

*The Teleology of Political Economy and Moral Philosophy in the
Age of the Anglo-American Enlightenment*

*Program in Early American Economy and Society
Markets and Morality Conference, November 7, 2008*

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Reviewing Thomas Cooper's (1759-1839) *Lectures on Political Economy* (1826) in the *North American Review*, J. Porter expressed confidence in the economic ideas and preconceptions associated with the Scottish political economist, Adam Smith (1723-1790). "The natural feelings and dispositions of man, undirected and uncontrolled but by the rules of justice," Porter noted, "obviously tend to the most rapid advancement of his own condition, and to the most rapid advancement also in opulence and improvement, of the whole community to which he belongs."¹ Pace Cooper, Porter concluded his long review with a resounding affirmation of *nature* and the "*vis medicatrix natura*" of the Physiocrats, Adam Smith, and other *laissez faire* advocates. Purposeful interference in the economy only diminished conditions, he argued. *Nature* as expressed through the uncoordinated decisions and *natural* desires of human beings ultimately achieved optimal equilibriums.

Political economists' confidence in *nature* and the *natural* was mirrored in contemporary Anglo-American moral philosophy, perhaps best expressed in the culture of sentiment. Late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Anglo-Americans were obsessed with a sentimental culture and their own deep and empathetic feelings. Exploring the roots of this culture in the *North American Review*, H. Holley likewise turned to *nature* and described these "spontaneous impulses" as *natural*, an unconscious predisposition implanted by God in the breast of man that was critical to the development of human benevolence and sympathetic social bonds.² For Holley, as for Porter, intuitive and unconscious acts ultimately resulted in an unintentional but *natural* equilibrium or harmony, moral and or economic. At first blush, these narratives seem to have little in common beyond the eighteenth century's obsession with *nature* and the *natural*.

¹ J. Porter, Review of Thomas Cooper's *Lectures on Political Economy* (1826), *North American Review* (October 1827), p. 416.

² H. Holley, "On the Pleasure Derived from Witnessing Scenes of Distress," *North American Review*, (November, 1815), pp. 59-67, in Jose R. Torre, ed. *The Enlightenment in America*, Volume 3: Moral Philosophy and Religion, (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2008), pp. 29-34.

The seemingly disparate narratives of markets and morality shared, however, an epistemic base and theory of causation. Both of these narratives understood the human experience as a self-realizing or immanent teleology driving towards a providential and benevolent outcome. Both these narratives derived these characteristics from the same philosophical and psychological developments in the Anglo-American world.

This paper situates eighteenth century Anglo-American political economy and moral philosophy in the debates surrounding nature and the natural, God and the Providential, and human purpose and agency from the thirteenth to the nineteenth centuries. It argues that the teleological elements expressed in these two philosophical systems were part of a series of larger shifts in human psychology and ideas from a medieval neo-Platonic or Hellenic system of thought, to early modern and Reformation-era theological voluntarism, to a neo-Platonic and Aristotelian theory of man and nature forcefully expressed during the Enlightenment. The moral philosophy and political economy of what might be called the *long* eighteenth century (1690s-1820s) clearly expressed a belief in the teleological and “intrinsic tendency in Nature towards progress or an ultimate goal” – most often seen as a function of a benevolent God’s providential design.³ Both of these narratives were part of a long-term transition in which purpose and agency were internalized in human beings, and reseeded in the *logos* and *telos* of nature.

Platonic and Aristotelian conceptions of man, nature, and the cosmos dominated the ideas of medieval thinkers like Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274). Aquinas followed both Plato (429-347 B.C.) and Aristotle (384-322 B.C.) and understood the cosmos as an organism, a living creation of God. In this neo-Hellenic system, the so-called laws of nature were not an external logic

³ Ernst Mayr, “The Idea of Teleology,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 53, No. 1 (Jan. – Mar., 1992), pp. 117-135. Quote on p. 118.

imposed on creation but were immanent in nature and man; God created the universe and he seated within it a logos or reason that united all of creation. Human beings were at the centre of this creation and intuitively understood it through their own reason – part of the system of logic that united all things. The “laws of nature” were thus “external manifestations of an indwelling and immanent reason.”⁴ There was in this logic, as Charles Taylor has argued, a “self-affirming aspect of reason’s hegemony.” Reason was related to more than just the “different goals, appetites and elements in the soul,” Taylor concludes. Reason “related the order of things in the cosmos” to the “right order of the soul” as the “whole is to the part, as englobing to englobed.”⁵

Central to this providential viewpoint was a theory of causation and agency in matter that reflected the theological and cosmological beliefs of both the Greeks and their Scholastic followers. Aristotle had argued that action or development in natural substances and processes (including movement, reproduction, etc) came from the “actualization of a form” – an immanent theory of causation (agency and purpose implanted in matter by God).⁶ Action was thus governed by an “inner principle of change.” Plato on the other hand, saw human purpose as driven by external goals. All substances struggled to fulfil their *forms*; thus the “standard of excellence that drives the striving towards the good is external to the object itself.” Both of these teleological theories of agency were based on “final causes.” In Aristotelian teleology, the goal reached was “useful” to the individual or organism; in the Platonic model, the final cause was a cosmological “best.”⁷ Medieval thinkers borrowed from both these systems. They took from

⁴ Francis Oakley, “Nebuchadnezzar’s Fiery Furnace,” *Omnipotence, Covenant and Order: An Excursion Into the History of Ideas From Abelard to Leibniz*, (Ithaca, 1984), pp. 67-92.

⁵ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 122.

⁶ Margaret J. Osler, “Whose Ends? Teleology in Early Modern Natural Philosophy,” *Osiris*, 2nd Series, Vol. 16, Science in Theistic Contexts: Cognitive Dimensions (2001), pp. 151-168. Quote on p. 152.

⁷ André Ariew, “Platonic and Aristotelian Roots of Teleological Arguments,” In André Ariew, Robert Cummins, and Mark Perlman (eds.) *Functions: New Readings in the Philosophy of Psychology and Biology* (Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 6-7.

Aristotle an “immanent” theory of causation wherein action and or development derived from “an aspect of the nature of the thing that caused it to actualize its form.” The nature of humanity including our ability to think was thus an endowment seated in the “substantial form of man” by God.⁸ At the same time, however, they also adopted a Platonic best ends teleology, wherein human action led to an ultimately providential and harmonious goal.⁹

Changes in this system of thought derived from tensions inherent in the union of Hellenic and Judeo-Christian ideas. Scholastic thinkers took from Aristotle an organic theory of nature and humanity but differed on other significant points. For Aristotle, for example, no creation existed and God played no role in the providential “government” of the world.¹⁰ This sat uneasily within a Judeo-Christian vision of a God that dominated his creations either through his direct will or the wisdom of his design, and in the thirteenth century the neo-Hellenic Judeo-Christian synthesis of a reason-filled world intuitively intelligible to human beings broke down. Historians of ideas have interpreted the causes for this development in a couple of ways. Some have seen it in part as a reaction to the reintroduction of Aristotelian ideas in the Latin translations by thirteenth century Islamic scholars. Following this logic, the reintroduction of Aristotelian ideas revealed the deep fractures inherent in the Hellenic-Judeo-Christian synthesis. As Francis Oakley notes, a similar development took place in Islamic culture, perhaps also as a

⁸ Osler, “Whose Ends? Teleology in Early Modern Natural Philosophy,” pp. 153-154.

⁹ Historians of ideas continue to debate and refine these concepts. André Ariew suggests that a final cause system based on external laws is Platonic. Aristotle, according to Ariew proposed an “immanent” theory of agency in matter. These concepts were not, however, clearly delineated by seventeenth and eighteenth century thinkers who endowed humanity with both an Aristotelian “immanence” and a Platonic “purpose.” Ariew, “Platonic and Aristotelian Roots of Teleological Arguments.” Mayr argues that Aristotle never developed a “cosmic teleology” but was concerned with “ontogeny and adaptation in living organisms.” According to Mayr, the Judeo-Christian God and neo-Platonism imposed a cosmic teleology on Aristotelian nature. Mayr, “The Idea of Teleology,” p. 121. Osler collapses the Platonic theory of teleology into the Aristotelian model. Osler, “Whose Ends? Teleology in Early Modern Natural Philosophy,” p. 152.

¹⁰ Oakley, “Nebuchadnezzar’s Fiery Furnace,” p. 90. M. B. Foster, “The Christian Doctrine of Creation and the Rise of Modern Natural Science,” in Daniel O’Connor and Francis Oakley, eds., *Creation: The Impact of an Idea*, (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1969), p. 36, 42.

reaction to the rise of Aristotelian logic compromising their vision of an all-powerful deity.¹¹ Others have interestingly reversed the causal mechanisms and seen these developments as a function of the rise of royal absolutism.¹² In this vision, the rise of absolutist kings and the corresponding state mechanisms brought about a change in man's perception of God; state power and the absolute monarch thus created the deity upon whose power they came to depend on for their legitimacy. Regardless of the causes, historians of ideas find this sea change expressed in the writings of Robert Kilwardly (d. 1280), the Archbishop of Canterbury, and Etienne Tempier (d. 1279), the Bishop of Paris, who in 1277 rejected Aquinas's neo-Hellenic cosmology and affirmed the dominance of a voluntarist deity whose power could not be compromised. These ideas were further developed in the fourteenth century by William of Ockham (c. 1287-1347), who saw even moral law as absolutely arbitrary and dependent on the whim of God. "[E]vil", wrote Ockham, "is nothing other than the doing of something opposite to that which one is obliged [by God] to do."¹³ Martin Luther (1483-1586), John Calvin (1509-1564) and others, including many New England divines, followed Ockham and expounded variations on these ideas during and after the Reformation.¹⁴ The theological implications of this argument are of course profound. The largely unintended epistemic consequences are no less interesting and perhaps even more important.

The turn from an organic cosmology based on a natural theology and a benevolent and generous deity to a voluntarist and contingent cosmos marked a significant change in the nature

¹¹ Oakley, "Christian Theology and Newtonian Science," in Daniel O'Connor and Francis Oakley, eds., *Creation: The Impact of an Idea*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969) p. 62.

¹² Oakley, "Christian Theology and Newtonian Science," p. 56. Oakley attributes this concept to Edgar Zilsel, "The Genesis of the Concept of Physical Law," *The Philosophical Review*, LI (1942), pp. 245-279. Along these lines see also, Francis Oakley, "Divine Sovereignty, Papal Miracle, Royal Grace," *Omnipotence, Covenant and Order*, pp. 93-118.

¹³ Oakley, "Christian Theology and the Newtonian Science," pp. 62-64.

¹⁴ Henry Guerlac, "Theological Voluntarism and Biological Analogies in Newton's Physical Thought," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 44, No. 2, (Apr.-Jun., 1983), pp. 219-229; p. 227.

of Christianity and western epistemology. The voluntarists' deity was an all-knowing, all-seeing God who imposed his will upon the world rather than seated the logic of the world in his creations. This was an active God that maintained the world, as it were, at each and every point in time. Consequently, it was impossible for human beings to acquire knowledge of the world *a priori*. *A priori* logic rested on a final and immanent theory of causation that threatened to impinge on God's fiat power. It suggested that human beings – and nature – had within them the logic and reason of the universe and could thus discover the world through a series of deductions and by following the “laws of nature” immanent within them.¹⁵ In a voluntarist cosmology the sources of knowledge were external to men; men came to knowledge of the world as a function of observation. In other words, they had to embrace empiricism. Theological voluntarism, M. B. Foster notes, “attributes to God an activity of will not wholly determined by reason.” “Thus,” Edward Davis concludes, “the products of God's creative activity are not necessary, but contingent. Since our minds cannot have demonstrative *a priori* knowledge of a contingent reality, the created world can only be known empirically.”¹⁶ Voluntarist thinkers thus rejected a final causes model of agency immanent in matter for a model in which God acted upon reality at each and every point in time. Final causes immanent in nature threatened to limit God's fiat power; they also implied an absent deity that a number of scientists and philosophers, including Isaac Newton (1643-1727), simply could not live with.

¹⁵ Oakley, “Nebuchadnezzar's Fiery Furnace,” p. 81.

¹⁶ Edward B. Davis, “Christianity and Early Modern Science: The Foster Thesis Revisited,” in David N. Livingstone, D. G. Hart and Mark A. Noll (eds), *Evangelicals and Science in Historical Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 75–99. Davis's essay is a discussion of the “Foster Thesis.” In a series of articles M. B. Foster argued that empiricism was a logical necessity of theological voluntarism. See M. B. Foster, “The Christian Doctrine of Creation and the Rise of Modern Natural Science,” *Mind*, 43 (1934), pp. 446–68 (reprinted in Daniel O'Connor and Francis Oakley, eds., *Creation: The Impact of an Idea*, (New York, 1969), pp. 29-53.; “Christian Theology and Modern Science of Nature,” *Mind*, 44 (1935), pp. 439–66; and 45 (1936), pp. 1–27. Foster as quoted in Davis, “Christianity and Early Modern Science,” p. 79.

The logic of a voluntarist deity and a contingent universe knowable only through received knowledge was at the heart of the early modern epistemic systems of scientists like Isaac Newton and philosophers such as John Locke (1632-1704). Historians of course, often see Newton as the father of a mechanistic universe.¹⁷ We are fond of thinking of the Newtonian universe as a model of the Enlightenment vision of an orderly creation, complete with mathematical formulas. This was the popular eighteenth century reading and or use of Newton. It was also, however, a confusion he sought to clear up in his lifetime. John Toland (1670-1722), for example, used Newton's theories of the universe to promote his radical deist positions. In response Newton inserted passages in subsequent editions of his work to specifically refute Toland.¹⁸ Newton, as historians of ideas have long argued, was a voluntarist for whom the universe existed as a function of God's will.¹⁹ The cosmos and the laws by which it functioned – the very laws Newton discovered – were contingent on God's will – at each and every point in time.

Newton's theological beliefs had profound consequences for his epistemology and scientific ideas. He rejected hypotheses more so on the basis of theological than scientific principles. Nature for Newton was contingent on God's will; therefore our everyday "experience that nature follows a rational course does not allow us to consider that an a priori necessary principle."²⁰ Put another way, in a contingent universe we cannot assume that nature will follow a "rational course." *A priori* hypotheses are thus useless. Newton was also wary of an "absolute mathematical a priori" – or a world that *had* to follow mathematical precision *always*. God

¹⁷ P. M. Heimann notes the prevalence of these ideas in the earlier literature on Newton, the Scientific Revolution, and the Enlightenment. P. M. Heimann, "Voluntarism and Immanence: Conceptions of Nature in Eighteenth Century Thought," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 39, No. 2 (Apr. – Jun., 1978), pp. 271-283. Osler also finds these ideas still have currency. Osler, "Whose Ends? Teleology in Early Modern Natural Philosophy," p. 151.

¹⁸ Guerlac, "Theological Voluntarism and Biological Analogies in Newton's Physical Thought," p. 224.

¹⁹ Guerlac, "Theological Voluntarism and Biological Analogies in Newton's Physical Thought," pp. 226-227. Guerlac provides a useful historiography of Newton's voluntarist theology and voluntarism overall.

²⁰ Louis Dupré, *The Enlightenment and the Intellectual Foundations of Modern Culture*, (Yale, 2004), p. 20.

created mathematical laws through which the universe functioned and he could also break them.²¹ In this he resembled René Descartes (1596-1650) who also argued that math was a function of the will of God and could be altered and transformed by a similar act of his will.²² Newton thus believed in the ordinary and extraordinary providence of God. “Miracles,” he argued, “are so called not because they are the works of God but because they happen seldom and for that reason create wonder.”²³ He could not in any way avow the mechanistic model of the cosmos that we are so fond of attributing to his work. For Newton, mechanism meant that God had no role or purpose in the maintenance of the universe. In other words, God had abandoned the cosmos he created. A God without a purpose was no God at all – a “do-nothing King” as Samuel Clarke (1625-1729) put it to Gottfried Leibniz (1646-1716) in Newton’s defence.²⁴ A mechanistic model of the universe also opened the door to the atheistic argument that the universe had existed forever. Thus Newton imagined an imperfectly created and decaying cosmos in need of periodic reformation – even at the risk of diminishing God’s power. For example, he speculated that the tails of comets were used by God to replenish the universe and thus periodically directly intervene in his creation to rejuvenate it.²⁵ These “small inequalities” Newton’s editor and popularizer, Henry Pemberton, argued, contain “a very strong philosophical argument against the eternity of the world.”²⁶ Leibniz famously scoffed at this idea

²¹ Guerlac, ‘Theological Voluntarism and Biological Analogies in Newton’s Physical Thought’, 219-29.

²² Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 161.

²³ Heimann, “Voluntarism and Immanence: Conceptions of Nature in Eighteenth Century Thought,” p. 274.

²⁴ Oakley, “Nebuchadnezzar’s Fiery Furnace,” p. 92.

²⁵ David Kubrin, “Newton and the Cyclical Cosmos: Providence and the Mechanical Philosophy,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 28, No. 3 (Jul. – Sep., 1967), pp. 325-346.

²⁶ Henry Pemberton, *A View of Sir Isaac Newton’s Philosophy*, (London, 1728), pp. 180-1. As quoted in Kubrin, “Newton and the Cyclical Cosmos: Providence and the Mechanical Philosophy,” p. 329. Kubrin notes that Pemberton edited lines from Edmund Halley’s *Ode to Newton* (which appeared at the start of the first edition of Newton’s *Principia* (1713)) that suggested that the universe was eternal. Kubrin, “Newton and the Cyclical Cosmos: Providence and the Mechanical Philosophy,” p. 327.

by characterising Newton's God as an "incompetent watchmaker" but we cannot.²⁷ Newton's contingent universe was an expression of his voluntarist theology and his deeply seated belief in the need for an active deity.

In terms of causation, these tensions forced no small amount of twisting and turning for Newton. Newton considered final causes in the "natural world to be the result of God's purposes to be imposed on the creation." He could not abide by a theory of final causes "immanent" in the nature of man or matter for fear of usurping God's power. At the same time he was unable to support a purely mechanical theory of causation "that sought to reduce all causality to the contact and impact between particles of matter, that is to efficient causes."²⁸ He thus supported an active God that controlled all agency in matter at each and every point in time. All activity in nature, Samuel Clarke declared in his defence of Newton's position, depended on "an Immaterial Power Perpetually and actually exerting itself every moment in every part of the world."²⁹ For Newton, God governed "all things, not as the soul of the world, but as Lord over all." He created "accurate laws" by which he governed but felt free to vary them and indeed was capable of making "worlds of several sorts in several part of the universe."³⁰

Similar voluntarist ideas are clearly also at the heart of John Locke's epistemology, especially as expressed in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690). We are again fond of imagining Locke as the proto-liberal philosopher that spawned our modern Enlightenment-era world vision. This is not entirely untrue and as numerous historians have found, John Locke's ideas played a formative role in the development of modern political,

²⁷ Oakley, "Nebuchadnezzar's Fiery Furnace," p. 92.

²⁸ Osler, "Whose Ends? Teleology in Early Modern Natural Philosophy," pp. 154-155.

²⁹ Heimann, "Voluntarism and Immanence: Conceptions of Nature in Eighteenth Century Thought," p. 274.

³⁰ Oakley, "Nebuchadnezzar's Fiery Furnace," p. 87.

economic and epistemic theories.³¹ Thanks primarily to John Dunn, however, we now also know that this was not Locke's purpose. In fact, Locke worked against these tendencies. Locke, in Dunn's unforgettable phrasing, "prophylactically" established himself against a social order "attained through institutional design and the causal mechanisms of human belief and human passion."³² In the *Essay* he attempted to establish empiricism as a bulwark against the sort of *a priori* logic that challenged the sovereignty and power of his voluntarist deity. God, according to Locke, had provided all the logic we needed to understand his world through revelation. Men needed not so much to question or interrogate nature as to explore its providence through their senses. Thus for Locke, science was, as Dunn notes, "not so much a form of knowledge ... but, rather, a peculiarly complicated and cunning form of belief – a matter of judgment (or guessing), not of direct vision."³³ Man's role in this world was to decipher and follow his purpose as established by God. To presumptuously substitute human logic and purposes for those provided by the Lord was a grievous error. For Locke, Dunn concludes, "Once we have lost the religious guarantee that reason, 'the candle of the Lord,' shines bright enough for all our purposes, we have no conclusive reason to expect it to shine bright enough for any. And once we can no longer see our purposes *as authoritatively assigned to us from outside our selves*, it becomes very hard to judge just which purposes we have good reason to consider as (or to make) our

³¹ See, for example: Isaac Kramnick, *Republicanism and Bourgeois Radicalism: Political Ideology in Late Eighteenth-Century England and America*, (Ithaca, 1990).

³² John Dunn, "From Applied Theology to Social Analysis: The Break Between John Locke and the Scottish Enlightenment," in Istvan Hont and Michael Ignatieff (eds), *Wealth and Virtue: The Shaping of Political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 119–36. Dunn argues that Locke's ideas represent a self-conscious "refusal of the future as it was to come to be." Furthermore, he concludes that in terms of human happiness, Locke was essentially right. "The development of a purely internal conception of rational agency has left human individuals impressively disenchanted and undeceived. But it has also left them increasingly on their own and devoid of rational direction in social or political action, prisoners of games of self-destruction to which, on these terms, there may well be no rational solutions. It is easier now to see the connections between these menaces. If there is indeed nothing to human existence, individually and socially but opinion, it will certainly be bad news if opinion ever falters." Dunn concludes that the "anguish" Locke protected us from will eventually "be truly ours when we at last learn to feel what now we know" (p. 135).

³³ John Dunn, *Locke*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 82.

own.”³⁴

I have been tracing the transition of human ideas on God, nature and causation from a medieval neo-Platonic or Hellenic epistemic and cosmological system perhaps best expressed by Thomas Aquinas, to a Reformation-era voluntarist ideal found in the work of John Locke and Isaac Newton. As noted, this involved competing and conflicting epistemic and religious systems. Both of these systems were founded on different conceptions of God and the human experience. Aquinas’s benevolent deity seated humanity at the centre of his creation and endowed it with the system of knowledge by which to understand the world and aspire to the Good immanent within them. The deity that corresponded to Newton’s universe and Locke’s epistemology was an all-powerful pseudo-Calvinist God jealous of his fiat power. Newton emphasized the contingency of the universe. Locke created a system of knowledge that undermined human agency and exalted God’s power. The epistemic basis for this world was empiricism, and its causal mechanisms were external; the world worked as a function of various “natural laws” imposed on nature by God. Changes to this system derived from factors internal and external to these arguments and include Newton’s own theory of inertia, and the work of the Cambridge Platonists and their followers, mainly Anthony Ashley Cooper, the third Earl of Shaftesbury (1671-1713).

Newton, Henry Guerlac has argued, carefully avoided publishing anything that might be interpreted as undermining his voluntarist deity. His own notes, however, reveal ambivalence and doubts on the critical questions of human agency. In the draft of a paper written for Samuel

³⁴ J. M. Dunn, “‘Bright Enough for All Our Purposes’, John Locke’s Conception of a Civilized Society,” *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London*, 43:2, Science and Civilization Under William and Mary (July 1989), pp. 133–53

Clarke, Newton toyed with the idea of agency in matter as analogous to agency in human life. The offending lines were crossed out by Newton and only a falsified version made its way into Clarke's long debate with Leibniz.³⁵ Whether he made these changes in the manner of Benjamin Franklin because he was thinking of the public good or his own spirituality is beside the point, because in the long run the implications of his ideas developed their own momentum. Newton's theories contained the seeds, Louis Dupré argues, of their own dissolution. In particular, his theory of inertia was picked up by continental scientists and used as a wedge to split the early modern contingent universe.

Newton's theories of inertia undermined the early modern idea that a constant source of external power was needed to maintain motion and thus the notion of a completely contingent universe. Very briefly, Newton argued that "A body maintains every new state it acquires by its force of inertia." This suggested, of course, that a still body relied upon an external source of power to move it. At the same time, however, inertia implied that a body in motion decreased only as a function of external resistance – *hence no external source of power was needed to maintain motion*. This clearly contradicted the idea "that motion had to be constantly induced by a transcendent source."³⁶ It is not clear that Newton was aware of the implications of his own ideas. Both his theological and epistemic efforts were consistent with the notion that "to conceive of matter as having the capacity for motion as an essential defining quality was a sure path to atheism since it implied a material universe totally self-sufficient, operating without the intercession of a Deity."³⁷

³⁵ Guerlac, "Theological Voluntarism and Biological Analogies in Newton's Physical Thought," p. 229.

³⁶ Dupré, *The Enlightenment and the Intellectual Foundations of Modern Culture*, p. 20. Dupré complicates this narrative substantially giving Newton a larger role in undermining a voluntarist theory of causation than, for example, Guerlac, "Theological Voluntarism and Biological Analogies in Newton's Physical Thought."

³⁷ Guerlac, "Theological Voluntarism and Biological Analogies in Newton's Physical Thought," p. 224.

Newton may have been unaware of the consequences of his theories but eighteenth century scientists understood Newton's ideas in a different theological context and saw clearly the implications of his conclusions. They took from his theory of inertia a theory of matter in motion and turned it into a theory of human agency. Some scientists like the French "Materialists," Julien Offray de La Mettrie (1709-1751) and Denis Diderot (1713-1784), used Newton's opening to imagine a mechanical universe. For Diderot, the cosmos were blind – they had no sense of purpose. At the same time they followed laws that developed spontaneously from chaos. Others developed a progressive narrative. Paul-Henri Dietrich d'Holbach's (1723-1789) *System de la Nature* (1771) imagined a natural teleology where "the emergence of forms of being follows a strict hierarchy from the inert to the intelligent, as if mental life were its anticipated goal."³⁸ Still others like Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon (1707-1788) moved to an organic and teleological vision of nature and humanity. Following this logic, matter contained within it the seeds of its own purpose. God created the universe and was the first and final cause, but all nature contained within it self-realizing principles. The logic of nature (and humanity) was immanent.

Of course, agency in matter had other sources and intellectual pathways. P. M. Heimann has traced these ideas from Leibniz to the deist John Toland, through to Herman Boerhaave (1668-1738), and David Hume (1711-1776), amongst others. He sees the culmination of this tradition in the work and words of Joseph Priestly (1733-1804) and James Hutton (1726-1797). He clearly gives pride of place, however, to Leibniz and his contemporary challenge and opposition to Newton's voluntarist ideas. In his *Specimen Dynamicum* (1695), Heimann notes, Leibniz argued that "force constituted the inmost nature of material substance." Leibniz understood the cosmos from a neo-Hellenic or organic perspective. In his *Monadologie* (1714)

³⁸ Dupré, *The Enlightenment and the Intellectual Foundations of Modern Culture*, p. 33.

he seated purpose within matter in the “metaphysical points” he called “monads.” Monads made up reality and “were not moved by external forces but exclusively by their own internal teleology.”³⁹

Other critics of voluntarism and empiricism approached the problem from moral and aesthetic perspectives. Anthony Ashley Cooper, the third Earl of Shaftesbury, worked within the tradition of the Cambridge Platonists, and created a teleological and immanent theory of morality and social affection. Shaftesbury wrote specifically in opposition to his tutor, John Locke. Locke as described above began with a voluntarist vision of God and extrapolated external systems of knowledge and morality. Shaftesbury condemned both Locke’s empiricism and his voluntarist theology. Following the Cambridge Platonic philosophers, he denied the validity of a “peevish” deity that resembled more “the weak, womanish and impotent part of our nature rather than the generous, manly and divine.”⁴⁰ To love and obey God out of fear, Shaftesbury argued, was insulting to God. Overall, as Charles Taylor notes, Shaftesbury believed that the “highest good doesn’t repose in any arbitrary will but in the nature of the cosmos itself; and our love for it isn’t commanded under threat of punishment, but comes spontaneously from our being.” Our love for the good derived both from the objective reality of a benevolent and beautiful cosmos that defined virtue, as well as “certain inclinations implanted in the subject.” Thus human beings were innately good, and emotions and sentiments were the natural arbiters of good and evil. With these moves, Shaftesbury, Taylor argues, internalized the “teleological ethic of nature” and transformed “an ethic of order, harmony and equilibrium into an ethic of benevolence.”⁴¹

Francis Hutcheson (1694-1746) self-consciously followed Shaftesbury into this cosmologically harmonious subjectivity. Hutcheson understood human development as a

³⁹ Heimann, “Voluntarism and Immanence: Conceptions of Nature in Eighteenth Century Thought,” p. 276.

⁴⁰ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 253

⁴¹ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 255.

function of the natural order and thus similar to the development of plants or the gravitational pull that maintained the universe. “How clearly does the Order of our Nature point us to our true Happiness and Perfection, and lead us as naturally as the several Powers of the Earth, the Sun, and Air, bring Plants to their Growth, and the Perfection of their Kinds?”, Hutcheson asked rhetorically.⁴² The divine creator had not, as the voluntarists maintained, alienated humanity from a harmonious universe. Indeed, human emotions and sentiments, human industry and political economy were all evidence of a wise and benevolent providential order working through humanity. “For the strengthening therefore our motives to *Industry*, we have the strongest attractions of *Blood*, of *Friendship*, of *Gratitude*, and the additional motives of *Honour*, and even *external Interest*,” Hutcheson concluded. “*Self-love* is really as necessary to the *Good* of the *Whole*, as *benevolence*; as that *Attraction* which causes the *Cohesion* of the *Parts*, is as necessary to the *regular State* of the *Whole*, as *Gravitation*.”⁴³

By the beginning of the eighteenth century then, numerous philosophers and scientists had developed a cosmology that challenged the Reformation’s voluntarist deity. As discussed, this involved no less than the re-imagining of God, his creations, and his relationship to them, as well as the nature of society and human relationships within it. A benevolent and affectionate deity usurped an inscrutable and “peevish” God. This had, as we have discussed, a tremendous impact on the nature of knowledge. It also had a tremendous impact on the theory of causation. What was once an external system of moral approbation and causation driven by a voluntarist deity became an internal, teleological, and immanent system of human agency driven by a benevolent God. This affected all aspects of intellectual, spiritual and material life. In this

⁴² Hutcheson; quoted in Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 261.

⁴³ Francis Hutcheson, *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue; In Two Treatises* (1726; New York: Garland, 1971), p. 285.

regard, perhaps no one better represents these changes than Adam Smith, the author of the eighteenth century's seminal texts on moral philosophy and political economy *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) and *The Wealth of Nations* (1776).

Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* represents the culmination of a tradition begun by Shaftesbury and continued by Francis Hutcheson. While there were numerous differences and even conflicts between Smith, Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, they can all be said to have agreed on the basic idea that human emotions were the key to morality and therefore to society. Furthermore, all of these philosophers shared a fundamental teleology in their ideas. For Smith especially, moral and economic harmony and equilibrium derived from human beings acting in a "natural" and or intuitive manner to further their own selfish interests, all the while unintentionally bringing about harmonious and providentially designed "natural" ends. According to this logic, human agency was tied into the *telos* of nature and thus human beings following their *natural* impulses carried out larger goals of which they were unconscious. Put another way, for Smith and others of his generation, sentiments were the efficient teleological causes fulfilling human potentiality and working towards the final and providential cause of harmony and equilibrium. This was, as James E. Alvey and Andre Ariew have argued, a blend of Platonic and Aristotelian notions of teleology.⁴⁴ Aristotelian immanent and natural sources of agency (emotions) acted as efficient causes (complete with their "own" selfish final outcomes), while a Platonic external teleology (a benevolent providential end) acted as the final cause.

In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) Smith argued that human bonds were based on

⁴⁴ James E. Alvey, "The Role of Teleology in Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*: A Belated Comment on Kleer," *History of Economics Review*, Vol 40, (Winter 2004), pp. 137-144; James E. Alvey, *Adam Smith: Optimist or Pessimist? A New Problem Concerning the Teleological Basis of Commercial Society*, (Ashgate: Aldershot, England, 2003); André Ariew, "Platonic and Aristotelian Roots of Teleological Arguments," In André Ariew, Robert Cummins, and Mark Perlman (eds.) *Functions: New Readings in the Philosophy of Psychology and Biology* (Oxford University Press, 2002).

sympathy. For Smith sympathy was a natural and intuitive emotion that provided the source of fellow feeling and thus morality. This was not, however, simply an instant reaction and Smith spent a great deal of time breaking down the process by which men came to empathise with each other and create communities of feeling. According to Smith, sympathy was a natural reaction as the *spectator* changed places *in fancy* with the sufferer.⁴⁵ Part of this process involved what Smith called the “impartial spectator” – the key actor in a reflective moral system that allowed human beings to imagine themselves as others saw them. For Smith the impartial spectator was an internalized and reflective social morality. The complex interplay as various spectators negotiated their behavior, perceiving themselves through the eyes of others, acted as the efficient causes that unconsciously created a benevolent and providential morality:

In order to produce this concord, as nature teaches the spectators to assume the circumstances of the person principally concerned, so she teaches this last in some measure to assume those of the spectators. As they are continually placing themselves in his situation, and thence conceiving emotions similar to what he feels; so he is as constantly placing himself in theirs, and thence conceiving some degree of that coolness about his own fortune, with which he is sensible that they will view it. As they are constantly considering what they themselves would feel, if they actually were the sufferers, so he is as constantly led to imagine in what manner he would be affected if he was only one of the spectators of his own situation. As their sympathy makes them look at it, in some measure, with his eyes, so his sympathy makes him look at it, in some measure, with theirs, especially when in their presence and acting under their observation: and as the reflected passion, which he thus conceives, is much weaker than the original one, it necessarily abates the violence of what he felt before he came into their presence, before he began to recollect in what manner they would be affected by it, and to view his situation in this candid and impartial light.⁴⁶

If the spectator, Smith continued, witnessed the misfortune of a friend, this reflective interplay between the two worked to generate sympathy and alleviate suffering. In this regard, “Society and conversation,” Smith concluded, “therefore, are the most powerful remedies for

⁴⁵ Adam Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, (1759), I.i.1-3.

⁴⁶ Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments* 1.i.37.

restoring the mind to its tranquility, if, at any time, it has unfortunately lost it; as well as the best preservatives of that equal and happy temper, which is so necessary to self-satisfaction and enjoyment.”⁴⁷ The “impartial spectator” was thus key to Smith’s notions of sympathy, morality and the social order. “The impartial spectator,” Charles Griswold concludes, “exemplifies sympathetic understanding at its best, a stance of caring for the other, of caring to understand the truth of the matter, and the reasons for which the people in question have acted as they have. This sympathetic care is at the core of morality and sociability; it holds us mutually responsible to each other, drawing us together in the exercise of responsiveness and perceptive judgment.”⁴⁸ It was also completely involuntary – a function of the natural constitution of man. Human beings, according to Smith, were designed by the deity to reap pleasure from “mutual sympathy.”⁴⁹ They sought out a “concord” of feelings and sentiments. Even the larger moral consensus was in effect unplanned or involuntary. Moral approval or disapproval in Smith’s system was “the unanticipated product of a multiplicity of moral judgments.”⁵⁰ Human feelings were the immanent and unconscious causes that drove humans to a final harmony established by God.

A similar logic drove Smith’s political economy. Smith’s system of human liberty famously argued that human beings left to their own devices and with a modicum of government intervention necessarily drove the economy to its greatest potential. This simple idea was expressed in a number of economic problems but the logic was consistent; human agency and action were *natural* and part of the greater good, and could thus attain *natural* and optimal

⁴⁷ Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments* 1.i.39.

⁴⁸ Charles L. Griswold, Jr. *Adam Smith and the Virtues of Enlightenment*, (Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 144.

⁴⁹ Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, “Of the Pleasure of Mutual Sympathy,” 1.ii.1.

⁵⁰ Ronald Hamowy, *The Scottish Enlightenment and the Theory of Spontaneous Order*, (Carbondale: Southern University Illinois Press, 1987), p. 14.

equilibriums, but not through any foresight. As O. H. Taylor as pointed out, the division of labor so critical to Smith's political economy derived not from design but from the "natural propensity of men to truck and barter"; economic progress was not a function of purposeful policies but the "natural desire of every man to better his own condition"; economic equilibriums – or "natural" price, income, production and consumption levels – derived from the "natural" "gravitation of men, money, and goods to their best markets."⁵¹ Similarly, Richard Kleer finds a strong role for teleology in Smith's theories on the division of labor, capital accumulation, order and government, and "the optimal allocation of capital."⁵²

All of this famously functioned by way of unintentional outcomes. For Smith, the desire that drove accumulation and thus the economic system was ultimately a web of deception. Men were naturally disposed to the trappings of wealth in order to accelerate economic development. "And it is well that nature imposes upon us in this manner," Smith concluded in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*:

It is this deception which rouses and keeps in continual motion the industry of mankind. It is this which first prompted them to cultivate the ground, to build houses, to found cities and commonwealths, and to invent and improve all the sciences and arts, which ennoble and embellish human life; which have entirely changed the whole face of the globe, have turned the rude forests of nature into agreeable and fertile plains, and made the trackless and barren ocean a new fund of subsistence, and the great high road of communication to the different nations of the earth. The earth by these labours of mankind has been obliged to redouble her natural fertility, and to maintain a greater multitude of inhabitants.

There was no place in this optimizing system for purposeful human action. The landlord accumulated wealth "without a thought for the wants of his brethren." Yet the landlord's "luxury and caprice" provided "that share of the necessaries of life, which they

⁵¹ O. H. Taylor, "Economics and the Idea of Jus Naturale," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, Vol. 44, No. 2, (Feb. 1930), pp. 205-241. Quotes on p. 231.

⁵² Kleer, "The Role of Teleology in Adam Smith's Wealth of Nations," *History of Economics Review*, Vol. 31 (Winter 2000), pp. 17-20.

would in vain have expected from his humanity or his justice.” The rich, Smith concluded, “in spite of their natural selfishness and rapacity, though they mean only their own conveniency, though the sole end which they propose from the labours of all the thousands whom they employ, be the gratification of their own vain and insatiable desires, they divide with the poor the produce of all their improvements. They are led by an invisible hand to make nearly the same distribution of the necessaries of life, which would have been made, had the earth been divided into equal portions among all its inhabitants, and thus without intending it, without knowing it, advance the interest of the society, and afford means to the multiplication of the species.”⁵³

Smith thus imagined a world created through providential design that could not be brought into being through purposeful human agency. His attack on mercantilism was precisely an assault on intervention in the marketplace with specific goals in mind. In other words, human agency could only bring about optimal results when it made no such effort. The logic of Smith’s ideas relied on an immanent and teleological theory of causation.⁵⁴ The unconscious sentiments of individuals acting in their own best interests brought about optimal results because they were tied into the *logos* and *telos* of the cosmos, or put another way, were *natural*.

These ideas found friendly soil upon which to prosper in Early Republic America.⁵⁵

⁵³ Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, IV.i.10.

⁵⁴ Kleer, “The role of teleology in Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations*,” pp. 14-29 and Alvey, “The Role of Teleology in Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations*: A Belated Comment on Kleer,” pp. 137-144.

⁵⁵ Jessica Riskin has recently argued that Benjamin Franklin was in this respect a causal agent. Riskin joins a number of earlier historians of science and argues that Franklin’s “electricity” and his science overall were based on an immanent and self-driven teleology. Riskin argues that his ideas had a tremendous effect on French science and contributed to the work of those she refers to as “sentimental empiricists.” Furthermore, she argues that Franklin’s teleology was critical to the Physiocrats and their ideas. Regardless of the flow of these concepts, however, it is clear that these ideas were expressive of larger changes in the psychology of Enlightenment-era Americans. Jessica

Historians have long established that Enlightenment-era Americans read Adam Smith, J Baptiste Say, Destutt de Tracy, the Physiocrats and other *laissez faire* political economists, as well as no small share of sentimental moral philosophers.⁵⁶ Their work was available in numerous private, academic, and circulating libraries.⁵⁷ The French philosophers had their ideas translated, supported and commented upon by no less a cultural trendsetter than Thomas Jefferson.⁵⁸ More important, however, was the widespread absorption of these ideas. For example, at the head of this essay I quoted J. Porter's review of Thomas Cooper's *Lectures*. Cooper's own words self-consciously mirror Adam Smith's ideas.⁵⁹ More thought provoking, however, is Porter's lusty affirmation of the logic of Cooper's argument. The study of political economy, Porter argued, was critical to understanding the "noblest truths in natural theology."

“[The student of political economy] sees the wise and the benevolent designs of Heaven in even the most sordid passions of our nature. The true, the real interests of all nations and all individuals appear to be in perfect unison, and indeed inseparately joined. The enlightened selfishness of a man or of a people, although accompanied by no generous feeling, and even, it may be, prompted by avarice and a spirit of covetousness, and desires that look not kindly on the rights of others is yet made, by the beneficent arrangements of Providence, to administer most effectually to the furtherance of those rights. It subserves the purposes of the most perfect benevolence, the most unqualified generosity to them. It adds immediately to the accumulation of their wealth, and leads, in the plainest manner

Riskin, *Science in the Age of Sensibility: The Sentimental Empiricists of the French Enlightenment*, (University of Chicago Press, 2002), pp. 69-138.

⁵⁶ For example, see: Samuel Fleischacker, “Adam Smith’s Reception among the American Founders,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, Vol. 59, No. 4 (Oct., 2002), pp. 897-924; Cathy D. Matson, “Capitalizing Hope: Economic Thought and the Early National Economy,” *Journal of the Early Republic*, Vol. 16, No. 2, Special Issue on Capitalism in the Early Republic, (Summer, 1996), pp. 273-291; Janet Riesman, “Money, Credit and Federalist Political Economy,” in Richard Beeman, Stephen Botein, and Edward C. Carter II, eds., *Beyond Confederation: Origins of the Constitution and American National Identity*, (University of North Carolina Press, 1987), pp. 128-161. Joyce Appleby, *Capitalism and a New Social Order: The Republican Vision of the 1790s*, (New York University Press, 1984).

⁵⁷ David Lundberg and Henry F. May, “The Enlightened Reader in America,” *American Quarterly*, Vol. 28, No. 2, Special Issue: An American Enlightenment (Summer, 1976), pp. 262-293.

⁵⁸ For example see: Count Destutt Tracy, *A Treatise on Political Economy*, trans. Thomas Jefferson, (Georgetown, D. C., 1817)

⁵⁹ See Joseph Dorfman, ‘Introduction’, in Thomas Cooper, *Lectures on the Elements of Political Economy* (1826; New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1971); Joseph Dorfman, *The Economic Mind in American Civilization* (New York: Viking Press, 1946–59).

and with unerring steps, to the rapid increase of national wealth, and to the general improvement of all enjoyments of social life.⁶⁰

For Porter, these beneficent outcomes sprang “naturally” from “enlightened selfishness.” The “true interests” of men could never be “the instruments of evil to others” but were instead the “minister of the highest and most extensive good.” God had endowed men with certain principles and or qualities upon which they acted with little foresight for the greater good. Among these was the “passion for accumulation” – “an instance, though a very humble one, it is true, of the most powerful and persevering principle of our nature, the principle of unceasing advancement.”⁶¹ Human beings could never succumb to the gloomy predictions of political economists like Thomas Malthus (1766-1834), Porter concluded. The genius of men’s “discovery and invention” would persevere. Failure was “inconsistent with Heaven’s great general law of universal benevolent design.”⁶² Porter’s review was a particularly forceful affirmation of the *laissez faire* doctrine as developed by Adam Smith but there were of course many others.⁶³ Pelatiah Webster, for example, in his *Third Essay on Free Trade and Finance* (1780) clearly enunciated *laissez faire* principles. The “natural course of things,” Webster argued, favored “liberty and property.” Violations of these rights – the “abridgment, restraint, or control” of liberty and property – could never produce “salutary” effects, but rather could prove “fatal” and “tragical.” “Trade, if let alone,” he concluded, “will ever make its own way best, and like an irresistible river, will ever run fastest, do least mischief and most good, when suffered to

⁶⁰ J. Porter, “Review of Thomas Cooper, *Lectures on the Elements of Political Economy*,” (Columbia, S. C. , 1826), *North American Review*, (October, 1827), p. 412.

⁶¹ Porter, “Review,” p. 412.

⁶² Porter, “Review,” p. 423.

⁶³ Overall see Dorfman, *The Economic Mind in American Civilization*, Volume Two, Book Two: From Independence to Jackson, Chapter XX, “The Northern Tradition of Laissez Faire,” pp. 512-526 and Chapter XXI, “The Southern Tradition of Laissez Faire,” pp. 527-565.

run without obstruction in its own natural channel.”⁶⁴

In the realm of moral philosophy we can find similar patterns of absorption by a large and educated Early Republic reading public. The ideas of Shaftesbury, Hutcheson and Smith were widely reviewed, discussed and excerpted in the popular press. Americans owned numerous copies of their books that were reprinted in American editions throughout this period.⁶⁵ More impressive, however, is the American literature on the subject that adopted and debated these positions. In the *Boston Monthly Magazine*, for example, *The Remarker*, a regular pseudonymous columnist, debated the sources of human pleasure in scenes of distress, a concept perceived by Shaftesbury, Hutcheson and Smith as central to the culture of sentiment. For Shaftesbury, “the very disturbances which belong to natural Affection, tho they may be thought wholly contrary to Pleasure, yield still a Contentment and Satisfaction greater than the Pleasures of indulg’d Sense.” Further, they brought about “social affection” and “human sympathy.” Thus human beings naturally derived some form of pleasure in witnessing distress for the purposes of encouraging sympathy, benevolence and social cohesion. Hutcheson made a similar argument, pointing out that suffering brought about compassion and benevolence and thus pleasurable emotions.⁶⁶ Smith too thought that the scenes of pathos that drew men for their “pleasurable” qualities, in the theatre for example, also increased their sympathy and benevolence.⁶⁷ For these moral philosophers, scenes of distress acted as springs to the natural emotions of sympathy and

⁶⁴ Pelatiah Webster, “A Third Essay on Free Trade and Finance,” (Philadelphia, 1780), in *Political Essays on the Nature and Operation of Money, Public Finances and Other Subjects*, (Philadelphia, 1790), pp. 50-73. Quote on p.66

⁶⁵ Norman S. Fiering, “Irresistible Compassion: An Aspect of Eighteenth-Century Sympathy and Humanitarianism,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 37:2 (April–June 1976), pp. 195–218; Norman S. Fiering, “The Transatlantic Republic of Letters: A Note on the Circulation of Learned Periodicals to Early Eighteenth-Century America,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Series, 33:4 (October 1976), pp. 642–60. Richard Sher, *The Enlightenment and the Book: Scottish Authors and their Publishers in Eighteenth-Century Britain, Ireland & America*, (Chicago, 2006).

⁶⁶ Anthony Ashley Cooper, 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, 3 vols (1711; Farnborough: Gregg, 1968), vol. 2: *An Inquiry Concerning Virtue and Merit*, p. 44; Hutcheson, *An Inquiry into the Original*, p. 239.

⁶⁷ Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, I.ii.16-I.ii.18.

benevolence and were part of the deity's providential design.

In the *Boston Monthly Magazine*, *The Remarker* echoed these ideas. "Sympathy," he noted, "is emotion communicated from the bosom of another," and was "used to signify our fellow-feeling with distress." It was clear to the *Remarker* that "sympathetick pain is a source of pleasure." However, the sources of this phenomenon were less-than-clear and in the end, he alluded simply to *nature*. "It is believed to be a law of our mental frame, that in certain circumstances we shall derive pleasure from affecting objects and representations," *Remarker* concluded. To what purpose did this law serve? It was certainly not the "sight of the sorrow, but from the exercise of that benevolence, which like mercy blesses him that gives and he that takes."⁶⁸ The anonymous authors in the *Port-Folio* agreed: "the painful or pleasurable feelings excited in ourselves by the affections of others, are the cause of our morality – because it is to allay these feelings in *us* that we fly to *their* relief, as we are impelled to make *them* glad by the pleasing reaction of their gladness on *our* own sensibility."⁶⁹

In the *North American Review*, H. Holley also investigated the sources of human sympathy – again, specifically as derived from witnessing scenes of distress.⁷⁰ Holley first developed the various efficient causes of this phenomenon, arguing that sympathy, curiosity, love of novelty, sublimity and piety all led us to experience pleasure in others' distress, real or imagined (as represented in novels or the theatre). At the same time, following Hutcheson and Smith, he concluded that these feelings had larger purposes. "But what in technical language is

⁶⁸ Remarker No. 30, *The Boston Monthly Anthology and Review*, (February, 1808), pp. 88-93. In Jose R. Torre, ed., *The Enlightenment in America*, Volume 3, Moral Philosophy and Religion, (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2008), pp. 18-20.

⁶⁹ [Anon.], "Man Constitutionally Moral," *Port-Folio* 2:4, (October, 1809), p. 42.

⁷⁰ There is a generous contemporary literature on this concept. See, for example, Analyticus, "By the Celebrated Adam Smith . . .", *Port-Folio*, 1:1 (January, 1809), pp. 52-7; [Anon.], "Man Constitutionally Moral," *Port-Folio*, 2:4 (October, 1809), pp. 300-7; [Anon.], "Man Constitutionally Moral," *Port-Folio*, 2:5 (November, 1809), pp. 391-402; Analyticus, "Sympathy," 2:6 (December, 1809), pp. 537-40. In Jose R. Torre, ed., *The Enlightenment in America*, Volume 3, Moral Philosophy and Religion, (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2008), pp. 37-64.

called the *final* cause, or in common language the *end*, for which this pleasure from scenes of distress is made to arise,” Holley argued, “is an important / article in the illustration of this subject. The end is, that by our spontaneous impulses we may be put in the place, and in the way of extending relief when it is wanted, and when it is our power to afford it.” In part, the instinct for pleasure in the distress of others was thus designed with the providential goal of providing “relief” to those in need; at the same time, however, a clearly stated second but primary goal was “unfolding the powers of the mind and in forming a benevolent character.” Thus human beings had within them an immanent predisposition to take pleasure in scenes of distress so that they might provide relief and at the same time fulfil their own development. These *final* causes of relief and self-development were clearly the product of a God who shared the same proclivities as his creations. “The Deity himself has affections,” Holley argued. “His mind is not mere intellect without feelings or sympathy. He is not satisfied with the possession of knowledge without love, with the exercise of power without a heart to be interested in the benevolent results of his providence. Every creature he has made shares in his affections, and the virtue and happiness of each contribute to the enjoyment of his divine existence.”⁷¹

Over the length of this essay we have followed ideas about nature, causation, human purpose and agency from medieval scholars like Thomas Aquinas, to Newton, to Adam Smith and his American progeny. My goal has been to understand changes in these ideas in the context of their theological underpinnings and interrelationships. Medieval scholars derived much of their cosmology from the Greek philosophers. From their perspective the universe was an enchanted place created by God for men. Their systems of knowledge and causation reflected these ideas. The voluntarist version of the universe ascendant through the Reformation was

⁷¹ H. Holley, “On the Pleasure Derived from Witnessing Scenes of Distress,” p. 30, 32-33.

radically different and both shaped and expressed competing ideas about nature and humanity. With the rise of a voluntarist universe, knowledge became external and men were alienated from the *natural*, and the Good.

The return of the Hellenic cosmology in the eighteenth century was part of another revolution in the human experience, the Enlightenment. The new deity was benevolent; the cosmos were friendly, once again tied into human nature; conversely, human nature was once again *natural*. Theories of causation shifted, to paraphrase Heimann, from “voluntarism to immanence” and derived their logic from Aristotelian and Platonic teleologies. Men were self-developing animals that fulfilled the greater good by seeking their selfish goals; their natural impulses and desires were part of the *logos* and *telos* of nature. Thus human action derived from an inner drive to fulfil “natural” or immanent impulses that were tied into larger providential ends. This was especially important to our purpose as we traced the influence of these ideas on political economy and moral philosophy.

Human beings according to Smith and his Early Republic followers accomplished moral and economic optimal equilibriums by pursuing their own interests, unconscious of the greater good they promoted. As Smith presented it, this was never really a function of choice. After all, “nature” determined all the efforts and outcomes of human sentiments. Ultimately, however, the notion that a benevolent deity had created a cosmos measured to our own desires and ends proved too alluring, and an ideology that reified a teleological nature sprang forth to capture the human imagination, with all the subsequent consequences.