or become irrelevant in the public square.

Stackhouse affirms the liberationist’s “passion” for social justice, but dismisses the rest of liberation theology’s insights as “narrow dogmatism.” Liberation theology views social questions through the lens of power analysis which distorts an “accurate understanding” of the causes of oppression by drawing on Marxist analysis. Ecological theologians (along with, presumably, eco-feminists, eco-womanists and the like) are also mistaken, since their theory tends to be anti-technological and it is clear that God may use technology to heal, build community, and preserve creation. Those who cannot rethink the issues must be left behind as relics of an earlier era.

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105 Ibid., 15.


107 Ibid., 24.


Stackhouse claims that he agrees with liberation theology’s diagnosis of wrong—social sins resulting from complex societies—and its idea that “the only God worth worshiping is
biased in favor of the oppressed. Yet he wants to offer an alternative prescription to the pretense that salvation can be found in a form of revolutionary/radical social change. Instead of radical social change, Stackhouse proposes drawing on the “dynamism” of contemporary democratic capitalism. In his view, Christianity (especially Protestantism) has done much to sustain and support this dynamism. In the twentieth century, it helped to subdue Fascism, imperialistic colonialism, national socialism, and communism. The ghastly events at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, during the Holocaust, and in the Gulag were all resisted by constitutional democracy, human rights, and economic corporations independent of state control, all forces defended (even generated by) Protestantism. Because of its Protestant roots, this sort of

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114 Ibid., 21-22.

115 Stackhouse is correct when he states that social change alone cannot bring about human salvation. As Pascal states, the “infinite abyss” of the human soul “can be filled only with an infinite and unchangeable object” (Blaise Pascal, Honor Levi, and Anthony Levi, *Pensées and Other Writings*, The World’s Classics (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 10.148). What can be brought about through social change is provision for the basic needs of human beings and a political economic order than yields equitable outcomes. That is something the “dynamism” of democratic capitalism has failed to do. Furthermore, that democracy has opted for a capitalist system which distributes nearly all the resources and income to privileged elites does not bother Stackhouse in the least.


117 Ibid., 19. Stackhouse is either unaware or ignores the fact that U.S. corporations were also there providing services for the Third Reich. Hitler’s goal of exterminating the Jewish community and other “undesirables” was so massive that it required the resources of a computer. In 1933, however, there were no computers. Instead IBM designed and engineered a punch card system specifically built to control and store the information about the millions of diverse people that went through the concentration camps. There was an IBM system at many railroad stations and in every camp. None of these machines were sold; they were all leased by IBM. Each machine had to be serviced once a month, even those in the concentration camps. While IBM has attempted to discredit their association with Nazi Germany by arguing that it had no control over its German subsidiary, a letter written by Thomas J. Watson, president of U.S. IBM at the time, reveals all sorts of details about the activities of their German subsidiary. See Edwin Black, *IBM and the Holocaust: The Strategic Alliance between Nazi Germany and America’s Most Powerful Corporation*, 1st ed. (New York: Crown Publishers, 2001).
democratic capitalism has an “inner validity,” a “moral coherence” and “spiritual fiber.” Citing Matthews, he affirms that all political systems are to be evaluated by their abilities to sustain all persons in a community and that the community of faith is not to become identical to coercive structures of government. In economic matters, Stackhouse agrees with Matthew that Christians above others should have a deep sympathy with the poor and unfortunate, but it is a mistake to think of Jesus as being against wealth. Christian approaches should be more anti-greed than anti-capitalist.

Stackhouse doubts the ability of any of these other options to adequately access the deeper Christian ethical heritage or respond to the present political economic needs. Instead of these options, Stackhouse proposes the development of a “public theology.” Public theology presumes that theology, while related to personal faith, particular communities, and concrete social conditions, can never be “psychologically defined, contextually determined.” According to Stackhouse:

‘Public theology’ points toward a wider and deeper strand of theological reflection rooted in the interaction of biblical insight, philosophical analysis, historical discernment and social formation. It sees the moral interpretation of the common life as a fundamental task of theology and seeks to link that interpretation with the cultivation of a normative vision to form, guide and reform society.

118 Stackhouse, Public Theology and Political Economy, 53.

119 Ibid., 56.

120 Ibid., 58.

121 The term “public theology” is associated with the Reinhold Niebuhr’s Christian Realism and the work of contemporary Roman Catholic theologian David Tracy.


123 Ibid. There is a sense in which public theology, thus understood, is simply a description of Christian social ethics, which attempts to make theological insights intelligible to a wider (i.e., public) audience. Stackhouse proudly identifies the roots of public theology in the writings of the biblical prophets, the teaching of Jesus and Paul, Augustine’s City of God, Thomas’ writing of justice, the Reformers’ teaching on the orders of creation, vocation, and covenant, Ernst Troeltsch’s quest for a
Over and against neosectarians, public theology insists that we can elaborate a discourse that is intelligible to both those within religious traditions and those outside of it. It is an effort to offer guidance for society, its sectors, institutions, and organizations. It makes use of public sources, insights, and terminology. Thus, public theology is a theology informed by public discourse about social, political, and economic problems.\(^{124}\)

Public theology insists on the relevancy of theology and ethics to a pluralistic society. This claim poses no problem for Stackhouse who contends that modern society is constructed by values grounded in a religious metaphysical-moral foundation. For Stackhouse, developments in the early church gave rise to the idea of universal moral law and the creation of a universal community independent of tribe or nation. The ethos of the church gave rise to creeds which became the basis for human solidarity, identity, and universal human rights.\(^{125}\) He doubts that God and Mammon have ever been kept separate.\(^{126}\) He suggests that “modern” political-economic life “must be understood, at least in part, by reference to its religious heritage.”\(^{127}\) Since theological values have such direct bearing on worldly affairs expressed in political forces


\[^{126}\] Stackhouse, *Public Theology and Political Economy*, x, among other places.

\[^{127}\] Ibid., 88.
and economic interests, it becomes obvious that a public theology can once again provide ethical guidance for the structure of society and public life.

For Stackhouse, what is decisive for economics is the kind of religion that forms the ethos of the civilization. In this sense, Stackhouse’s project heavily depends on and agrees with Weber, who argued that the “inner-worldly asceticism of Puritanism first produced a capitalist ethic.” In structuring society, the decisive pattern is not culture, human will, rational choice, class interests, or ruling ideology. These are all secondary to religious and spiritual dimensions, defined as “the basic structure of meaning and the principles of right and wrong, good and evil, truth and falsehood.” Stackhouse finds Weber especially useful in combating the utilitarian secularists he believes pose such a threat to political and economic life. According to Stackhouse, Weber “has demonstrated that modern social realities simply cannot be understood without detailed knowledge of the metaphysical-moral visions that, along with other factors, brought into existence the modern method, on which our political and economic systems depend.” What Weber cannot do is articulate that metaphysical-moral system.

In 1997 Stackhouse wrote that though in the past he believed that corporations acting in a capitalistic context produced inequities of distribution, after fifteen years of spending every leave and sabbatical in socialist countries with different modes of production, he concluded that he “was substantially in error.” The problems of misdistribution and consumerism are worse


131 Stackhouse, Public Theology and Political Economy, 92.

132 Ibid., 120.
in socialistic economic systems than they are in the West where corporate structures of production dominate.\textsuperscript{133} While he grants that there is no definitive “Christian” political economic system, he argues that the political economic systems of developed countries are theological and ethically defensible. For Stackhouse, a mixed political economy, centered on the corporation but moderated through government regulations and taxes, is the most “likely social form of economic life in the foreseeable future.”\textsuperscript{134} Moreover, because corporate capitalism “support[s] the possibilities of pluralistic democratic governance under laws and protect[s] basic human rights, minorities, and dissent,” it is also “the best expression of basic theological principles in modern social life.”\textsuperscript{135} Those who scorn capitalism and condemn the corporation as “the embodiment of profit-oriented greed, a soul-less artifact that pollutes the environment, uproots people from their farms, closes plants, dislocates workers, [and] promotes growing discrepancies between the rich and poor” have failed to diagnose the problems of modern political economies.\textsuperscript{136}

Stackhouse argues that of the seven possible social centers for economic organization—families, worker guilds, religious organizations, the market (an indirect possibility), the state, and the corporation, only the last two are serious contenders. In socialist experiments in Eastern Europe and elsewhere around the world, “problems of maldistribution and rampant consumerism are at least as dramatic, if not more striking, than they are in the West.”\textsuperscript{137} Government-centered economic production has succeeded, and then only partly, where state-

\textsuperscript{133} Ibid., 121.
\textsuperscript{134} Ibid., 113.
\textsuperscript{135} Ibid., xiii.
\textsuperscript{136} Ibid., 114.
\textsuperscript{137} Ibid., 120.
centered economic planning functioned very much like independent corporations. In other words, the corporation is currently the chief social form of economic life and is likely to remain so for the foreseeable future. Stackhouse concludes that business corporation-centered production and distribution is the only viable model of the political economy.

In Stackhouse’s moral vision of the political economy, the basic structures and institutions through which humans organize social life remain unchallenged. He agrees that there are serious problems with the political economy and that the emphasis of Christian social ethics should be to demand more equitable distribution of wealth, defend human rights, ensure full employment, and defend the poor. His solution to these problems is the revitalization of current political economic structures through public theology. Since there are no serious alternatives to the corporation as the center for production and distribution, the task of Christian ethicists and theologians is to transform the corporation spiritually and morally. Thus, Stackhouse affirms the status quo as it pertains both to the broader political economic structures and to the central role of corporations in production and distribution.

Wogaman Democratization as Social Ethic

Wogaman grew up in Southern California. He stayed in his home state for college, earning a B.A. at the University of the Pacific in Sacramento (1954). Immediately after college, with a sense of calling to the pastorate, Wogaman moved to Boston where three years later he earned an M.Div and after three more years of work a Ph.D. in Social Ethics (Boston University, 138 Ibid., 114-17.

139 One problem with Stackhouse’s argument is that the behavior of corporations are determined by the context in which they operate. Within a capitalist context, unless corporations act according to maximize profit, unless they act in accordance with their fiduciary responsibility of the shareholders, they will be bought and gutted by other corporations.
1957, 1960). Rather than return to his home Methodist conference and take a church as he had intended, Wogaman was “lured into teaching.”\(^{140}\) Initially, he taught at his alma mater, the University of the Pacific (1961-66) before taking a post at Wesley Theology Seminary in Washington, D.C. as a professor of Christian social ethics where he taught for 26 years (1966-92). His only pastoral experience during that time was for a two year appointment during his last year of seminary and first year of doctoral work in “the (then) shoe mill town of Marlborough, Massachusetts.”\(^{141}\) After his retirement from that post in 1992, Wogaman began an “unexpected journey”\(^{142}\) as Senior Minister at Foundry United Methodist Church, also in D.C., at the age of sixty. In that post he served as spiritual advisor to Bill Clinton, who regularly attended the church during his terms as U.S. president.\(^{143}\)

In his writing, Wogaman has generally been attentive to the issues and problems of his day. His dissertation, published in 1960, dealt with some of the theoretical and practical challenges of racial integration in the Methodist Church.\(^{144}\) Wogaman’s early writing also


\(^{141}\) Ibid.


\(^{143}\) His geographic location at the crossroads of power in the U.S. capital and his professional positions first as an established academic, a denominational leader, and counselor to a sitting U.S. president has had, no doubt, a profound effect on his positions in his academic writings. Enjoying so much success and privilege as a professor, academic (he served as dean of Wesley (1972-83), president of the Society of Christian Ethics (1976-77), president of the Iliff School of Theology (2004-06)), and pastor explains, at least partly, his strong pro-status quo stance.

\(^{144}\) J. Philip Wogaman, "A Strategy for Racial Desegregation in the Methodist Church" (Boston University Graduate School, 1960).
addresses religious freedom and the problem of human overpopulation.\textsuperscript{145} His ethics is guided by the conviction that there is a logical connection between religion and ethics, that Christian theology has something to add to moral discourse, and that to be relevant, Christian ethics must speak to the structures of the human existence in the present world.\textsuperscript{146} Wogaman, like Finn and Stackhouse, has written extensively on the intersection of economic and politics with ethics. In the 1960s, he addressed the issues of guaranteed income.\textsuperscript{147} Sensitive to the plight of the poor in “civilized” countries and excited by the national debate about new social proposals to simply give to the poor a minimum income, Wogaman took up the question: “is it moral for people to be given income which they have not earned and may not deserve?”\textsuperscript{148} The idea commanded the attention of neoliberal economists Milton Friedman as well as liberal thinkers Robert Theobald and Leon Keyersling. Wogaman articulates the arguments for and against and concludes that the basic material conditions for human life is a social right of every person.\textsuperscript{149} God’s purpose for economic life is to “create and maintain the material conditions which best serve man’s true humanity.”\textsuperscript{150} Objections to guaranteed income on the grounds of injustice without work, “its damaging effect on human creativity and social fulfillment, its overlooking the


\textsuperscript{148} Ibid., 14.

\textsuperscript{149} Ibid., 79.

\textsuperscript{150} Ibid., 77.
incompetence and immorality of the poor, and its neglect of the need to overcome man’s selfishness and inertia” are rejected on the basis of denying a person’s right to physical and social existence.\(^{151}\)

Affirming this somewhat radical position of guaranteeing a minimum income floor for all, Wogaman is quick to warn his readers that this does not in any way equal “socialism” or any form of “collectivism.”\(^{152}\) Socialism, which Wogaman glosses as government ownership of the means of production, is not necessary for guaranteed annual income to work. All the means of production could be in private hands and still the concept would not be affected. He continues to push the limits of the idea of economic equality as the Christian norm, citing some exceptions where inequalities are necessary in order to maintain God’s covenant community. All the while emphatic that “guaranteed income does not mean ‘socialism.’”\(^{153}\) Ensuring equality of income, Wogaman insists, will engender a genuine sense of community and will strengthen democracy, a chief mechanism in bringing about God’s intention for creation.

In his later writings Wogaman continues to be optimistic about the ability of democracy to defend against injustices. In *The Great Economic Debate* he expands his concerns from the narrow exploration of the ethical issues associated with a guaranteed minimum income for the poor to a concern with the political economy as a whole.\(^{154}\) The “great economic debate” of the

\(^{151}\) Ibid., 49.

\(^{152}\) Ibid., 90.

\(^{153}\) Ibid., 104.

title refers to the ideological debates particularly fervent during the Cold War era about the organization of economic life. Wogaman compares five competing ideologies: Marxism, laisser-faire capitalism, social market capitalism, democratic socialism, and economic conservatism. These he compares on the basis of “moral considerations” and pragmatic “real world” considerations. Ultimately, Wogaman concludes that the two ideologies on the extremes, Marxist communism and laisser-faire capitalism “seem to have fatal flaws which would prevent a Christian from espousing either without serious reservations.”155 The other three choices he holds out as possible positions of Christians to hold since each of these forms “can be deeply committed to human rights and political democracy,” “can envisage the use of economic production for the welfare of human beings in the good society,” and “can encompass safeguards against sinfulness.”156

Wogaman writes about liberation, and even speak approvingly of Gutiérrez, Cone, Rosemary Radford Ruether, and Segundo, but then has amnesia about this when it comes to creating criteria for adjudicating between political economic systems. He affirms the major themes of “Third World theologians” and challenges whoever believes that Christian ethics is mostly a “sanction of an unjust status quo” need only read their works.157 He believes that liberation theory “has much to teach us,” but he has one caveat.158 While the theme of liberation is “laden with possibilities for an economic ethic” it does not constitute the entirety of Christian thinking on economic matters. A too narrow focus on liberation from oppression in history distracts from the overall task of Christian ethics: the “careful analysis of ultimate

155 Wogaman, The Great Economic Debate, 156.

156 Ibid.

157 Ibid., 40.

158 Ibid., 41.
norms” in terms of relationships to God and the material world. One needs to return to the basic “metaphysical and ontological commitments” to determine “whether ‘liberation’ or any other kind of action really matters.” Wogaman presents a glowing assessment of liberation theory and history only to immediately dismiss its insights.

Wogaman lists what these ultimate Christian norms relevant for economic life are on a number of occasions. According to Wogaman, Christian ethics applied to economic life:

1. Understands creation as the sphere of provision for material well-being and human fulfillment.
2. Upholds the basic unity of the human family undergirded by mutual love in community.
3. Values each individual and is committed to individual freedom, creative development, and expression.
4. Affirms the basic equality of human beings.
5. Takes the universality of human sinfulness seriously.

A careful analysis of how these norms relate to the economy, according to Wogaman, would yield a moral vision of the political economy. Yet, these values would not raise eyebrows within current pluralistic societies.

In *Economics and Ethics*, Wogaman offers an articulation of economics based on his interpretation of Christian moral values based on the theoretical grounding that the “connections between economic reality and social purpose . . . cannot be understood apart from an ethical frame of reference.” He expands his list of norms necessary for constructing a Christian ethical framework to six:

1. “The material world is good because God created it to reflect good purposes”

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159 Ibid.
160 Ibid., 51-53.
161 Wogaman, *Economics and Ethics*. 
2. Grace precedes works. Justice should be patterned in accordance with the priority of grace, in such a way to enhance human well-being, self-acceptance, and communal feeling without reference to what people deserve.

3. Both physical well-being and good social relationships are necessary for the moral structuring of economic life.

4. Human beings are invited to respond to God’s grace and to the creative activity of vocation.

5. The perspective of stewardship allows for the enjoyment and use of property for loving and not selfish purposes. Treating right to property as absolute is not permitted.

6. The recognition that self-centeredness—i.e., original sin—is a painful and persistent part of human nature. Thus blaming poverty on the character deficiencies of the poor is out of bounds.  

Though they are stated here in theological language, many of these values are already widely accepted outside of Christian communities. For example, both the goodness of the physical world and the human tendency towards selfishness are very widely held views. Thus, it remains unclear how these two sets of values challenge the boundaries of established political economic order.

For Wogaman, the relationship between economic reality and ethics is reducible to a choice between social priorities, based on (in)visible values that are always present. Choosing among priorities always involves a trade-off: saying yes to something necessitates saying no to others on all levels of decision making, from personal and family to national and international. The question arises: who is to make the choices regarding social priorities? In Wogaman’s view, there are three possible answers to the question of who should decide: the free market, elites

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162 Ibid., 33-38.

163 Wogaman recognizes what he is presenting as “Christian” values are regarded as “universal” by non-Christians. Putting that argument on its head, Stephen Long claims that the values that Wogaman defines here has “no intrinsic relationship to Christianity” and that “any connection between these theological values and Christian particularity, is, at best, tenuous” (Long, Divine Economy, 33-34).

164 Wogaman, Economics and Ethics, xi, 129.

165 Ibid., 129.
(private, public, or party), or a responsible civil service.\textsuperscript{166} He rejects free markets as the exclusive means for deciding between choices because they inefficient in addressing social and communal concerns, such as highways and national defense. The second method, priority setting by some type of elites, he seemingly rejects as inefficient aristocratic paternalism, both on the right (extraordinarily wealthy private citizens) and left (Marxist party elites). Wogaman favors the third method, that of a civil service responsive to a basic ordering of social priorities determined through democratic means. In other words, it is democratization that matters most in adjudicating between political economic choices: “either a democratic capitalism or a democratic socialism or some mixture of the two” is acceptable as the basis for a moral political economy.\textsuperscript{167}

Wogaman’s Christian moral vision of the political economy has the same basic structure of the political economy of the liberal democratic nation-states of the world. The practical outworking of his moral vision are clear from his application of the norms discussed above the social priorities of adequate production, equity and security, employment and educational opportunity, conservation, and a new world order.\textsuperscript{168} In Wogaman’s system the poor and families in need of welfare and those who do not have adequate resources must depend on largess of the majority in order to participate fully in the social enterprise. His ethic provides no mechanism for caring for the least of these except the hope (remote as it is) that those who govern, chosen either through election or appointment, hold the right sorts of values in order to translate their concerns into actual social policy. His insistence that participatory, democratic

\textsuperscript{166} See Ibid., 14-31.

\textsuperscript{167} Ibid., 29.

\textsuperscript{168} Ibid., 58-127.
economic arrangements are most in keeping with Christian values, given the widening gap between rich and poor, widespread unemployment, enormous global military expenditures, and the threat of exhaustion of basic resources and environmental pollution (all of which Wogaman acknowledges as economic realities!\textsuperscript{169}) constitutes a short-circuiting of the moral imagination and an endorsement of the status quo.

Wogaman’s interpretation of the spectrum of the Christian moral imagination in terms of politics reveals the same short-circuiting of the moral imagination. Wogaman divides the major viewpoints—or “generating centers” as he calls them—of Christian ethics of the political economy into five camps: 1) Pacifist and Anarchists; 2) Liberationist; 3) Neoconservative; 4) Evangelical (right and left); 5) Mainstream liberal. He emphasizes that these viewpoints represent intellectual tendencies and thoughtfully recognizes that each is in the state of “dynamic development.”\textsuperscript{170} Wogaman is striving not for an air tight classification—none is possible—but proposes instead to explore issues. Thus, he acknowledges, there is overlap between categories and many of the figures discussed in one section might be discussed in another. Critically examining each viewpoint in turn provides evidence of how Wogaman has already set the conditions and boundaries of what is “imaginable” in term of the political economy.

The Christian Pacifist and Anarchist perspectives question the legitimacy of the state by asserting that violence and coercion, the typical tools of state action, contradict fundamental principles of Christian ethics. From this perspective, the heart of the gospel is nonresistance to evildoers (Tolstoy) or renunciation of the way of violence (Yoder). Power exercised in the

\textsuperscript{169} In chapter 4 of Economics and Ethics.

political order is then necessarily and by definition illegitimate; Christians cannot morally approve or reconcile the fundamental contradiction between Christian conviction and state action.\textsuperscript{171} For the pacifists-anarchist, Christians best serve the state through their personal and social participation in a gospel-formed reality to which the state must respond.

According to Wogaman, they accept subjugation but not obedience to the state.\textsuperscript{172} To the extent that the state employs coercion and/or violence, it is something less than a Christian understanding of the state and can only be conditionally accepted.\textsuperscript{173}

Wogaman is cautious about any kind of pacifist-anarchist orientation. Though he presents it as a question, it is clear enough that he believes this orientation “may not best represent Christian teaching.”\textsuperscript{174} His major concern is that this perspective theologically weakens the legitimacy of the political order that he imagines as the proper Christian view of the political economy. Ultimately, Wogaman concludes, this perspective is “an inadequate one.” Wogaman’s caution is a form of falsifying—as delusional or unrealistic—the pacifist/anarchist perspective since it does not affirm the current political order.

\textsuperscript{171} Wogaman acknowledges that no major Christian thinker fits exactly into this categories, the pacifist views of three contemporary thinkers leads them to call into question the legitimacy of the state: Jacques Ellul, the French sociologist and theologian; John Howard Yoder, the Mennonite theologian and ethicists; and James Wm. McClendon Jr., a Baptist thinker.

\textsuperscript{172} The subtle difference between subjugation and obedience may be lost on those on the margins of society for whom disobedience is met with severe, overwhelming, and decisive punishment. In Dostoevsky’s novel \textit{The Brothers Karamazov}, the punishment for the serf-boy, a child of eight, for hurting the paw of the general’s favorite hound while playing was to be stripped down in the chill morning and hunted like a wild animal. The pack of hounds caught the child and tore him to pieces before his mother’s eyes. There is little difference between the subject position of the nineteenth century serf-boy and twenty-first century Central American peasant farmers or migrant farm workers in the U.S. southwest. Both are subject to the control and governance of forces beyond their control.

\textsuperscript{173} Wogaman, \textit{Christian Perspectives on Politics}, 67-70.

\textsuperscript{174} Ibid., 57.
At the outset, shaped by a moral imagination determined by his social and cultural matrix, Wogaman is unable or unwilling to imagine an alternative form of political ordering. The legitimacy of the state in its current configuration is a fundamental, non-negotiable part of his moral language. While these pacifists-anarchists do an admirable job of reminding us that violence is evil and “counterproductive,” and that Christians ought never to be cavalier about acting “coercively or violently,” Wogaman insists that their perspective is by and large dismissible on the grounds it fails to affirm the political order. Convinced that social responsibilities are best exercised in and through the current political regime, Wogaman short-circuits the imagination, falsifying a creative alternative even when it is an alternative articulated in and through the symbols and categories of his basic (Christian) convictions.

According to Wogaman, the liberationist perspectives share many concerns about the legitimacy of the existing power structures of the leading pacifists thinkers. Liberation theologies are consciously revolutionary in respect to what it sees as oppressive structures and are critical of reformism.\textsuperscript{175} Reformism implies that some social-political-economic system is fundamentally sound and needs only improvements at some points.\textsuperscript{176} Liberationists are skeptical about reformism as it is seen as shoring up the current power structures and deflecting attention from the root causes of oppression. The call to revolution implies that the entire system is fundamentally, irrevocably flawed. It calls for an overthrow of existing order by the powerless who empower themselves. The Magnificat of Mary provides the liberationist’s slogan: “He has

\textsuperscript{175} Ibid., 87.

\textsuperscript{176} Ibid., 86.
brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.”

Wogaman elaborates three “troubling points” about liberation theology in all its forms: 1) an inadequate account of redemption given the social or institutional location of sin; 2) the absolutizing of the limited diagnostic tools of Marxism; 3) a seeming unwillingness to listen to its adversaries—or to learn from the “oppressor.” On the first point, Wogaman’s concern is the degree to which the liberationist account of sin rides on the outcome of concrete political objectives. The institutionalization of sin bothers Wogaman insofar as it suggests that redemption can be found in institutional change. Wogaman insists that “personal self-centeredness of individual human beings limits both the permanence and the quality of any institutional change.” Is Wogaman suggesting there can be no just institutions as long as human sin—conceptualized as personal self-centeredness—persists? If so, this is not only a case against the revolutionary call of liberationists, but of the reformist impulse Wogaman is pointing towards.

On the second point, Wogaman acknowledges that Marxist analytical tools have far greater value than most Western Europeans and North Americans are willing to admit. His concern is whether liberation theology is “open enough to presentations of empirical truth” unfiltered through ideological lenses, such as Marxism. Wogaman’s appeal to “empirical truth” is a way of dismissing the type of analysis of capitalism by Marxists diagnostic tools.

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178 Wogaman, Christian Perspectives on Politics, 100.

179 Ibid., 101.

180 These tools, he argues, have a “limited range” and are thus inadequate as a basis for “analyzing even economic form of oppression, much less those based on racism and sexism” Ibid.
Moreover, his appeal reveals a more troubling tendency underlying his analysis: a simple
distinction between “truth” and ideology, between fact and values. Wogaman’s analysis, like the
debate between moral objectivists and moral subjectivists is misguided: in as much as matters
of fact and matters of value are not easily distinguished.\textsuperscript{181} They are best thought of as
statements along the same continuum, with statements (whether fact or value) that are widely
accepted by a given community of language users on one side (statements for which warrants
are usually not demanded), and statements which are in contention on the other. For example,
that babies should be not be chopped up for use in bullion is a value statement, but one which
there is widespread agreement in U.S. society. Wogaman is troubled by liberation theology’s
filtering the world through an ideological lens, one that accepts the Marxists tools as a valid
basis for analyzing and critiquing capitalism. It is not “empirical truth” that Wogaman offers, but
a different moral imagination, one that does not accept the validity of Marxists tools, but
implicitly embraces capitalism. Hence, Wogaman short-circuits the imagination in refusing to
make use of the insights of liberationist theologians.

Wogaman’s third concern correctly emphasizes a loss of humanity on both sides that
follows any hard and fast division of oppressor/oppressed, rich/poor, us/them. Overcoming
oppression is as important for the oppressor as the oppressed. Agreed, although this insight is

\textsuperscript{181} Moral objectivists, like Jeremy Bentham and Immanuel Kant, hold that ethical statements
express factual propositions that can be rationally resolved—either through utilitarian logic, in Bentham’s
case, or the universalizing of one’s will, as with Kant. See Jeremy Bentham, \textit{Utilitarianism} (London:
Progressive Publishing Company, 1890); Immanuel Kant and Mary J. Gregor, \textit{Groundwork of the
Metaphysics of Morals}, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy (Cambridge, U.K.; New York:
Cambridge University Press, 1998). Moral relativists, like Sartre, function as a sort of negative thesis that
challenges the claims of moral objectivists: moral judgments cannot be rationally resolved. Subjects can
use any criteria to form value judgments, but these have moral authority only over some group of persons
or segment of society or even just one person. See Jean-Paul Sartre, \textit{Cahiers Pour Une Morale} ([Paris]:
not original to him: postcolonial theorists have for decades argued along these lines. While people located in places of privilege have something valuable to share, one wonder if this is just another way to dismiss the creative insights of those employing a different moral imagination, in particular those on the margins of society. It may be a form of falsification on the grounds that people of privilege are busy elaborating their own very valuable contributions. It is easy to see how the insistence that even the oppressor may have something to share can devolve into a reification of the oppressor’s moral imagination.

Conservative movements usually represent a concern to preserve institutions and values in the face of what is perceived as imminent danger. Conservative political regimes such as those of Ronald Reagan in the U.S. and Margaret Thatcher in Great Britain formed in the face of Soviet power and communist expansionism. With the end of the Cold War, the threats and dangers have shifted. Nevertheless, the mood of neoconservatives, a new generation of theological conservatives, remains “anti,” with communism “replaced by feminism, abortion, homosexuality, pornography, and the perceived liberalism of Protestant denominations and

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182 In *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (first published in French in 1957 and in English in 1965), Memmi argues that the site of postcolonial contestation is complex, mutual oppression and interdependency of the colonizer and the colonized. See Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, trans. Howard Greenfeld, Expanded ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991). The colonizer and the colonized are locked in a co-constructed relationship of oppression. Ashis Nandy extends and elaborates on Memmi’s analysis. In *The Intimate Enemy*, which focuses on the British colonized India, Nandy argues that psychological states are rooted in earlier form of social (colonial) consciousness. Like Memmi, Nandy examines the psychological effects in the wake of the colonial aftermath not just on the colonized, but also on the colonizer. Nandy maintains that the psychological effects on a populous and heterogeneous society like India is minimal compared to the effect on a small, homogenized society like that found on the tiny British Isles. See Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism* (Delhi: Oxford, 1983). More recently, George “Tink” Tinker argues in *Spirit and Resistance* (2004) that even American Indian liberation theology, which has at its center a concern for identifying and healing social dysfunctions among American Indian peoples, nevertheless recognizes that any sustainable healing of American Indian communities must involve a parallel healing of Euroamericans. From Tinker’s perspective, Euroamerican healing must begin with a systematic repentance and confession of their genocidal relationship with native peoples. See George E. Tinker, *Spirit and Resistance: Political Theology and American Indian Liberation* (Minneapolis, TN: Fortress Press, 2004).
councils of churches.” Neoconservatives should not at the outset be characterized as one-dimensional. The latest generation of neoconservative thinkers of this orientation tends to be former liberals and even former radicals. They continue to espouse aspects of their more former political views and are therefore more complex than the characterization “anti” suggests.

Amid this complexity, Wogaman identifies several themes. Neoconservatives 1) affirm democracy, 2) emphasize a limited state, 3) exhibit a deep commitment to capitalism, 4) support a strong U.S. military and political presence around the world, and 5) maintain that individual Christians (mostly) and churches (to a lesser extent) should be engaged in political life.

The neoconservative perspective serves as perhaps the best evidence of the limits of the their moral imagination: they engage in a form of falsification through an accusation that alternatives are delusional. Unlike pacifists and liberationists who exhibit skepticism concerning democracy, neoconservatives strongly affirm the superiority of democracy among possible political systems. For the neoconservative, democracy is indelibly linked to capitalism. A market economy may be “a necessary condition for democracy.” And capitalism promotes liberal-democratic political systems. In the minds of many neoconservatives, such as Paul Johnson, democracy and capitalism are the twin parents of freedom, and the “notions of political and economic freedom both spring from the workings of the Christian conscience as a

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183 Wogaman, Christian Perspectives on Politics, 104.

184 Of the thinkers that Wogaman identifies as neoconservative, many of whom gained prominence as proponents of decidedly more liberal forms of politics. Ernest W. Lefever, originally a pacifist; Richard John Neuhaus, founder of a anti-war organization, Clergy and Laity Concerned, Michael Novak, formerly known as a voice for the Catholic left.

historical force."¹⁸⁶ For neoconservatives, democratic capitalism is not only a superior way to provide adequate material well-being for the people of the world, but is, in a substantive way, the form of political-economic organization ordained by God.

When the collapse of the Soviet Empire around 1990 revealed profound flaws in the economic and political Soviet-style communism the neoconservatives went much further in condemning communism. For them, communism was not just deeply flawed; it was the enemy, the “prime example of social, political, economic evil of our time.”¹⁸⁷ The absoluteness in the neoconservative opposition to world communism reveals an “almost Manichean tendency” that, as Wogaman correctly points out, is “as much a form of idolatry as the absolutizing of any person or movement we wish to affirm.”¹⁸⁸ The danger is not only the spiritual danger of self-righteousness, but a short-circuiting of the imagination, a closing off of creative possibilities.

Wogaman argues that evangelicals offer a great deal of fire, but very little light. The brevity of his treatment suggests he finds very little insight among evangelicals in terms of the intersection of Christian thought in politics and economics. He divides evangelicals into the right and left. Evangelicals of the right, while a diverse lot, share a number of views: the identification of Christian values with U.S. tradition, advocacy for the restoration of prayer and Bible reading in public schools, alarm over liberals and secular humanists, and a host of issues to which they are opposed including abortion, homosexuality, pornography, drugs, and gambling. While these positions are pursued with passion, it remains unclear how any of these positions are derived from a theological analysis, raising doubts that it constitutes a serious Christian conception of


¹⁸⁷ Wogaman, Christian Perspectives on Politics, 112.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 120.
the political economy. The evangelical right relies on intellectual capital of earlier conservative theologians and secular thinkers whose support for limited capital they incorporate into their thinking.\textsuperscript{189} Wogaman believes that the “lack of well-thought-through positions or of openness to dialogues with alternative views means that this movement is not—at least not yet—a strong generating center of Christian political thought.”\textsuperscript{190}

Evangelicals on the left are more of “an intellectual force than their counterpart of the right.”\textsuperscript{191} They emphasize along with the pacifist and liberationist perspectives God’s special concern for the most vulnerable members of the human community. Both evangelicals of the right and left cite the Bible as the source of their political views. But while evangelicals of the right draw mostly from the prescriptive laws of the Hebrew Bible, the left characteristically draws on Jesus and the Prophets. Evangelicals of the left adhere to a generally conservative theological orientation while pressing for a liberal political agenda. Their political liberalism is expressed in their vigorous attention to “economic issues, civil rights, prison reform, and international peace” but have remained decidedly conservative in regards to their views on abortion and homosexuality.

The label “mainstream liberalism” for the fifth generation center of Christian political thought is somewhat misleading. Though mainstream suggests majority opinion and/or relationship to mainstream Protestantism, the high visibility and political success of the evangelical right, along with the inclusion of Roman Catholic thinkers within this perspective indicates otherwise. By mainstream liberal, Wogaman is referring to Christian thinkers who are committed to established churches and participate in crafting denominational and conciliar

\textsuperscript{189} Such as Francis Shaeffer, Cornelis Van Til, and Carl F. H. Henry.

\textsuperscript{190} Wogaman, \textit{Christian Perspectives on Politics}, 129.

\textsuperscript{191} Ibid., 133.
documents. They share one fundamental theological conviction—a Niebuhrian conception of original sin.\textsuperscript{192} Reinhold Niebuhr’s conception of “original” sin as perennial and universal, ultimately based on human insecurity, was accompanied by the idea that human beings are capable of justice and benevolence. Two consequences for political economic ethics result from the view that evil and good are inherent in human beings. First, that all political solutions are limited and provisional. Second, since all have sinned, no one individual or group has grounds for self-righteousness; politics cannot be reduced to the forces of righteousness against the forces of evil.\textsuperscript{193}

Other characteristics mainstream liberals share: an ecumenical spirit, a reformist attitude towards change, a positive attitude toward government, and acceptance of the legitimacy of democratic states including police action. Writing in contexts where they do not consider revolution a viable option, mainstream liberals advocate for broad outlines of a “mixed economy.” They are involved in political struggles for: 1) adequate public welfare; 2) full employment and job training programs; 3) a more progressive tax structure; 4) adequate health care delivery; 5) environmental protection and energy conservation; 6) additional protections of public safety, such as safety features on automobiles and great regulation of nuclear reactors; 7) civil rights struggles; 8) support for disarmament, increased role for the UN, more generous foreign aid programs, and greater regulation of transnational corporations.\textsuperscript{194}

\textsuperscript{192} Do Roman Catholic thinkers such as John Coleman and Charles Curran really hold to a conception of sin articulated by a liberal Protestant? This is a dubious claim that must be left to others to examine further.

\textsuperscript{193} Wogaman, \textit{Christian Perspectives on Politics}, 137-38.

\textsuperscript{194} Ibid., 144-45.
Wogaman portrays the mainstream liberal perspective as a mediating position, rhetorically strengthening the position he favors. The mainstream liberal orientation lies at the center of “ether end of the ideological spectrum.” The orientation is . . . treated as revolutionary by ideological conservatives. And radical structuralists, such as socialists, often characterize reformism as an implicit support for existing systems of injustice because the reform only serves to make the system more palatable. The language of “ideological extremism” is another technique for dismissing more leftist or radical views. Wogaman acknowledges the critique that his perspective supports unjust structures, but offers no response except to state that “mainstream liberals remain unpersuaded by the arguments at either end of the ideological spectrum.”

Wogaman believes a mainstream liberal position is the most “reasonable” one offered by Christian thinkers, avoiding excessive trust in any one particular political configuration, standing above the fray of the raging debates. Moderation and reformism are the bywords of the mainstream position. They will not challenge the violence and coercion inherent in state action (like the pacifists), nor will they stand in opposition to oppressive structures and institutions (like the liberationists). These are, no doubt, manifestations of humanity’s universal sin expressing itself. But the same human beings are capable of wondrous acts of righteousness. Wogaman has it right: the fundamental theological conviction of mainstream liberals is in the coexistence of the universality of sin with the possibility of righteousness in every person.

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195 It is revealing that the chapter of mainstream liberal perspectives begins with a quote about the time honored imperative of Aristotelian political ethic “seeking to find the mean between extremes” (Donald E. Messer, Christian Ethics and Political Action (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1984), 105); cited in Wogaman, Christian Perspectives on Politics, 135.

196 Wogaman, Christian Perspectives on Politics, 146.

197 Ibid.
The preceding analysis of Wogaman’s account of the full spectrum of the Christian moral imagination concerning politics reveals Wogaman’s affirmation of the status quo. To reiterate succinctly, for Wogaman, the pacifists-anarchist view categorically excludes violence within the range of acceptable Christian action and denigrates “‘effectiveness’ as a primary goal for Christians.” The only logical conclusion of their perspective is to somehow exist apart from the state—an impossibility—or to dissolve the state. The liberationist perspective combines an emphasis on conscientization, insistence on praxis, and open advocacy for revolution with skepticism about existing political institutions and ambivalence about democracy. By identifying sin with current social structures, they fail to address the problem of evil and injustice after the revolution takes place. Neoconservatives insist on the superiority of the democracy, the indispensability of capitalism, the need for a limited state, the importance of social mediators, and the legitimacy of U.S. military and economic power abroad. They were better suited to opposing totalitarianism than elaborating a positive vision. Evangelicals, alternatively relying on the intellectual capital of an earlier era (the evangelical right) or combining a political liberalism with a social conservatism (the evangelical left), lack a concrete, comprehensive moral vision of the political economy. Despite their enthusiasm for serving justice, evangelicals on the left lack an understanding of the consequences of a power vacuum upon the dismantling of social institutions. Finally, mainstream liberals, convinced of both the universality of sin and human benevolence, strive to affirm what is redeemable in the current political economic climate and reform what is not. It advocates for Christians to achieve a balance that both stands outside of the mainstream society as a prophetic community and works within it to help recover a civil identity that grounds society. Ultimately, Wogaman envision that Christians will, “in concert

198 Ibid., 71.
with people of goodwill of all faiths and nations” will forge “a new era of global community with peace and justice.”

Wogaman builds the case that the only viable moral vision of the political economy is a type of reformism that emphasizes democratization within the contours of current structures. Wogaman’s “prophetic” Christian moral vision is basically the status quo, with some modest policy adjustments to curb the most grotesque forms of injustice. Attempts to creatively imagine alternatives that question the legitimacy of current structures (such as the inherent violence of state action or that existing social systems create injustice) are falsified as either fantasy or self-deception (i.e., unrealistic and delusional). For Wogaman these alternatives are necessarily mistaken and thus, through a short-circuiting of the moral imagination, relevant insights are lost.

**Concluding Assessment**

The task of Christian ethics is to evaluate political economic life in light of the requirements of the Christian faith. Some Christians uncritically endorse the political economic world, while others have nothing but condemnation for it. In the view of mainstream Christian social ethicists, the appropriate posture is somewhere in between. There are injustices in the world that are in need of prophetic critique, but a blanket condemnation of modern political economic systems is unwarranted.

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199 Ibid., 364. Sweet dreams of collaboration, tolerance, and justice.


Mainstream Christian ethicists’ moral vision of the political economy is a market-based society circumscribed by appropriate laws and regulations, in Finn’s language, “markets with fences.” These Christian ethicists are concerned with what is morally defensible in the context of that account of political-economic life. Instead of challenging the system of capitalism, mainstream social ethics grapples with how market outcomes, corporate behavior, and government actions can be conceived of as more just.\(^{202}\) The entire discourse centers on eliminating moral abuse of both governments and markets through providing a Christian moral underpinning to society. The basic claim that capitalist economies improve the economic well being of nearly everyone is accepted as fact.\(^{203}\)

The three ethicists under study here are concerned not only with relating theology to political economy, but in constructing a Christian moral vision of the political economy. Yet it remains an open question whether they have done so. All three acknowledge that Christian teaching emphasizes the importance of the material necessities of life.\(^{204}\) Without adequate care for the conditions of the materially needy, human beings cannot be what God intended human beings to be spiritually. Along with Rauschenbusch, they affirm that good spirituality requires confronting material inequality and injustice. With Karl Barth (though Stackhouse would dislike being associated with him), they affirm “creation as the external basis of the covenant” and of

\(^{202}\) The debates within mainstream Christian social ethics, about how religion relates to society and about how to envision a more just political and economic reality, all take place within a narrow field of a neoclassical understanding of political economy. The reliance of Christian social ethics on a neoclassic model of economics will be explored in more detail in chapter four.


\(^{204}\) Wogaman acknowledges that the decisive criterion of Christian moral judgment as stated in Matthew is whether one has fed the hungry, given drink to the thirsty, clothed the naked, and dealt hospitably with strangers and the sick. Wogaman, The Great Economic Debate, 46.
“the covenant as the internal basis of creation.” They hold that the material realm (creation) represents the preconditions for the fulfillment of the spiritual ends of human life. These thinkers insist on the relevancy of Christian theology and ethics on the practices of other religions (Stackhouse especially) and for the wider world. They are also clear that God has a special concern for the poor (Finn particularly) and values the importance of liberation from oppression (Wogaman here is especially sympathetic). Neither are they oblivious to the horrors and gross tragedies that have coincided with the rise of democratic capitalism since the sixteenth century.

Yet, they have constructed a selective theology that is resonant with capitalist political economics rather than one that is critical of it. In their view, the brutality of laissez-faire capitalism has given way to social welfare capitalism, which institutionalizes a greater concern for the poor. Not everyone has benefited, true, and there have been injustices, yes. But the possibility still exists that economic productivity can yield a just system in which all can benefit, if only markets and international trade are conceived of correctly, if only theology once again takes on a publically accessible character, if only democratic processes are allowed to function properly. These Christian social ethicists do not attribute these injustices to the capitalist political economic climate at all. They consider these events aberrations, excesses, or outliers to a system that has, on the whole, brought about freedom, wealth, and well-being. They therefore see no fundamental incompatibility with these values and norms and global democratic

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207 See Pemberton and Finn, *Toward*. 78
capitalism. From their perspective, a system which is better or more compatible with Christian social ethics has yet to be conceived.

It is wishful thinking that somehow one can disrupt systems of oppression by perpetuating more of the same. But such wishful thinking is what Christian ethicists are engaged in most of the time. The result is a Christian moral vision that does not matter, one that fails in terms of addressing the urgent needs of the majority of the world’s peoples. It views pluralist liberal capitalist democracy as the best way to organize political economic life and the entire moral imagination is subordinated to this overarching modernist conclusion. Despite its purported concern for the least of these, mainstream Christian ethics poses no threat to the current capitalist political economic system. In fact, it affirms reformed capitalism as the system which is most in line with a Christian moral vision. As a result, mainstream Christian ethics fails to deal in any substantive way with the social realities of inequality, discrimination, and oppression generated by the capitalist system. Perpetrators of capitalist injustice might get disgusted by being gummed and slobbered on by this toothless Christian social ethics that supposedly protects society from oppression and inequalities. But they are under no real danger.

The next chapter takes up the challenge of how we can expand the Christian moral imagination. It points to Latina/o thinking as an ethical space from which to theorize Christian political economic ethics, disrupt the feedback loop, and reestablish the connections of the short-circuited moral imagination.

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208 This language is borrowed from Gloria Yamato, "Something About the Subject Makes It Hard to Name," in Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Color, ed. Gloria Anzaldúa (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Foundation Books, 1990).
CHAPTER 3: IMPLICATIONS OF LATINA/O THINKING FOR CHRISTIAN ETHICS OF THE POLITICAL ECONOMY

Introduction

The previous chapter argued that mainstream Christian ethicists affirm the status quo with some modifications, despite the insistence that their work constitutes a prophetic and counter-cultural call for social change. Given the growing disparity between the promises of capitalism—namely material prosperity and political freedom for all—and what it can deliver, devotion to capitalist models of political-economic development constitutes a failure of the moral imagination.²⁰⁹

There are two ways to account for this failure of the moral imagination. The first concerns the epistemic limitations of theorizing from a universalizing point of view that covers up or conceals the geopolitical location and structures of power of the speaking subject.²¹⁰

²⁰⁹ This disparity is in the growing gap between rich and poor, the erosion of public services, and degradation of community life in countries, like the U.K. and the U.S., where capitalism is most uninhibited. Capitalism has historically brought about these disparities and degradation s in complex and contradictory ways as Ellen Wood makes clear. See Ellen Meiksins Wood, The Origin of Capitalism: A Longer View, New ed. (London; New York: Verso, 2002 [1999]). One of Wood’s purposes is to challenge the naturalization of capitalism, which “denies its specificity and the long and painful historical processes that brought it into being” (Wood 8). Wood’s account challenges the widespread and dangerous assumption that capitalism has brought about enormous benefits to humanity and is compatible with democracy. Examining capitalism’s sordid past is an important step in imagining possible alternative futures. The author returns to this challenge about the naturalization of capitalism in chapter four.

²¹⁰ The Argentinean philosopher and social theorist Enrique Dussel argues for a reconceptualization of knowledge along geopolitical lines in Enrique D. Dussel, Philosophy of Liberation, trans. Aquolina Martinez (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, [1977] 1985). This first chapter is entitled “Geopolitics and Philosophy.” It is not the same thing, Dussel notes, to be born in Chiapas or in New York. Access to knowledge and education depends heavily on what part of the world one is born in and what
other words, the problem is with the particular point of view that presents itself as being without a point of view, the “point zero” of western philosophies. The second lies with an underlying neoclassical understanding of economics combined with a rhetorical strategy that frames Marxist socialism and unfettered neoliberal economics as the entire spectrum of choices for the political economy. Given this structural framework, some form of moderated mixed economy (a democratic socialism or democratic capitalism) becomes the inevitable and “obvious” moral choice for the political economy. The second issue is addressed in chapter four through a heterodox analysis of mainstream Christian ethics’ weak economic framework.

This chapter focuses on the former challenge. It moves beyond the failure of the moral imagination by exploring the ways in which the social location of mainstream Christian ethicists limits their moral imagination and by proposing an alternative social-cultural framework. It is not enough, however, to replace one social-cultural framework with another; one must instead construct a dynamic framework that allows for multiple subject positions and the intersection of cultures. What is needed is a paradigm that resists the “god’s eye view that hides its local and particular perspective under a universal perspective,” dualistic (either-or) conceptual paradigms, language one speaks. Mignolo refers to this uneven distribution of knowledge as the “geopolitics of epistemology.” For Mignolo the ideas of “America” and “Latin America” emerged and have been maintained by the geopolitics of knowledge. See Walter Mignolo, The Idea of Latin America, Blackwell Manifestos (Malden, MA; Oxford: Blackwell Pub., 2005), 43-44; Walter D. Mignolo, "Globalization and the Geopolitics of Knowledge: The Role of the Humanities in the Corporate University," Nepantla 4, no. 1 (2003).


212 While this chapter offers a social explanation for the limitations of mainstream Christian ethicists’ moral imagination, it recognizes that there are other factors involved in constructing moral visions. Earlier theories emphasized the impact of social location on ethics in a rather one-sided fashion, presuming an overriding role. The complexities of how people arrive at their moral visions suggests an approach which recognizes that social location plays an important role in ethical analysis while acknowledging that a precise delineation of the influence of social location is nearly impossible.
monoculturalism, and ethnocentrism. What is needed is an epistemic framework that consciously and critically relates the local and particular to the global, closes the dualistic gap, embraces pluralism, and achieves a holistic perspective in cognition. Latino/a thinking offers such a framework.

Latina/o thinking is a pointer to Latina/o religious and cultural discourses, a way of referring to its insights and analyses. Latina/o thinking affirms the idea of postcolonialism, but from a standpoint of embodied existence on the border, of life between colonial forces and postcolonial imaginary. It does not precede from the orderly assumption that one can claim a higher moral ground by achieving a postcolonial state of being. Instead it aims for a decolonizing of reflections, praxis, and narratives of the other as the basis for constructing moral visions. It refers to the epistemological and ethical potential of thinking on the borderlands. Authors refer to this thinking and meaning-making on the borderlands in various ways: “new mestiza consciousness” (Anzaldúa), “double consciousness” (Du Bois), “creolization” (Glissant), “religious


\[214\] In this project, Latina/os—or Latin@s, Latino/as, Hispanic—refers to two different but related groups: those who are born in and identify with the countries of Latin America and those who live within the U.S. who originate from the first group. There are all sorts of people who are at the margin of both groups about whom there are arguments about whether or not they should be included. Labels are enormously important, but in this project, Latin@, Latina/o, and Hispanic are used interchangeably. For a brief examination of the term “Latin@” specifically, see Immanuel Wallerstein, "Latin@s: What's in a Name?," in Latin@s in the World-System: Decolonization Struggles in the Twenty-First Century U.S. Empire, ed. Ramón Grosfoguel, Nelson Maldonado Torres, and José David Saldívar, Political Economy of the World-System Annuals (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2005), 31-40.

The term Latina/o itself covers over enormous complexity. There are a number of articles and books that describe the demographic, racial, and religious complexity of Latina/os. For an overview of these complexities see the introductory essay in Miguel A. De La Torre, ed., Hispanic American Religious Cultures (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2009). For a more extensive treatment, including theoretical and empirical approaches to Latina/o social science research, see Havidán Rodriguez, Cecilia Menjívar, and Rogelio Sáenz, eds., Latinas/os in the United States: Changing the Face of América (Boston, MA: Springer, 2008).
“poetics” (León), “border thinking” (Mignolo), “double translation” (Subcomandante Marcos). These terms refer to a simultaneity of multiple (at least two) perspectives; they critically reflect on the hegemonic paradigm that assumes a neutral, universalistic, and objective point of view. They affirm that people always speak from a particular social location, acknowledging that no one can escape the sexist, racial, gender, and geographical hierarchies of the modern/colonial world system.

Latino/a thinking is intrinsically concerned with intermixing combinations of cultures, languages, and thought. It incorporates rather than excludes multiple perspectives. It invites discontinuity and change. It refers to subjugated forms of knowledge produced by Latina/o and Latin American critics and religious scholars who—because of their status as a hybrid, mestiza/o, mulata/o, people standing between two (or more) worlds, in a “third space,” have gravitated in their scholarly work to theorize cultural and religious mixing. Some of these intellectuals, like Gustavo Gutiérrez, Enrique Dussel, and Walter Mignolo, live between former colonized and colonizing countries. Others did not move, but the world moved around them, such as American Indians in Latin America. Still others belong to a category somewhere between these two:

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Chicano/as are part of migration but the world has also moved around them. Virgilio Elizondo, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Chela Sandoval are a few examples.\(^\text{217}\)

Other groups have engaged in this dual strategy of critical theorizing and epistemic decolonization: the sub-altern studies group from the Indian sub-continent and African thinkers focusing on inculturation, to name but two cadres. The parallel manifestation of such a strategy in the Americas is what is referred to here as Latina/o thinking. The argument here is not that Latina/o thinking is unique or that it categorically “better” than thinking of people from monocultural backgrounds (whatever that might mean). Instead, the argument is that Latino/a thinking offers a socio-ethical space from which to construct a moral vision of the political economy that counters capitalism’s complex web of oppression.

Like a symphony, this chapter proceeds in five movements, with the addition of a conclusion.\(^\text{218}\) The opening movement explains how the moral imagination is socially contingent, analyses how the dynamic of privilege works to render invisible the concerns of those on the

\(^\text{217}\) As this diverse list of theorists makes clear, this dissertation rejects the orderly and clear division between U.S. Latina/os and Latin Americans as well as the underlying notion that there is a clear distinction between colonizing and indigenous knowledge production. While there are differences between the two, given the family resemblances among their theoretical insights, a strong differentiation remains unwarranted. Thus, this dissertation adopts the term Latina/o thinking as a way of referring to the knowledge production taking place among scholars both in Latin American and in U.S. Latina/o communities and everywhere inbetween. Latina/o thinking draws on the border gnoseology and exilic theorizing of Chicana/os, Latina/os, Hispanics wherever they may happen to be geographically.

The concept of Latina/o thinking is thoroughly indebted to the efforts of an earlier generation of scholars who investigated the possibility, nature, and structure of a distinctly U.S. Latina/o epistemology. Among religious scholars and theologians, this includes scholars such as María P. Aquino, Orlando E. Costas, Allan Figueroa Deck, Orlando O. Espín, Ismael García, Justo L. González, Roberto S. Goizueta, Ada María Isasi-Díaz, Ana M. Pineda, Harold J. Recinos, Jean-Pierre Ruiz, and Jaime R. Vidal, to name but a few. Their reflections on epistemology, along with the efforts of Latin American philosophers such as Leopoldo Zeo, Enrique de Lima Vaz, Enrique Dussel, and José Carlos Mariátegui, constitute the groundwork of Latina/o thinking. A more systematic and sustained discussion of their epistemological insights lies outside the scope of this study.

\(^\text{218}\) Those versed in music history might object that the normal form of the symphony since the 18\(^{th}\) century decline of the “Italian”-style of symphony is a four movement symphony. However, Tchaikovsky’s Third Symphony, for example, has five movements, so the five movement symphony is not without precedent.
margins of society, and illustrates how social location and privilege work together through mainstream Christian ethicists’ allegiance to Niebuhr’s realism to limit the moral imagination. The second movement sets up the parameters of Latina/o thinking. It insists, despite claims to the contrary, that there is such a thing as Latina/o thought; it parses out the categories of Latina/o religious-cultural discourse; it warns of essentialist dangers in the quest to describe Latina/o thinking; and it makes the case that Latina/o thinking addresses the postmodern critique of the vanishing center. The third movement addresses Latina/o thinking’s potential for restructuring moral visions of the political economy by moving beyond identity politics, connecting identity and epistemic modalities through a noninnocent reading of history, a rearticulation of the self according to a border imaginary, and examining Latina/o thinking’s postexilic moments. The discussion moves apace in the next two movements which further explore Latina/o thinking by examining two key concepts: praxis and lived experience. In short, Latina/o thinking proposes a decolonizing praxis which calls for a transformation of the methodology and social/intellectual basis of Christian social ethics. Connected to Latina/o thinking’s praxis of decolonization is the concept of lived experience, which challenges rigid academic categories and has the potential to broaden the moral imagination. The final movement critically analyzes two concepts that have family resemblances to Latina/o thinking articulated among scholars associated with world system analysis: the notions of Border Thinking and Transmodernity. Both contribute and strengthen Latina/o thinking’s project of

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219 Of course it can also have the effect of infuriating academics from the dominant culture, causing them to dismiss the work of Latino/a scholars as less than rigorous. This dismissal is further evidence of falsification of imaginative alternatives and the failure of the moral imagination.

220 "Family resemblance" as a philosophical construct is primarily associated with Ludwig Wittgenstein. It refers to the idea that certain comparisons are best made by analogy to a resemblances between members of a family (eye shape/color, build, temperament, etc.). Wittgenstein offers the example of games: card games, board games, Olympic games must share something in common, but the similarities overlap in complicated ways. Hence, Wittgenstein concludes, games form a family. See Ludwig
decolonizing moral vision of the political economy. The chapter concludes with a summative rearticulation of the implications of Latina/o thinking for decolonizing and rearticulating Christian moral visions of the political economy.

First Movement: Social Location and the Moral Imagination

Linking Social Location and Moral Imagination

Social location and moral imagination, or moral vision, are linked in three important ways. The first pertains to the recognition that the spectrum of the moral imagination is historically and socially contingent. Inherited symbolic systems, lived experiences, and historical narratives constitute the horizon of possibilities concerning what is feasible and ethically desirable. For example, medieval scholastics writing about economics in the fourteenth century did not consider increases in wealth to increase quality of life, let alone be an end to itself. For the scholastics, wealth was beneficial only if it was used in a way that was consistent with the demands of justice and charity. A social system built on avarice, or at least acquisitiveness, was unimaginable. Yet within a couple of centuries of the scholastic debates on wealth that began humbly in manuals for confessors, commercial attitudes pushed moral questions aside. Instead of disputing the morality of profit, profit-seeking behavior was taken

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222 Around 1215 CE, the year it become compulsory for all adults to go to confession at least annually, Thomas of Chobham (c. 1163-1235) wrote the *Summa Confessorum*, a medieval manual for confessors, which were books on how priests should advise people who came to them for confession. Among his list of chief sins Thomas includes both usury and avarice. Thomas provides a strong defense of commerce missing from earlier writings; he finds nothing wrong with merchants charging more for a good than its purchase price, and approves of merchants including labor and transportation expenses incurred
for granted. Thinkers began to work out the implications of people taking actions that were in their own interests. Economic thought was increasingly abstracted from situations of economic compulsion and the ethical dilemmas that gave rise to it. A social world in which individuals did not pursue their own interests, in which they would not use any means to maximize that interest, became unimaginable.

Second, ethical reflection is as much a function of imagination and social sentiments—both socio-historical accidents—as it is of rational comparison. Stated differently,

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223 Economic compulsion is what forces people to make unpalatable economic choices any reasonable person would not take under normal conditions. It is the application of power of the possessor of goods or services to obtain unfair terms of exchange from a party in need or poverty. See Blackhouse, *The Ordinary Business of Life*.

contemporary ethical debates pit not just different rational arguments against one another, but different moral and social imaginaries. Making ethical decisions in complex world—puzzling through possible responses using various motifs (or ways) of forming ethical norms—and adjudicating between responses requires drawing on one’s social location and the activation of the imagination. A simplistic appeal to ends, principles, or virtues cannot alone solve complex ethical problems. Regardless of the approach to making moral decision-making that is favored (either teleological, deontological, or character/virtue ethics), the active use of the social imaginary is required.

Much of contemporary Christian ethical discourse that addresses imagination takes its understanding from Kant’s focus on its productive aspect and the Romantic Movement’s association of imagination with creativity, genius, and freedom. Imagination is conceived as

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225 Some make a stark distinction between morality and ethics. Morality, as defined by those who make this distinction is a set of behaviors or a code followed by a group or a society, as in “the two groups with clashing moralities.” Ethics then is defined as the systematic study of morality or moralities. This absolutist distinction was made famous in the Alexander Payne’s 1999 movie Election, in which a civics teacher, Jim McAlliser (Matthew Broderick) becomes embroiled in the life of his student Tracy Flick (Reese Witherspoon) during school elections. Every year, McAlliser begins his civics class with a lecture on the difference between morality and ethics. The distinction is lost not just on the students but the other faculty as well. When Dave Novotny (Mark Harelik), who is having an affair with their mutual student Flick, is confronted by McAlliser, Novotny responds “Jim, come on, I don’t need a lecture on ethics.” McAlliser retorts “I’m not talking about ethics, I’m talking about morals.” Along with most of the audience Novotny responds “What’s the difference?” The problem of course is that in common speech ethics and morality are roughly synonymous. The terms are more permeable and less distinguishable than is suggested by McAlliser and his ilk.

226 In Critique of Pure Reason, Kant links imagination to the task constructing objective knowledge of the world. For Kant, imagination’s activity is “a blind though indispensable function of the soul . . . without which we should have no cognition at all, but of which we are seldom even conscious.” Imagination serves as something of a bridge harmonizing our sense and feelings and cognitive faculties that make knowledge possible. See Immanuel Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 211. For a brief and clear articulation of Kant’s conception of imagination, see “Kant on Imagination” in Paul Hamilton, Coleridge’s Poetics (Oxford, England: B. Blackwell, 1983), 47-54.

Among the Romantics, Percy Bysshe Shelley argued for the need for imagination to transform society. Society promoted “the cultivation of the mechanical arts” while neglecting creativity, “which is the basis of all knowledge.” Percy Bysshe Shelley, "A Defense of Poetry," in English Essays, from Sir Philip Sidney to Macaulay (New York, NY: P. F. Collier & son, 1910). Available on-line,
the human capacity or power to transform experiences into new mental constructs. Bernard Hoose writes in his introduction to Christian Ethics that “we stand in relation to reality not merely physically . . . but also through our imagination." Creativity is an essential element in elaborating theological ethics. As Darby Kathleen Ray put it, “if there is one thing we cannot do without on this journey into Christian responsibilities, it is the imagination, robust and patient.” Some authors, like Cardinal J. H. Newman—concerned with the relationship between science and theology in the late nineteenth century—pit reason against imagination.

The author takes a different approach than this familiar trajectory. Moral imagination in this project refers to a complex social capacity which does not set imagination in opposition to reason, but is an inseparable part of it. Since moral judgments always involve prior imaginings, imagination and reason must be understood as co-constitutive elements; imagination cannot in any simple way be separated from reason, practical or otherwise.

http://www.bartleby.com/27/23.html (accessed June 28, 2010). Also cited in P. H. Sedgwick, The Market Economy and Christian Ethics, New Studies in Christian Ethics (Cambridge, U.K.; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999). Shelly adds that “there is no want of knowledge respecting what is wisest and best in morals, government, and political economy . . . We want the creative faculty to imagine that which we know; we want the generous impulse to act that which we imagine; we want the poetry of life.” Shelley’s comments here anticipate protestations of the Frankfurt School that in capitalist societies the forces of production are deployed according to the logic of commodification and capital accumulation, stifling creative practice outside of the logic. For an exceptional collection of essays by theorists associated with the Frankfurt School see Stephen Eric Bronner and Douglas Kellner, Critical Theory and Society: A Reader (New York: Routledge, 1989).


Third, theories of morality are irreducibly imaginative and depend largely on socially constructed images, schemas, metaphors, and narratives. Fundamental concepts of morality depend on deep (usually unconscious), socially mediated metaphorical understandings. Objectivist and rationalist approaches to moral judgments ignore how human beings actually make sense of the world. This understanding of imagination makes it clear that the spectrum of what is considered ethically possible is articulated out of received conceptual categories. Previous articulations of the moral imagination delimit boundaries for how moral action in the political economy is conceived/perceived. The moral imagination sets the boundaries within which ethicists conceive or imagine. Mainstream Christian ethicists, believing that they are elaborating a radical social vision, are simply producing and reproducing particular human conceptions of how the world works based on human social institutions, structures, and philosophical assumptions. This process represents a feedback loop of the Christian moral imagination. The feedback loop not only determines the moral imagination of ethics; it also creates the structure of the social reality itself.

To make this point more concretely, consider as an illustration the following definition of ethics. Ethics is the analysis of how agents make judgments about good and evil, right and wrong. Defining ethics this way posits that there is a good or evil, right or wrong “out there,” a reality ready to be discovered. The binary of good and evil invokes a cosmic dualism, one replicated and repeated in the development of ethical models. The mind of the ethicists is therefore prepped, biased by their own conceptualization of the type of work they are engaged in, to misrepresent the complexity, ambiguity, and pluralism of contemporary society. Consider another illustration: the relationship between ethics and philosophy. Ethicists look to philosophy

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231 As per Johnson, *Moral Imagination*.

232 Ibid.
among other disciplines) for insights in elaborating their own reflections. Yet philosophical views depend on the cultural and historical climate in which they arise. Ethicists who rely on philosophy are thus stuck in a feed-back loop, endlessly rehearsing the same tired ideas about how to reason through complex moral issues like the political economy. Their imagination is disengaged; the world of the possible is transmuted into the world of the likely, and finally into the world of what is expected and anticipated. There is nothing new under the sun and ideas which do not correspond to “reality” as constructed in the incestuous western intellectual tradition are relegated to operations of fanciful, or worse, deluded minds.

Privilege, Oppression, and the Moral Imagination

The social construction of reality, which is then internalized and becomes part of an individual’s consciousness, begins to explain how privilege allows Christian ethics to define

233 It may help to provide an additional illustration of the feed-back loop from a related matter, divine command ethics. Richard Mouw, long time professor of Christian philosophy and ethics and president of Fuller Theological Seminary, argues that divine command ethics provides a way to think about moral judgments (Richard J. Mouw, The God Who Commands (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990). According to Mouw, a person learns about the content of divine commands by gaining familiarity with the character of God as revealed in the context of the biblical text. This mode of moral imagination allows a person’s position within the social structures of privilege to override other concerns. The actions of people from the dominant social group who believe themselves to be obeying God’s commands—interpreted through their understanding of God’s character—have often resulted in terrible consequences for minority communities. The privileged members of society—whether they are evangelicals with Reformed sympathies, conservative Christians concerned with divine commands, or scholars weary with the prevalence of character and virtue theory in Christian moral reflection—have little reason to quibble with Mouw’s understanding of God as sovereign administrator of the world. And the result is a feed-back loop: the output generated through Mouw’s formulation of divine command reinforces and justifies the input, the position of privilege and power. For a more detailed critique of Mouw’s divine command ethics, see Rodolfo J. Hernández-Díaz, "Richard Mouw on Divine Command,” in Beyond the Pale: Reading Ethics from the Margins, ed. Miguel A. De La Torre and Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011).

reality as fitting the experience of privileged theorists. One of the most visible consequences of this privilege is an uneven distribution of income, wealth, and jobs along with everything associated with it, from good housing to access to education and health care. As such, its concerns are about the right mix of government and markets, or the inherent morality of markets, or theorizing stewardship, or analyzing the common good. These projects are replete with insights into how to make Christian ethical reflections in a complex “secular” society relevant, and how to conceive the relationships between politics, economics, and theology. They simply fail to deal with the elephant in the room: a society in which for many people it is difficult to live decent and productive lives. Rather than challenging the yawning divide in levels of income, wealth, dignity, and quality of life, these ethical systems affirm the basic structures of society and ignore the social structures that attach privilege to being white, male (mostly), heterosexual, and nondisabled.

One of the most insidious characteristics of privilege is that it is usually invisible to those who have it. Privilege is an unearned benefit granted to members of a particular group that is

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235 The term “social construction” was introduced to the social sciences in Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (London: Penguin Press, 1967). Their basic argument, which is now widely accepted, is that human beings collectively construct, affirm, and alter knowledge and reality. Reality is more a matter of social agreement than an accurate representation of the natural world.

236 The recent debates in the U.S. about the federal debt and deficient have centered (unbelievably) on which social benefits and services to cut rather than increasing government revenue by (for example) having the wealthiest individuals and corporations pay a fair tax rate. This is another example of the way that privilege makes people oblivious to the state of gross inequality and rampant poverty. Amazingly, Warren Buffett, one of the wealthiest people in the world, pleaded with the I.R.S. and U.S. Congress to increase taxes on him and his “mega-rich friends.” “Stop Coddling the Super-Rich,” Published: August 14, 2011, NY Times Op-Ed, [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/15/opinion/stop-coddling-the-super-rich.html?_r=2&hp](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/15/opinion/stop-coddling-the-super-rich.html?_r=2&hp) (accessed September 9, 2011).
denied to other because they belong to a different group. Privileges that some groups enjoy at the expense of others create the corroding effect of oppression on millions of people every day. And yet it is easy to be unaware of being granted these privileges. As members of a privilege social class, mainstream professional Christian ethicists have a vested interest in defending the status quo and ignoring the way in which the current political economic configuration deals death. It is much easier to focus on issues of that have the least to do with the matrix of privilege and oppression. The ease of unawareness to privilege is an aspect of privilege itself. Social problems of oppressed people are routinely ignored, even as close attention is paid to privilege and privileged culture.

While mainstream Christian ethicists may acknowledge the important of views from oppressed people groups, in their theorizing they stay safely within the established canon (which of course represents the perspective of privilege). The interests of those who are female or of color or in some other way on the outside of privilege are not represented by mainstream Christian ethics. Since these interests are routinely overlooked, they become invisible. This becomes a major way in which patterns of privilege and oppression repeat themselves again and again.

Latina/o thinking troubles this state of mainstream Christian social ethics. As much as people might wish that the U.S. had moved in the 21st century into a post-racist/ethnic prejudiced society, the reality of most U.S. Latina/os says otherwise. Segregation in housing and education are stubborn and pervasive. The average wealth of white families is almost 15 times

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238 A phrase used by sociologist Patricia Hill Collins. See Hill Collins, Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment.
that of Latina/os and Black families. The average annual household income for whites is 44.6 percent greater than Latina/os and 70.3 percent greater than African Americans. Income advantages among whites exist on all levels of educational achievement. Middle class Latina/os and blacks who believe what whites told them, that if they went to school and worked hard, race/ethnicity would not be an issue, are discovering that nothing can protect them from structures of white racism. Latina/os thinking destabilizes the binary epistemes that form the foundations of ethical analysis of the political economy. It also invites those of privilege groups to take ownership over their own involvement in systems of privilege in order to discover what can be done to heal the dysfunctionality in the system.

Oppression, hostility, and violence on the basis of difference are part and parcel of a peculiar political economic system which has become the basis for every other social institution: capitalism. The rise of capitalism is linked historically with the invention of whiteness and racism on the basis of skin pigmentation, that is, for less time than Europeans have been aware of other “races.” For most of recorded history, differences that are now considered so crucial were considered socially irrelevant. However, when Europeans began to conquer and exploit for their own economic gain, the idea of race was developed to justify their behavior on the


242 Biologist have long agreed that the characteristics associated with race/ethnicity—eye color and shape, hair color and consistency, skin color—do not define distinct biological groups. Instead they are socially defined categories.
grounds of racial superiority. Skin color, which had no importance in social life, became something significant in order to justify and enforce privilege within the capitalist system.

The dynamics of capitalism produce an enormous amount of wealth but high and increasing levels of inequality, within societies and globally. Capitalism manifests as a race to the bottom: creating jobs for the least skilled, least powerful, and most vulnerable. It is a system that creates and perpetuates oppressive conditions. For those living at the bottom the cost in terms of living conditions is enormous. Even among those who are employed, the capitalist class system offers little security and takes an emotional toll.

It’s surprising, given these characteristics of capitalism, that mainstream Christian ethicists parrot arguments about capitalism being the only viable way to organize the political economy. It’s a bizarre outcome that results partly from their privileged social location and having benefited from capitalism.

**Niebuhrian Realism as Limitation**

Mainstream Christian ethicists’ social location and privilege work together, through their reliance on Niebuhrian realism, to limit their moral imagination. They argue for the superiority of Christian realism by affirming the paradox of the basic goodness of God’s creation, including human nature, with the ubiquitous presence of sin. Niebuhr’s Christian realism, they argue, is

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244 More will be said about capitalism’s deleterious effects in chapter four.
profoundly relevant for politics and democracy.\textsuperscript{246} They approvingly cite Niebuhr’s conviction that “the human capacity for good makes democracy possible, and the human capacity for evil makes democracy necessary.”\textsuperscript{247} Adherence to realism also supports for their opposition to liberation utopianism. For Stackhouse, liberationists are “on the fringes of serious political and economic thought” which for him is a definitive argument against it.\textsuperscript{248}

Stackhouse and Wogaman’s dismissal of liberationist’s moral visions as “ naïve” and “unrealistic” is an odd sort of critique. To the extent that the goal is to imagine another social reality, it is poor practice to insist on “realism” at the outset. The initial task of the imaginative construction of a moral political economy is not policy recommendations, which are a second order activity, but to broaden the conception of what is possible. John Milbank provides a profound critique. He insists that Niebuhrian realism itself is an impoverished concept:

The Christian grasp of reality right from the start is utterly at variance with anything the world supposes to be ‘realistic’. This is why it is so absurd deliberately to import the world’s realism into the sphere of Christian ethics as if, when it came to the practical crunch, we could set our entire religious vision to one side. In Christian terms it is the world that will never understand the world aright.\textsuperscript{249}

Most mainstream Christian ethicists accept Niebuhr’s Christian realism. The result is a sort of politics of the possible, short-circuiting any notion of what is ultimately good and liberating. A

\textsuperscript{245} Long has also observed this appropriation of Niebuhr’s theology by the mainstream tradition. See Long, \textit{Divine Economy}, 39-43.

\textsuperscript{246} So Wogaman’s affirmation that “any approach to politics that neglects the need for institutions preserving order and justice will prove if the relevant to the hard realities” J. Philip Wogaman, \textit{Faith and Fragmentation: Christianity for a New Age} (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 119.

\textsuperscript{247} Cited in \textit{On Moral Business}, 301.

\textsuperscript{248} Stackhouse, \textit{Public Theology and Political Economy}, x.

reliance on realism sets limits on their moral imagination and serves to legitimate reformed
democratic capitalism.250

Second Movement: Parameters of Latina/o Thinking

¿Existe un Pensamiento Latino/a?

Latina/o thinking can serve as an alternative social-cultural framework from which to
elaborate Christian political economic ethics. But a possible difficulty exists in undertaking this
type of argument. Some, like the Peruvian Augusto Salazar Bondy continue to ask ¿Existe una
filosofía de nuestra América? (does a (Latin) American philosophy exist?), that is, a type of
philosophy that is not contemplated by the classic accounts of what is called philosophy.251 In
Filosofía de la liberacion latinoamericana, Leopoldo Zeo identifies Juan Bautista Alberdi as one
of the pioneers of Latin American philosophy.252 Alberdi’s work “Ideas para un Curso de Filosofía
Contemporánea” takes the existence of a distinctly Latin American thought for granted.253

250 Long refers to this as “epistemological humility” Long, Divine Economy, 40.

251 Augusto Salazar Bondy, ¿Existe una Filosofía de Nuestra América?, decimosexta edición ed.
(México, D.F.: Siglo XXI editores, S.A., [1968] 2004). This is not, it turns out, a new question. In 1925 José
Carlos Mariátegui raised the question of whether there is a distinctly Latin American thought or
philosophy and the question in various forms have been posed by Hispanic/Latino/a thinkers since. For a
broader discussion see Susana Nuccetelli, "Is 'Latin American Thought' Philosophy?,” Metaphilosophy 34,

252 Horacio Cerutti Guldberg, Filosofía de la Liberación Latinoamericana, 1a ed., Colección Tierra

253 Juan Bautista Alberdi, "Ideas Para Presidir a la Confección del Curso de Filosofía
Contemporánea,” in Pensamiento Positivista Latinoamericano, ed. Leopoldo Zea, Biblioteca Ayacucho
(Caracas, Venezuela: Biblioteca Ayacucho, [1842] 1980). Certainly, Sor Juana Inez De La Cruz (1648-95), the
Mexican nun who rebelled against Iberian (and European) scholastics, should be counted prominent
among those who first began elaborating a distinctly American thought. For a recent biopic of Sor Juana
focused on theological aesthetics, see Michelle A. Gonzalez, Sor Juana: Beauty and Justice in the Americas
(Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003). Many consider José Martí (1853-1898), the Cuban patriot, poet, and
intellectual to be one of the greatest articulators of Latin American thought. For a sampling of Martí’s
The problem, as José Carlos Mariátegui points out, is that many Latin American thinkers have been educated in Euro-American schools. Thus, raising the question: is Hispanic American thought merely a rhapsody of elements composed of motifs and fragments of Euro-American thought? It is certainly possible to argue that Latina/o thinking is culturally dependent on North Atlantic societies. One could undertake a comparative approach to see if such a claim is supported by surveying prominent Hispanic thinkers. The results of such study would most likely prove only that Hispanic thought fails to be distinct from the Western tradition, since it has not produced the major figures and "isms" that indicate an original tradition. But this view is based on an incorrect assumption: that distinctly Latina/o thought must deny or reject its Euro-American elements to become Latina/o. Yet Euro-American thought forms are a constitutive aspect of what Latina/o thinking means. At its best, Latina/o thinking embraces the best of modernity, unlike Third World and/or Indigenous fundamentalism that shun these elements in their totalizing rejection of Euro-American thought.

Latina/o thinking does exists, but in a form that intersects with, runs parallel to, and sometime contradicts Euro-American thought. The content of Latina/o thinking largely


255 Nuccetelli, "Is 'Latin American Thought' Philosophy?"

256 Moreover, the preoccupation with the existence of Latina/o philosophy and continuing interest it indicates the creative presence of that philosophy.

257 The relationship between Latina/o and Euro-American thought is analogous to the relationship described by Luis León between established, institutional forms of religion and "poetic, creative religious practice" performed on the borderlands León, La Llorona's Children: Religion, Life, and Death in the U.S.-Mexican Borderlands, 5.
depends on one’s questions and interests. In history, which asks about the significance of the past to understand the present and construct the future, it is about the sense of history and the philosophy of history. In social sciences, it involves a new interpretation of social structures and institutions, such as dependency theory. And in cultural-religious discourse, in particular liberation theology and philosophy, it is about the establishment of the Reign of God, a reign of justice and liberation, in which human beings are no longer exploited.  

Praxis and Lived Experience

The massive body of socio-cultural-religious texts produced by Latina/o scholars since the 1960s can be grouped into categories: liberation theology, philosophy, and pedagogy and narratives of resistance and liberation. That is, these texts focus on either the idea that thoughtful action or active thought is transformative or liberatory (often called praxis) or the importance of the personal narrative and other expressions of lived experience. These texts are the discursive component of transformative social movements, including the continued organization of indigenous groups (Rigoberta Menchú, Chiapas), the movement towards a more inclusive and multicultural society (César Chávez), the emergence of Christian base ecclesial communities (Gutiérrez, Boff), and development of alternative notions of pedagogy geared towards collective consciousness-raising (Freire). These Latina/o discursive manifestations of religion and social change, in addition to offering fresh examples to the tired, often used cases of King and Ghandi, serve as a new way to explore the complex and not always transparent


259 These are two of Iván Márquez’s categories in his anthology. The other three categories are: dependency theory; guerrilla revolution and socialist utopia; and democracy, neoliberalism, and globalization. See Iván Márquez, *Contemporary Latin American Social and Political Thought: An Anthology*, Latin American Perspectives in the Classroom (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008), xi-xiii.
relationships between discursive, social, and cultural-religious change. They suggest the two loci of Latina/o thinking explored later in this chapter: praxis and lived experience.

**A Non-Essentialized Approach: A Lesson from Latina/o Identity Debates**

A deployment of Latina/o thinking as a method for formulating a cultural-religious framework is fraught with essentialist dangers that find parallels in the scholarly quest to describe Latina/o identity. Some scholars have attempted to portray Latina/o identity (understandably so) by describing the essential traits of *Latinidad*, the central characteristics or constitutive elements of life embodied in a Latina/o context. Invocations of *Latinidad* rarely question its exclusionary premises, especially in regards to gender and sexuality. The results of these studies have been a portrait of “homo hispanicus,” and other flat, one-dimensional characterizations of an enormously diverse set of peoples. Another, more sophisticated technique has been to define latinoness as the mixing between two cultures, its *mestizo/a* characteristic. Still others argue that this fails to go far enough and treat *latinidad* in

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relationship to hybridity, pointing to complex negotiation of meanings rather than essential characteristics as a way to conceptualize Latina/os identify.\(^{263}\)

It is this last perspective that best describes Latina/o identity. Thus, debates on Latina/o identity emphasizes that Latina/o thinking must eschew essentialized descriptions in favor of non-essentialized approaches.\(^{264}\) The Hispanic is creatively localized in-between worlds and

\(^{263}\) Anzaldúa suggests that umbrella terms such as Latina/o or Hispanic undermines the political agenda of the Chicana/o community. "We call ourselves Hispanic or Spanish-American or Latin American or Latin when linking ourselves to other Spanish-speaking peoples of the Western hemisphere and when coping out" (62). See Anzaldúa, Borderlands.

\(^{264}\) Latina/o religious scholars and theologians have long debated how to define identity within the context of their theoretical production. The concern for identity arises out of the need to defend U.S. Hispanic communities against overt racial and ethnic prejudices, the devaluation of Latino/a collective identity, and strong assimilationist tendencies that frequently demand cultural and linguistic repression in order to attain status as full U.S. Americans (Benjamín Valentín, "Oye, ¿Y Ahora Qué? / Say, Now What? Prospective Lines of Development for U.S. Hispanic/Latino(a) Theology," in New Horizons in Hispanic/Latino(a) Theology, ed. Benjamin Valentín (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2003), 110-11). Reflections on the popular symbols, myths, rituals, and practices of Hispanics serve as a major wellspring and bulwark for maintaining the integrity of Latino/a self-identity and culture. Orlando Espín understands popular religiosity as a cultural expression of the sensus fidelium (literally, the “sense of the faithful”) (Orlando O. Espín, "Tradition and Popular Religion: An Understanding of the Sensus Fidelium," in Frontiers of Hispanic Theology in the United States, ed. Allan Figueroa Deck (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992)). Roberto S. Goizueta contends that popular religiosity embodies a unity of reason, beauty, and justice that offer a radical critique of mainstream North American Christianity and offers the latter avenues for transformation and renewal (Roberto S. Goizueta, Caminemos Con Jesús: Toward a Hispanic/Latino Theology of Accompaniment (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), 18-46). More recent scholarship has sought to “rethink” various identity categories deployed by Latina/o scholars of religion, such as mestizaje, mulatez, and machismo. See Miguel A. De La Torre, "Rethinking Mulatez," in Rethinking Latino(a) Religion and Identity, ed. Miguel A. De La Torre and Gastón Espinosa (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2006); Luis D. León, "Exhibiting Religious Erotics; Ethics of Machismo after Aztlán," in Rethinking Latino(a) Religion and Identity, ed. Miguel A. De La Torre and Gastón Espinosa (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2006); and Manuel A. Vásquez, "Rethinking Mestizaje," in Rethinking Latino(a) Religion and Identity, ed. Miguel A. De La Torre and Gastón Espinosa (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2006).

The debate among Latina/o religious scholars here also parallels (it might be argued) the move from modernist to postmodernist claims. Though what is principally gained by such an argument is to affirm in the minds of lovers of western philosophy that all other thought is merely a footnote or variation of it. Moreover, many of these Latina/o thinkers themselves would deny a one-to-one correction. A question of interest remains: how can Latino/a thinkers be postmodern when modernity bypassed them? On non-essentialized and non-reductive approaches, see two excellent introductory articles Nelson Goodman, “Just the Facts, Ma’am,” in Relativism: Interpretation and Confrontation, ed. Michael Krausz (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989); Catherine Z. Elgin, “The Relativity of Fact and the Objectivity of Value,” in Relativism: Interpretation and Confrontation, ed. Michael Krausz (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989).
within worlds constituting the intercultural “border,” not as essences or reductive elements, but as being involved in the dialectical creation and integration of new components in the process of historical development. The dignity of this historical development should be affirmed as a way to destabilize the Anglo strategy of jealously projecting “su alegada superioridad cultural, política, religiosa” (his or her alleged cultural, political, and religious superiority).

The Postmodern Case for Latina/o Thinking

Postmodernism, as Lyotard defines it, is “incredulity towards metanarratives.” There is no single story, no metanarrative that holds the center together or allows a place from which to stand. Since, according to postmodernist thought, nothing that is known can be checked

Latina/o religious scholars involved in the debate on identity have paid little attention to the fieldwork-based examinations of Latino pan-ethnicity. These studies reveal the difficulties in delineating identity and make clear that the question of identity remains complex, as people choose to identify themselves with various ethnic or national labels or with the larger Latina/o community according to circumstances, locations, and historical moments. Dávila argues that the classification of all people of Spanish origins as self-defined, stable community as revealing more about U.S. marketing strategies than of the people themselves (Arlene M. Dávila, Latinos, Inc.: The Marketing and Making of a People (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001)). Ricourt and Danta point to the hope of organizing Latina/o communities not on the basis of some shared essentialized characteristic, but on the basis of working-class immigrant interests (Milagros Ricourt and Ruby Danta, Hispanics de Queens: Latino Panethnicity in a New York City Neighborhood, Anthropology of Contemporary Issues (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003)). Santiago-Irizarry charges that the essentialist concept of Latina/o cultural among psychiatric medical practices are incongruent with experiences of the urban, U.S. born Latino patients (Vilma Santiago-Irizarry, Medicalizing Ethnicity: The Construction of Latino Identity in a Psychiatric Setting, Anthropology of Contemporary Issues (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001)). On the changing nature of Latina/o identity, see Jorge Duany, The Puerto Rican Nation on the Move: Identities on the Island & in the United States (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).


266 Ibid., 42.

against reality as such, what is the basis of commending a particular story, or way of making
meaning, over another? Postmodern theorists have responded in various ways. Willad Van
Orman Quine provides one basis for adjudication:

Truth is whatever we can get our colleagues (our community) to agree
to. If we can get them to use our language then—like the “strong poets” Moses,
Jesus, Plato, Freud—our story is as true as any story will ever get.
Of course, if our story doesn’t “work,” if we fail to have a language that
allows us safely to “cross a street when a bus is coming,” few of us will be
around long in a modern city. Some language will pass out of existence because
the language framers did not survive long enough to have children to whom
they taught the language. But since many human languages—from Hindi to
Mandarin to Swahili—keep us alive in the cities, they have all the truth value
needed to keep us from being hit by a bus. 268

In short, the only kind of truth is the kind of truth related to practical affairs. It is on this basis
that one can adjudicate between social-cultural perspectives: their usefulness in keeping people
alive. There is no “truth of correspondence,” but there is efficaciousness of language insofar as it
acknowledges death dealt out by current political economic systems and ethical reflections
around it.

Another way to adjudicate between competing socio-linguistic-cultural perspectives is
to deploy Alasdair MacIntrye’s scheme for evaluating large-scale traditions. According to
MacIntyre, a tradition can be rationally accepted if it is internally consistent and has the
resources to address the intellectual crises it faces. 269 As an example, consider the crises faced
by the Christian tradition. Christianity survived the crucifixion of Jesus, the delay of the second
coming beyond the lifetime of the apostles, the introduction of Aristotelian thought by Arabian
conquests, and (much later in the 19th century) the rise of the historical-critical method. As

268 W. V. Quine, “Two Dogmas of Empiricism,” in From a Logical Point of View: 9 Logico-
Philosophical Essays, ed. W. V. Quine (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), 44.

269 See Alasdair C. MacIntyre, "Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative, and the Philosophy of
Science," in Why Narrative?: Readings in Narrative Theology, ed. Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones
Christianity faces each of these crises, it reevaluates its account of the historical situation, reconstructing itself in light of these challenges. The Christian tradition thus can be rationally accepted, on the basis of its ability to face intellectual crises and internal consistency. Latina/o thinking demonstrates the same type of internally consistency and survival of intellectual crises.

In an intellectual age (in the sense of intellectual history) that is becoming more and more postmodern, awash in a pluralism of perspectives, there is no sense of how to get from here to there. The horizon has been washed away. The fixed center has vanished. Cultural anarchy seems inevitable. What is needed is an intellectual-cultural framework that has resources for dealing with the washing away of the horizon and the vanishing of the center. A framework that accounts for various perspectives not in an either/or fashion, but a both/and. Latina/o thinking offers just such a framework.

**Third Movement: Thinking Beyond Identity Politics**

The third movement explores the ambiguous relationship between identity and knowledge production by drawing from postcolonial and Latina/o religious and cultural discourses. Latina/o histories and identities are indelibly linked to epistemic modalities which begin to address epistemic injustices. By connecting identity with the notions of noninnocent reading of history, exploring the European “I,” New Mestiza consciousness, *la facultad*, hybridity, and *mestizaje-mulatez*, Latina/o thinking offers new epistemic modalities, rather than just an articulation of an identity or a transmission of knowledge from a particular perspective.
Noninnocent Reading of History

Latina/o thinking draws on the concept of a noninnocent history as a way of moving beyond questions of identity to Hispanic ways of perceiving and knowing. Justo González contends that understanding U.S. Latina/o experience necessitates a “noninnocent” reading of history. Innocent history is constructed from a singular perspective that justifies its political goals religiously. U.S. history, as taught in schools and even universities, is guilty of such innocence. González insists that as long as this country constructs its past as an innocent, “it does not have to deal with the injustices that lie at the heart of its power and its social order.”

In an innocent telling of history, Hispanics are either constructed as the “beneficiaries” of

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270 As to the matter of what constitutes “knowing” or knowledge, there is, as one might imagine, little consensus. The classical approach conceived of knowledge as truth or at least justified beliefs. It split into two forms: 1) empiricism, exemplified by the work of David Hume and 2) rationalism, illustrated by the work of René Descartes. Empiricists like Hume uncover knowledge through the establishment of universal laws based on observation of individual instances. Rationalists like Descartes conduct the search for truth through the proper use of reason, the mind.

Kant attempts to reconcile Hume’s empiricism and Cartesian rationalism. For Kant, the philosophical problem of epistemology centers on one question: how are synthetic a priori judgments possible? His Copernican revolution in philosophy lies in his emphasis on the role of the mind in ordering scientific experience. Kant argued that the laws of nature are not discovered, but imposed (See The Critique of Pure Reason). Kant’s negotiation between the realm of rational and empirical received further development in the work of Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, the Frankfurt School, and Michel Foucault. For Foucault, knowledge has nothing to do with truth or justification; it is the network of beliefs that are institutionalized by a particular community, culture, or society as a means of control. Foucault’s social constructivist view of knowledge is affirmed and is elaborated on by some Latino/a scholars.


272 As in the case of “manifest destiny” in U.S. history or “la mission civilisatrice” in the French or British context. Roughly, manifest destiny refers to the deeply held belief, strongly marked the U.S. collective consciousness, that the North American process of expansion—first westward, then across the oceans, and now all over the globe—is natural, even God ordained. La mission civilisatrice (the civilizing mission) generally refers to the idea that the violent and exploitative project of French and British colonization has the mission of promoting civilization and is therefore justified. It is Rudyard Kipling’s “White Man’s Burden.”

273 González, Mañana, 39.

274 Ibid.
missionary activity or they disappear altogether. A noninnocent history unveils the hidden tradition of oppression and violence and the rationalizing of that behavior.\textsuperscript{275} Latina/o thinking, as expressed in González’s noninnocent telling of history, articulates far more than an identity. It recognizes that societal norms that establish and authorize knowledge often ascribe more credibility to the powerful than the powerless. It makes clear that the present order is result of theft, and not merely “hard labor, daring enterprise, and rugged individualism.”\textsuperscript{276}

The European “I” and Latina/o Thinking

Claims about another way of thinking, an alternative reflective process are often met with skepticism. The astonishment—sometimes cloaked as righteous anger—that their ways of thinking are not the only ways is paralleled in the agonizing discovery, when they made their way across the Atlantic, that they are not the only people.\textsuperscript{277} But the Euro-Americans’ agony merits diagnosis. It must be uncovered how Euro-Americans came to totalize their experiences in order to uncover if Latina/o ways of thinking are different from theirs.

Predecessors to today’s Euro-Americans did not center themselves in the same way. For example, Francis of Assisi recognized God within the other. But, as Dussel explains, the subject of the self, the European “I” is the beginning of a process. The first experience of the “I” is that

\textsuperscript{275} González’s notion of noninnocent history finds parallels and contrasts in the reflections of poststructuralist, critical, feminist, and postcolonial theorists on the relationship between history, subject position, and subjugated knowledges: from Friedrich Nietzsche’s and Michel Foucault’s genealogical method; Walter Benjamin’s distinction between “historicism” and “historical materialism”; Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza’s feminist reconstruction of history; to David Scott’s argument about emplotment of the (colonial) past as tragedy. A comparison to each of these methods to the Latino/a historiography suggested by J. González must be left for another project.

\textsuperscript{276} González, \textit{Mañana}, 40-41.

of “I conquer.” The foundation of its potency is in the “I conquer” of Cortez or Pizarro. The European “I” begins with “I have sovereignty over all the lands” of the Hispanic king. The second stage begins with Descartes “I think.” Descartes doubts everything, even his own senses and body. The result is the reduction of the self to a disembodied soul. The foundation of everything else is this “I think.” With this foundation in place, the other is subliminated, diminished, belittled, if not outright denied. The Indian, the African, and the Asian are reduced not as something exterior but ideas internal to the system of the “I.” Finally, the “I” becomes an “I will to power” in Nietzsche. He envisions a psychologically healthier being beyond the common human conditions who creates, as an artist does, all from within. Things exists when I believe them to exist. The “I” is the complete man (übermenschlich).

The “I” that emerges is unconditional and indeterminate. Nothing comes before it, no previous condition. Since it comes first, all determination is within the “I.” This “I” is an autonomous chooser who transcends cultural norms. Isolated from the interpersonal relationships, social responsibilities, and larger social forces, the European self lacks emotional bonds and commitment to social conventions that undermine ethical duty. Beyond this “I” there is nothing, the nothing about which nothing can be said.

Latina/o thinking offers a different way of articulating the self and points towards the possibility of another logic. It is a configuration of the border imaginary, in contrast to an

278 Enrique Dussel is an outstanding contemporary figure of Latina/o thought who has contributed many different disciplines. Few have done more to assess carefully and critically North Atlantic philosophy to elaborate an American philosophy.


280 Ibid.

281 Ibid., 153.
Atlantic imaginary, which has become the imaginary of the modern/colonial world.\textsuperscript{282} Latina/o thinking names a dynamic, multi-valent cultural milieu and the conditions of misery, poverty, discrimination, and deprivation that is the norm for so many living on the borderlands. It represents epistemic modalities that cannot be disassociated from the conditions and sites of its production. It calls into question the omissions and interpretations of the victors of history.

Thus, Latina/o thinking holds potential for restructuring moral visions of the political economy by supplementing the victor’s partial perspective with those of the vanquished and calling into question the suffering which is the basic condition of those on the “underside of modernity.”\textsuperscript{283}

**Latina/o Thinking’s Postexilic Moments**

Latina/o thinking also expresses the relationship between identity, history, and epistemic modalities through the concept of the postexilic.\textsuperscript{284} For a myriad of reasons and in various ways, Latina/os have been exiled from their homelands, often as a result of U.S. foreign

\textsuperscript{282} Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*, 3.

\textsuperscript{283} Dussel uses this phrase to refer to the conditions of and the non-white people of the world under the modernist projects of white supremacy. See Dussel and Mendieta, *The Underside of Modernity: Apel, Ricoeur, Rorty, Taylor, and the Philosophy of Liberation*.

\textsuperscript{284} “Postexilic” as used in this chapter refers to a theological and hermeneutical context and not just a historical one. Using this definition, the texts of the Hebrew Bible can be read against a postexilic background, even if it is difficult to make a strong argument for a postexilic dating. This is another way of saying that the context one uses to interpret a text is an ethical, political choice.

Chéla Sandoval’s notion of differential consciousness offers a useful tool for conceptualizing history, identity, and epistemology. Differential consciousness points to the constantly dynamic flux and development of political identities in response to colonial oppression. That is, political identities are highly context-specific strategies of resistance or methodologies of the oppressed Chela Sandoval, “Re-Entering Cyberspace: Sciences and Resistance,” *Dispositio/n* 19, no. 46 (1994). Emma Peréz extends Sandoval’s differential mode of consciousness by arguing that it can only function within the context of the “decolonial imaginary,” a theoretical tool for uncovering the hidden voices of Chicanas in history Pérez, *The Decolonial Imaginary*, xvi. Drawing on Hayden White, Pérez contends that all historical interpretation is determined by the deep structure of the historical imagination Pérez, *The Decolonial Imaginary*, 8-9. Thus, repudiating the ideological trappings of tradition historical interpretation—or decolonizing the historical imagination—is a political, ethical move.
policy. Some of Latina/os are literal exiles. For political, economic, or ideological reasons—more likely some combination of these—Latina/os fled their countries. They later understood that the U.S. supported the right-wing dictatorships Latina/os were fleeing and that the U.S. economic policies created the poverty at home. Whatever the reason, their lands of birth are now lost to them; they live in this adopted land. And though they no longer have any other land, they nevertheless remain exiles. Other Latino/as are not exiles in the sense that they left their lands of birth to come here. They were born here, and in many cases so were their parents and grandparents. Although they may be citizens by birth, they are not treated as full citizens; they remain “exiles living in a land that remains foreign.”

Latin/o religious scholars have theorized exile as a method of exploring the connections between U.S. Latina/o experiences, identity, and epistemic modalities and ancient Judean communities. For instance, Miguel De La Torre contends that juxtaposing the portrayal of the Israelites’ Babylon captivity found in Psalm 137 sheds light on the social location of Cuban exiles. The forced removal that happens during the galut—the Hebrew word translated exile, banishment, or diaspora—becomes more than a reinvention of identity. It becomes a “religious condition” and raises questions of theodicy in the mind of the displaced: How can God allow such a fate to come to pass on God’s people? The Judeans living in the foreign land of Babylon

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285 This paragraph draws from González, Mañana, 41. González is by no means the only the only theorist to reflect on exile or to write from an exilic sensibility. He should be understood in the context of this discussion as merely a representative figure. An entire literature has developed around exile, which Gustavo Perez-Firmat describes as a retrospective discourse powerfully fixated on the cultural of origin (Gustavo Pérez Firmat, Next Year in Cuba: A Cubano’s Coming-of-Age in America, 1st Anchor Books ed. (New York: Anchor Books, 1995)).

286 González, Mañana, 41.


288 Ibid., 54.
drew on their faith to cope with their existential situation by finding new meaning in the humiliation and shame of their displacement, not just by reinventing their community’s identity. Exilic Cubans have also abstracted important events of the past to engage in meaning making in the present, a type of meaning-making that functions as a critique of prevailing ideologies. De La Torre makes explicit how the pain of exile and the struggle to cope generates a new religiosity. For Cubans and Judeans residing in a foreign land, (re)negotiating a (post)exilic identity determines their sociopolitical reality and justifies their worldview. Their alienation from their homeland forces a religious quest that reconfigures identity and a new consciousness.

Latina/o thinking connects postexilic moments with knowledge and aesthetics that are not established by transcendent subjects, but historical ones in diverse cultural centers. Within Latina/o thought, Chicana feminist Gloria Anzaldúa’s New Mestiza consciousness—a transformed state of feminist, political, and social awareness—represents a powerful alternative aesthetic and political hermeneutic. Anzaldúa’s work is characterized by a struggle to develop a language that offers new conceptual repertoire for understanding human existence. For Anzaldúa, the alternative form of knowing that comes about through *la facultad* (faculty). Anzaldúa defines *la facultad* as “the capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities, to see the deep structure below the surface.” La facultad is “latent in all of us” but is more developed in postexilic subjects (or for Anzaldúa, those on the border) who are

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289 Ibid., 55.

290 Ibid., 15.

291 Anzaldúa’s work is located at the crossroads of three traditions—Nahuatl, Spanish-American, and Anglo-American—which creates a locus where different ways of knowing and individual and collective expressions mingle.

292 Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, 60.
constantly “against the wall” and experience “all sorts of oppression.”

This sense is more apt to develop in “those who do not feel psychologically or physically safe in the world . . . the females, the homosexuals of all races, the darkskinned, the outcast, the persecuted, the marginalized, the foreign.”

La facultad arises as a necessity, as a survival technique to assess threats and manage fear. Anzaldúa contends that Latina/os are “forced to develop this faculty so that we’ll know when the next person is going to slap us or lock us away.”

It is a type of non-verbal perception, an acute awareness that communicates in “images and symbols which are the faces of feelings.”

Anzaldúa’s configuration of Latina/o thinking insists that perception and understanding derived from pain, suffering, and loss, from an unwarranted and sudden offense and the fear of it happening again is a legitimate source of knowledge.

The intersection of the postcolonial notion of hybridity to mestizaje and mulatez, constitutes another postexilic moment in Latina/o thinking, one that speaks about the diversity of the human experience.

For Hommi Bhabha, an Indian literary critique and key figure in postcolonial discourse, hybridity emerges as a product of colonialism. Hybridity is a state of in-betweeness, a “third-space” of communication, negotiation, and translation resulting from the colonial cultures inability to replicate itself in a homogenized manner.

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293 Ibid., 60-61.
294 Ibid., 60.
295 Ibid., 60-61.
296 Ibid., 60.
298 Bhabha, The Location of Culture, 159-62.
hybridity is nothing new for Latina/o scholars who anticipated his theoretical moves. Nevertheless, Bhabha is a good starting point for understanding the diversity and multiplicity of postcolonial/postexilic/border subjectivity and its relationship to epistemic modalities. Bhabha highlights the ambiguous nature of the colonial process and the always unstable notion of culture. However, Bhabha’s notion of hybridity has its limitations. As Alfred J. López argues, Bhabha’s writings represent a rejection of the progressive narratives of liberation in favor of the language of postmodernism. In trying to offer a theory that is applicable to colonialism in general, Bhabha has abstracted away historical particularities. The result is that Bhabha’s notion of hybridity fails to remain rooted in the daily struggles of peoples’ lives. Turing to the Latina/o mestizo/a and mulato/a context allows a concretization of Bhabha’s ideas in a way that both affirms and expands Bhabha’s notion of hybridity.

As a part of Latina/o thinking within the identity/knowledge complex, mestizaje-mulatez offers a way to reconceptualize difference and identity. Latino/a thinking transforms

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299 Bhabha himself admits as much in The Location of Culture, 173.


302 Etymologically, mestizaje and mulatez refer to the mixing of blood that came about through the European’s brutal military conquest, colonization, religious imposition, and (more to the point) rape of Indian and African women—producing mestizo/as and mulato/as. Contemporary debates around the notion of mestizaje began with José Vasconcelos who articulates an essentialist conception of mestizaje, encapsulated by his notion of la raza cósmica—which posits that those identified as mestizos represent a superior racial synthesis. Gloria Anzaldúa (whom we have already discussed in connection with a New Mestiza consciousness and la facultad) turns attention away from essentialist to a decidedly anti-essentialist conception. María Lugones explicitly links the notion of mestizaje and hybridity. For each of these scholars the term mestizaje functions not only as a way of portraying the ambiguity of the Latino/a identity, but also its function as an epistemic and hermeneutical category. The adoption of the category of mulatez constitutes an attempt to recognize and honor Hispanics’ African ancestry—in particular among Latino/as from Caribbean islands, the coastal areas of Columbia and Venezuela, and Brazil. However, the mulatez remains a contested term. Some scholars have argued that it is a racist expression since it is derived from the root word mulo or mule. As an alternative,
mestizaje-mulatez from merely a way of representing and referencing Hispanics into an ethical choice and a hermeneutical tool for reinterpreting difference. Latina/o thinking’s embracing of mestizaje-mulatez as an ethical choice constitutes a denunciation of the racism/ethnic prejudice and the poverty it generates among Hispanics. Difference is reconceptualized as heterogeneity, not as absolute otherness or mutual exclusion. The mestiza/o and mulato/a embodies multiple traditions and cultures simultaneously, challenging the dominant conceptions of difference. The dominant and the deviant, the self and the other, are contained in the same body, not as discrete parts, as if one could cut off the European or Amerindian or African part of themselves, but as aspects of the same being, creatively intermingling. From the mestizo/a and mulato/a perspective of Latina/o thinking, it is clear that different cultures have value and that the attempt to eliminate cultural differences constitutes a great evil, something that should be resisted.

Latina/o thinking’s postexilic moments given rise to la facultad, hybridity, mestiza/o-mulato/a, revealing a strategy of resistance to the insistence of homogenized epistemic modalities and rigid, inflexible social orders. Latina/o thinking represents a condition of possibility—a creative opportunity—to construct moral visions which challenge the established

De La Torre has suggested the metaphor of ajiaco, a hearty and life-giving food that nourishes and sustains the community from its own indigenous roots, as more appropriate, complete, and precise description of at least Cuban—if not Caribbean—culture. See De La Torre, La Lucha for Cuba: Religion and Politics on the Streets of Miami, 17.

Ada María Isasi-Díaz, En la Lucha = in the Struggle: Elaborating a Mujerista Theology, 10th anniversary ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004), 203-04. Isasi-Díaz elaboration of “non-exclusionary and non-oppositional perspective of difference” begins in the last chapter of En La lucha.

frameworks of thinking and knowing. For Christian ethicists aiming to articulate an anti-capitalist moral vision of the political economy that moves beyond identity politics, Latina/o thinking can open up new hitherto unimagined conceptual possibilities.

Fourth Movement: Decolonizing Praxis and Lived Experience

Brief Genealogy of Praxis

This section addresses Latina/o thinking’s praxis of decolonization as a way of decolonizing moral visions of Christian ethics. But before undertaking this task, it is appropriate to (briefly) trace the genealogy of the notion of praxis in some key figures in the western philosophical tradition, beginning with Aristotle, then flash-forwarding to the Hegel and Marx.

Aristotle understood the free person as having three ways of relating to life, or alternatively, three human activities through which understanding arises: *theoria*, praxis, and *poiesis*. The three ways represent speculative (*theoria*), practical (praxis), and productive (*poiesis*) modes of interaction of the reflective subject with the objective world: they are...

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305 The phrase “condition of possibility” is Kant’s phrase for the framework necessary to bring an entity into being in *The Critique of Pure Reason*. Roughly, the phrase means “the necessary condition,” though philosophers quibble over its precise meaning.

306 The word praxis has been used and misused in a variety of ways in contemporary discussions in philosophy and theology. Part of the problem lies with its confusion with the English word practice and the commonly held view that practice is the opposite of theory. While praxis is often reduced to practice, the two have quite distinct meanings. Understanding praxis requires a shift away from the prevalent dichotomy between theory and practice. Praxis involves seeing these as twin aspects of the same activity. Instead of theory as the necessary precursor to practice, theory becomes the reflective moment in praxis and the articulated theory arising from praxis yields more praxis. Thomas H. Groome, *Christian Religious Education: Sharing Our Story and Vision*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980), 152.

therefore three different ways of knowing. The difference lies mainly in their *telos* or their intended purpose. Theoretical knowledge is an end in itself, while practical knowledge engages in the ordering of human actions, and productive knowledges leads to the creation of artifacts.  

Aristotle used the term praxis in a number of different ways, but with a basic commonality. For Aristotle, praxis means a reflective action through which knowing arises through social engagement. In praxis, knowing arises not from inward speculation, but form the experience of social situation and intentional engagement with it. Given the purposes of Christian ethics discussed above, it is reasonable to argue for the praxis way of knowing as an epistemological basis for ethics. The praxis way of knowing must dialectically unite theory and practice in a rearticulation of the Christian community’s narrative and vision.

Rather than seeing these concepts in opposition, as is held by common interpretation, Aristotle understood *poiesis* and praxis as cooperating together to make possible the life of *theoria*. Yet, Aristotle is partly to blame for the dichotomizing of theory and praxis that later developed. While he understood the three forms of knowing to be interrelated, *theoria* led to the highest form of wisdom, *sophia*, and functioned as its own end. After Aristotle’s death,

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310 Like other discourses, the discourse of Christian ethics analysis and critiques theories and methods for engaging in ethics. Unlike other discourses, it claims that its purposes go far beyond that to the development of moral character, to persuasion of moral agents, and shaping of society.

311 For a similar claim about Christian education see Groome, *Christian Religious Education: Sharing Our Story and Vision*, 156.

poiesis as a way of knowing fell out of favor. Largely as a result of the influence of the Neo-platonists, the primacy that Aristotle gave to theoretical knowledge was further emphasized and praxis as a way of apprehending the world was greatly downgraded. Over time, speculative, theoretical knowledge became the primary way of knowing without qualification. While Aristotle held that both theoria and praxis were two aspects of the free human life, praxis was now spurned. The result was a mindset that becomes typical of Western philosophy: to know the world one should begin with speculative type of knowing and then apply, if any application existed, to practice.

Slowly, human knowledge as a reflection on experience was reestablished. G. W. F. Hegel (1770-1831) began to use the term praxis in these terms. He deepened the rational moment of praxis far beyond Aristotle’s notion. Hegel’s understanding of praxis is tied into the organizing theme of his philosophy, what he called the Geist. The Geist is the all-encompassing “Spirit” that is the sum total of all creation possibility. For Hegel, all praxis is the praxis of the Geist. History in Hegelian terms is an ongoing and dialectically evolving praxis, shaping the future towards the development of human freedom through praxis. Knowing is not realizing through speculative theorizing about the world, but by reflection on and participation in the praxis of the Geist.

One can draw two lessons from Hegel’s understanding of praxis as a way of knowing. First, he rejects the underlying assumptions of theory to practice model. Hegel challenges the

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313 Lobkowicz, Theory and Practice: History of a Concept from Aristotle to Marx, 87.

314 This has lead many theologians, ethicists, and social theorists to procedural forms of justice, for e.g., in which thinkers are more interested in getting the definition of justice worked out than the actual doing of justice. The interest in praxis here lies in its insistence that the two—thinking about justice and its outworking—are intimately related.

primacy of *theoria*, proposing instead the primacy of praxis. Second, he rejects the dichotomy between theory and praxis: they bond together in a fundamental unity. For Hegel, praxis becomes the actualizing of *Geist*, and *theoria* becomes human reflection on the Geist’s actualization. This unity of praxis and theory appears in Latina/o thinking’s approach to praxis in the attempt to decolonize moral visions. However, Hegel’s conception of praxis contains a fundamental flaw. For Hegel, human knowing is merely consciousness of the Geist’s praxis. Thus, there is no self-initiated reflective and active engagement. That is, Hegel’s praxis is overly contemplative, receptive, and passive. One can only speculate that Hegel was caught up in the Greek theoretical mode of knowing. While Hegel brought a praxis way of knowing back to the attention of western philosophy, his conception is not adequate for the purposes of Christian social ethics.

Marx understood that Hegel’s grand system contained this fundamental problem: though it promised a type of salvation through the actualization of the Geist, the world remained unchanged. Marx came to see Hegel’s idea of the Geist as no more than an ideology—a false consciousness—that legitimizes the world as it appears to be as the world ought to be. Still fascinated by Hegel’s system, Marx replaced humankind in the place of Geist, so that the evolutionary process became a human activated one. For Marx, then, knowledge is not a reflection of the consciousness of Geist, but a reflection of “historical materialism,” the modes of production and the material means of existence.

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317 Ibid., 165.

318 False consciousness is a consciousness that merely reflects the superstructure of the world and accepts the an unjust society as legitimate Ibid., 166. See Karl Marx and Joseph J. O’Malley, *Critique of Hegel’s ‘Philosophy of Right’* (Cambridge: University Press, 1970).
According to Marx, the alienation that occurs is the result of the objectification of the inner life of the laborer. The reappropriation of one’s labor leads to a “material synthesis” in which true self-consciousness is achieved. However, in a capitalist system, where the products of labor are controlled by the owners of the means of production, this process is stymied. Thus, a revolutionary praxis, Marx claimed, is necessary to change social and economic structures so workers can share in the products of their labor. For Marx, human praxis becomes the agency in history of freedom and emancipation. Labor, which mediates between subject and objects is both a means of engaging in the world and a means of knowing it. One knows about the world as she engages in critical reflection that transforms the world.\textsuperscript{319}

Two insights are distillable from Marx’s praxis way of knowing. First, Marx affirms human knowing demands human creativity and initiative as active participants in human praxis. In this he has already moves beyond Hegel. A second insight is that authentic knowing should transform reality towards human freedom and emancipation. But Marx’s notion of praxis is also deficient for the purposes here. Marx reduces human beings to products of their own labor. An exclusively materialist way of knowing can never be adequate for Christian ethics. The human emancipation Marx hoped for is entirely the product of human efforts. This is a type of Pelagianism that denies the transcendental realities incongruent with the Christian tradition. Moreover, in positing labor as the mediating moments between subject and object, Marx reduces the reflective moment in praxis to the level of “instrumental action.”\textsuperscript{320} Marx limits the breadth and scope of the reflective moment in praxis.


\textsuperscript{320} Jürgen Habermas, \textit{Knowledge and Human Interests} (Boston,: Beacon Press, 1971), 44. The critique here on Marx draws heavily from Habermas.
Praxis of Decolonization

Latina/o thinking offers a broadened understanding of the active and reflective moments of praxis that transcends the limitations of Marx’s position. A view of praxis as decolonization, as part of Latina/o thinking, can serve as a basis for rearticulating Christian moral visions of the political economy.

In Latina/o thinking, the term praxis can be traced genealogically to two sources. The first is the Latin American Episcopal Councils (CELAM), from Medellín (1968) to Puebla (1979), which pushed the findings of Vatican II to more progressive ends. The second is through reflections developed in response to the conditions of oppression and exclusion experienced by the majority of those in Latin America. Although both sources are theological, their deployment of praxis reveals enormous sociological, political, and economic implications.

Gustavo Gutiérrez’s *A Theology of Liberation*, largely a product of the reflections of CELAM meetings, symbolized a significant shift in understanding praxis. Gutiérrez redefined theology as “a critical reflection on Christian praxis in light of the Word” enables the radicalization of the same praxis of liberation. For Gutiérrez, praxis is conscious human action that affects economic and political structures aimed at liberative transformation of human history. Theory and praxis are not separate; there is an inseparable and intimate relationship

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between the two.\footnote{Ibid., 66.} Juan Luis Segundo expands the concept of praxis by arguing that any theological ethics worthy of attention stems from a commitment to change and improve the world.\footnote{Juan Luis Segundo, \textit{Liberation of Theology} (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1976).} Praxis leads to a new interpretation of sociological realities which in turn leads to a fresh reading of the Bible and an impetuous to change the world and then go back and reinterpret the Bible again, and so on.\footnote{Ibid., 8-9.} This is Segundo’s “hermeneutic circle,” a circular interpretation of the world, word, and work towards transformation (praxis).

Latina/o thinking’s praxis of decolonization enables an approach to ethics that moves beyond the subject-object distortion that continues to characterize the modern/colonial project.\footnote{On decolonizing pedagogical praxis, see Carlos Tejeda and Kris D. Gutiérrez, "Fighting the Backlash: Decolonizing Perspectives and Pedagogies in Neocolonial Times," in \textit{Latino Education: An Agenda for Community Action Research}, ed. Pedro Pedraza, Melissa Rivera, and National Latino/a Education Research and Policy Project. (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2005).} It moves ethics from the rarefied atmosphere of academia to the world of the formally colonized people. It’s starting point is not the “European I” but solidarity with the poor that “experience death before their time,” as the bishop from Chiapas put it. The praxis of decolonization challenges the historical practice of Christian ethics by reconceptualizing its social parameters and calling for a transformation of its social and intellectual basis. Social ethicists must begin to develop a critical consciousness about society’s neocolonial existence and to correct these perceptions by engaging in relationships with those who do not benefit from the current system. Latina/o thinking’s praxis of decolonization sets out to actively reflect on and critique existing forms of domination and exploitation that have become normative.
Lived Experience and Epistemic Privilege

“You’ll understand when you’re older” is an aphorism young people are no doubt tired of hearing. The statement might represent an argument from authority, a logical fallacy that argued that the statement is true or correct because of its source. Or it might be used as a form of deflection, a patronizing way for adults to evade difficult or uncomfortable questions. But it can also mean a legitimate appeal to experience as a way of gaining knowledge. A three year old does not understand love, but experience offers the opportunity to learn of love in its various expressions. “You’ll understand when you’re older” because experience is the great teacher and there are some lessons only experience can teach.

Yet, the underlying assumption is of a common experience. You will understand later because all human beings go through similar experiences. Here the European self creeps back into the analysis: all human beings are in some basic way the same. Latina/o thinking starts at a different place. Attempting to grapple with the inadequacies of Euro-American systems of thought, its widespread inapplicability—and even utter irrelevance—to Latina/o communities, experience takes precedence as a teacher. On this basis Latina/o thinking appeals to lived experience as a counter-hegemonic source of epistemological, theological, and ethical reflection.

Lived experience is sometimes coded in Latina/o scholarship as lo cotidiano.328 Lo cotidiano is a key element in the meaning making and the struggle for liberation. It corrects the

328 The term lo cotidiano was coined, as an analytical category, by Daphne Patai, Brazilian Women Speak, New Brunswick, 1988, 1-35. It has since been explored from a variety of perspectives in the scholarship of, among others, María Pilar Aquino, Orlando Espín, Roberto Goizueta, and Ada María Isasi-Díaz. For Aquino, the presence of God is experienced through lo cotidiano, which has a salvific element (María Pilar Aquino, “The Collective 'Dis-Cover' of Our Own Power: Latina American Feminist Theology,” in Hispanic/Latino Theology: Challenge and Promise, ed. Ada María Isasi-Díaz and Fernando F. Segovia (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996), 240-58). For Espín, structural realities of violence, poverty, and politics are part of the lo cotidiano, and popular religion is the key to understanding it (Orlando O. Espín, "Traditioning: Culture, Daily Life and Popular Religion, and Their Impact on Christian
fixation of liberation theologies on social structural elements by pointing to daily lived experience. *Lo cotidiano* refers everyday struggles/experiences of Latina/os. Experiences “deal with the substance and the form of *lo cotidiano*” but do not constitute all of it.\(^{329}\) *Lo cotidiano* refers both to the material reality and the interpretation of it.\(^{330}\) It is the cultural, historical, and locative milieu around experience and through which experience has meaning. *Lo cotidiano* is tied to the work of Latina/o justice pointing to both to “the struggle (la lucha) against the present social order and to the liberating alternative” of the *la comunidad* (community).\(^{331}\)

Despite the underlying wisdom revealed through the common aphorism with which this section began, the prevailing assumption among many academics (trapped by the European “I”) that the everyday does not matter or at the least it cannot be accessed. In a now famous lecture, Heidegger criticizes philosophical attempts to access life and life experience.\(^{332}\) He argues that attempts to grasp life experience ultimately distort the thing they hope to discover.\(^{333}\) Certainly the philosophical question of how to grasp life experience in a *Tradition,* in *Futuring Our Past: Explorations in the Theology of Tradition,* ed. Orlando O. Espín and Gary Macy, *Studies in Latino/a Catholicism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006), 1-22. For Goizueta, *lo cotidiano* is the locus of divine accompaniment, expressed in ritualized practices (Goizueta, *Caminemos Con Jesús*).


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\(^{330}\) Ibid., 96.


\(^{333}\) Ibid., 3, 48. Heidegger’s first objection is that “because theoretical reflection is necessarily objectifying, it is incapable of revealing lived-experience” in its immediacy. “Secondly, since description is only possible using general concepts then concrete, pre-theoretical lived-experience can never be described in its immediacy.”
comprehensible way constitutes a rich and treacherous area of philosophical exploration.\textsuperscript{334} However, the appeal to lived experience in this chapter is pragmatic. Lived experience focuses attention on the violent and oppressive realities of the marginalized people around the world and sets one on the path to liberation.\textsuperscript{335}

As a social space, lived experience refers to the impact of class, gender, poverty and work on relationships within families, friends, and neighbors, and religious authorities.\textsuperscript{336} As folk-wisdom, it is the engine that generates pragmatic, prudent, and levelheadedness in dealing effectively with situations.\textsuperscript{337} In Isasi-Díaz’s conception, \textit{lo cotidiano} has at least three functions: a 1) descriptive, 2) hermeneutical, and 3) epistemological one. Its descriptive function feeds “new narratives” that have the capacity to “break the hegemony established mainly by men” that has produced oppressive structures.\textsuperscript{338} As a hermeneutical device, which “deals with context” and the “use of power,” it describes how day-to-day oppression operate and “unmasks those who benefit from them.”\textsuperscript{339} Epistemologically, \textit{lo cotidiano} points to the fragmentary, provisional, and conjectural aspects of knowledge.\textsuperscript{340} Lived experience, as part of Latina/o thinking, appeals to the daily realities of marginalized Latina/os. Identifying with the reality of

\textsuperscript{334} Along with Heidegger, Husserl, Paul Natorp, and Wilhelm Dilthey have addressed this problem.

\textsuperscript{335} Isasi-Díaz, \textit{La Lucha Continues}, 93.

\textsuperscript{336} Ibid., 95-96.

\textsuperscript{337} Ibid., 96.

\textsuperscript{338} Ibid., 98.

\textsuperscript{339} Ibid., 99.

\textsuperscript{340} Ibid., 100.
marginalized groups can begin to transform mainstream Christian ethics into a counter-hegemonic process.

**Fifth Movement: Latina/o Thinking in the World System**

Latina/o thinking begins at the moment reflection on conquest/discovery of the Americas. While Latina/o thinking of the sixteenth century has gone unnoticed by modern philosophy, it has contemporary relevance because it was that generation that experienced the creation of the first world system. The central ethical question of that era was the following: what right has the European to occupy, dominate and manage the recently discovered cultures, conquered by the military, and in the process of being colonized? The discussion of this question within the School of Salamanca on the “rights of people” began with the well-known debate of Valladolid between Bartolomé de las Casas and Juan de Sepúlveda. This debate was erased in the eighteenth century, when the declaration of the “rights of men and of the citizen” came into existence. The eighteenth century redefined the imaginary of the modern/colonial world system in a manner consistent with the new imperial powers of Britain, France, and Holland. Conceived of as a new beginning, it erased for future generations the crucial importance of the Renaissance and the Reformation. The entire theological, ethical, and legal debates on colonialism and the rights of colonized people vanished. Postcolonial thinking

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341 Dussel, *Ética de la Liberación en la Edad de la Globalización y de la Exclusión*, 15. Two Renaissances may not be enough. Some historians argue that Europeans experience several renaissances before “the” Renaissance. For e.g., In the thirteenth century, Alfonso el Sabio, Castile between 1252 and 1284, came to power on the heels of three major Christian victories against Islam: Cordoba in 1236, Valencia in 1238 and Seville in 1248. Alfonso surrounded himself with men of wisdom and knowledge of languages, Jews and Muslims who translated from Hebrew and Arabic into Spanish. Through Hebrew and Arabic, Green knowledge, absent in Europe for a thousand years, was recast through translations Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*, 75.


promoted an imaginary that begins in the eighteenth century. This is due in no small part to the work of Edward Said.

Many scholars cite Edward Said’s publication of *Orientalism*[^344] as the starting point of postcolonial studies. In *Orientalism*, Said, a Palestinian American and literary critique, focuses not on colonial history or the psychological effects of the colonial aftermath (as Franz Fanon and Albert Memmi had already done and Ashis Nandy did independently) but in European textual and discursive representations of the Orient, by which he meant primarily the Arab Middle East. Said’s main argument in that the Orient is a discursive invention of the West used to engender and maintain control. Orientalist discourse portrays the Orient as sensual, erotic, emotional, and fundamentalist, while “Occidental” is rational, cool, logical, and secular. Said limited his analysis primarily to British and French colonial representations of the eighteenth and nineteenth century and thus emerged the idea that the field begins there. The entire Americas, including the Caribbean, North Africa, and most of Sub-Saharan Africa were left out of the picture. “Postcolonial” criticism and theory, as Walter Mignolo argues, increasingly became employed by critics and intellectuals writing in English to refer to the domain of the British empires and their ex-colonies (Australia, India, and New Zealand).[^345]

The intention here is not to critique Said on that basis of what the book does or does not do (as Aijaz Ahmad has done).[^346] The intention instead is to point to the enormous silence

[^344]: Said, *Orientalism*.


[^346]: See Ahmad Aijaz, *In Theory: Nations, Classes, Literatures*, Radical Thinkers (London; New York: Verso, 2008 [1992]). Said’s work, while innovative, is deeply flawed not only in its glaring omission of earlier periods, but is also limited in at least three other ways: 1) It focuses on just one side of the discursive binary, failing to attend to discourses of resistance; 2) represents the Orient as a unified whole; and 3) it creates a reverse stereotype—that of the essentialized and racist Westerner. Said’s more recent work *Culture and Imperialism* attempts, with some measure of success, to address these limitations—see Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1993). In it, Said focuses on the novel as a
that Said’s work enforces: orientalism is only the second hegemonic cultural imaginary of the modern world system. This second world system marks the transitions when the image of “modern/secular Europe” (England, France, Germany) replaced “Christian Europe” of the fifteenth to mid-seventeenth centuries (Italy, Portugal, Spain). It was the theft of nearly incalculable amounts of wealth, in the form of gold and silver, that reached Spain and the rest of Europe that made the second modernity possible. These enormous riches made possible the rapid growth of world trade. The great beneficiaries of such intense trade were the European middle-men, the merchants, the bankers, and other industries. It was also this influx of hard currency that enabled subsequent economic development.

Said is right when he argues that the Orient become Europe’s Other during the eighteenth century. However the extreme West, the Occident, was never Europe’s other but its child, the “daughter” of Europe. That is why, in the words of Mignolo, “without Occidentalism there is no Orientalism.” Occidentalism envisioned the Americas as an expansion of Europe.

Here is Mignolo’s basic definition:

Occidentalism, in other words, is the overarching geopolitical imaginary of the modern/colonial world system, to which Orientalism was appended in its first radical transformation, when the center of the system moved from the Iberian Peninsula to the North Sea, between Holland and Britain.

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347 Mignolo, Local Histories/Global Designs, 57.


349 Mignolo, Local Histories/Global Designs, 58.

350 Ibid., 59.
The modern/colonial world system that emerged in the sixteenth century proved far more discriminatory and destructive to nature than the system it replaced. At the moment, societies around the world are facing a new horizon of historical change. Among the possible scenarios is the creation of a new historical system worse than the current one in which capitalist elites follow the familiar strategies of feudal aristocracy, shaping the world to ensure they maintain their own power. Another possible scenario is the subaltern groups around the world, the ones that Fanon called the wretched of the earth, mobilize to create a more diversified system. These groups consciously resist or simply resist homogenization, cultural assimilation, and co-optation by U.S. nation and empire. Transformation of the metropolitan centers is crucial for the future to take this second path. One of the factors in bringing about the transformations is the growth of Latina/o population the United States, one of the most powerful core countries in the world system.

Latina/os arrive in metropolitan spaces with the conceptual distinctions elaborated above. They are polluted by a colonial history, colonial knowledges, and a history linked to empire. In Huntington’s *Who Are We?*, a follow up to *The Clash of Civilizations*, seeks a strategy for justifying and maintaining white supremacy in the U.S. domestic area in light of the fast growing Hispanic population. Huntington provides a racist, xenophobic response to justify

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353 Ibid., 8.

the exclusive leadership of WASP elites when they are no longer the demographic majority. Huntington insists on the assimilation of Latina/os which for him are non-English speaking foreigners. The challenge and the opportunity for Latina/os is to change the terms of the debate, to bring their consciousness of colonial history into the mainstream. Thus, Latina/o thinking can form part of the larger project of decolonizing knowledge in the U.S. and other parts of the globe by decolonizing moral visions of the political economy.

**Latina/o Thinking and Border Thinking**

A related concept to Latina/o thinking is border thinking. Both concepts exhibit epistemic and ethical potential; both are analytical and critical tools for dislodging modern/colonial imaginary. Border thinking attempts to restore what has been eliminated through colonial difference. Colonial difference names what distinguishes—within the colonial imaginary—the European from the other in the configuration of the world into a modern/colonial system. In the sixteenth century, colonial difference revolved around the lack of alphabetic writing. In the late eighteenth and nineteenth century, it was history. In the twentieth century, it was development. Thus, border thinking is linked to but not synonymous with subjugated or subaltern or knowledges. It exploits the “cracks” in the imaginary of the

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356 Mignolo follows Edouard Glissant’s use of “imaginary”: all the ways that a culture has of perceiving and conceiving of the world. Mignolo proposes “Occidentalism” as the over-arching metaphor of the colonial imaginary in *Ibid.*, 23.
world/colonial system to allow the percolation of repressed forms of knowledges. The recognition of colonial difference demands an exploration of border thinking.

Border thinking emerges both within and without the geopolitical borders of the modern world system: within the “local histories” of metropolitan centers of Europe and the U.S., but also in the local histories of its margins: Latin American under Spanish control, India under British rule, Algeria and Tunisia under French colonialism. For Mignolo, “border thinking and double critique are the necessary conditions for ‘an other thinking,’ a thinking that is no longer conceivable in Hegel’s dialectics, but located at the border of coloniality of power in the modern world system.” This other thinking constitutes a way of thinking “that is not inspired in its own limitations and is not intended to dominate and to humiliate; a way of thinking that is universally marginal, fragmentary, and unachieved; and, as such, a way of thinking that, because universally marginal and fragmentary, is not ethnocidal.”

While border thinking’s recovery of subjugated knowledges is worthy of admiration, it also displays two troubling tendencies. First border thinking itself, with its refusal to take any particularized stance, can become a type of universal gaze with no accountability except itself. For Mignolo the “key configuration of border thinking” lies in “thinking from dichotomous subjects rather than ordering the world in dichotomies”; it is a “dichotomous locus of enunciation.” It seems that this may amount to a positing of a new universal subject position.

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357 Ibid.
358 Ibid., 6.
359 Ibid., 65.
360 Ibid., 67.
361 Ibid., 68, drawing on Khatibi 1983, 19.
362 Ibid., 85.
Second, Mignolo is more concerned with how border thinking applies to the disciplines (the academies) than the underlying material realities. In this sense border thinking becomes a constant cultural critique of and between schools of thought.

Despite these short-comings, border thinking helps to illuminate an aspect of Latina/o thinking that moves between subaltern and hegemonic knowledges. Both offer a double critique, that is critical both of monovision western epistemology and Christianity, that can think from both traditions and at the same time neither of them, that has potential to decolonize Christian moral vision of the political economy.

**Latina/o Thinking and Transmodernity**

Another concept that can be related to Latina/o thinking is transmodernity. Transmodernity arises out of the observation that for some theorists talk about postmodernism indicates that, at least in some essential aspects, modernity has ended.\(^{363}\) But this begs the question: which parts of modernity have concluded? If the center of modernity has been the conception of history as a progressive realization of authentic humanity, a process of emancipation, then certainly the center is in crisis. The twilight of modernity, that is postmodernity, was initiated by Nietzsche and Heidegger. However, according to Dussel, postmodern critique largely remains provisionalized. All the accomplishments of modernity are the fruits of a dialectic between center and periphery; that is, the periphery helped create modernity.\(^{364}\) The periphery of modernity is its side: like two sides of the same coin.\(^{365}\) The

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\(^{364}\) Dussel, *Ética de la Liberación en la Edad de la Globalización y de la Exclusión*, 161.

\(^{365}\) Ibid.
strategy of forgetting, concealing, and covering over has justified violence against the periphery as rational in the name of civilization, portraying its killers and perpetrators (conquistadores, traders, imperial colonizers) as innocent and its victims as guilty.\textsuperscript{366} The refusal (of Vatimo, Nietzsche, or Heidegger) to include the annihilation of non-European cultures of the planet reduces postmodernity to the same colonizing, dominating, and excluding conception.

Transmodernity is the name Dussel gives to an ethics of liberation that moves beyond Eurocentricism and singularity of modernity and postmodernity. Transmodernity refers to a new project of liberation of the victims of modernity and the development of its potential alternatives.\textsuperscript{367} It is an attempt to strengthen the twentieth-century project of decolonization. In the current system, only liberal notions of democracy are accepted and legitimated. There is no recognition for indigenous, African, Islamic, or other non-European forms of democracy.\textsuperscript{368} A transmodern world, a world beyond modernity, is open to diverse views of democracy, liberty, and human rights of the dominated and colonized world.\textsuperscript{369} Transmodernity names a current crisis in capitalism/modernity that covers over the periphery that has lead to our current global configuration.

While Dussel’s concept of Transmodernity is enormously valuable two critical comments are in order. First, it is worth noting that Dussel did not invent the “transmodern” phenomenon. What he did was to expand old ways of framing the interaction between the pre-modern, modern, and postmodern and to propose and application of the coloniality of power. Dussel’s

\textsuperscript{366} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{367} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{368} Grosfoguel, Maldonado Torres, and Saldívar, "Latin@s and the 'Euro-American Menace': The Decolonization of the U.S. Empire in the Twenty-First Century," 20.

work flies high but people on the ground have been working on the disruption of modernity for decades (as other parts of this chapter make clear). Dussel’s account slights the efforts of Feminist, Latina/o, and Black rereadings of history and philosophy. He takes insights from them, but does not engage them. Second, some claim that Dussel is a Latin American liberation theologian, but he says nothing about Christianity, the church, or religion. That blinds him to the ordinary discourses of most of the people most of the time. This is somewhat surprising, given his attention to liberation. Along with transmodernity, Latina/o thinking affirms the need to recognize the dignity of the negated alterity. Both transmodernity and Latina/o thinking point to other epistemologies and an openness to otherness that can help to decolonize moral visions that move beyond modern/colonial/capitalist world system.

**Conclusion**

Social location shapes the analysis of the social situation, the reading of the tradition, and the resulting elaboration of Christian moral visions. Insofar as Christian social ethics is meant to address the problems of life concretely, the influence of social location cannot be treated as a matter of indifference, nor should the tension between social location and moral imagination be minimized.\(^{370}\) Christian ethics that continues to be elaborated from no place, from a zero point perspective, ironically speaks to no one and certainly not to the marginalized and oppressed communities it purports to champion.

Envisioning and enacting a moral vision of the political economy requires moving beyond the formula of more of the same with some modifications. Latina/o thinking challenges mainstream Christian ethicists by asking what their moral visions would like from the underside

\(^{370}\) Teresa Okure, “Reading from This Place: Some Problems and Prospects,” in *Reading from This Place*, ed. Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995).
of modernity. It insists that any vision of the political economy that refuses to acknowledge the majority of the world and continues to impose provincial or regional European thinking as global is critically inadequate. The agenda of Latino/a thinking is to allow for the simultaneity of a multiple perspectives; it seeks to acknowledge, respect, and value other vantage points. Latina/o thinking, as expressed by U.S. Latina/o and Latin American intellectuals, emphasizes that there is a twofold condition of the subject: the Christian tradition and concrete social realities. Both must be taken into account in constructing moral visions.

The lived experience of Latino/a peoples demonstrate that the present political economic order can be traced to Indian-annihilating and African-enslaving policies of the Spanish monarchy and of Anglo-American “democracy.” Hostile government policies continue to target Hispanics who are descended from populations that have been routinely and systematically conquered, renamed, and killed by Euro-American colonists. Conquest, colonization, and capitalist expansion are tied together in the Latina/o experience. From the perspective of Latino/a thinking, the horrific events of the past haunt the present with memories of conquest, killing, and deculturalizing.

Latino/a thinking further reveals that the past not only haunts the present, but continues to shape the present through the continuing imposition of the Euro-American epistemological tradition, the “cultural archive” of the West: built in the service of imperialist expansion and colonial rule. The discursive covering of the majority of the world constitutes a

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strategy of modernity that continues to justify violent acts of the privileged few as rational in the name of progress and development. The contemporary political economy of the U.S. is not only rooted in the mutually reinforcing systems of colonial and capitalist domination but perpetuates past imperial policies of genocide and cultural holocaust, now affecting an ever greater number of people through the globalization of the market.\footnote{373 Tejeda and Gutiérrez, "Fighting the Backlash: Decolonizing Perspectives and Pedagogies in Neocolonial Times," 277.}

A political economy that benefits a privileged few at the expense of the many can hardly be worth sustaining. Latino/a thinking can support the struggle to envision a moral, inclusive, and egalitarian political economy. What then are the implications of Latina/o thinking for Christian ethics of the political economy? They are rearticulated briefly here:

1. Identity and social location are tied to knowledge production. Latina/o thinking makes clear that the present order is result of theft, violence, and oppression and a rationalizing of those actions. As such, Latina/o thinking holds potential for restructuring moral visions of the political economy by reconfiguring the self according to border imaginary, which makes clear that misery, poverty, discrimination are the norm, not the exception. Through a reconceptualization of difference, Latina/o thinking allows movement beyond identity politics and creates the possibility of elaborating anti-capitalist moral visions of the political economy, visions that are not designed around one group’s efforts to control and exploit others.

2. Latina/o thinking, through a revitalized praxis (that transcends the limitations of the Aristotelian /Hegelian /Marxian conceptualization), moves ethics beyond the subject-object distorion and dichotomization of the modern/colonial project and into the world of formally colonized people. It calls on Christian ethicists to abandon the theory to practice approach to knowledge that prioritizes developing a tidy abstract thought world without reference to (except as abstract categories) the misery and suffering of the majority of the world’s people. Latina/o thinking’s decolonizing praxis challenges Christian ethicists to develop a critical consciousness about society’s neocolonial arrangement.

3. Latina/o thinking draws on lived experience as a counter-hegemonic source of ethical reflection. As part of Latina/o thinking, lived experience focuses attention on the violent and oppressive realities of the marginalized people around the world. Thus Latino/a thinking, by acknowledging the reality of marginalized groups, has the potential to transform mainstream Christian ethics into a counter-hegemonic process.
Lastly, Latina/o thinking brings Latina/os consciousness of colonial history into the mainstream and offers a point of departure other than this modern/colonial complex of conquest and inequality. Latina/o thinking theorizes from both subaltern and hegemonic knowledges, enabling it to be critical of the tradition while drawing from it. It moves beyond the Eurocentrism of both modernity and postmodernity by acknowledging diverse notions of democracy, liberty, and human rights covered by the current capitalist/modern configuration of the world. It recovers subjugated knowledges lost through colonial difference and affirms the dignity of the neglected alterity.

Thus, Latina/o thinking provides an alternative ethical space from which to decolonize and construct new moral visions of the political economy. Christian ethicists heeding the insights of Latino/a thinking are far better equipped to begin to rupture the status quo of inequality and oppression and make way for a socially just reimagining of the political economy. Yet, accounting for the failure of the Christian moral imagination and decolonizing moral visions of the political economy requires more than just addressing the epistemic limits of theorizing from a universalizing point of view. It also requires addressing the underlying economic framework upon which mainstream Christian ethics build its moral visions of the political economy. The next chapter examines these structural weaknesses using the insights of heterodox economics.
CHAPTER 4: REFRAMING THE POLITICAL ECONOMY

Introduction

The last chapter analyzed the way in which social location limits mainstream Christian moral visions of the political economy. It was argued that Latina/o thinking offers a way of addressing the limitations of social location. This chapter continues to delineate the limits of the Christian moral imagination by examining mainstream Christian ethics’ economic thinking. The argument in this chapter is that insistence of mainstream Christian ethics on “orthodox” neoclassical economics as the singular viable basis for the political economy limits the spectrum of possible moral visions to reformed capitalism (which remains essentially capitalist) and that heterodox economics offers a way to destabilize the entrenched position of neoclassical theory and expands the limits of the moral imagination. Heterodox economics imagines and realizes non-essentialist economic approaches, which accepts some concepts associated with neoclassical theory, such as market mechanisms, but are not reducible to these. Furthermore, heterodox economics shows that non-capitalist forms of economic activity are already present and prevalent. Incorporating heterodox economic principles expands the limited Christian moral

374 It should be said at the outset that neoclassical theory does not have a have a monopoly on exploitation. The critique of the neoclassical approach here does not constitute an uncritical affirmation of all heterodox theory. Neoclassical economics is not being singled out because it is the only school of economics that can be associated with unjust economic outcomes. Rather it is the focus here because it is what undergirds the economic theorizing of the mainstream Christian ethicists under study.

Heterodox economics names alternatives both to existing economic systems and to economic orthodoxy, or (neo)classical forms of economic theorizing. As an umbrella term, heterodox economics covers a diverse set of perspectives or schools of thought. This chapter draws on insights from radical/post(modern) Marxist, feminist, postmodern/Austrian, and postcolonial heterodox insights.
imagination to transcend the old left-right dichotomy and moves towards the creation of
decolonized moral visions.

Reliance on Neoclassical Economics

The premise of mainstream Christian ethical thought is that a reformed capitalism and
neoclassical economics constitute the only viable framework on which to build a moral vision of
the political economy. It presumes that reformed capitalism, capitalism curbed of the excesses
of laissez-faire ideology, can bring the political economy into closer alignment with the Christian
faith. The attempt is to integrate Christian values with “realistic” economic patterns and to
envision strategies to transform free-market relationships to deliver on the promise of economic
prosperity for many.

A brief survey of the Christian ethicists introduced in chapter two reveals their reliance
on the neoclassical economic model. Conceptually, mainstream Christian ethics adopts its
definition of economics, its relationship to other disciplines, and largely accept the neoclassical
account of the human person in relationship to market realities. Their reliance on these
neoclassical conceptual models is also manifested in the limited scope of their economic
analysis and their tendency to emphasize its promises and minimize its problems.

Defining Economics and Its Relationship to Ethics

Finn uses the terms “economics” and “economist” as synonyms for neoclassical
economics. He concedes that there are other “significant” schools of economic thought
(“Institutionalism, social economics, Marxism, feminist economics, Austrian economics, and so
(forth”) that offer substantive and “badly needed” critique of economic orthodoxy.\textsuperscript{375} It is for the sake of simplicity, he explains, and not to disparage heterodox economics that he makes this theoretical move.\textsuperscript{376} In terms of its relationship with ethics, Finn affirms that economics—as a social science—plays an important part by correcting ideological perceptions about how the world “works.” Moral conviction, Finn argues, should not be allowed to trump or substitute for scientific social analysis.\textsuperscript{377}

If Stackhouse does not explicitly label his understanding of economics neoclassical, it is partly because for him it goes without saying: neoclassical theory is the only viable form of economics. Stackhouse does acknowledge that there are schools of economic thought outside of neoclassic economics.\textsuperscript{378} They are not however, for Stackhouse, economics proper. For Stackhouse, the discipline of economics is useful as a technical tool that has the ability to accurately describe and explain how political economic systems work. Economics analyzes how societies respond in the aggregate to economic pressures and trends of one kind or another. Stackhouse emphasizes that the advances in economics are so monumentally significant that

\textsuperscript{375} Finn, \textit{Just Trading}, 25.

\textsuperscript{376} Besides, Finn argues, heterodox economists are more likely to agree with mainstream economics on the issues he addresses than on many other issues.

\textsuperscript{377} Finn is cautious on the objectivity of social analysis. His reservations are examined in more detail later in this chapter. For now, it is worth noting that Finn is particularly concerned about the social scientific understanding of causality. Attributing causality accurately is of vital importance for Finn. Indeed, the “misattribution of causes” is “the largest single stumbling block in the moral conversations” about trade policy. Finn, \textit{Just Trading}, 146.

\textsuperscript{378} According to Stackhouse, only two are relevant in terms of thinking about the structures of economic life. The first is the school of Marx, Engels, and Lenin, which focuses on the social implication of the means of production, the formation of classes, and the mobilization of political will to transform the political economic order. The second is what Stackhouse calls the “post-Marxist” school (Max Weber, Talcott Parsons, Clifford Geertz, Robert Bellah, and Peter Berger), which studies economics cross-culturally. Both of these schools of social analysis assess the structure and dynamics of economics in society. Max L. Stackhouse, “Introduction: Foundations and Purposes,” in \textit{On Moral Business: Classical and Contemporary Resources for Ethics in Economic Life}, ed. Max L. Stackhouse, et al. (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 1995), 29-30.
they are analogous to the discoveries of Galileo, Newton, and Einstein in physics.\textsuperscript{379} Here Stackhouse echoes the claims of some neoclassical economists themselves: that economics is a progressive process of refinement in modeling economic reality; that like the physical sciences it is a detached, objective, and value-free enterprise; that they are simply describing economic phenomenon through the process of hypothesis formulation and empirical testing.\textsuperscript{380}

In Stackhouse's view, economics offers a set of theoretical tools that are the necessary but not sufficient basis for creating a moral political economy, just as physics is the necessary but not sufficient basis for launching a probe into space (for example). Public theology is the hand that wields the tools of economics to determine economics organizations and practices that correspond to the laws, purposes, and mercies of God appropriate under a globally competitive and pluralistic life.\textsuperscript{381} Stackhouse insists that whatever these economic organizations and practices look like, they must be grounded in modern economics, law, and culture: “whatever ethical vision we propose must be socially viable” and that is revealed through neoclassical economics.\textsuperscript{382} Stackhouse takes economics (of the neoclassical variety) as given. Economics provides basic models, such as the law of supply and demand, that describe

\textsuperscript{379} Ibid., 17.

\textsuperscript{380} Economics has long maintained the distinction between positive economics, as objective analysis, and normative economics, as the adjudication between policy choices. Yet a growing body of literature questions whether positive issues are really just normative issues in disguise. Milton Friedman famously argued the opposite. Friedman holds that many issues that are taken as normative, like the debate over minimum wage, are actually positive. See Milton Friedman, "The Methodology of Positive Economics," in Essays in Positive Economics, ed. Milton Friedman (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1964). For a discussion of objectivity in economics and the pursuit of detachment in the history of the field, see Julie A. Nelson, Feminism, Objectivity and Economics, Economics as Social Theory (London; New York: Routledge, 1996), chapters 3-4.

\textsuperscript{381} Stackhouse, "Introduction: Foundations and Purposes," 32.

\textsuperscript{382} Ibid., 18.
economic realities and allow for the construction of moral visions of the political economy that cohere with economics, law, and culture.

Wogaman also defines economics according to a neoclassical understanding. For Wogaman, economics is “the process of making or developing or distributing goods and services and the system of allocating those goods and services.” It is “concerned with the systems of production and distribution of scarce values.” Despite defining economics in this limited fashion, he recognizes that there have been many economic “ideologies,” including traditionalist, feudalism, mercantilism, and various forms of socialism. But these systems are mostly of historical interest. In the late 20th century, there is only one reasonable form of economics and it lies between the extremes of laissez-faire capitalism and socialism. For Wogaman, the proper role of the economist is to clarify technical questions in such a way that the non-economist can participate in the discussion since “economics is too important to the human enterprise to leave in the hands of economists alone.”

Moreover, because these Christian ethicists utilize such a narrow definition of economics, large portions of human economic activity are ignored. For example, Stackhouse recognizes that household (or family, clan, villages, or estates) based economic activity exists, but their significance is minimal in comparison to the influence and allocative efficiencies of the

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384 These values are mainly material, but they do not have to be (such as entertainment or copyrights). Wogaman, *Christian Moral Judgment*, 163. Elsewhere, Wogaman defines economic life as “the production and distribution of scare goods,” Wogaman, *Economics and Ethics*, 2.


corporation. For Wogaman, scarcity is a necessary characteristic of economics. Unless a value is scarce, it should not be considered in economic models. Goods that are normally abundant can become scarce—such as clean air in the context of pollution—and thus are rendered “economic.” But unless they are construed as scarce, goods are not perceptible to economic analysis.

Individualism, Self-Interest, and Economic Activity

Neoclassical economics is built upon the idea of *homo economicus*, a portrayal of the human person characterized by radical individualism and unlimited self-interestedness. While mainstream Christian ethics repudiates the first, it accepts the second as part of economic reality. Finn and Pemberton argue that free-market advocates that uphold individual freedom as the most important element in human life have misunderstood the lessons of modern psychology and sociology about what human life is and the Judeo-Christian tradition in terms of what human life ought to be. Along with neoclassical economics, Finn and Pemberton affirm that self-interest (which they equate with “sin”) is part of human nature. For example, choosing to obtain a luxury good when those resources might have been used to secure basic needs of others is a selfish/sinful choice. Social evils are a result of sinful choices, rather than the model of capitalism. They applaud free-market economics for accounting for this aspect of the human


\[388\] Advocates such as Milton Friedman. Pemberton and Finn, *Toward*, 196.
person. Since sinfulness is not created by capitalism, they discredit the notion that doing away with capitalism will end social evils.\textsuperscript{389}

Stackhouse critiques the radical individualism characteristic of unfettered markets. Protestant Christian ethics must oppose this framing of economic life.\textsuperscript{390} But in Stackhouse’s opinion, this is not the kind of human agency operative within the current political economy. The radically individualistic capitalism proposed by Friedman has been displaced by the present political economy, a new type of capitalism, sometimes called a mixed economy or free-market society. The charge that this revitalized capitalism is individualistic is for Stackhouse untrue. He admits that it does break up old communal relationships, but it immediately creates new associations.\textsuperscript{391} Revitalized capitalist society furnishes the connections of association and networks people require to sustain them. In this system, people are related to each other in literally hundreds of ways: through information in mass media, classes, political parties, religious groups, and last, but not least, through work in corporations. Stackhouse does not imagine that self-interest and individualism continue to operate within these new associations.

Stackhouse describes economists as defining \textit{homo economicus} as a view of humanity “basically driven by material interests, rationally calculated,”\textsuperscript{392} but expresses doubts that this \textit{homo economicus} is in fact as rational as economists claim. While Finn and Pemberton argue

\textsuperscript{389} Ibid., 43. This is particularly instructive because it provides insight into their reasons for rejecting socialism. Unlike socialism, capitalism accounts for sin in making self-interest part of its economic models and so it is more in line with the Christian account of the human person. What they fail to acknowledge is that capitalism rewards and glories in unlimited egoism. Ironically, they adopt the framework which sanitizes and institutionalize what they consider sin.

\textsuperscript{390} It must also oppose liberation thought for its wrong-headed analysis of the causes of oppression and its goal of liberty as self-sufficient, Stackhouse, "Christian Social Ethics in a Global Era," 37-39.

\textsuperscript{391} Stackhouse says much the same thing about judgments of Protestantism, Ibid., 65-66.

\textsuperscript{392} Stackhouse, \textit{Public Theology and Political Economy}, 48.
that markets account for sin, Stackhouse argues instead that “sin . . . deflects the [sic] rational capacities.”393 “Only God can bring about the transformation of the will” so that people can make truly rational decisions.394 Nevertheless, Stackhouse believes that this model of the human person can be made useful by extending the concept of rationality to include cultural and religious interests. He argues that people ought to be driven as much by rational calculations based on cultural norms and religious values as by calculations of material gains and losses. Stackhouse does not so much challenge the neoclassical account of the human person as he creates a more robust version of *homo economicus*.

Like Finn, Wogaman critiques the radical individualism of *laissez-faire* capitalist ideology on anthropological grounds.395 He also critiques the “naked pursuit of self-interest” on moral grounds. Acquisitiveness or “principled selfishness,” Wogaman affirms, is both idolatrous and socially divisive, and thus unsuitable as an economic model for Christians.396 The market provides incentives for irresponsible behavior when such behavior serves self-interest.397 Self-interest, however, is a reality of economic life. The solution is setting priorities from outside the market mechanism. Whereas various forms of capitalism that rely on “the indirect visitation of the ‘invisible hand,’” social market capitalism and democratic socialism embody “prophetic judgment upon” *laissez-faire* capitalism’s encouragement of selfishness.398 Wogaman concludes that principled selfishness is sufficiently reined in by these centrist forms of political economy.

393 Ibid., 46.
394 Ibid.
Even though these Christian ethicists reject radical individualism as the basis for Christian ethics, they accept self-interestedness as reality of economic life that must be managed. Self-interestedness is an organizing principle for the market. They may have some reservations about self-interested behavior, but they affirm that the notion of self-interest accurately describes the basis for economic decision-making. Thus, the essence of neoclassical theory, of *homo economicus*, remains intact.

**Emphasizes Promises, Minimizes Problems**

Mainstream Christian social ethics emphasizes the promises of the neoclassical framework while minimizing or dismissing its problems altogether. Finn is aware of the problems wrought by capitalism. In various places he makes reference to the threat multinational corporations pose to democracy, the power differentials that lead to extraction of unfavorable terms for workers and the poor, and the increasing levels of unemployment matched by downward pressure on wages. But then he makes a theoretical move analogous to neoliberal economists: he treats these as “background commitments” that are asides from the “main” economic issues.399

Stackhouse argues that capitalist-style globalization not only can deliver on its promises, it already has delivered on some major fronts. Stackhouse sees the story of capitalism as the story of the great expansion of the middle class.400 Increased population and industrialization

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399 In neoclassical parlance, they are “externalities.” See Finn, *Just Trading*, chapter 5 “Background Commitments,” 89-104.

initially lead to increases in inequality, but eventually they result in a less stratified and more egalitarian society. The best evidence, Stackhouse claims, reveals that capitalism has:

- Raised millions of poor people into a new middle class
- Exploited less than economies that are centrally planned
- Shaken confidence in state managed economies
- Provided a place of refuge for immigrants in democratic, capitalist areas
- Allowed people to adopt its patterns in a selective and locally sensitive manner
- Improved nutrition levels, health, life span, leisure time, and openness to religious values

Given such overwhelming evidence of reformed capitalism’s positive effect on economic development and social progress, reformed capitalism must be the more just and humane political economic system Christians have been looking for: “Is it possible that, in the face of the new evidence, everyone who holds to a ‘preferential option for the poor’ must now embrace capitalism, since socialism itself impoverishes? In some measure, the answer is Yes. But it must be a reformed capitalism.”

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402 It is a matter of debate whether global poverty has increased or decreased over the last few decades. Uncertainties about the extent of poverty, in particular in China and India, make such estimates difficult. See Sanjay G. Reddy and Camelia Minoiu, "Has World Poverty Really Fallen?," Review of Income and Wealth 53, no. 3 (September 2007).


For Wogaman, the chief priority of economic life is productivity and capitalism is responsible for the vast expansion of productivity and growth in recent centuries.\textsuperscript{405} But unlike Stackhouse, Wogaman acknowledges the tendency of even welfare capitalism to concentrate economic power and thus permit great inequality.\textsuperscript{406} Examining the data on poverty, Wogaman concludes that the tendency both within and among nations is for the relative gap between the rich and the poor to increase, even when the poor are improving their situation in absolute terms. In the U.S., despite enormous expansion in productive capacity, the proportion of poor people has remained fairly constant over the last 30 years. Among rich and poor nations the contrast between wealth and poverty is even more dramatic. Wogaman argues that it is an undeniable economic reality that the poor people of the world, who lack basic necessities, are the vast majority while the rich constitute a much smaller number. He remains agnostic, however, as to the cause of such enormous disparities.\textsuperscript{407}

\section*{A Heterodox Economic Assessment}

\subsection*{A Narrow Approach to Economics}

Heterodox economic analysis addresses each of the flaws in neoclassical theory that Christian ethicists either discount as an inescapable part of economic life or consider solvable through superficial changes. The first flaw is a narrow approach to economics, marked by defining economics as the study of efficient allocation of scarce resources and accompanied by economic orthodoxy's fundamental accoutrement: the pivotal assumption of economic 

\begin{footnotes}
\item[407] "Determining the causes of such great disparities of wealth and income in the modern world is very difficult,” Wogaman, \textit{Economics and Ethics}, 47-48.
\end{footnotes}
rationality, which includes the features of self-interest, exogenous preference formation, and strict optimizing behavior. The assumption of economic rationality is a necessary condition for neoclassical economics: without it, neoclassical theory is left adrift. Neoclassical thought presumes that what economics is, what it does, and how to go about “improving” economic outcomes are settled issues. Yet the narrow approach that neoclassical economics have chosen for themselves ignores the historically contingent character of the economy. Economic processes evolve over time along with social order. The neoclassical definition of economics is but one way of theorizing the political economy. Heterodox schools of economic thought (Keynseian, Austrian, feminist, neo-Marxian, institutionalist, etc) do not adhere to its narrow economic definition. Instead of the neoclassical preoccupation with abstract theorizing, methodological individualism, and equilibrium, heterodox economics is concerned with the effects of economic and social institutions on human beings and the environment, the social and cultural embeddedness of economic agents and their activities, and the myriad of ways in which capitalism generates oppression.

The narrow neoclassical approach yields unintended economic, social, and historical consequences which are not accounted for in its economic models. In many heterodox perspectives, capitalism is seen to be directly and indirectly connected with racism, ethical

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prejudice, and imperialism. The capitalist appetite for cheap labor led to the enslavement of millions of Africans to meet the demand for cotton, sugar, and tobacco. After the end of the


411 Many historians, economists, and social theorists have examined the ways in which capitalism is connected to the institution of slavery and the general pattern of modernist development, beginning with the work of Eric Williams in 1944 with the publication of Capitalism and Slavery (Eric Eustace Williams, Capitalism & Slavery (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1994 [1944])). Williams, a Trinidadian professor at Howard University in Washington, D.C. at the time, argues that the slave trade provided the capital which financed the British Industrial Revolution and that the British moved to abolish the international slave trade as a tactic to regain control of the European market by undermining French Caribbean sugar production while leaving unharmed the production of British East Indian sugar.

Since then there have been a number of criticisms of William’s work, including his methodology which lacks the use of modern statistical tools of analysis. For broad attacks on his work see Seymour Drescher, Econocide : British Slavery in the Era of Abolition (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1977); and David Eltis, Economic Growth and the Ending of the Transatlantic Slave Trade (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987). Drescher argues that it was the abolitionist movement that led to the
Civil War, the same appetite led to a system of tenant farming that kept freed blacks in a new form of bondage: that of perpetual debt. Capitalist logic also led to the acquisition of land and raw materials through imperialism. To acquire the materials needed to fuel industry and wealth, Europe and the U.S. relied on a combination of military conquest, political domination, and economic exploitation in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. The U.S. harvested the rich natural resources in North America through a combination of conquest, genocide, and a complex series of treaties that were routinely ignored.

Capitalism is also indirectly connected with the creation of a system of oppression based on racial/ethnic identity after the Civil War. Following emancipation, lower-class whites could no long point to their freedom as a mark of superiority. The response to this loss was violence against blacks, including the Ku Klux Klan, with no serious opposition from government or churches. In the west, Chinese immigrants were used to build railways in harsh and decline in Caribbean slavery and not the other way around while Eltis claims that British colonialism provided too little wealth to Britain to spark the industrial revolution. For a history of the making of Capitalism and Slavery, its arguments and critical reception see Selwyn H. H. Carrington, "Capitalism & Slavery and Caribbean Historiography: An Evaluation," Journal of African American History 88, no. 3 (2003); and Heather Cateau and Selwyn H. H. Carrington, Capitalism and Slavery Fifty Years Later: Eric Eustace Williams--a Reassessment of the Man and His Work (New York: Peter Lang, 2000). Despite these critiques, no scholar has been able to undermine William’s basic thesis.


demeaning conditions. Even further west, Japanese immigrants had similar experiences on pineapple and sugar plantations in Hawaii.\footnote{Ronald T. Takaki, \textit{Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans}, Updated and rev. ed. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1998 [1989]); Ronald T. Takaki, \textit{A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America}, 1st rev. ed. (New York: Back Bay Books/Little, Brown, and Co., 2008 [1993]).} The same dynamics operate today. Claims of reverse racism, concerns about the influx of immigrant workers from Mexico and Asia, and the outsourcing of jobs to other countries reveals an underlying belief that the greatest challenge facing U.S. workers is competition from people of color at home and abroad. This belief ignores the fact that the capitalist system itself increases wealth by exploiting workers and keeping wages as low as possible. None of these direct or indirect effects of capitalism—slavery, genocide, racism/ethnic prejudice, theft, imperialism, exploitation—register on neoclassical models. A narrow conception of economics generates oppressive economic practice.

A narrow approach to economics is also connected to the creation and perpetuation of the modern/colonial complex. Neoclassical economics has played a central role in constructing the discourses of poverty and wealth and has framed public policy that has discursively marginalized millions of communities in the Majority World as underdeveloped or less developed.\footnote{Eiman O. Zein-Elabdin and S. Charusheela, "Introduction: Economics and Postcolonial Thought," in \textit{Postcolonialism Meets Economics}, ed. Eiman O. Zein-Elabdin and S. Charusheela, \textit{Economics as Social Theory Series} (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 2.} Economic orthodoxy in the form of capitalism has upheld the narrative of development which presumes that North Atlantic societies are a desirable model for economic development.\footnote{See Eiman O. Zein-Elabdin, "Articulating the Postcolonial (with Economics in Mind)," in \textit{Postcolonialism Meets Economics}, ed. Eiman O. Zein-Elabdin and S. Charusheela, \textit{Economics as Social Theory Series} (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 21-39.} Capitalist development, while merely a historical experience of capitalist industrialization in a few regions, has become universal trajectory and a prescription for
economic and social intervention in all of the world’s nations.\textsuperscript{418} It continues to authorize and support institutional forms of power that center the processes of modernization and progress encompassed by the modern/colonial developmentalist perspective.

Several heterodox approaches to economics seek a “non-modernist” approach that reconceptualizes economics from a subaltern perspective, including the hegemonic role that economics has played in the modernity and the relationship between culture and economics.\textsuperscript{419} Like postcolonial theory, this strand of heterodox economic theory constitutes a critical approach, a strategy that maintains an attitude of openness to continuous revision, rather than a single economic theory. As such, it does not reject any economic paradigm in total. The hybrid nature of economic heterodoxy proceeds by selecting, contesting, and reappropriating categories in a syncretistic fashion.\textsuperscript{420}

Postcolonial economics envisions a new political economy by bringing to the fore the connection between the western telling of history, the production of political economic knowledge, and the exercise of western power.\textsuperscript{421} History has served as a synonym for the development of Euro-American consciousness. Non-Euro-Americans only formed part of that telling of history to the extent that they are involved in the constitution of the European historical being. The historical experiences of the West become the templates from which to


\textsuperscript{419} Zein-Elabdin and Charusheela, "Introduction: Economics and Postcolonial Thought," 7. The term “non-modernist” should not be understood as an antithesis to modernity or a naive attempt at escaping the modernist theoretical framework. Rather, the term reflects the necessity of critically appropriating modernism even as non-modernist horizons are imagined.

\textsuperscript{420} Ibid., 8.

\textsuperscript{421} Zein-Elabdin argues that postcoloniality on its most basic terms is concerned with revising “the hegemonically defined themes of history, culture, and knowledge from a subaltern perspective” Zein-Elabdin, "Articulating the Postcolonial (with Economics in Mind)," 22.
know and measure the world. This vision of history has grounded political economic analysis from Smith to contemporary scholarship.\footnote{Eiman O. Zein-Elabdin, "Contours of a Non-Modernist Discourse: The Contested Space of History and Development," \textit{Review of Radical Political Economics} 33, no. 3 (2001): 255-63; cited in Zein-Elabdin, "Articulating the Postcolonial (with Economics in Mind)," 26.} The heterodox task is to “acquire epistemic and material authority to effect change.”\footnote{Zein-Elabdin, "Articulating the Postcolonial (with Economics in Mind)," 25.} This requires formerly colonized people to interpret their own histories and to reject the notion of the inevitable movement towards the Euro-American prototype of political-economic development. Otherwise, the non-Euro-America people will continue to be permanently categorized as “pre capitalist, pre modern, or under developed.”\footnote{Ibid., 27.}

Mainstream Christian ethical approaches to political economic ethics begin with entrenched disciplinary divisions, each maintaining its own methodological tools and traditions.\footnote{The relationship between economics and Christian ethics portrayed here is analogous to Zein-Elabdin’s critique of interdisciplinary attempts to synthesis ecology and economics in “Articulating the postcolonial,” 35.} Economics is taken as given, while infusing it with insights from ethics in order to examine which political economic system is most Christian or how to make market moral. Christian ethics becomes another constraint on a generally accepted economic rationality. Therefore, mainstream Christian ethics has compounded neoclassical modeling with even moral variables while leaving the premise of neoclassical economic rationality intact. Heterodox economics destabilizes the disciplines’ epistemic authority, unmasking its “metaphysical priors” in order to understand individual academic disciplines as part of a broader cultural system of Euro-American modernity.\footnote{Zein-Elabdin, "Articulating the Postcolonial (with Economics in Mind)," 34.}
From various heterodox perspectives, the narrow, neoclassical approach to economics, wedded to the development of modernity and colonialism, has little to do with the actual lives of poor, marginalized, and “less developed” people of the world. It is connected with the creation and sustaining of a complex matrix of oppression. As a development project, it has more to do with validating the metaphysical movement of history that culminates in a Euro-American type industrial society. Christian social ethics must not accept a culturally hegemonic definition of economics that operates within modernity. A moral vision of the political economy must resist the “techniques of specialist knowledge as they work with strategies of power.”

Instead, with heterodox economics, it must utilize a critical, counter-disciplinary approach in the hope of transforming the understanding economics and the political economy itself.

A Simplistic Account of the Human Person

Under economic orthodoxy, human beings make economic decisions by rationally maximizing their utility (or preference satisfaction) through the application of their exogenously determined preference ordering. Society is a collection of self-interested, preference satisfying, rational individuals interacting in an open marketplace. The neoclassical assumption about human rationality, however, represents a profoundly incomplete account of human decision making. This conception of human decision making excludes people with certain developmental disabilities, children, and the infirm. It also renders invisible a wide variety of economically significant relationships that do not fit into the rubric of rational utility maximization, such as

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428 Nelson, *Feminism, Objectivity and Economics*. 

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community service or caring labor, undertaken out of a sense of social responsibility or affection for others. This simplistic view of the human person also covers over differences of gender, sexuality, class, race, and ethnicity since these have no bearing on economic decision making, except to the degree that they bear on preferences.

Heterodox economics advocate for a complex view of the human person which acknowledges that human beings make decisions in the midst of complexity and uncertainty. Human decision making involves (mis-)perceptions, emotions, intuitions, anticipation of uncertain futures, and involves a “pervasive ignorance” which “renders impossible the full accounts of costs and benefits that would be necessary to decide whether (or how much) a particular activity contributes to happiness” or utility. In contrast, neoclassical models adopted a bounded rationality as a mechanism for economic decision making. Individuals engage in utility-maximizing calculations based on fixed preference order. A desire for simple and elegant mathematical models, which has become the basis for arguing for neoclassical formulation, has led neoclassical economics’ reluctance to deal with complexity that is not easily represented in such models.

The heterodox view of the human person also includes the emotive and social aspects of human behavior. It recognizes that human beings are epistemically limited individuals making decisions based on preferences that are developed only on the spot, after coming to market, in the midst of changing circumstances. Individuals are understood to have subjective perceptions of both their own goals and the constraints they face. Their own subjective perceptions are

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further influenced by others’ subjective preferences and perceptions.\footnote{In fact Hayek wrote this book on psychology in which he elaborates influence and constitution of perception. See Friedrich A. von Hayek, \textit{The Sensory Order: An Inquiry into the Foundations of Theoretical Psychology} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952).} The result is a non-reductionist view of economic decision making that better accounts for complexity of human perceptions and imagination. Given this collection of epistemically limited and subjective individuals, market mechanisms are best described as a sea of “unpredictable change,” not a rationally predictable process.\footnote{Burczak, \textit{Socialism after Hayek}, 29.}

**Ignoring the Majority of Economic Activity**

A third flaw in the neoclassical economic framework is that it ignores the majority of economic activity. The neoclassical approach privileges commodity production and wage labor. Yet, wage-labor for capitalist firms and commodities exchange in a market is only the tip of the iceberg in terms of diverse activities of the economy.\footnote{For an illustration of the ice-berg image see J. K. Gibson-Graham, \textit{A Postcapitalist Politics} (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 69-70.} Just underneath the surface are a multitude of non-market transactions which are also economic activities—the hosts of elders and deacons that serve their location congregations, the grandparents and other relatives who provide child care for children so their parents can join the workforce, volunteers who donate several hours a week to shelters, food pantries, and soup kitchens (among other organizations), the police who turn a blind eye to illicit drug trades in exchange for kick backs, reciprocal forms of farm labor exchange in which families exchange an equal number of day’s work or attend
work parties hosted by a neighbor (accompanied by feasting and drinking). All of these economic actors participate in a diverse economy outside of formal market transactions. But none of their activities are considered as economic within an orthodox economic framework.

The current global political economy is economically diverse. What is usually considered the economy—formal markets, wage labor, capitalist firms—is merely a subset of a complex field of economic relations that sustain livelihoods around the world. Acknowledging diverse economic activities as economic has important consequences for envisioning a moral political economy. It allows envisioning a political economy that values the vast majority of human activity and generates and sustains communities that delivers wellbeing “directly rather than through the circuitous route of capitalist industrialization.” It emphasizes a diversity and richness of human relationships rather than reducing human relationships to those mediated through capitalist logics. It resists the idea that the endless consumption of commodities and competition for jobs that enrich capitalist corporations constitutes human progress. Recognizing the diversity of practices that sustain livelihoods, including paid and unpaid labor, market and non-market activities, non-capitalist and alternative capitalist business (cooperatives, socially responsible firms, etc.), opens the possibility of imagining a political economic ethics beyond

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435 There have been attempts to theorize this “informal” economic activity. See J. J. Thomas, Informal Economic Activity (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992).


capitalism. Given that economic difference accounts for perhaps more than 50 percent of economic activity, Christian social ethics built exclusively on neoclassical theory discursively covers over a myriad of noncapitalist economic activity and is thus irresponsible and somewhat irrelevant. Beginning to see capitalism as a “fantasy of wholeness” rather than a “reality” is of course, difficult. Yet it is an important part of decolonizing the economic terrain of the moral imagination.

**Persistent Instability, Growing Inequality, and Exploitative Labor Process**

A fourth flaw in the neoclassical framework is the pattern of instabilities, growing inequalities, and exploitative labor processes. Capitalism is enormously unstable. Over the last 75 years, global capitalism has experienced two major crises—the Great Depression that began with the 1929 stock market crash and the global economic meltdown that began in 2007—and smaller contractions every 3 to 7 years. From the Marxian perspective, these instabilities are permanent features of capitalism. Attempts to reform capitalism, to perfect it through the removal of periodic downturns, have failed. Neither Mill nor Hayek, the masters of liberal and free-market theory, nor Keynes and his followers could do it. The instability or crises of

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438 Ibid.


441 Keynesian theory certainly mitigated the effects of these instabilities. The welfare capitalism of the late 21st century witnessed different sort of downturns from the *laissez-faire* capitalism of Marx’s witness in the 19th century, with its cyclical panics and runs on banks. The sort of crisis capitalism faces depends on historical conditions. But the instabilities are characteristic of capitalism. For an examination of these instabilities in a Japanese context, see Hiroshi Uchida, ”Japanese ‘Cultural Eclecticism’ and a Reinterpretation of Marx and Keynes on the Instabilities of Capitalism,” in *Marx for the 21st Century*, ed. Hiroshi Uchida, *Routledge Frontiers of Political Economy* (London; New York: Routledge, 2006).
capitalism takes on diverse forms in different situations. But no amount of tinkering to date has been able to mend capitalism’s structural instabilities.\[442\]

Capitalism is also characterized by massive and growing inequalities. Claims of capitalism’s track record of poverty reduction mask these inequalities. Despite steady increasing in U.S. productivity since the 1970s, real wages for lower and working class workers has stagnated. While it is generally assumed that inequalities are greatest in poor countries, steep inequalities exist within the U.S. and the U.K. The inequality of both countries is far greater than that of India, for example.\[443\] The Gini coefficient for the U.K. is now higher than it has been during the last 30 years at .36, compared with .25 in 1979 when Margaret Thatcher came to power.\[444\] This trend of growing inequality since the 1980s is being observed in other European countries as well, including staunchly egalitarian societies such as Scandinavia and the

\[442\] U.S. economic history is one of periods of turmoil (in the forms of wars, depressions, or recessions) followed by periods of prosperity. Never was this boom more successful than during the “Golden Age” of capitalism (the period roughly from 1946 to 1976). It is called a Golden Age because of its sustained growth and high employment, which was commonly held to have brought prosperity to every segment of U.S. society [Stephen A. Marglin and Juliet Schor, The Golden Age of Capitalism: Reinterpreting the Postwar Experience, Studies in Development Economics (Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, 1990)]. This common perception is basically wrong because only the white segments of society prospered. Racism, ethnic exclusion, and patriarchy were all associated with the evolution of capitalism, without exception for its so-called Golden Age. On this point see Leonard Beeghley, The Structure of Social Stratification in the United States, 5th ed. (Boston, Mass.: Allyn and Bacon, 2007 [1989]); Deanna Jacobsen Koepe, “Race, Class, Poverty, and Capitalism,” Race, Gender & Class, no. 3/4 (2007); Theda Skocpol, Social Policy in the United States: Future Possibilities in Historical Perspective, Princeton Studies in American Politics (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995); Dan Zuberi, Differences That Matter: Social Policy and the Working Poor in the United States and Canada (Ithaca, NY: ILR Press/Cornell University Press, 2006).


The same pattern is being repeated elsewhere around the world. The income gap between North-South and East-West was higher in the late 1990s than it was in the 1980s. Since the early 1980s, income concentration has risen everywhere: “this trend toward an increase in inequality is perplexing and marks a clear departure from the move towards greater egalitarianism observed during the 1950s and 1960s.” The conventional neoclassical wisdom, that free trade and global economic integration will create a rising tide that will lift all boats, has lost its credibility.

Of course, distributive inequalities are not a problem in the neoclassical model because equality is ignored in favor of individual freedom and absolute preference satisfaction. Neoclassical economists are concerned with achieving economic efficiency through Pareto optimal solutions, which say nothing about equality or fairness. Neoclassical economic models also ignore uneven distributions that favor whites over blacks (or another other privileged over oppressed group). While capitalism has produced an overall abundance of goods, it

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447 Pareto optimality refers to a situation in which no individual can be made better off without making someone else worse off. That is, an outcome is Pareto superior if “at least one individual in a society prefers A to B, while no one prefers B to A.” If no outcome is Pareto superior to A then it is a Pareto optimum. This is a “wonderfully elegant” but “largely irrelevant” approach to adjudicating between policy alternatives. A common neoclassical solution to the problem is to use the Kaldor-Hicks criterion. Under Kaldor-Hicks, outcome A is superior to outcome B if the winners under A can fully compensate the winners under B and still enjoy a net benefit. “The Kaldor-Hicks criterion emphasizes potential as opposed to actual compensation in assessing rival economic outcomes.” In practice, the winners rarely compensate the losers. George DeMartino, Global Economy, Global Justice: Theoretical Objections and Policy Alternatives to Neoliberalism (London; New York: Routledge, 2000), 45-47.

448 For example, racial and ethnic difference is correlated to increases in the extent and severity of poverty. In 2009, the official poverty rate in the U.S. for all groups was 14.3 percent. That is, 43.6 million people were living in poverty. Yet the poverty rates for Blacks and Hispanics greatly exceed the national average. In 2009, the poverty rate for Blacks was 25.8 percent and for Hispanics 25.3 percent,
distributes these goods so unevenly that it creates conditions of scarcity for most of the world’s population.

In the Marxian view, capitalism is the exploitative labor process in which surplus value is extracted from the working class. While on the surface markets appear to be based on equal exchange—or liberty and freedom—a deep analysis of capitalism’s production process reveals how workers are exploited. In Marx’s terms, the processes of production and exchange are exploitative because capitalist control forces workers into a relationship in which their labor

compared to 9.4 percent for non-Hispanic whites and 12.5 percent for Asians. Poverty rates are also higher for those who are foreign-born versus those who are native-born. In 2009, the poverty rate among foreign born was 19.0 percent, compared to 12.6 percent for native born. The poverty rate was highest for those who are foreign born non-citizens: 25.1 percent (U.S. Census Bureau, P60-238, Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2009, issued September 2010).

As unconscionable as income disparities are, the figures for wealth inequality are even more staggering. By any measure, people of color possess less wealth than whites. In 2007, the median family net worth for all groups was $120,300. Like the poverty level, this number masks considerable variation among subgroups. The median family net worth for white families was $170,400 while non-whites or Hispanics enjoyed a median family net worth of only $27,800, less than 17 percent of the median white family’s net worth (U.S. Census Bureau, Table 720, Income, Expenditures, Poverty, and Wealth, in Statistical Abstract of the United States: 2011). The median figure is not always the best measure of wealth disparity. In fact, most Black and Hispanics families are two and half times more likely than whites to have a zero or negative net worth. Home ownership, often the only source of wealth in minority communities, is also skewed along racial/ethnic lines. In 2000, nearly three-quarters of whites own their home while just 46 percent for Blacks and 46 percent of Hispanics owned their home (U.S. Census Bureau, Homeownership Rates by Race and Hispanic Origin: 2000. These numbers should be understood as vastly overestimating home ownership rates which have undoubtedly decreased since the housing market crash of 2007. Moreover, home ownership is defined simply as having a mortgage, which is hardly a sign of wealth when underwater).

Even in the midst of a general downward pressure on income and wealth, the racial/ethnic gap continues to grow. The U.S. currently has the largest number of people living in poverty since the official poverty estimates have been published. But while poverty rates have been increasing since 2006 for all groups, poverty rates for racial/ethnic groups have increased at a faster pace. Moreover, between 2005 and 2009, white households experienced a modest drop in wealth, falling about 16%. During the same period, the net worth of Black households fell 53 percent and Hispanic households net worth decreased 66 percent (Rakesh Kochhar, Richard Fry and Paul Taylor, “Wealth Gaps Rise to Record Highs between Whites, Blacks, Hispanics,” Pew Research Center’s Social & Demographic Trends, July 26, 2011, http://pewsocialtrends.org/2011/07/26/wealth-gaps-rise-to-record-highs-between-whites-blacks-hispanics/ (accessed August 10, 2011)).

power takes on the status of a commodity along with land and raw materials. Workers have no choice but to exchange their labor power for a wage that does not fully compensate for the labor performed. Commodities are produced through the exploitative practice of extracting surplus labor. Exploitation is the unavoidable grounds of capitalist production processes. Ownership of the means of production in the hands of a small group of elites renders impossible a non-exploitative economic system under which genuine equality and human capabilities can flourish.

The neoclassical approach to economics is structurally flawed. Instability, unequal distribution of income and wealth, and exploitative production processes are all part of capitalism’s structural problems. Many have tried to repair capitalism’s faults, among them mainstream Christian social ethicists. Structurally, however, the capitalist setup is unjust. It promises fairness through the market and democratic representation, but in practice it depends necessarily on exploitative systems, results in oligopolies rather than competitive markets, and creates a privileged class that maintains inequality.450 Envisioning a moral political economy requires critically addressing these features of capitalism, rather than accepting them as a necessary part of economic reality.

Lack of Alternatives

While recognizing the shortcomings of capitalism and the neoclassical framework addressed in the previous section, mainstream Christian ethicists offer no alternatives. Chapter two referred to Finn and Pemberton’s critique of certain concepts within the neoclassic school of economics: scarcity, the market, efficiency, property, and the human person and self-interest.

Finn also finds “persuasive” Cobb and Daly’s critique of neoclassical/capitalist economics, including problems with Ricardo’s argument for comparative advantage, the reduction of environment damage to an externality, the disregard for democratic control, and the loss of community.\textsuperscript{451} Moreover, Finn cautions that neoclassical economists’ confidence in their theories as the science of social policy is at same time arrogant and out of sync with the recent philosophical consensus that science itself is a social project. Christian ethics must navigate the hazardous waters between having to rely heavily on economics for understanding economic reality and adjudicating between competing economic explanations on ethical and “scientific” grounds.\textsuperscript{452}

These critiques have deep resonances with heterodox economic theory. But it is there that the resonance ends. Finn does not treat these critiques as definitive nor does he move away from a neoclassical economic understanding because for him there is no alternative. The small, disciplined communities of Christian stewards Finn and Pemberton envision will work hard to strengthen social reforms, but they will do so within the context of the existing political economic order. For Finn, the Biblical challenge of radical redistribution—described by the Year of Jubilee (Lev 25:8-17) and in the practices of the first century Jerusalem church (Acts 2:44-55)—is to be held out as an ideal. Finn defends his position here by appealing to sin. While sin creates a temptation for the wealthy to exploit the poor it also tempts individuals to shirk their responsibilities to work hard if they were guaranteed an equal share without regard to work.\textsuperscript{453} Despite the Biblical challenge of radical redistribution, Finn argues that there must be a better

\textsuperscript{451} Finn, \textit{Just Trading}, 36-45.

\textsuperscript{452} Ibid., 75-77.

\textsuperscript{453} Ibid., 55-56.
solution to the problems of inequality than simple redistribution. He does not discuss, however, what that solution might be. By arguing that “an adequate analysis of markets, whether a defense or a critique, must include an articulation” of its moral ecology he upholds the division in neoclassical economics between moral arguments and morally neutral markets.\footnote{Finn, The Moral Ecology, 33.} Having acknowledged the difficulties with the neoclassical model’s strict distinction between fact and values, between empirical and moral analysis, Finn then reinscribes them.

Stackhouse also acknowledges the faults with democratic capitalist systems: structural inequalities; the hypocrisy of advocating “free trade” while passing protectionist laws; and the inconsistency of advocating for democracy accompanied with a manipulation of elections.\footnote{Stackhouse, Globalization and Grace, 29.} Stackhouse is adamant that all of this can be corrected by a robust public theology guiding the development of the global political economy. Public theology will create social change not by challenging the domination of the world economy by technocratic corporations and militaristic nation-states, but by transforming their ethos. There is no need to raise up prophetic protest against the crucifying of the weaker people of the world and the destruction of ecological systems which make life possible.\footnote{Ibid., 239.} Instead, one should concentrate on forming a new moral and spiritual basis of global institutions to create a more ethical economic globalization.\footnote{Ibid., 242.}

Wogaman notes a number of problems with free-market capitalism. He acknowledges that it has lead directly to the “exploitation of child labor (and of the labor of men and women), hazardous working conditions, dehumanizingly long hours of work, low wage, periodic times of depression with high unemployment, shoddy and dangerous products, ruin of the natural

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\footnote{Finn, The Moral Ecology, 33.}
\footnote{Stackhouse, Globalization and Grace, 29.}
\footnote{Ibid., 239.}
\footnote{Ibid., 242.}
environment, racial, religious, and gender discrimination.\textsuperscript{458} The most serious failing of the free-market mechanism is that it allows free market processes to establish and set priorities, neglecting the “social nature” of human beings.\textsuperscript{459} Conceptualizing human beings as individuals and society as the sum of individual transactions leads to social inefficiencies (such as the inability to provide community wide facilities, highways, and national defense) and incentivizes cost cutting in ways that are damaging to people and communities (it treats harmful practices as externalities). Free-market capitalism, left unchecked, is destructive to human society and the ecology. In Wogaman’s view, these issues can be and have been successfully addressed by a mixed political economy, a system in which the economic order is subject to a political order: either democratic capitalism or democratic socialism.\textsuperscript{460} For example, while social discrimination on the basis of gender, race, or ethnicity has a long history in the U.S., Wogaman argues that “sweeping social revolutions changed all this in the twentieth century.”\textsuperscript{461} Government intervention sparked by democratic, grass-roots movements, such as the woman’s movement, labor movements, and the civil rights movement, have largely succeeded in restraining the worst practices of free-market capitalism.

In contemporary debates within mainstream social ethics the biggest obstacle to constructing non-capitalist alternatives is the representation of capitalism as hegemonic.\textsuperscript{462} While mainstream Christian social ethics acknowledges problems with capitalism—even identifying capitalism as source of exploitation, inequality, and dehumanizing conditions—the

\textsuperscript{458} Wogaman, Economics and Ethics, 20.
\textsuperscript{459} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{460} Ibid., 29.
\textsuperscript{461} Wogaman, Christian Perspectives on Politics, 314-16.
\textsuperscript{462} This is one of the central arguments of Gibson-Graham, The End of Capitalism.
only alternative it offers is a reformed capitalism. Thus, mainstream Christian social ethics succumbs to an “inevitability” syndrome. The solution to capitalism’s problems is capitalism.

**Alternative Economic Frameworks**

The more just and sustainable world political economy that mainstream Christian ethicists so desire cannot be built on a neoclassical framework. Conceptually, neoclassical theory defines the science of economics narrowly and builds on an untenable and reductive account that overlooks the complexity of human behavior. In practice, it has yielded massive income disparity, growing global inequality, social instability, and ecological devastation; it also overlooks over a vast array of economic activity.

Fortunately, there is more than one way to theorize the political economy. There are non-capitalist forms of economic activity, both in terms of present practices and envisioned futures. One cannot conclude that capitalism is co-terminus with the political economy. The research of certain heterodox economists is uncovering evidence of these non-capitalist theories and practices. In short, their work has the ability to rupture the limits and open potentials in the economic understanding of mainstream Christian social ethics and provides insight into alternative frameworks of the political economy.

**Conceptually**

Conceptually, heterodox economics offers some crucial concepts that can help Christian ethicists make adjustments to their operative political economic framework (and thereby

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463 Ibid., 261.
achieve something like a prophetic vision). This subsection develops some conceptual categories that are sometimes underdeveloped in the social theorizing of Christian ethicists.

The first conceptual insight is the recognition that the world is already a combination of capitalist and non-capitalist economic activity. Heterodox economists insist on the need to disrupt the portrayal of economic life as dominated by capitalist logics. A sampling of the wide variety of non-market based economic activities is listed above. Feminist economics in particular has paid particular attention to the variety of non-market-oriented, non-capitalist economic production that takes place within the context of the home (such as cooking, cleaning, and caring for children and elders). Some studies estimate that unpaid household labor and production accounts for 30 to 50 percent of total economic activity while other studies estimate that non-capitalist economic activity accounts for more hours of work per week in both rich and poor countries than hours of work performed for capitalist firms.

Unpaid domestic work and production within the household are significant examples of “economic difference,” non-capitalist practices operative in the world. Gibson-Graham, Resnick, and Wolff warn of the danger of portraying economic difference as “less significant, less productive, less world-shaping, [and] less real” than capitalist practices. Gibson-Graham has named this dynamic “capitalocentrism.” Capitalocentrism values capitalist economic activities

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464 For an overview of these issues, see the didactic collection Ellen Mutari and Deborah M. Figart, eds., Women and the Economy: A Reader (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2003). In Women and the Economy, Mutari and Figart collect some of the classics of feminist economics along with in contributions of feminists in other fields.

465 Cited in Gibson-Graham, A Postcapitalist Politics.


467 Ibid. Stackhouse engages in this type of dismissal.
over all other processes of production and distribution by identifying them “in relation to capitalism as the same as, the opposite of, a complement to, or contained within.”

Capitalocentrism treats noncapitalist economic processes “as obsolete remnants of a precapitalist ‘traditional’ economy, or as seedbeds of truly capitalist endeavor, or as ultimately ‘capitalist’ because they involve commodification or markets.” Christian social ethicists should be wary of falling into capitalocentrism because it limits the moral imagination.

The process of identifying noncapitalist economic activities and practices begins with recognizing that economic differences have been confined, naturalized, or integrated into capitalocentric discourse of political economics. Heterodox economists call for engendering an identity crisis in capitalism, relativizing it as simply one mode of production among many.

Mainstream social ethicists, on the other hand, are caught up in a dualistic political economic imagination are unable to call forth any non-capitalist alternatives.

The second conceptual insight is tied to the first; since economic activities are far more varied than imagined by neoclassical theory, a different, anti-essentialist, non-reductive, overdetermined approach is needed to theorize the political economy. Non-reductionist/anti-essentialist theory rejects the notion of timeless, contextless, and universal determinants of social interaction—such as rationality and scarcity—as neoclassical economists tend to do. Human nature and social affairs are understood to be the result of the interaction of complex and often contradictory economic, social, political, and natural factors. Non-reductionist/anti-essentialist theory also asserts that the world is too complex to naively pretend, as neoclassical

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468 Gibson-Graham, A Postcapitalist Politics, 56.

469 DeMartino, Global Economy, Global Justice, 83.

470 Ibid.
economists do, that economic rationality explains all human behavior at every time and place, or that all choices should be made using only one criteria (the strength of desire) without reference to the validity of the desires, or that some aspects of human existence are ethically weightier than people’s subjective states.\textsuperscript{471}

Christian social ethics attempts to discipline social structures and realities in accordance with theological convictions, motifs, and systems of thought. It presupposes a theoretical formulation that approximates the essence of reality and draws on modern epistemologies that provide an absolute grounding for all knowledge as a mirror representation to an external reality. Reality is seen as a singular phenomena whose nature makes it accessible to theory. Thus, for Dan Finn, markets can be considered moral within the proper legal framework and under the right conditions. Stackhouse holds that if only the appropriate theological convictions were to underlie social processes, then society will be transformed. Each of these theorists holds to a rationalist epistemological position by which true observation of the reality depends on a true theory of the correct essence of social reality.\textsuperscript{472} This common epistemological position of knowledge as an accurate representation of a single external reality, as Richard Rorty and others have pointed out, is largely misguided and self-deceptive.\textsuperscript{473}

On a macro level, heterodox economics abandons the starting assumption that perfectly competitive markets are the norm.\textsuperscript{474} While the assumption of perfectly competitive markets

\textsuperscript{471} Ibid., 80.


\textsuperscript{473} Cited in Ibid., 18.

makes for an elegant and simplified world that neoclassical economics finds useful for analysis, heterodox economics holds that it is “neither intellectually or morally justifiable.” From a non-essentialist perspective, the economy is the result of the complex interplay of factors, including existing cultural, historical, social, natural, and political ones, without prioritizing any of these. The overdetermined approach to economics rejects the idea of a unified linear history of economic evolution towards some economic ideal. Instead, the economy is seen as contextual and contingent on a multitude of diverse forces “which together produced the particular sets of institutions, norms, behaviors and rules that govern economic behavior and outcomes.”

The third conceptual insight is the need to disrupt the focus on nation-states as the basic unit of economic activity. To articulate a decolonized vision of the political economy, it is important to critically examine the way in which orthodox economic theory has imagined the nation-state. The nation-state is marked in many ways with continuity with Euro-American/colonial control. State normalizing theories assume that nations are isolated economically from the outside world, treating the nation as a natural unit and treating international trade, migration, and finance as additive elements.

For postcolonial heterodox thinkers, the nation-state represents a continuation of colonial/modernist control. Instead of the rigid and compartmentalized world of nation-states, Colin Danby envisions a world that moves beyond “state-normalizing modernity.” He ruptures

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475 Ibid., 46.

476 For a more complex description of this non-reductionist economics and a concrete example of how it applies to non-reductionist market, see DeMartino, Global Economy, Global Justice, 83-88.

477 Ibid., 83.


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the notion of nation-states by noting the transnational economic activity that is already prevalent: the Hakka Chinese living in Calcutta but with business interests in China, India, and Canada; the Mexican elites who move assets on both sides of the border with ease. Households also earn income across nations: “Zambian men working in South Africa coal mines, Filipina women working as maids in Singapore, [and] a country like El Salvador with at least a quarter of its labor force earning incomes in the United States.” Given the deep transnational connections already present, Danby argues that treating nation-states as the basic unit of the political-economy is largely misguided. He develops an alternative model, called “constitutive openness,” which is more attentive to transnational and international links that are fundamental to certain domestic centers, such as export industries and import-dependent firms and sectors.

Ultimately, Danby’s postcolonial heterodox economics troubles and problematizes the neatness of state-normalizing modernity. Orthodox economics assumes modernist nation-states and conceptualizes the world as a collection of such states. Danby opens the door to the possibility of moving beyond a state-normalizing modernity and effectively develops a picture of an integration and connected “migrant, overlapping, contested world.” Heterodox economics offers transgressive ways to think about the state, as a porous subject of both endogenous and exogenous zones.

The lesson from postcolonial heterodox economics for Christian social ethics is that the contemporary configuration of nation-states is part of a deeper ideology of

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479 Ibid., 265.
480 Ibid., 264.
481 Ibid., 266.
modernity/coloniality rather than any form of social ontology. The arbitrary bounding of nation-states as economic units masks the often unequal distribution of benefits derived from a country’s resources. The centrality of the nation-state in mainstream economic analysis reinforces the leveling of difference and portrays large numbers of people under a single interest, a technique that began with colonialism. Continuing to theorizing the nation-state as a primary source of resistance to the negative effects of global capital limits the moral imagination in terms of constructing regional, local, and communal sources of resistance. Decolonized moral visions must move beyond nation-centric economic theorizing by opting for economic theories that decentralize the nation-state in economic models in order to better capture the devastation visited upon the non-elite majority through neoclassical development.

The last conceptual insight is a disruption of the idea of detachment in economics, a destabilizing of the fictive positive/normative split. Heterodox economists contend that the sacrosanct idea of economic as “science” is a modernist theoretical construction. Economics is not an objective, value-free science. Instead, all economic analysis is value-laden “to the extent that it is guided—implicitly or explicitly—by an approach to economic and social problems that combines issues of ‘what is’ and ‘what ought to be.’”

Neoclassical economic theory rests on a set of normative commitments that mainstream Christian ethicists would find objectionable. Indeed, the normative objections to neoclassical theory are perhaps more damning than all the empirical, analytical, and practical


\[483\] Ruccio and Amariglio, Postmodern Moments in Modern Economics, 176.
objections raised so far. But because mainstream Christian ethicists accept economics as a tool which is neither moral or amoral in itself, they have largely ignored its normative underpinnings.

The set of normative commitments shared by neoclassical economists is called “welfarism” or welfare consequentialism. Without it, neoclassical economists would have little basis for adopting their positions about free trade and market economies. Welfarism derived from utilitarianism that assesses outcomes based exclusively on the subjective states—the internal mental workings—of those affected by the outcome. Neoclassical economics is concerned with achieving “efficient” outcomes. An “efficient” outcome, one in which no one is made better off without making at least one person worse off. Consider a scenario described by DeMartino:

assume that I walk into my classroom with $100 and distribute this money equally among my students. Once this distribution is completed, the situation that obtains is efficient in the neoclassical sense. This is because any one student can be made better off at this point only if at least one other student is made worse off (e.g. if I take money away from the second to give to the first) . . . . What if, instead of distributing the money equally, I were to give all $100 to one student, leaving nothing for the others. Would this situation be efficient? Indeed it is, because the only way that one of the unfortunates could be made better off after the initial distribution is made is for me to take away some money from the lucky recipient, making her worse off.

This example makes clear that efficiency is not concerned at all with equity or fairness.

Whenever there is an efficient outcome of this sort, it is called a “Pareto optimality,” or

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484 The Normative assumptions of neoclassical theory are described in DeMartino, Global Economy, Global Justice, 43-51.
485 Ibid., x.
486 Ibid., 44.
487 Ibid., 43.
488 There are ways of addressing at least some of the problems of the neoclassical approach within a neoclassical framework. For example, it can be posited that inequality creates negative externalities. The social instability which would result in the classroom illustration above would require
maximum social welfare. The goal of neoclassic economics is to maximize social welfare or to achieve Pareto optimality, which in no way implies that society is equitable. In fact, as the above example illustrates, a state of maximum social welfare is consistent with highly unequal distributions of income. Welfarism (seemingly) offers neoclassical economists a way to adjudicate between policy alternatives with reference to the purportedly positive concept of efficiency rather than value judgments.

Why should the discipline of economics be concerned with efficiency and achieving Pareto optimality instead of reducing poverty or ensuring equality? Should economics deal with maximizing output given limited resources, or should it be directed at minimizing harm to the natural world while ensuring a sufficient level of sustenance? These questions begin to make clear that "the notion of economics as value-free is a value-laden fiction." Value judgments are already implicit in the choice of initial assumptions, theoretical bases, and the choice of what to make the object of study. When Christian social ethicists accept the neoclassical vision as indicative of “economic reality,” they are accepting a questionable set of policies derived from normative choices about what constitutes economic reality.

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489 DeMartino, Global Economy, Global Justice, 43. Instead of calculating the summation of utility, neoclassical economists calculate Pareto optimality.

490 Ibid., 77.

491 Ibid.
Heterodox economists agree that the normative commitments of the neoclassical vision are morally bankrupt. DeMartino carefully parses out five objections to purported value-neutrality of neoclassical theory, which when taken together seriously undermine welfarism. The first objection deals with the exogeneity of preferences. Neoclassicals assume that individual preference ordering remains unaffected by economic activity, a vital assumption for assessing the social benefit of economic outcomes. Critics point out that social culture, religious institutions, level of wealth, and other institutions are not innocent “with respect to the content of people’s preferences.”

One of the chief economic agents, corporations, consciously acts as if preference ordering is endogenous. Why else would these corporations spend vast amounts of resources on advertising to induce consumer desires if preferences were merely exogenous? Preferences, DeMartino insists, are endogenous: they change as a result of participation in economic processes.

The second objection is over the neoclassical tendency to mistake values for preferences. Neoclassicals use people’s preferences, based on their willingness to pay, as the basis for determining all policy outcomes. Critics argue that this is a categorical error. The strength of desires (preferences) should be tempered by the reasons for the desires (values). The neoclassical vision fails to distinguish between private affairs, with little or no social effect (like preferences for a blue shirt) and decisions involving values with “broad social (and natural)

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493 DeMartino, Global Economy, Global Justice, 78-79.

494 Ibid., 79.
effects” (like paving over wetlands to make way for a new mall). The third, closely related objection concerns the rejection of utility or preferences as the sole criteria for assessing outcomes. The neoclassical strategy bans interpersonal utility comparisons, or the comparison of subjective states. Critics affirm that the “capacity to avoid starvation” or “avoid preventable morbidity” are comparable interpersonally. Thus critics of neoliberalism would have little difficulty, for e.g., in demanding redistribution of $100,000 of a billionaire’s wealth for immunizations of impoverished people without reference to the psychic damage that this transfer causes the billionaire.

The fourth objection is the agnosticism that neoliberal visionaries bestow on economic agents. This agnosticism shields the economic agent from having to account for her actions (they are simply rational) and the economists from the sticky business of normative evaluation. Critics reject agnosticism of people’s preferences, insisting that the reasons behind an economic agent’s desire should be brought to bear on assessing its significance. The last objection concerns the legitimacy of unequal resource endowments that are “convertible to inequality in other domains.” Critics recognize inequalities in the domains of “education, housing, nutrition and so forth” perpetuate and deepen inequalities in resource endowments. Unequal resources distribution is granted by unequal opportunities rather than by free choice.

The political economy is complex. Economic modeling that requires excessively simplified and essentialized assumptions about society and humanity misses important information that is relevant to constructing a moral imagination. The positive-normative

\*495 Ibid.
\*496 Ibid.
\*497 Ibid., 81.
\*498 Ibid., 82.
The distinction upheld by neoclassical theory is a social construction. Its models are based on a set of normative commitments that are designed to maximize social welfare, defined narrowly as Pareto optimality. Their policies might increase efficiency (though even claims to capitalism’s efficiency are under attack by heterodox thinkers), but they have little regard for equality and ecological sustainability. This makes neoclassical economics morally suspect, an unworthy theory for those concerned with developing a political economy centered on community and the common good. In choosing theoretical economic models, Christian social ethicists should choose models concerned with social equality and ecological sustainability over models that than focus on “efficiency” in the neoclassical sense.

**In Present Practices**

The representation of the economy as essentially capitalist excludes many other types of non-capitalist economic transactions. Household production, child-rearing, cooperatives, voluntary labor, and gift giving are just some of the economic activities that do not register within a capitalist framework. There are many, many other examples of non-capitalist economic activity, actually existing non-capitalist practices. This subsection examines such practices as models and proposals for reimagining the political economy by examining three sites studied by the Community Economies Collective (the Republic of Kiribati, the Latrobe Valley Community Partnering Project, and Mondragon). Community Economies Collective is a group of activists and scholars who are committed to envisioning and enacting just and ecologically-sustainable economic communities. The project is particularly concerned with community economies in which “the material well-being of people and the sustainability of the community are priority
The goal of the collaborative is to bring together theorizing about conceptual possibilities based on “already existing alternative economies.” While the three studies highlighted below do not encompass all possible models of economic difference, they serve as a sample for the possibilities of real world economic experimentation.

**Community-Centered Economy of the Republic of Kiribati**

The community-centered economy of the Micronesian island state, the Republic of Kiribati serves as an example of unconventional notions of economic development and noncapitalist economic forms. Kiribati is comprised of 34 islands, including the Gilbert Islands, the Phoenix Islands, and the Line Islands, with combined area of 811 km². All but one of the islands are coral atolls. Its population is about 100,000, with over half of the populace living in the capitals South Tarawa.

Kiribati’s economy embodies some of the noncapitalist elements that are discussed above. The country’s experience serves as a counterpoint to modern/colonial developmentalist notions of development from a Euro-American experience of industrial growth and capitalist

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500 Ibid.: 124.

501 The discovery of the islands of Kiribati by Europeans in the 17th and 18th century initiated a series of visits by 19th century whalers and traders. Except for a few Protestant and Catholic missionaries, who largely converted to Christianity, the islands attracted little European settlement, due to the poor quality of soil. Kiribati came under British colonial rule in 1892. By 1937 the rest of the islands also came under British control. Cultural differences existed between the islands, including variations in social and political organization and dialect. A national identity emerged only as a result of colonial policies in the decades after WWII. In the 1960s, interest and awareness and national issues developed among the indigenous populations leading to a series of steps which resulted in independence of the Gilbert Islands (now known as the Kiribati) in 1979. For a brief history of Kiribati see Howard Van Trease, “From Colony to Independence,” in *Atoll Politics: The Republic of Kiribati*, ed. Howard Van Trease (Christchurch/Suva: Macmillan Brown Centre/Institute of Pacific Studies, 1993), 3-22.
expansion. The nation has managed to develop a stable economy based on independent subsistence farming, the sale of offshore fishing licenses, seafarers’ remittances, and a trust fund which plays a major role in stabilizing the economy and supplementing income flows. The nation’s trust fund does not operate according to capitalist logics. Initially funded through windfall gain from non-renewal resources (phosphate from 1900-79), it is now used for the fiscal support for the community. The fund administrators (a committee chaired by the Minister of Finance) are charged to act in the best interests of the people, rather than shareholders. The goal of the fund is not to maximize return or even to accumulate ever-expanding levels of wealth, but to serve the collective interest of the nation. All income generated by the fund is reinvested unless the government authorizes a drawdown in order to augment government revenue.

Indicators of poverty and hardship that depend on income generating activity is less than meaningful in a largely subsistence or semi-subsistence environment. What does poverty, measured by income, mean when basic means of livelihood are provided for without money? More relevant indicators of well-being are life expectancy, access to health, and mortality (or death) rate. While data that is useable for comparison is not available for all these indicators, the crude death rate, the number of deaths during a year per 1,000 population at midyear, is 7.4 in July 2011 for Kiribati, but 8.4 for the U.S. While the death rate is only a rough

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503 For example, it is difficult to meaningfully interpret the UNDP survey data indicating that on average 18.6 percent of households are without any member with employment.

estimate of mortality, it is widely accepted as an accurate indicator of mortality impact on population growth. 505

Kiribati provides an example of an economy centered on community interests (rather than individual interest), the very thing for which mainstream Christian ethicists advocate, but have been unable to imagine.

The Latrobe Valley Community Partnering Project

Like towns across the U.S., including Detroit, MI, the Latrobe area in Australia, a region two hours east of Melbourne, was once a bustling industrial town. 506 It has served the electricity needs of the State of Victoria since the 1920s and developed ancillary manufacturing and services industries until the 1970s. But in the 1980s, the decision to privatize the State Electricity Commission of Victoria (SEC) led to a cascading effect of downsizing, deindustrialization, population loss, unemployment, and despair. Having witnessed the effects of the neoliberal agenda, Jenny Cameron and Katherine Gibson understood that orthodox approaches to


506 The Latrobe Valley is located about 150 kilometers east of Melbourne in the southeastern state of Victoria, Australia. Victoria’s electricity system has been based for decades on the extensive brown coal deposits of the Latrobe Valley, one of the richest coal deposits in the world. The SEC, formed in 1919, first transmitted electricity made with brown coal to Melbourne in 1924 and soon became the main power supplier in the state. Between 1918 and 1939, English immigrants moved to Victoria’s factory towns which manufactured a wide range of products (made possible by electricity produced with brown coal) including motor vehicles, farm machinery, explosives, and ammunition. The Latrobe Valley and its chain of factory towns became the pride of Victoria. At first, “even the chimney smoke which cloaked the valley on windless days was seen as a kind of triumphant white banner,” Geoffrey Blainey, A History of Victoria (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). Blainey, A History of Victoria, 223. But the towns of the Latrobe Valley, under the restructuring of privatization of the 1980s funneled wealth away from local communities, became one of the most deprived and disadvantaged areas in the state.

community and economic development, which focuses on attracting firms that promise employment, could not work. Instead, they developed an “action research intervention,” the Latrobe Valley Community Partnering Project.\(^{507}\)

Over a two year period, they developed four different community initiatives: the Latrobe Valley Community Environmental Gardens, Santa’s Workshop, the Latrobe Valley Community Partnering Project, and the Latrobe Valley Community Partnering Project.\(^ {508}\) These initiatives were developed with members of the Latrobe Valley community in discussions about four challenges to common representations of community development. These “key ideas” are:

1. Identify and build on assets already in place
2. Diverse economic practices, guided by non-capitalist values and dynamics, support and sustain the economic world
3. Community brings into being new and yet unknown identities, generated by difference and diverse of life experiences, not common identities, interests or locales
4. “People with different knowledges and forms of expertise can jointly research and develop strategies for producing change in the world”\(^ {509}\)

Each initiative fared differently, but each represented non-capitalist economic activity that could become full-fledged enterprises. Moreover, the project overall “revealed the richness and depth of skills and capacities . . . of those who had been marginalized by the SEC’s restructuring.”\(^ {510}\)

Development that focuses on business growth and job creation through offering concessions and tax breaks has often hurt the long-term well being of communities. The asset-based community development and action research experiment in the Latrobe Valley Community Partnering Project destabilizes that unitary paradigm and demonstrates the


\(^{508}\) Ibid.: 282.

\(^{509}\) Ibid.: 275-77.

\(^{510}\) Ibid.: 283.
potential of economic development on different terms. By foregrounding communities of differences, and through collaboration between professionals and those that have been marginalized, it produced rich tangible outcomes that surpass the scope of formal economic development. And it provides Christian social ethics with noncapitalist model for community/economic development.

**Rethinking the Mondragon Story**

Such economic innovations are not limited to the Pacific. The Mondragon cooperative of the Basque region of Spain contradicts Stackhouse’s insistence that the ability of capitalist-style corporations in handling the complexities of production and distribution on a massive scale is inimitable. At the end of 2010, Mondragon had over 85,000 employees (88 percent of which are partners in the cooperative), 13.8 million Euros in total sales, and 33 million Euros in assets. The cooperative continues to expand its presence in international markets, with 13.3 percent increase in 2010 over the previous year in international sales and 77 overseas.

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511 The Basque country (Euskadi or Euskal Herria to the Basque El Pais Vasco to the Spanish) is divided by an international frontier; four of its seven provinices are in Spain, three in France. The Basque themselves preceded the formation of both the Spanish and French nation-states. The modern Basques Country, a region of some 20,000 square miles, lies at the western slope of the Pyrenees mountain range facing the Bay of Biscay. The Basque region has been the site against internal colonialism for centuries, though this conflict has gained resurgence within the last century with the strong ethnic/nationalist movements among the Basque. Indeed, the 25 workers who gathered together in the province of Gipuzkoa in the town of Mondragon and established in 1956 the firm that would become the complex of cooperatives companies known as Mondragon were motivated by desires to generate employment and income in the region but also by an interest to putting Catholic Social teaching into practice. For an analysis of the colonial conflict between Spanish and Basque see Fernando Molina, “The Historical Dynamics of Ethnic Conflicts: Confrontational Nationalisms, Democracy and the Basques in Contemporary Spain,” *Nations & Nationalism* 16, no. 2 (2010). On the background to the Mondragon experienced with special attention to its philosophical/religious roots, see Fred Freundlich, Herv Grellier, and Rafael Altuna, "Mondragon: Notes on History, Scope and Structure," *International Journal of Technology Management & Sustainable Development* 8, no. 1 (2009).

512 Gibson-Graham, "Enabling Ethical Economies."

production plants, in countries such as Brazil, China, Russia, and India. No other Spanish industrial company has managed to achieve Mondragon’s size, financial diversification, or international scope.\textsuperscript{514}

Rather than the self-interested pursuit of profits that mainstream ethicists scorn, Mondragon’s activities are guided by the principles of democratic organization. All owner-workers are equal members of the cooperative. The sovereignty of the workers, the subordination of capital to people, pay solidarity, and social transformation (the goal of creating a more just and free Basque society).\textsuperscript{515} When the cooperatives were first set-up, they sought to produce domestic appliances not already found in the region out of a commitment to an ethic of regional business solidarity.\textsuperscript{516} Since then, Mondragon has expanded its manufacturing in ways that have strengthened the regional economy. More recently it has moved into retail and service industries out of a desire to increase employment. In terms of pay, wages are determined through a democratic process, according to the principles of “equilibrio and solidarity.”\textsuperscript{517} Wages are pegged to that comparable to workers in neighboring industries to guard against the creation of a new wealthy social class. Differences in wages within any cooperative are set at a fixed ratio, most recently 1:6, between the lowest and highest paid worker. Profits are distributed into owner-worker saving accounts, “apportioned according to number of hours worked and salary grade.”\textsuperscript{518} Individuals have a right to draw on the interest

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{514} Mauro F. Guillén, The Limits of Convergence : Globalization and Organizational Change in Argentina, South Korea, and Spain (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 90.

\textsuperscript{515} Gibson-Graham, "Enabling Ethical Economies," 139-41.

\textsuperscript{516} Ibid.: 141.

\textsuperscript{517} Ibid.: 143.

\textsuperscript{518} Morrison, R. We Build the Road As We Travel, 1991, 50, cited in Ibid.: 144.
\end{footnotesize}
accumulated or to use their accounts as collateral for personal loans, “but the principle cannot
normally be touched until they resign or retire." Management of operations represents one of
the clearest advantages over capitalist corporations. The cooperatives are “not burdened by
layers of supervisors and managers who act as enforcers” and must be paid out of surplus. Instead, each cooperative elects general members to four year terms on a council that oversees
the day to day operations. The governing council meets before the beginning of the working day
and then resumes their specific jobs at the conclusion of the meeting.

The choices of production, the process of setting wages, the handling of profits, and the
terms and conditions of management all reveal a strong commit to an ethics of *equilibrio* and
*solidarity* and a respect for the individual and collective rights of owner-workers. It is not
surprising that Mondragon has been the focus of so much study from groups around the world
who are interested in efficient business practices that emphasize cooperative and community
values. Mondragon cooperative serves as a model for how to organize economic activity
ethically that centers on community-interests and is free from exploitative labor processes.

All of these examples represent diverse economies that are not dependent on the
engine of global capitalism. They are community economies that are currently in place,
operating according to values and policies that do not correspond to capitalist logic.
Commentators have often framed these alternative spaces as ultimately beholden to or
dominated by capitalist forces. Positioned as “alternatives” to capitalism, they cannot help but

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519 Matthews “the Mondragon Cooperative Corporation: A Case Study,” a paper presented at the
International Communications for Management Conference on Executive Remuneration, Sydney, April,


521 Race Mathews, *Jobs of Our Own: Building a Stake-Holder Society : Alternatives to the Market
and the State* (Sydney: Pluto Press, 1999), 199.

disappoint.\textsuperscript{523} The solution, as noted above, is to reform the story outside of a capitalocentric framing.\textsuperscript{524} Read instead as “local practices of economic experimentation” they open up the space for reimagining the political economy. It cannot be said, in the face of these community economies, that capitalism is the only alternative, and thus the ethical one.

The goal of non-reductive political economics is not to force all economies to fit one model, but to insist that there are many local non-capitalist models through which to bring about human flourishing. In building sustainable, equitable political economies there are no fixed paths to follow, there are no off-the-shelf solutions.\textsuperscript{525} The process of combining Christian ethics with communal values will begin to create pathways to just and sustainable economic communities. Through this process, the decolonizing of the moral imagination is made into concrete, actually existing practices and institutions.

\textbf{Conclusion}

Mainstream Christian social ethics builds upon the framework of neoclassical economic consensus. Because of this framing, alternatives to “enlightened” capitalism are dismissed as utopian nonsense: capitalism is the only possible (and conveniently most moral) configuration of the political economy. Rather than examine the reasons for this commitment to such a narrow conception of economics, mainstream Christian social ethicists take it for granted that it represents the best of economic thinking, perhaps because it is the most prevalent.

\textsuperscript{523} Ibid.: 125. Obviously, Kiribati’s economy is not viable outside of its extensive interactions with the global capitalist economy through trade, finance, tourism, and employment. Nevertheless, Kiribati still functions as a way of expanding the moral imagination of what is feasible.

\textsuperscript{524} Gibson-Graham, \textit{The End of Capitalism}, 40-41.

\textsuperscript{525} Gibson-Graham, "Enabling Ethical Economies," 128.
Finn cites Roger Hutchinson on this topic, who warns against insisting on a “framework for discussion’ which itself ‘predetermines the outcome of the debate,’” but ironically succumbs to this very error by failing to critically examine the neoclassical framework in his own work.⁵²⁷

Christian ethicists might be forgiven for advocating reformed capitalism given that their research question is about the big picture. What’s the political economic system most in line with Christian values in every situation, for the whole world? One of the insights of this project is the recognition that this is the wrong sort of question. There is no one-size-fits-all form of political economy, or rather there does not have to be. What constitutes a moral political economy may have to be determined on a local and regional level, in conversation with community interests and values.

Economic monism is evidence of the colonization of hegemonic conceptions in the economic terrain.⁵²⁸ The challenge to Christian ethicists is to read the economic landscape of economic difference, “populated by various capitalist and non-capitalist institutions and practice.”⁵²⁹ The goal is a counter-hegemonic theorizing that eschews the view of the political economy as essentially, unavoidably, capitalist.⁵³⁰

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⁵²⁶ Neoclassical economics is the predominant economic theory in the U.S. and around the world. It is not surprising then, perhaps, when mainstream Christian social ethicists theorize the political economy they draw on the most prevalent economic theory.


⁵²⁹ Gibson-Graham, A Postcapitalist Politics, 54.

This restructuring of the Christian political economic imagination is a difficult task, for it means contending not only with colonized imaginations, but naturalized conceptions of the economy and long held beliefs about politics.\(^{531}\) What is needed is a *non-reductive principle of social change*, which recognizes that the unfeasibility of immediately implementing certain policy regimes does not constitute a sufficient warrant to dismiss these policy initiatives.\(^{532}\)

Certainly the kinds of policy changes necessary to create a more just and sustainable world require a deeper level of international cooperation and solidarity than is currently available. But it does not follow that the world then should sit on its hands. The politics of today must build cooperation and solidarity to ensure the possibility of implementing these policies tomorrow.

The non-reductive principle of social change counteracts the passivity and immobility resulting from the portrayal of class oppression and capitalism as an all-encompassing phenomenon that cannot be challenged except by a unified global political movement, a movement that is unlikely to ever materialize.\(^{533}\)

Thus, the non-reductive principle of social change accomplishes several feats: 1) it provides a way out of the dilemma proposed by Gibson-Graham and the reform-revolution

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\(^{532}\) This principle is derived from DeMartino’s articulation of what might be call the non-essentialist view of social change. This principle has a profound significance for social ethics concerning the perennial reform vs. revolution debate. The non-essentialist view of social change challenges the logical fallacy of those committed to a revolutionist political agenda that reject any reforms as capitulations to the capitalist system. For example, DeMartino refers to the leftist James O’Conner, a critic of the environmental reform movement who argues that anything short of a complete overthrow of capitalism only deepens the social crisis. A non-essentialist view of social change challenges the reform-revolution dichotomy, since there is no basis for privileging any one kind of politics and therefore no grounds for rejecting any sort of politics as “epiphenomenal, false, or merely ameliorative—in a word, as reformative” (DeMartino, *Global Economy, Global Justice*, 239).

In his dissertation, Ivan Petrella argued for a parallel approach, calling for gradual road to democratization that would ultimately yield greater Access to political and economic opportunity. See Fernando Ivan Petrella, “Liberation, Democracy and Capitalism: A Study of the Role of Historical Projects in Latin American Liberation Theology” (Harvard University, 2002).

\(^{533}\) DeMartino, *Global Economy, Global Justice*, 240.
dichotomy by producing a form of politics better suited to the overdetermined character of human beings and social structures; 2) responds to liberationists and radical social ethicists that reject out of hand “cosmetic” reforms, citing their inadequacy in bringing about revolutionary changes to our current institutions and global structures; 3) frees the Christian moral imagination to undertake the task of elaborating a moral vision that encourages piecemeal policy initiatives while still holding out for more comprehensive social transformation, without being constrained by the artificial intellectual constrains that are implicit within neoclassical thought.  

Heterodox approaches sensitive to postmodern and postcolonial theoretical developments are more than just new configurations of the neoclassical model. In a sense, they represent a fundamental challenge to orthodox economic thinking. Heterodox economics is not generally interested in making the argument that it better represents the economy “out there.” Rather, it relinquishes the “‘mirror of nature’ view of knowledge” and emphasize the “constitutive, as against the representational, view of economic thinking.” That is, each theory of economics creates what economics is and does through producing a specific discourse. One particular approach to economics no more mirrors the “real economy” than any of the other existing theories with the discipline.

The implications for social ethics are enormous. It opens up an ethical space for social ethicists to create new points of encounter across the disciplinary landscape of economics. One

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534 Ibid.

535 “Postmodern” economics, Ruccio and Amariglio insist, is not a separate economic theory. Instead modern and postmodern approaches cut across each school of thought. Figure 8.1 “Modernism and Postmodernism in Economics” illustrates this nicely (Ruccio and Amariglio, Postmodern Moments in Modern Economics, 294).

536 Ibid.
discourses of the economic world cannot be demonstrated as more objective than another.\footnote{This formulation follows MacIntyre’s account of intellectual history as a narrative history. See Alasdair C. MacIntyre, After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory, 2007, 3rd ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987); and Alasdair C. MacIntyre, Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues (Chicago, IL: Open Court, 1999).}

Since there is no objective standpoint from which to evaluate, the social ethicist is free to chose the school of economics that best helps him or her to articulate a vision of economics and economic relationships that best corresponds to Christian moral theory rather the constraints and requirements of capitalism.

The next and final chapter identifies some themes and concerns about which the conversation among social ethicists can usefully center.
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS, CONTRIBUTIONS, AND PROSPECTS

The Argument Revisited

The Problem: Modern/Colonial Limits of the Christian Moral Imagination

The moral visions of mainstream Christian social ethicists fall within a narrow spectrum of political economic possibilities. Conditioned by their subject position within modernity/colonialism and committed to a neoclassical understanding of the political economy, they have largely failed to account for the multiple forms of oppression that form part and parcel of the capitalist political economy. While they write against neoliberalism—understood as an extreme ideological position which advocates for unrestricted free markets, the maximization of individual freedom, and unapologetic pursuit of self-interest—they argue that reformed capitalism can serve as the basis for a moral political economy, ignoring its exploitative, neocolonial arrangements. The form of Christian social ethics which reifies capitalism as the only viable form of the political economy is a Christian social ethics that deals death to millions of people. A political economy ethics in the trajectory of Jesus’ consistent life ethic would focus on life. But, as many social ethicists have recognized, instead of promoting life, capitalism focuses on industrialization, development (narrowly conceived), and growth.

Mainstream Christian social ethics takes the orthodox, neoclassical approach as the only relevant way to conceive of the political economy, enervating the ability to imagine an economic

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538 In the gospels, Jesus never confronts people for wrong doctrine; but he often confronts them for the actions that marginalize and exclude people from communal life and thus bring social and literal death to people.
order that is intended to reduce the exploitation of one group over the other. Even when heterodox approaches are acknowledged (Finn), they are dismissed as secondary or tangential, unworthy of consideration. Instead of undertaking an analysis of the exploitative and oppressive practices that may flourish under capitalism, these social ethicists write about the “moral ecology” of markets (Finn), the spirituality of corporations (Stackhouse), or power of democratic processes to curb economic injustices (Wogaman). They claim that attacks against MNCs, market mechanisms, and the state are unwarranted, since all three have produced enormous benefits to humanity. Analysis of mainstream Christian social ethics of the political economy reveals colonized moral visions and a short-circuiting of moral imagination, whereby the conditions that frame the discussion impede the possibility for the construction of solutions to political economic problems outside of a moderated version of the existing state of affairs.

The Solution: Embracing Latina/o Thinking and Economic Heterodoxy

Part of the solution is to embrace Latina/o thinking. Latina/o thinking is not a nativist project, which rejects modernity, attempts to expel the colonizing other, and castoffs all things Euro-American because of their geographical origin. Latina/o’s existential reality suggests the method of Latina/o thinking: a people who embody the oppressor and the oppressed, the colonizer and the colonized. Thus, Latina/o thinking points to something much more difficult than a nativist project: a retrieval of the best of all traditions. The goal of this retrieval is not to create some sort of conglomerated ethnicity/culture/race, an artificial social location from which to theorize. Rather, it is a cross-border, trans-cultural, cross-social location that recognizes the horrors and atrocities of the past and insists on keeping exploitation before the mind’s eye both as a warning of what may happen if the least of these are forgotten and as a
guide for constructive theorizing. Latina/o thinking is a subversive epistemology that rejects entanglements with modern/colonial logics, such as patriarchy, anthropocentrism, and heterosexuality. It constitutes a border-crossing, transmodern, queering gnosis that explodes categories, invalidates binaries, and disrupts stability of the Christian moral imagination. It offers tools to question, rethink, and reconceptualize established ethical paradigms and point towards the development of a decolonized Christian political economic ethic.

This leads directly to the embrace of the rich variety of heterodox economic views. Heterodox economics offers a multi-dimensional challenge to neoclassic economics’ claim to value-neutrality, theorizes economics itself through non-reductive and non-essencialist paradigms that better accounts for the complexity of the human person, and offers guidance for how to envision an egalitarian, just political economy. Envisioning a pragmatic and workable solution that is substantively different than the status quo is an important part of moving ethical analysis to a new level since, ironically, social ethicists, who have in a sense no problem in articulating dreamy eyed visions of an eschatological future, tend to reject as “impractical” or “unworkable” any solution that does not involved markets and corporations as the primary mechanisms of distribution and production. They have in a sense given up on the possibility of an egalitarian and just future for the politics of the possible. But the worst of it is that the “possible” constitutes an enormously narrow range: one that takes as self-evident the supremacy of capitalist structures and institutions. In order to construct decolonized moral visions, Christian social ethics must embrace, along with Latina/o thinking, heterodox economic thought. Latina/o thinking combined with theoretical suggestions and practical examples of economic heterodoxy, disrupt and destabilize the modern/colonial imaginary. Together they offer a more supple and flexible framework for constructing a Christian political economic
ethics, one that is responsive to plight of those most vulnerable in the face of the systems of
domination and oppression of modern/colonial complex.

Contributions of the Project

To Christian Social Ethicists

The project’s overall contribution to Christian social ethics is to call for decolonization of
the way that ethics is done in terms of the political economy. The proposals in this dissertation
suggest new possibilities that expand the options to engage political economic ethics, proposals
that respond to and differ from the mainstream perspective. These proposals should free and
empower other theorists to pursue their own projects, in political economy or otherwise, in an
enhanced way. Within this broad contribution, this dissertation offers three specific
contributions. First, the dissertation emphasizes the need for an examination of the underlying
normative principles in neoclassical thought as part of Christian ethical analysis. As observed
in chapter four, neoclassical economics is grounded in normative principles that Christian
ethicists would find objectionable if these underlying normative principles were made explicit.

Christian political economic ethics that continues to take for granted the viability of neoclassical

539 It is fairly common for Christian ethicists and theologians to criticize capitalism for its
encouragement of greed, its damage to the environment, and its basis on human self-centeredness.
These critiques are not the sort of deep analysis of neoclassical theory’s normative basis for which this
project calls.

540 Finn is aware of the underlying normative commitment driving neoclassical economic
thought. He makes the case that the efforts of some well-known economics already employ some form of
moral commitment to sustain their arguments about the inevitability of markets. However, he mentions
this and then quickly moves on as if it had no bearing on his analysis. See Finn, The Moral Ecology. In
contrast, heterodox economics undertake a thoroughgoing analysis of neoclassical theory’s normative
basis. Feminist economists in particular have developed numerous critical assessments of neoclassical
theory’s normative assumptions. For one example see Francine D. Blau and Marianne A. Ferber, The
articulation of this type of analysis see “Value neutrality and welfarism,” in DeMartino, Global Economy,
Global Justice, 77-82.
economics as a basis for moral visions of the political economy builds on a framework incongruent with Christian concerns. The neoclassical approach is based on simplistic assumptions about human beings as self-interested, utility maximizing, self-actualized, rational individuals. Ethically significant categories of difference, such as race/ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and (dis)ability, are irrelevant in neoclassical theorizing and thus it is inadequate as the basis for Christian social ethics. A decolonized moral vision of the political economy recognizes these ethically significant categories and identifies human beings as epistemologically limited individuals-in-community, who base their decision making both on their own subjective perceptions of their goals; the social, psychological, and physical constraints they face; and their commitments and internal turmoil.

A second contribution to social ethics lies in the deployment of postcolonial hermeneutics and tools as a method for articulating Christian social ethics. Religious scholars, such as Richard King and David Chidester, and biblical scholars such as Musa Dube, Fernando Segovia, and R. S. Sugirtharajah, have successfully deployed the insights of postcolonial theory and criticism to the fundamental questions within their field of study. In contrast, Christian social ethicists, with a few exceptions, have paid scant attention to postcolonial studies. As Kwok Pui Lan remarks, “this oversight is unwarranted, given the lengthy history of [Christian] theology’s relation with empire building, especially in the modern period.” Within the context of the ascendancy of U.S. imperialism, failing to attend to the collusion with colonialism in


ethical frameworks amounts to complicity with empire. Christian social ethicists should be concerned that if they continue along the lines of homogenizing colonial tendency, they increase the danger of becoming irrelevant to shaping a multicultural, multiracial, and polyphonic society. To the extent that social ethicists desire their discourses be more than academic production, that they play a part in shaping society and influencing social change, then they must do better than continue to perpetuate monocultural monstrosities on multicultural societies.\textsuperscript{543}

The third and related particularized contribution is a more careful analysis of political economy than is generally found within the liberationist strand of Christian social ethics.\textsuperscript{544} Many liberationists have utilized the term political economy, and its cognate terms such as late capitalism, global capital, or globalization, without any precision whatsoever.\textsuperscript{545} They engage in prophetic denunciation of capitalism without a serious analysis of the normative basis of capitalist political economy or attention to non-capitalist forms of economic activity. This dissertation addresses head on the issue that haunts U.S. liberationist projects, which attempt to address oppression in various manifestations, but seldom address the configuration of the


\textsuperscript{544} As Gary Dorien has argued in Social Ethics in the Making, the three broad movements in the development of social ethics have been the social gospel, Christian realism, and liberationist disruptions. The liberationist paradigm takes on the perspective of excluded and marginalized people. Unlike the two other major paradigms which attempt to make theology credible and socially relevant to the urban, educated, upwardly mobile middle class that takes a certain form of Protestant liberalism for granted, liberation theologies have been devoted to giving voice to the voiceless and liberating people from oppression and dependency. Dorrien, Social Ethics in the Making: Interpreting an American Tradition, 390.

\textsuperscript{545} If mainstream social ethics affirm the current configuration of the political economy as generally good, then liberationists take it for granted that the political economy is oppressive. Yet in general neither group demonstrates familiarity with the discourse of economics beyond neoclassical frameworks.
totalizing complex which forms the context of these oppression. Thus, it offers a modest theoretical advancement to the on-going liberationist project by correcting the vagueness about the term “political economy” that plagues U.S. liberation theologies.

**To Latina/o Religious Cultural Studies**

The dissertation’s overall contribution to Latina/o religious cultural studies is the application of Latina/o thinking, which points to the work of U.S. Latina/os, Chicanas, and Latin America’s religious scholars and theologians, in decolonizing moral visions. It is the first major research project that attempts to articulate a Latina/o liberation ethics of the political economy. This general contribution can be particularized in two ways. First, the project moves beyond identity politics by applying the insights of Latina/o thinking to political economic ethics. Latina/o thinking does more than just rethink categories of identity and politics; it shifts the locus of theorizing political economic ethics. Generations of Latina/o scholars have now attempted to articulate a critical religious theory and theology which reflected their social location and the experiences of racial/ethnic prejudice and cultural imperialism. However, as has been noted by Miguel De La Torre, Gastón Espinosa, and Benjamin Valentín, among others,

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547 Some might object that because they are not of a Latina/o background, then Latina/o thinking has no relevancy for them. This view is somewhat misguided: embracing the border gnosis represented by Latina/o thinking offers a method of navigating the waters of cultural criticism without negating any particular tradition. Latina/o thinking is possible for those who are not Latina/o because knowledge can be expanded to include areas that are not obviously connected to one’s social location by consciously inviting conversation partners who have a different social location into one’s process of knowing. Moreover, as chapter three notes, Latina/o thinking constitutes merely one particular instance of an entire class of double critiques, in which African theorists and Indian Subcontinent thinkers, among many others, are engaged. The signifier is less important than what it signifies.
these theories and theologies have for far too long been stuck in identity politics.548 This project moves beyond questions of identity, self-determination, and minority rights by addressing the questions of the political economy.549 Latina/o thinking creates the possibility of a general social theory and critique, not just a theory of a social minority. It moves beyond deconstruction of identities and dominant epistemologies to a critique of the political economic conditions which make imperialist and dominating epistemologies possible.550 Latina/o thinking ties the critical theory of Latina/o religious scholars to articulate an ethical standpoint that can guide Christian social ethics.551

A second contribution lies in pointing to non-capitalist theoretical tools for use in Latina/o religious cultural scholarship. U.S. Latina/o religious scholars and theologians have generally shied away from analyzing the inner-workings of the economy partly because wariness


549 The concern for political economics has deep historical roots in the Latin American liberationist tradition. From its inception, Latin American liberation theologies has been concerned with the political economy. Gutiérrez uses the term “liberation” to express the process of radical change—personal and social, internal, and external—and the break with political economic status quo that for him is necessary for “the creation of a new humankind and a qualitatively different society.” Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988 [1973]), 25. This project continues this legacy expanding Gutiérrez’s strong critique of a political-economy that “keeps people from self-fulfillment” (Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 18).


551 An alternative to embracing Latina/o thinking’s simultaneous multiple perspectives and straddling of cultures, languages, and knowledges is entrenchment with mono-culturalism, ethnocentrism, and homogeneity. As discussed in chapter three, at least one scholar of note has advocated for such a move: Samuel Huntington has proposed the creation of a near-apartheid society with white minority leaders who exclude a non-white majority from access to resources, power structures, and decision-making. See Huntington, *Who Are We?: The Challenges to America’s National Identity*. This type of racist, xenophobic response amounts to at best sticking one’s head in the sand and at worst an all-out declaration of Euro-American’s genocidal intentions against those who embody any form of difference.
of Marx. This eschewing of Marxism has little or nothing to do with the merits of Marxist analysis; rather, it is rooted in a complex set of socio-political factors. In that sense, Latina/o...

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552 Chief among these factors are: 1) the Roman Catholic Church’s condemnation; 2) the (justified) demonizing of regimes in their countries of origin; and 3) the wider anti-Marxist attitude in the U.S. There has been a long history of conflict between Catholic beliefs and organizations and Marxist theories and movements based on what has been perceived on both sides as an essential incompatibility between religion and Marxism. Otto Maduro, “Christian Faith and Socialism: A Latin American Perspective,” in Struggles for Solidarity: Liberation Theologies in Tension, ed. Lorine M. Getz and Ruy O. Costa (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992). In the 1937 papal encyclical Divini Redemptoris, Pius XI declared Marxism (chiefly manifested in Bolshevism) antithetical to Christianity, though this condemnation of Marxism did not constitute official approval of neoliberalism and capitalist practices. In Centesimus Annus, John Paul II clearly criticizes capitalism. However, elimination of one extreme position centralizes all positions on the other end of the spectrum. In this case, purging the most radical critique of capitalism centralized the neoliberal position.

In the 1970s and 80s, the Vatican vociferously criticized various incarnations of Latin American liberation theology for its Marxist content and vilified its proponents. At the Conference of Bishops at Puebla, Mexico (January 1979), Pope John Paul II warned that those “who sup with Marxism should use a long spoon.” The Vatican’s Congregational for the Doctrine of the Faith, under then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI), issued “Instruction on Certain Aspects of the Theology of Liberation” (Libertatis Nuntius, 1984) specifically condemning the Marxist strain within liberation theology and noting that it “constitutes a fundamental threat to the faith of the Church.” See Ratzinger, Joseph Cardinal, “Liberation Theology” (preliminary notes to 1984 Instruction). Available on-line http://www.christendom-awake.org/pages/ratzinger/liberationtheol.htm (accessed February 21, 2011). The major concerns of Libertatis Nuntius are tendencies towards reductionism in liberation theology, that is, reducing human liberation to what happens in this world, reducing the notion of sin to social sin, reducing the Kingdom of God to political changes and human timelines, and especially reducing Christian theology to social ideology.

The Church has also silenced and/or condemned the writings of some of the most prominent and articulate proponents of liberation theology, including former Franciscan priest Leonardo Boff of Brazil, and more recently (in March 2007) the outspoken advocate of the poor in El Salvador, Jesuit Jon Sobrino. These sharp criticisms of Marxism and actions against those members of the Church who utilized Marxist analysis gave their U.S. counterparts pause. U.S. Latino/a theologians, most of whom are Catholic, fearing retribution and chastisement from the Church, have focused their writings on liberation from racism, cultural marginalization, and devaluation of identity rather than addressing the issues of poverty and economic injustice.

A second important factor that accounts for the persistence of a narrowly conceived liberation is the association of Marxism with the often-brutal governments in their homelands. As you know, many Latino/as came to the U.S. fleeing violent Marxist-inspired regimes in countries such as Nicaragua, Guatemala, Honduras, Venezuela, and Cuba. Catholic and Protestant Cuban theologians in particular strongly associate any form of Marxism with Castro-style so-called socialism. The Cuban perspective is significant because a disproportionate number of U.S. Hispanic theologians hail from Cuba. Justo L. González, Ada María Isasi-Díaz, Fernando Segovia, Orlando Espín, Roberto S. Goizueta, and Sixto García, some of the most prominent Latina/o theologians, are all Cuban. As De La Torre notes, in the religious milieu of the exilic Cuban community, anything short of an unequivocal distaste of Castro’s government—equated with Marxism—constitutes treason. De La Torre explores the confluence of religious fever and political conviction in Miami’s exilic Cuban community, which he calls la lucha, in his book De La Torre, La Lucha for Cuba: Religion and Politics on the Streets of Miami.
religious scholars fall prey to the same capitalism or socialism dichotomy exhibited by the mainstream Christian ethicists. While these scholars intuit that there is something wrong with the capitalist system, they also are suspicious of socialism, and are thus unable to theorize alternatives economies. The process of seeing the political economy as something other than capitalist already breaks apart the binary and counters the argument that neoliberalism is here to stay. Heterodox economic theorizing makes clear that there are many other ways of conceiving of the political economy and allows theorists to engage in non-capitalist economic theorizing. The introduction of economic heterodoxy as an alternative way to think about the political economy empowers scholars by providing them with new analytical tools to combat the hegemonic conceptualization of capitalism as co-terminus with the political economy.

The wider anti-Marxism/Communist attitude in the United States also contributes to Hispanic theologians’ weariness of Marxism. Throughout most of the twentieth century the U.S. perceived Marxism, especially its Communist manifestation, as a threat to the established order (often referred to by conservatives as the “American way of life”). The Soviet expansion along with the local Communist victories in China, Korea, the Philippines, and Indochina, created a general wave of anti-Communist hysteria in the United States. In this context, Senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin held hearings to investigate real or suspected communist and supposed subversives in the federal government and military. The liberal Truman administration extended “McCarthysim” through its own persecutions and further intensified the nation’s anti-Communist mood. Hence liberals and conservatives alike jumped on the anti-Communist bandwagon. During the 1950s, the House Committee on Un-American Activities interrogated Americans about their Communist connections. See Zinn, A People’s History, 420-34.. The establishment succeeded in making the general public fearful of Communism. The threat of imprisonment or deportation in this anti-Communist and anti-Marxist culture made it virtually inconceivable for Latino/a theologians to draw on Marx for liberative insights. See Rodolfo J. Hernández-Díaz, “A Recovery of Marxist Analysis for U.S. Latino/a Theology” (paper presented at the American Academy of Religion, Chicago, IL, November 1-3, 2008).

Gibson-Graham’s observation that capitalism is discursively imagined as an undefeatable monster is very much alive in Latina/o religious thought. It may even be more prevalent among their theorizing than in mainstream Christian ethical thought because they see capitalism as the enemy. Whereas mainstream Christian ethicists think they can tame the beast, liberationists think there is no way to defeat the beast.
Prospects: Looking Forward

The reading of mainstream Christian ethics presented in this dissertation suggests some lines of research and theorizing that will further enhance the decolonization of moral visions. Chapter four noted some crucial heterodox concepts that can help Christian social ethicists make the necessary structural adjustments to the economic framework operative in their work. Heterodox theory and the examples of present non-capitalist economic practices can potentially reinvigorate the moral imagination by opening ethical space to theorize the political economy outside the limits of the neoclassic vision. These heterodox ideas formulate at least a starting point for future conversation. The concern of social ethics is now to consider how to incorporate heterodox insights into their own work.

At this point, a social ethicist might object, exclaiming “I am no economist, heterodox or otherwise.” But by tackling the political economy in their work, social ethicists have already engaged in the task of political economics. The question now facing social ethics is whether it will do its economics well or whether it will just take prevalent economic conceptions as given. In one way, social ethics is about drawing on the expertise of various fields around ethical questions. Social ethicists are jacks of all trades: they dabble, explore, and experiment with all of the social sciences and humanities. The call here is for social ethicists to do better in by drawing on the best of economics, the type of economic analysis that begins with the awareness of the exploitative nature of capitalism, its complicity with the modern/colonial complex, the physical, mental, and moral degradation that results from it, and its failure to deliver on its promises of efficiency, equality, and quality of life.\(^{\text{554}}\) The model of economics should also acknowledge that economic ideas are always value-laden and that economic realities are more complex than what

can be captured by reductionist and elegant mathematical models. It is a slam-dunk case: from this point on Christian political economic ethics that does not concern itself with economic heterodoxy is irrelevant. Beyond irrelevancy, this sort of ethics condones the current death-dealing configuration of the political economy.

A second line of research and theory around which Christian political economic ethics should proceed involves analyzing how to avoid the hegemonic suppression of subjugated knowledges. Latina/o thinking suggests one answer: to theorize from multiple places at once. Latina/o thinking always takes place from a subaltern perspective and well as (unavoidably) a perspective from within modernity/coloniality, unlike Mignolo’s “border thinking” which can never be a “form a territorial (e.g., from inside modernity)” perspective. However, Latina/o thinking is, like border thinking, a method for decolonization. As a critical practice, Latina/o thinking takes the deconstruction of the false contemporary consciousness as starting point. The goal is to move towards at least a dual perspective, one of which is a non-hegemonic local or regional history. A catalogue, of sorts, of one’s one local and/or regional history functions as a transforming initiative that just starts the process of decolonization and a historical anchoring of one’s production of knowledge. Engaging in this process of Latina/o thinking may be as straightforward as asking the question: what is the effect of this work on the subaltern, on the oppressed and marginalized of society? If the answer is “this work is concerned with broader issues,” or on the other extreme “much in every way: these changes will trickle-down to those on the margins.” the work has failed to consider the subaltern.

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556 Transforming initiative refers to a practice that breaks the cycles of traditional teachings and moves towards change. See Glen Harold Stassen and David P. Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003).
A third line of research and theorizing around which the conversation among social ethicists can usefully center is the enduring entanglement of history, culture, and political economy. Modernity and the capitalist political economy were born together with the 16th century. Both together led to the genocide of Amerindians, the enslavement of Africans, and annihilation of the culture, difference, and heterogeneity. The birthplace of modernity, along with Eurocentric culture, was 1492, though, as Dussel notes, it gestated in the cities of medieval Europe. The lessons European nobility and clergy had learned in geopolitical control of conquered bodies, from lower aristocracy to free serfs and unfree peasants, yield enormous benefits in the control and domination on a global scale. The European cultural conception of history as a progressive realization of authentic humanity has collaborated with and contributed to violence of modernity/colonialism. Social ethics must contest and repudiate modernity/coloniality’s long-standing history of strategically forgetting violence against non-Europeans or justifying it in the name of civilization and of portraying the perpetrators of violence as innocent and even heroic. There may be a good reason that social ethics is ignorant of historical and cultural matters: this inattention to history and culture is paralleled by neoclassic economics. The static universality and rational-choice individualism of neoclassical economics excluded culture from economic theory. While history and cultural ideas and the analysis of culture have greatly influenced the humanities and other social sciences, neoclassical economics remains impoverished in terms of cultural analysis. It seems that social ethics has unwittingly adopted

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559 For suggestions on how economics can overcome the economic/culture divide and learn from cultural criticism and its methods, see William A. Jackson, *Economics, Culture and Social Theory*, New Horizons in Institutional and Evolutionary Economics (Cheltenham, UK; Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar, 2009).
this economic/historical-cultural divide present in neoclassical economics, impoverishing its own research. In any case, continuing to ask questions about the influence of history and culture and political-economics on one another constitutes a useful area of research.

The final point concerns multi-dimensional analysis and the non-reductive, non-essentialist approach to social ethics. The decolonization of moral visions, as noted in chapter three, cannot be reduced to one dimension of life; it involves thinking broadly about social transformation, including epistemic and hermeneutical hierarchies. As discussed in chapter four, the non-reductive/non-essentialist approach refuses to reduce social interactions to a set of predetermined universal determinants: the social world is a complex interplay of cultural (as noted above), historical, natural, and political-economic factors. This “overdetermined” view of social world rejects linear historical narratives of the social evolution towards some ideal. It is a view consistent with postcolonial hermeneutics and Latina/o thinking. Decolonizing moral visions requires that Christian social ethics must reflect on how to capture this complexity in their own theoretical elaborations of political economy ethics.


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