

# **Anglican Social Thought and the Shaping of Political Economy in Britain: Joseph Butler, Josiah Tucker, William Paley and Edmund Burke**

Paul Oslington

Professor of Economics and Dean of Business, Alphacrucis College, Sydney, Australia.

Visiting Professor, Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture, Canberra.

Doctor of Theology Candidate, University of Divinity, Melbourne.

Email: paul.oslington@ac.edu.au

**Keywords:** Political Economy, English Enlightenment, Anglicanism, Adam Smith, Joseph Butler, Josiah Tucker, William Paley, Edmund Burke.

**JEL Subject Codes:** B11, B31.

Thanks to participants at the History of Economic Thought Society of Australia Annual Conference, participants at the David Nichol Smith Workshop on 18<sup>th</sup>C Studies at the University of Sydney, and the journal referees for helpful comments.

## **Abstract**

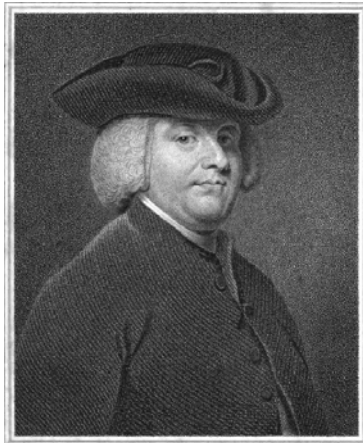
The story of political economy is often told beginning with Adam Smith and his Scottish Enlightenment friends, then migrating to England where it took shape as a discipline in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. This telling of the story neglects the role of 18<sup>th</sup> century Anglican natural theological thinking about the evolving market economy. We know that Joseph Butler's writings on the relationship between self-interest and the common good were important for Hume and Smith and other political economists, as was the more explicitly economic work of Josiah Tucker. William Paley's theological utilitarian framework and analysis of population and growth was the starting point for important 19<sup>th</sup> century political economists. Edmund Burke's vigorous economic policy advocacy has its roots as much in the 18<sup>th</sup> century Anglicans as Smith, and Burke was an important conduit for the idea of a harmonious free market order into the 19<sup>th</sup> century and beyond.



Joseph Butler 1692- 1752



Josiah Tucker 1712 - 1799



William Paley 1743-1805



Edmund Burke 1729-97

Joseph Butler was “The greatest name in the Anglican Church” according John Henry Newman, and “The greatest thinker of the English whose writings are, in these tubulous times and in the midst of the many controversies of the day, if one will study them, a comfort and a help both for what they give” according to James de Koven, *Sermons Preached on Various Occasions*, 1880

Josiah Tucker according to Dr Johnson was “one of the few excellent writers of the period. No person, however learned can read his writings without some improvement”. Another contemporary Bishop Warburton suggested “Trade was his religion and religion his trade”. According to Karl Marx “Tucker was a parson and a Tory, but for the rest, an honourable man and a competent political economist”

Karl Marx by contrast disparaged Edmund Burke as “an out-and-out vulgar bourgeois”

William Paley “laid the foundation of the moral philosophy of many hundreds—probably thousands—of youth while under a course of training designed to qualify them for being afterwards the moral instructors of millions” Richard Whately 1859. According to J.M. Keynes, Paley’s *Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy* was “an immortal book” and Charles Darwin shared his admiration.

## 1. Introduction

This paper is about the influence of some relatively neglected 18<sup>th</sup> century English writers on the formation of political economy as a discipline, but much of the motivation comes from the unduly predominant focus in the literature on a Scot - Adam Smith. The tale is often told of a heroic Adam Smith creating political economy out of nothing (perhaps picking a bit of theory from the French), and then political economy migrating to England through Dugald Stewart's lectures, then an alliance of Benthamite utilitarianism and Smithian political economy steadily advancing in Britain through the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Even when historians of economics tell a more nuanced tale of Smith systematising the earlier insights of natural law philosophers, merchant pamphleteers and various other writers on economic matters (for instance Schumpeter 1954 or Hutchinson 1988) there is seldom much attention devoted to 18<sup>th</sup> century English writers such as John Gay, Abraham Tucker, Joseph Butler, Josiah Tucker, William Paley, Joseph Priestley, and Edmund Burke. If these writers do appear, then all roads still lead through Smith to the formation of the discipline of political economy in England in the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Only a few writers (such as Checkland 1951, Winch 1971 1996, Rashid 1982b 1998, and Waterman 1991, 2004) offer variations on the Smith-centric story.

One way of sharpening the question of the influence of the 18<sup>th</sup> century English writers is to ask what would have happened if Smith had died in childhood, as his biographers suggest was a distinct possibility (see for instance Ross 2010 p16). Would political economy have emerged in Britain in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century? If so what would it have looked like? Would it have risen to a position of such influence in British public life?<sup>1</sup> I will suggest that a key idea of a harmony of self-interest and the common good was just as strong in 18<sup>th</sup> century English thought as in Smith. Perhaps the 19<sup>th</sup> century English School of Political Economy (discussed by Waterman 2008a 2008b 2014) has 18<sup>th</sup> century English roots as well as more immediate Scottish roots. Asking the historical counterfactual question in no way denigrates Adam Smith's work or his contribution to the development of economics – I am using the question to bring the contributions of these English writers into sharper focus.

Even if we allow Smith to have lived to adulthood and take his place in the history of economics, the English influences on his economic thinking still need to be better recognised.

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<sup>1</sup> The paper could be titled "What would the history of economics look like without Adam Smith?". A referee suggested an alternative counterfactual that might be investigated: "If Butler, Tucker, Paley and Burke had not existed (but Smith and the *WN* had existed), would English political economy have been significantly different?"

Smith was familiar with English writers on economics and spent considerable time in England, including the years leading up to the publication of the *Wealth of Nations*.

Launching such an argument means questioning the long running denigration of 18<sup>th</sup> century English thought. It means allowing the English Enlightenment to be something more than a cause for a polite chuckle – in the same way as the notion of English cuisine. Recent historical scholarship has emphasised the diversity of European Enlightenments, moving beyond equating Enlightenment with certain French anti-clerical philosophes. The strength and distinctiveness of the notion of an English Enlightenment has received particular support from the work Roy Porter (2000) and Gertrude Himmelfarb (2004).

The strong theological connections of the 18<sup>th</sup> century English writers mean that theology must be part of the story of political economy. This reinforces recent arguments about the importance of the Newtonian natural theology and moderate Calvinism for Adam Smith (for instance Viner 1927, Waterman 2004, 2008a, 2014; Oslington 2011a, 2011b, 2012), and of other theological ideas for Malthus (Pullen 1981, Waterman 1991)<sup>2</sup>. As well as being an alternative source of ideas for political economy, the English writers' theological commitment to harmony between the scriptures and political economy was important for the rise of political economy to the culturally authoritative position it enjoyed in 19<sup>th</sup> century Britain and beyond. I do not mean to suggest that all natural theological influences came through the English writers; Smith for instance drew on the natural theologies of his Scottish predecessors Francis Hutcheson and Gershom Carmichael, as well as the moderate Calvinism of the Scottish Enlightenment (as discussed in the introduction to Oslington 2011a).

Of the English<sup>3</sup> writers I will devote most space to Joseph Butler (1692-1752) and Josiah Tucker (1713-99) because of their particularly early and clear development of the harmony between self-interest and the common good, and because of their historical connections with Hume and Smith. William Paley (1743-1805) shaped 19<sup>th</sup> century English political economy in his own right and through Malthus, rather than through Smith. Edmund Burke (1729-97) warrants attention because of his influence on policy and intriguing connections to earlier English writers

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<sup>2</sup> An important question raised by Viner (1978), Facarello (1999) is the influence of French Jansenist thought on political economy in Britain, from Pierre Nicole, Jean Domat, Boisguilbert, through Mandeville to Smith. Further investigating this alternative line of theological influence on political is beyond the scope of the present paper.

<sup>3</sup> Butler Tucker Paley and Burke were all Englishmen and members of the established Anglican Church, though as noted below Butler's family background and early education were nonconformist, and Burke's early years were spent in Ireland. All fit within Anglican social thinking as described by Viner (1978), Waterman (1991) and others.

on economic matters. These 18<sup>th</sup> century Anglicans influenced the philosophical framework and key ideas of 19<sup>th</sup> century British political economy, and I will concentrate on frameworks rather than the detailed analytical apparatus of political economy (well treated by others such as Aspromourgos 2009). I am not suggesting that any of these writers should displace Smith as the pre-eminent 18<sup>th</sup> century economic theorist and system builder.

## 2. Joseph Butler (1692-1752)

After a Presbyterian upbringing Joseph Butler<sup>4</sup> was educated at the dissenting academy Tewkesbury, then Oriel College Oxford, before going on to distinguished Anglican appointments as Rector of Stanhope, Bishop of Bristol, Dean of St Pauls Cathedral, and Bishop of Durham. He famously clashed with John Wesley over unlicensed Methodist preachers operating in his Diocese of Bristol. Butler's major works are his *Sermons delivered in the Rolls Chapel* published in 1726, and his *Analogy of Religion* 1736.

Contemporary interest in Butler is mostly from philosophers – extracts from his *Sermons* often appear in anthologies among the “British Moralists” responding to Mandeville and Hobbes, but there is much less attention now paid to his *Analogy of Religion*. Little has been written on Butler's influence on political economy since Jacob Viner's pioneering work on 18<sup>th</sup> century Anglican social thought (some published in Viner 1960, 1972 but much remains unpublished). There are brief comments on Butler in Hirschman (1977, 46). Myers (1983, 57-59) discussion of “self-interest and public welfare” downplays Butler's influence on political economy on the basis that Butler relied solely on an internal psychological balance to self-interest, in contrast to Smith who balanced self-interest against the self-interest of others in a market economy.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Further information about Butler's life is available in Cunliffe (2004), which is a much more balanced account than Leslie Stephen's (1899) earlier treatment of Butler (and his treatments of Josiah Tucker and Paley). The clash between Wesley and Butler is described in F. Baker (1980) “John Wesley and Bishop Joseph Butler: A Fragment of Wesley's Manuscript Journal August 1739.” *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* 42 (May): 93-100. I am grateful to the editor and a referee for pointing out the recent PhD thesis and forthcoming article by Peter Xavier Price (2016) on Butler and Tucker. Price's emphasis on the role of Butler in providing the theological and moral philosophical framework for Tucker's economic writings complements my argument, though I am unconvinced by Price's characterisation of this framework as neo-Stoic, in contrast to the Augustinian-Epicurean framework of Mandeville and Hobbes.

<sup>5</sup> A reassessment of Butler's role in the history of economics implicitly repositions Hobbes role, since Hirschman (1977) and Myers (1983) saw Smith as responding to Hobbes' argument that the state of nature was chaotic and nasty, and that state power was the solution to this problem. Smith on their account was arguing, against Hobbes, that state power is not needed achieve economic order. Smith could not afford to acknowledge debts to notorious atheists Hobbes and Mandeville, though Smith at one point in *TMS* sets his own moral theory against Hobbes, criticising

We have no record of Butler's works in Adam Smith's library (Mizuta 2000), but there is other evidence Smith knew and respected Butler's work. Smith's friend David Hume acknowledged Butler's influence in the Introduction to his *Treatise of Human Nature*. Hume's correspondence records his respect for Butler's opinion of the work, and Butler seems to be the main model for Cleanthes in Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. Smith himself refers to Butler as that "late ingenious and subtle philosopher" (*TMS* I i 2.2 p14) when discussing topics like sympathy and conscience (for instance *TMS* I iii 1.1 p11) <sup>6</sup>.

Butler's fame in the 18<sup>th</sup> century rested on his *Analogy of Religion*, so it is here we must look for what Hume and Smith admired. Butler's outline of what religion teaches from the Introduction to the *Analogy* is worth quoting in full because it sums up the Anglican theological framework which I am arguing was important for the development of political economy<sup>7</sup>:

"Now the divine government of the world, implied in the notion of religion in general and of Christianity, contains in it—that mankind is appointed to live in a future state; that there everyone shall be rewarded or punished; rewarded or punished respectively for all that behaviour here, which we comprehend under the words virtuous or vicious, morally good or evil; that our present life is a probation, a state of trial, and of discipline, for that future one; notwithstanding the objections, which men may fancy they have, from notions of Necessity, against there being any such moral plan as this at all: and whatever objections may appear to lie against the wisdom and goodness of it, as it stands so imperfectly made known to us at present; that this world being in a state of apostasy and wickedness, and consequently of ruin, and the sense both of their condition and duty being greatly corrupted amongst men, this gave occasion for an additional dispensation of Providence of the utmost importance; proved by miracles; but containing in it many things appearing to us strange, and not to have been expected; a dispensation of Providence, which is a scheme or system

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Hobbes for supposing there is no natural distinction between right and wrong, making these a matter for the arbitrary will of the civil magistrate. Hobbes appears only incidentally in the *WN*. If Butler was responding to Hobbes, and Butler influenced Hume and Smith, then Hobbes has more historical influence on political economy than is commonly recognised. Hont (2005) gives a quite different account of the connection between Hobbes, Hume and Smith, where the Scots add an economic dimension to Hobbes purely political natural law theory.

<sup>6</sup> Mossner (1936) and Penelhum (1988) discuss the relationship between Butler and Hume. Further biographical evidence that Butler was respected by Hume and Smith is provided by Ross (2010). Raphael and Macfie's introduction to Smith *TMS* p11 suggests that the connection between Butler and Smith was mediated through Hutcheson, though the evidence for this suggestion is unclear.

<sup>7</sup> Many of these doctrines are part of the mainstream Christian tradition. The distinctively Anglican contribution is in how they were worked out in the social theory of the writers we are considering.

of things; carried on by the mediation of a divine person, the Messiah, in order to the recovery of the world; yet not revealed to all men, nor proved with the strongest possible evidence to all those to whom it is revealed; but only to such a part of mankind, and with such particular evidence, as the wisdom of God thought fit.” (Butler 1736, xxxi-xxxii)

The most notable features of Butler’s summary of Christian doctrine are his view of this life as a trial and discipline, his emphasis on rewards and punishments in the future life, and an imperfectly perceived divine providence operating in our present fallen life. These doctrines of divine providence, the future hope, and the moral and intellectual consequences of the Fall are important components of the framework of Adam Smith’s thought (Oslington 2011a, 2011b, 2012). Together with the “objections that may appear to lie against the wisdom and goodness of it” and the associated enterprise of theodicy, they are also part of the animating framework of early 19th century English political economy (Waterman 1991, 2004).

As well as this shared theological framework there are specific connections between Butler’s ideas and those of Smith and 19<sup>th</sup> century English political economy:

- Beginning with mankind as he actually is

Butler begins his Rolls Chapel sermons by pointing out that he is not "enquiring into the abstract relations of things" but beginning his moral enquiry "from a matter of fact, namely, what the particular nature of man is, its several parts, their economy or constitution; from whence it proceeds to determine what course of life it is". (Butler Preface to *Sermons* paragraph 12 p6).

- Idea of nature (including human society) as a teleological system

Butler continues "Every work both of nature and of art is a system: and as every particular thing, both natural and artificial, is for some use or purpose out of or beyond itself" (Butler Preface to *Sermons* paragraph 14, page 9-10). Butler then explains the purpose of this system “The interest or good of the whole must be the interest of the universal Being” (Butler *Sermons* Preface paragraph 30, page18)

- Affirmation of self-love, and showing that is not opposed to benevolence and virtue.

Butler then moves to one of his main themes: "self-love and benevolence, virtue and interest are not to be opposed...self-love in its due degree is as just and morally good as any affection whatever" (Butler Preface to *Sermons* paragraph 39, page 23-24). Further “Let it be allowed, though virtue or moral rectitude does indeed consist in affection to and pursuit of what is right and good, as such; yet, that when we sit down in a cool hour, we can neither justify to ourselves this or any other pursuit, till we are convinced that it will be for our happiness, or at least not

contrary to it" (Butler *Sermons* Sermon XI "Upon the Love of our Neighbour" paragraph 20 page 182 – this is the often anthologised "cool hour" passage )

- Private and public good are providentially reconciled

Butler argues our affections "do in general contribute and lead us to public good as really as to private" (Butler *Sermons* Sermon I "Upon Human Nature" paragraph 7 page 37.)

Then he restates the point: "private affections, as tending to private good; this does not hinder them from being public affections too, or destroy the good influence of them upon society, and their tendency to public good" (Butler *Sermons* Sermon I "Upon Human Nature" paragraph 7 page 37). Butler continues in language that could easily come from Smith, Whately, Chalmers, Whewell, or any number of early 19th century political economists: "by acting merely from regard (suppose) to reputation, without any consideration of the good of others, men often contribute to public good... They are plainly instruments in the hands of another, in the hands of Providence, to carry on the preservation of the individual and good of society, which they themselves have not in their view or intention" (Butler *Sermons* Sermon I "Upon Human Nature" paragraph 7 page 38). This is a clear statement by an influential figure of Adam Smith's key idea, fifty years before the publication of the *Wealth of Nations*.

- The Fall affects private and public good alike

Butler observes "there is a manifest negligence in men of their real happiness or interest in the present world, when that interest is inconsistent with a present gratification; for the sake of which they negligently, nay, even knowingly, are the authors and instruments of their own misery and ruin. Thus they are as often unjust to themselves as to others, and for the most part are equally so to both by the same actions." (Butler *Sermons* Sermon I "Upon Human Nature" paragraph 15 page 44)

- Illusion

Just as for Smith, a wisely designed illusion is part of the divine system "however perfect things are, they must necessarily appear to us otherwise, less perfect than they are" (Butler *Sermons* Sermon XV "Upon the Ignorance of Man" paragraph 15 page 239). Providence is used by Butler, just as by Smith, to explain motivation towards ends of the system that humans cannot see.

- Leaving the good of the whole to God

Human ignorance for Butler, just as for Smith, means that humans should restrict their concerns to their own interests, which they are competent to judge, for "the happiness of the world is the



concern of him who is the Lord and the Proprietor of it” (Butler *Analogy -Dissertation on Virtue* page 272).

Further "Since the constitution of nature, and the methods and designs of Providence in the government of the world, are above our comprehension we should acquiesce, and rest satisfied with our ignorance; turn our thoughts from that which is above and beyond us, and apply ourselves to that which is level to our capacities, and which is our real business and concern". (Butler *Sermons* Sermon XV "Upon the Ignorance of Man" paragraph 16 page 240)

Contrary to Milton Myers' suggestion that harmony in Butler is just internal and psychological, Butler clearly suggests in the preface to *Sermons* and *Analogy* that the social system works to harmonise individual interests with the common good. Though description of the mechanisms by which harmony is achieved is scanty in Butler, the same could be said of many early 19<sup>th</sup> century English political economists.

### **3. Josiah Tucker (1713-99)**

Tucker rose from humble Welsh circumstances through education at St Johns College Oxford to become Chaplain to Bishop Butler in Bristol, then Dean of Gloucester under Bishop Warburton<sup>8</sup>. Throughout his career Tucker was a pugnacious participant in public debates over economic matters, including a famous exchange with David Hume over the tendencies of trade to equalise wealth between rich and poor countries<sup>9</sup> and an exchange with Edmund Burke towards the end of his life over the economics of separation of the American colonies from Britain.

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<sup>8</sup> Further information about Tucker's life and works may be found in Shelton (1981, 1987) and Cornish (2004).

<sup>9</sup> The exchange between Tucker and Hume is discussed by Rotwein (1955), Semmel (1965), Berdell (1996) and Hont (1983, 2005). Hume suggested in his essay "On Money" in 1752 that trade between rich and poor country cannot generate limitless wealth for the rich country, because trade caused by the coincidence of its advantages and lower wages in the poor country will eventually be dampened as trade increases wages rise in the poor country. When Hume read a revised fragment in 1758 via Kames of Tucker's *Elements* (the fragment was later published as Tucker 1774) where Tucker suggested that expansion of the market would counteract the effect of rising wages so that trade could continue to enrich both countries. Hume revised his view in a new essay "On the Jealousy of Trade" added in 1758 to his *Political Essays*. As Hont (2005) points out, both Hume and Tucker's arguments contained the idea of mutually beneficial trade and international specialisation. Tucker claimed victory in the exchange, but Hume viewed "On the Jealousy of Trade" as merely clarifying his original argument.

His major economic works were: *Elements of Commerce and the Theory of Taxes* 1755 (privately circulated and only 3 copies exist), *Instructions to Travellers* 1757, and his *Treatise on Civil Government* 1781.

The literature on Tucker's economics is thin. It includes an adulatory biography by Clark (1903) and Schulyer's collection of texts (Tucker 1931) reviewed by Viner (1932) who agreed Tucker was "important for the history of ideas in the 18<sup>th</sup> century" but expressed skepticism about Tucker's contribution to economic theory. The more recent biography of Shelton (1981) distinguished Tucker from Smith in that Tucker required government as well as the market to reconcile private and public interest. By contrast, Rashid (1982a, 1998) elevates Tucker in disparaging Adam Smith's contribution to political economy.

The biographical connections between Tucker, Hume, and Smith are close. Eleven of Tucker's books are in Smith's library (Mizuta 2000). As noted there was an extended exchange between Hume and Tucker over trade between rich and poor countries which shaped the views on trade of Hume's close friend Adam Smith. Tucker's point that the expansion of the market facilitates mutually beneficial trade is prominent in Smith's discussion of free trade.

Ideas and even specific language from Tucker appear in Smith's works and early 19<sup>th</sup> century works of political economy<sup>10</sup>:

- Providential underpinnings of the economic system

One of Tucker's earliest economic works begins "Providence intended that there should be mutual dependence and connection" between people (Tucker *Essay on Trade* 1749 pii) and then goes on to apply this principle to trade between people in different nations. Like most 18<sup>th</sup> century writers Tucker recognised the doctrine of providence as the background for discussion of the economic system. Right actions by individuals in markets or by government are those which align with God's plans in creation and providence. As Tucker wrote: "The powers with which it has pleased the munificent Creator to form mankind, are suited to such important ends, that a wrong application of them cannot but be productive of great infelicity; as a right use of such endowments is the source of all enjoyments for which human nature was created" (Tucker *Elements* 1755, 55).

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<sup>10</sup> A striking but theoretically inconsequential example is Tucker's remark that England is a nation of shopkeepers. This appears in Adam Smith, is quoted by Napoleon, and many others down to Mrs Thatcher in the 1980s.

- Self-love is powerful but in need of direction

Tucker calls “Self-love, the great mover of created beings” (Tucker *Elements* 1931, 58). For Tucker, like Smith, the weakness of benevolence means that “the main point to be aimed at, is neither to extinguish nor enfeeble self-love, but to give it such a direction, that it may promote the public interest by pursuing its own” (Tucker *Elements* 1755, 59).

- Commerce, Government and Religion reconcile self-love and public interest

“Let us therefore enter upon the ensuing work with the following maxim strongly upon our minds: that universal commerce, good government, and true religion, are nearly, are inseparably connected. For the directions and regulations of each of these, are no other than to make private coincide with public, present with future happiness” (Tucker *Elements* 1755, 60). Tucker’s argument that the divergence of interests between merchants and the country as a whole means the role of government is to “frame Laws and Regulations relating to trade in such a manner, as may cause the private interest of the merchant to fall in with the general good of his country.” (Tucker *Essay on Trade* 1749/ viii).

For Tucker, matters should be arranged so that “every individual (whether he intends it or not) will be promoting the good of his country, and of mankind in general, while he is pursuing his own private interest” (Tucker *Elements* 1755, 61). Later he wrote “The rules of religion, and the rules of social industry do perfectly harmonize; and that all things hurtful to the latter, are indeed a violation of former. In short the same Being who formed the religious system, formed also the commercial; and the end of both, as designed by Providence, is no other than this, that private interest should coincide with public, self with social, and the present with future happiness. Those men therefore, who would represent the principles of religion, and the principles of commerce as at variance with each other, are in reality friends to neither, and quite ignorant of both” (Tucker *Travellers* 1757, 266). In another work: “I am thoroughly convinced that the Laws of Commerce, when rightly understood, do perfectly coincide with the Laws of Morality, both originating from the same good Being, whose mercies are over all his works”. This is used by Tucker as an argument against slavery when combined with the observation that slavery is an inefficient method of production in the Colonies. (Tucker *Letter to Burke* 1775/ 383).

In Tucker we have a clear and powerful statement of the providential harmony between self-love and the common good. Tucker though is not a proponent of laissez-faire, and government must direct self-love to its proper end.

#### 4. William Paley (1743-1805)

Paley was a Cambridge student with a particular talent for mathematics, senior wrangler, then Fellow at Christ's College Cambridge before marrying and moving to the posts of Archdeacon of Carlisle then Archdeacon of Wearmouth<sup>11</sup>. His major works were *Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy* 1785 (drawing on his 1776 Cambridge lectures), *Horae Paulinae, or the Truth of the Scripture History of St Paul* 1790, *Evidences of Christianity* 1784, *Natural Theology* 1802, and some posthumously published *Sermons* 1808<sup>12</sup>.

Paley is not much read today, and generally regarded as exploded by Darwin's *Origin of Species* 1859, if not earlier by Hume's *Dialogues on Natural Religion*. This contemporary view assumes that Paley's purportedly exploded *Natural Theology* is the same as his *Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy*. It also overlooks the continued popularity of Paley's works deep into the 19<sup>th</sup> century – Keynes for instance called his *Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy* “an immortal book” and Darwin greatly admired the book. Rather than Paley's arguments being exploded by Hume and Darwin, the late 19<sup>th</sup> century decline in his popularity was due to the

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<sup>11</sup> Paley's clerical career was rumoured to have been curtailed by the discomfort caused to Anglican authorities by the so-called pigeon passage in his *PMPP*: “If you should see a flock of pigeons in a field of corn; and if instead of each picking where and what it liked, taking just as much as it wanted, and no more you should see ninety-nine of them gathering all they got, into a heap; reserving nothing for themselves, but the chaff and the refuse; keeping this heap for one, and that the weakest, perhaps worst, pigeon of the flock; sitting round, and looking on, all the winter, whilst this one was devouring, throwing about, and wasting it; and if a pigeon more hardy or hungry than the rest, touched a grain of the hoard, all the others instantly flying upon it, and tearing it to pieces; if you should see this, you would see nothing more than what is every day practised and established among men.” (Paley *PMPP*, 63). This passage indicates Paley's understanding that the harmony of interests was by no means perfect – just as Smith was aware of the disharmony flowing from cartels.

<sup>12</sup> Further biographical information about Paley may be found in Le Mahieu (1976), Cole (1988, 1991) and Waterman (2010). Paley's place in an English Enlightenment to which social and economic improvement was central is discussed by O'Flaherty (2010). Waterman (1996, 2010, 2016) discusses Paley's relationship to Adam Smith and describes Paley's sophisticated model of population and growth in *PMPP* that led Keynes to call him “the first of the Cambridge economists”. Paley probably read Smith's *WN* 1776 before finalising his *PMPP* in 1785. According to Waterman (2016) the influence of Smith is the most likely explanation of the increased emphasis on economic analysis in *PMPP* compared to Paley's earlier Cambridge lectures, a manuscript of which has been recently discovered. Waterman (2016) also has a fascinating discussion of Paley's Cambridge contemporary John Hey's lectures which may also have been important for the development of Paley's thinking on economic matters. We cannot rule out reports of Paley's Cambridge lectures influencing Smith, though this is much less likely. Paley's enormous influence on English social and economic thinking is discussed by Norman (1976, 9).

collapse of the natural theological framework for British scientific and religious discussion. The popular reception of Darwin's *Origin of Species* had something to do with the collapse of natural theology, but struggles over theodicy, increasing professionalization of science, and church politics were arguably more important (as discussed by Brooke 1991).

As well as a natural theological framework Paley took the cumulative probabilistic method of argument from Butler's *Analogy*. However, Paley's theological utilitarian ethics left no role for Butler's conscience. Paley denied that moral sense or conscience was a useful guide for morality "Upon the whole, it seems to me, either that there exist no such instincts as compose what is called the moral sense, or that they are not now to be distinguished from prejudices and habits; on which account they cannot be depended upon in moral reasoning" (Paley *PMPP*, 11).

- The purpose of Scripture is limited, and we are licenced to reason from creation

As a natural theologian Paley reasoned from what God has given us in the created order, including human nature; this was what would deliver moral and political guidance. In his introduction to *PMPP* Paley suggested to his readers "Whoever expects to find in the Scriptures a specific direction for every moral doubt that arises, looks for more than he will meet with" (Paley *PMPP*, 3) and "Morality is taught in Scripture ... general rules are laid down... these rules are occasionally illustrated" (Paley *PMPP*, 4), and further that "the Scriptures commonly presuppose in the persons to whom they speak, a knowledge of the principles of natural justice; and are employed not so much to teach *new* rules of morality, as to enforce the practice of it by new sanctions, and by a greater certainty" (Paley *PMPP*, 5). In case the reader is still in any doubt "The Scriptures do not supersede the use of the science of which we profess to treat, and at the same time acquit them of any charge of imperfection or insufficiency on that account" (Paley *PMPP*, 6).

- The world as a system for happiness

Paley begins his substantive moral argument with an observation about the purpose of the created order: "God hath called forth his consummate wisdom to contrive and provide for our happiness, and the world appears to have been constituted with this design" (Paley *PMPP*, 41)<sup>13</sup>

- Our limited understanding

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<sup>13</sup> Paley's providential "finger of God" (*PMPP* p42) has received much less attention in the literature than Adam Smith's "invisible hand".

He then picks up Butler's theme of human beings limited understanding of God's government of the world, arguing we should focus on our individual role and use utility as our best (though imperfect) guide to action. Paley combines this theme with the previous observation about the purpose of the system: "God wills and wishes the happiness of his creatures. And this conclusion being once established, we are at liberty to go on with the rule built upon it, namely, that the method of coming at the will of God, concerning any action, by the light of nature, is to inquire into the tendency of that action to promote or diminish general happiness." (Paley *PMPP*, 42). This means "actions are to be estimated by their tendency to promote happiness. Whatever is expedient, is right. It is the utility of any moral rule alone, which constitutes the obligation of it." (Paley *PMPP*, 42). So, in contrast to his much less influential fellow utilitarian contemporary Jeremy Bentham, utility is not a principle that has moral force in itself, but rather a way of approximating the will of God which has moral force. Paley's argument is similar to Butler's except that utilitarian reasoning rather than conscience is the guide to action in an imperfect world.

- Self-interest and the public good

Paley's *Principles* paints a picture of the harmony of self-interest and the common good, within the English institutional setting. By ruling out moral sense it is only the properties of the larger social system that are left to reconcile self-interest and the common good. Some mechanisms of reconciliation are discussed in the long economic chapter of the *Principles* "Of Population and Provision" (*PMPP* Book VI chapter 11). Population and provision are kept in equilibrium by mechanisms operating through changes in the accustomed mode of living of the people, changes in the quantity of provisions, and changes in the distribution of provisions (*PMPP*, 424-32). The public benefit of trade is discussed (for instance *PMPP*, 437). Self-interest in Paley's economic chapter is the practical outworking of attending to our role in an imperfectly understood scheme of divine government, and he reminds his readers that "In the magnitude and complexity of the machine, the principle of motion is sometimes lost or unobserved" (Paley *PMPP*, 436). Prices play little part in Paley's system, so while it is a less sophisticated model than offered by Adam Smith, it has the same overall character of reconciling self-interest and beneficial outcomes for society. There is not the same emphasis as in Smith on the outcomes being unintended, although Paley does give examples of this, such as his discussion of desire for luxuries having the unintended consequence of maintaining employment of the population (*PMPP*, 436).

- Problems of Evil and Suffering

The theological problem of economic suffering was raised famously by Malthus in his *Essay on the Principle of Population* 1798 and Malthus offered a controversial theodicy in an attempt to deal with the problem (Pullen 1981, Waterman 1991). The problem is less pressing for Paley

than for Malthus because Paley models an easier equilibrium between population and provision, but the problem still exists. Paley's view in *Natural Theology* 1802 follows Butler; that this life is a trial for the future life, though with traces of an alternative view (perhaps influenced by Malthus 1798) that suffering provokes qualities which endure into the future life. "Now we assert the most probable supposition to be, that it is a state of moral probation; and that many things in it suit with this hypothesis, which suit with no other. It is not a state of unmixed happiness, or of happiness simply: it is not a state of designed misery, or of misery simply: it is not a state of retribution: it is not a state of punishment. It suits with none of these suppositions. It accords much better with the idea of its being a condition calculated for the production, exercise, and improvement of moral qualities, with a view to a future state, in which these qualities, after being so produced, exercised, and improved, may, by a new and more favouring constitution of things, receive their reward, or become their own." (Paley *Natural Theology*, 271)<sup>14</sup>.

- Extension of natural theology to human society and economics

Adam Smith extended natural theology beyond the physical world (Oslington 2011a), and Paley seemingly independently does this in his *Natural Theology*. The point is not whether Paley's arguments about divine design in the social and economic realms are ultimately persuasive, but rather that Paley like Smith made the attempt, and that this attempt shaped the subsequent development of political economy in England. Paley's influence is clear in Malthus' *Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798, 201) where Malthus states that "it seems absolutely necessary that we reason from nature up to nature's God and not presume to reason from God to nature" and goes on to speak of "the book of nature where alone we can read God as he is". In correspondence Malthus commented that "The proofs of design are indeed everywhere so apparent that it is hardly possible to add much to the force of the argument as stated and illustrated by Paley" (Malthus to Whewell 1833, as quoted in Hilton 1988, 51).

## 5. Edmund Burke (1729-97)

Burke occupies a different place in the argument of this paper to Butler, Tucker and Paley. Rather than being a source of a theological framework and the key idea of harmony of interest, Burke is

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<sup>14</sup> Paley was dying of painful cancer while writing his natural theology. There is no mention of this in the text, though perhaps the comment about bodily pain reflects this experience. (*Natural Theology* ch26, 255ff.). Paley is no Dr Pangloss, and unlike Voltaire's famous character from *Candide* recognises imperfection and evil are realities of a created order.

an alternative conduit to Adam Smith for these ideas into the 19<sup>th</sup> century, especially into 19<sup>th</sup> century English policy and popular discussion<sup>15</sup>.

There is a vast literature on Burke, the Anglo-Irish writer, politician and self-described student of political economy “from his early youth to near the end of my service in parliament” (Burke 1796, quoted in Winch 1996, 125)<sup>16</sup>. His most important writings on political economy were his *Observations on The Present State of the Nation* 1769, his *Parliamentary Speech on Economical Reform* 1780 where he attacked the Royal household’s “prodigality and corrupt influence” (161) and outlined principles of reform, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* 1790, *Thoughts and Details on Scarcity* originally written in 1795 for William Pitt in response to severe food shortages in that year and which was later edited for posthumous publication, and Burke’s *Letter to a Noble Lord* 1796 where he discussed political economy as part of his response to the Duke of Bedford’s criticism of Burke drawing a parliamentary pension.

The secondary literature on Burke’s economics has been dominated by C.B. Macpherson (1962, 1980, 1987) for whom the key question was how to reconcile his conservatism and his economic liberalism; how Burke could be both the “champion of tradition, hierarchy, privilege and prejudice” and yet have an “unqualified embrace of the capitalist market economy” (Macpherson 1987, 299). Macpherson’s best answer was that Burke believed the prosperity delivered by economic liberalism maintained something of the old order. This however was an unstable reconciliation because prosperity may undermine character, as in Burke’s famous remark that “the age of chivalry is gone. That of sophisters, economists, and calculators has succeeded; and the glory of Europe is extinguished forever” (Burke 1790, 446). Macpherson also suggested that Burke saw that “the operation of the capitalist market economy required that the hard core of hierarchical order should be maintained” (1987, 300). It is difficult now to accept Macpherson’s reading of Burke after Jacob Viner’s (1963) devastating review of his work. Viner after detailing a long list of anachronistic and forced interpretations concluded that “Macpherson tries to fit the seventeenth-century theorizing into a model built around the concepts of a possessive market society” (1963, 550) and judged Macpherson’s work a “greater loss to learning” than gain to “social salvation” (1963, 559). Winch (1996) is similarly critical of Macpherson.

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<sup>15</sup> Seeing Burke and Smith as parallel, though linked, sources of 19<sup>th</sup> century economic thinking was suggested by Winch (1996). I am emphasising the Butler-Paley-Malthus line as an influence on economic theory and Burke as an influence on policy and popular discussion. Winch (1996, 373) also elevated Malthus as a “joint founder” with Smith of the discipline of political economy.

<sup>16</sup> The standard life is probably now Bourke (2015). He emphasises the consistency of Burke’s philosophy, with the tensions others have identified often being due to different problems Burke was addressing.



Burke's connections with Smith are interesting (explored by Jacob Viner in his *Introduction to John Rae's Life of Adam Smith* 1965, 23-33 and by Donald Winch *Riches and Poverty* 1996, 127-200). Smith was reported to have said of Burke that "he was the only man who, without communication, thought on these topics [political economy] exactly as he did" (Bisset's 1800 anecdote, quoted in Winch 1996, 125). There are several letters, beginning with a letter from Burke to Smith 10 Sept 1759 after Burke received a copy via David Hume of Smith's *TMS*. Burke and Smith did not meet until 1777, the year after the publication of *WN*. Smith's library included many of Burke's books, speeches and pamphlets (Mizuta 2000). It seems that Smith made some alterations to later editions of the *WN* in response to Burke (Winch 1996, 209). Smith was no doubt among the great and learned men Burke was alluding to when he claimed that he had studied political economy "since his early youth" and that "great and learned men thought my studies were not wholly thrown away, and deigned to communicate with me now and then on some particulars of their immortal works" (Burke 1796 quoted in Winch 1996, 125)<sup>17</sup>.

If the biographical evidence points to Burke's economic attitudes being formed independently of Smith and before he read Smith's *WN*, and influences subsequently ran in both directions. What then were the other influences on Burke's economics? A candidate is Josiah Tucker, with whom Burke had well documented connections (Pocock 1985a and Winch 1996), but Tucker is only the most obvious of the group of Anglicans who saw a theologically grounded harmony in the emerging market order.

Discussion of Burke's economics tends to focus on *Thoughts and Details on Scarcity* where there are some passages that would not seem out of place in a 1980s speech of Margaret Thatcher or Ronald Reagan. However, such passages must be read in the context of the Burke's desire in 1795 to stop what he saw as hasty and damaging government intervention in food markets, at a time when Britain was at war. Burke pleaded with William Pitt to "resist the idea, speculative or practical, that it is within the competence of government, taken as government, or even of the rich, as rich, to supply to the poor, those necessities which it has pleased the Divine Providence for a while to withhold from them. We, the people, ought to be made sensible, that it is not in breaking the laws of commerce, which are the laws of nature, and consequently the laws of God,

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<sup>17</sup> Since Smith died in 1790 this claim must refer to Burke's early work, ruling out from consideration Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, as well as his *Thoughts and Details on Scarcity*. The claim could refer to student essays published in the Trinity College Dublin *Reformer* where Burke discussed political economy, or more likely his *Observations on The Present State of the Nation* 1769 which contains detailed arguments about the benefits of trade with the colonies, supported by statistical evidence.

that we are to place our hope of softening the Divine displeasure to remove any calamity under which we suffer, or which hangs over us.” (Burke *Thoughts and Details on Scarcity* 1795, 210)

Burke emphasised the providential harmony of interests, against those who wanted to blame farmers and speculators for the food crisis: “It is therefore the first and fundamental interest of the labourer, that the farmer should have a full incoming profit on the product of his labour. The proposition is self-evident, and nothing but the malignity, perverseness, and ill-governed passions of mankind, and particularly the envy they bear to each other’s prosperity, could prevent their seeing and acknowledging it, with thankfulness to the benign and wise disposer of all things, who obliges men, whether they will it or not, in pursuing their own selfish interests, to connect the general good with their own individual success.” (Burke *Thoughts and Details on Scarcity* 1795, 199-200)

These passages in *Thoughts and Details on Scarcity* must be balanced by other discussions of economic matters in Burke’s works<sup>18</sup>. Government is regarded as a natural complement to the market and discussed favourably in *Observations on The Present State of the Nation* 1769, *Economical Reform* 1780, and *Reflections* 1790. Among Burke’s criticisms during the impeachment of Warren Hastings was his failure to act as a government should to prevent famine in India.

The other important point to make about Burke’s economics is that the functioning of a commercial society depends on manners, which in turn, like much else in the social order, depends on religion. The causality in Burke runs from religion to manners to economics, and there is little trace in Burke of Adam Smith’s concern about a commercial order undermining manners and religion upon which the market order depends (for instance Smith’s discussion in *WN* of the deleterious effects on workers of the division of labour, for which education is suggested to ameliorate).

Burke’s remark about the age of chivalry (Burke 1790, 446 – quoted above) immediately follows his description of the invasion of Marie Antoinette’s bedchamber by the revolutionaries, and would seem to be referring to that and related events. Given that context the “economists” denigrated are most likely to be the French *économistes* associated with the revolutionaries, and fond of rationalistic speculation, rather than British political economy. Burke is consistent

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<sup>18</sup> Balanced perspectives on Burke’s economics are provided by JGA Pocock’s (1982) reading of the *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, and Renee Prendergast’s (2000) survey of the economic content in Burke’s other writings

elsewhere in his criticism of rationalism in political and economic matters. So, read in proper context, this often quoted sentence identifies Burke more closely with the 18<sup>th</sup> century Anglican writers on political economy (as well as with Smith) rather than distancing Burke from them.

If Burke was an important conduit of these ideas in to early 19<sup>th</sup> century policy and popular discussion, then Burke's version of the harmony of interests is extreme and over-theologised compared to Adam Smith. It was almost as if for Burke the only disharmony came from those who complained about the providential harmony of interests. Perhaps some of the less wise market advocacy in 19<sup>th</sup> century England comes from Burkean sources than from Adam Smith. Our discussion of Burke (as well as Tucker) warns against driving a wedge between the providential institutions of market and government. It is government overreach that is criticised by Burke rather than the institution of government itself.

## 6. Conclusions

This paper has been about the influence of 18th century English thought on 19<sup>th</sup> century political economy through Adam Smith and apart from Adam Smith. All of Butler, Tucker, Paley, Burke (and Adam Smith) shared a natural theological framework and the idea of a providential harmony of self-interest and the general good. The 18<sup>th</sup> century Anglicans emphasised sin and the effects of the Fall less than Smith, and did not have the same sense of the hiddenness or illusory quality of the reconciliation of self-interest with the common good. They also seem less aware than Smith of the potential of commercial society to erode the culture which supports it, and the potential instability this brings to commercial society. These differences may reflect the greater role of Calvinist theology in Smith's intellectual framework compared to the English writers, for Calvinism as well as emphasising divine providence emphasises the disruptive potential of fallen humanity.

Butler, Tucker and Paley made Adam Smith possible in the sense that the English intellectual elite were well prepared for the idea at the core of the *Wealth of Nations* that there is a providential harmony of interests in commercial society. Burke like Smith profited from this preparation; Burke in the policy and popular realms, and Smith as the founder of political economy.

So what about the counterfactual question of whether political economy would have emerged in Britain in the 19<sup>th</sup> century if Smith had died in childhood? We can only speculate, but my own view is that political economy would have taken a similar shape, though theoretical development

would have been slower without Smith's systematising of economic ideas and evidence from many sources, and Smith's analytical contributions. Without Smith perhaps we would have had to wait for JS Mill in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century for a theoretical synthesis of political economy.

How does this enrich our understanding the history of political economy as a discipline? First, it suggests softening the division between English and Scottish economic thinking. They share a broadly similar framework and a key idea of the harmony of interests (balanced by a concern for theodicy). Second, the importance of theology for understanding the formation of political economy is reinforced. English theological sources as well as the moderate Calvinism of the Scottish enlightenment need further attention.

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