THE RITES AND RELICS OF VALUE: SACRIFICE AND COMMUNALITY IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY POLITICAL ECONOMY, ANTHROPOLOGY, AND FICTION

Supritha Rajan

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Approved by:
John McGowan
Jeanne Moskal
James Thompson
Laurie Langbauer
Beverly Taylor
ABSTRACT

SUPRITHA RAJAN: The Rites and Relics of Value: Sacrifice and Communality in Nineteenth-Century Political Economy, Anthropology, and Fiction (Under the direction of John McGowan)

This dissertation examines the fictional and non-fictional prose of the nineteenth century, arguing that the tendency among Victorian writers such as John Ruskin, Charles Dickens, Anthony Trollope, George Eliot, and Rudyard Kipling to synthesize conceptions of the sacred, sacrifice, and ritual with economic value and exchange reveals a pattern of thought hidden within capitalist theories of value and exchange as well. Political economists such as Adam Smith, David Ricardo, John Stuart Mill, William Stanley Jevons, and Alfred Marshall theorize value in terms of sacrifice and conceive of the market as the site wherein agents consecrate the social body and its values by engaging in ritualized networks of exchange. In illuminating this pattern, Victorian writers expose the shared disciplinary genealogies of political economy and anthropology. Victorian anthropologists like E.B. Tylor, Henry Maine, James Frazer, and W. R. Smith inherit the social and religious preoccupations that had once been conjoined to theories of value and exchange, examining the gift economies and sacrificial rituals among non-British subjects that political economy embedded in its theories of value and exchange. By revealing this displacement, the dissertation extends discussions on the ethics of economics by demonstrating that notions of communality, equitable distribution, and interdependence are just as crucial to the foundations of capitalism as self-interest and competition.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter

I. INTRODUCTION

II. “PERSONS THEMSELVES ARE THE WEALTH”: A COMMON MEASURE FOR THE COMMONWEALTH IN JOHN RUSKIN’S POLITICAL ECONOMY

The Theory of Value in John Ruskin

The Search for an Invariable Standard

III. THE VISIBLE HAND: COMMUNALITY AND THE RITES OF EXCHANGE IN RUSKIN, POLITICAL ECONOMY, AND VICTORIAN ANTHROPOLOGY

Value of Actions, or Acting on Values

Ruskin, Ritual, and Reciprocity

Models of Communality

IV. ANIMATING HOUSEHOLD GODS: VALUE, THE SACRED, AND KINSHIP IN ELIOT, DICKENS, AND TROLLOPE

The Problem of Value

The Destruction of Household Gods

Value, Kinship, and the Regeneration of Household Gods

Mclennan, Kinship, and Totems

Household Gods, Resacralization, and Kinship
V. ENERGY, SACRIFICE, AND RITUAL IN KIPLING………………..262
   Economic Systems and the Regulation of Sacred Forces……………268
   Magic, Mechanical Rituals, and Empire’s Long Day of Work……….286
   Electric Kim and the Ludic Rituals of Empire………………………315
VI. CODA…………………………………………………………………..348
WORKS CITED………………………………………………………………………..355
Since Marcel Mauss’s publication of *The Gift* (1925), scholars from various disciplines have debated the commonalities and divisions between archaic gift economies and modern capitalist practices. For Mauss, the gift economy that characterizes Melanesian exchange practices represents but a medium through which Melanesians establish social obligations and norms. The gift embodies not just one type of communal bond, but all structures of reciprocity, exchange, and obligation. This tendency to totalize social phenomena expresses Mauss’s moral and political interest in gift economies as an alternative to British utilitarianism’s reduction of human agency to self-interested drives. Thus, Mauss’s ideological and political interest in the gift cannot be separated from his analysis of the gift as an expression of social bonds—a moral contract in which the receiver of the gift reciprocates the act of gift-giving by rendering a return gift that is both obligatory and, paradoxically, freely given. Mauss’s analysis of exchange practices centers on the thesis that exchange in archaic economies appears “free and disinterested” but is actually “constrained and self-interested” (3). Though the return gift presents itself as voluntary, it is in fact “reciprocated obligatorily” (3).

Mauss and Hubert’s earlier analysis of sacrificial ritual, in which they interpreted the logic of gift-sacrifice as the offering of something sacred to the gods so that the gods would be compelled to reciprocate, resurfaces in Mauss’s treatment of reciprocal gift-exchange. In his efforts to explicate the principle that compels the return-gift in
Melanesian exchange practices, Mauss questions what it is about the object given that compels a return. Having presented the question along these lines, Mauss explains the logic of reciprocity through the Maori concept of the *hau*. The *hau* or spirit that embodies the gift ultimately characterizes the spiritual aspect of the person who gave the gift and must eventually return to the donor, a return initiated through the reciprocal gift. Unlike commodity exchange, Mauss’s interest in the gift and its *hau* underscores what C.A. Gregory would call its inalienability—objects still retain a magical and spiritual quality that derives from the person who once owned them even after exchange and thus the relationship between persons and things can never be entirely sundered.\(^1\) In this context, Mauss’s analysis of reciprocal gift exchange becomes a means of establishing social cohesion and alliances since the things exchanged perpetuate a set of indissoluble links (33).

Subsequent theorists on gift exchange have departed from Mauss’s political and spiritual interests in the gift; instead, the paradoxical assertion that the return gift is free yet obligatory has created a schism in gift theory.\(^2\) Intent on exposing Mauss’s mystification of exchange, especially the rivalries and contests of prestige inspired by agonistic exchange practices such as the potlatch, theorists such as Pierre Bourdieu and Jacques Derrida focus on the self-interested motives concealed by the disinterested and reciprocal exchange of gifts. Both theorists unveil the bad faith in gift-giving, arguing that agents derive self-satisfaction from their seemingly altruistic behavior—what Derrida terms auto-recognition (“King” 137). Bourdieu’s concept of symbolic capital

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\(^1\)Gregory claims there are two economies: the commodity exchanges of alienable possessions between independent persons and gift exchange practices where inalienable objects are given and received in a network of dependent relations. See 100-105 and 43-53.

\(^2\)For a brief summary of this schism, see Osteen and Woodmansee 28-32.
resonates with similar grievances: collectively organized *misrecognition* underlies all gift exchanges and transforms interested relations into the “sincere fiction of a disinterested exchange” (*Outline* 171). Interested actions are retrospectively understood as generosity but actually establish our prestigious and elevated position within the social hierarchy.

Both Derrida and Bourdieu, seizing on the problem of obligation in Mauss’s theorizations of the gift, conclude that so long as exchange binds us to others and obliges us to give, it is not really giving. This impossibility of the purely disinterested gift becomes for Derrida *the impossible* itself (“King” 124). By contrast, Mary Douglas and others have argued that the notion of the free gift contradicts the purpose of exchange in Mauss because it disentangles individuals from a state of indebtedness rather than reinforcing social obligations (Douglas “Free” vii-xvi).³ Gift theory inevitably arrives at a repeated impasse: either self-interested desires form the basic motive of all exchanges in both archaic and capitalist economies or, following Mauss’s statement in *The Gift*, gift exchange lies “outside the bounds of the so-called natural economy, that of utilitarianism” (72).

These debates on the gift provide the backdrop and, to some extent, the motivations of my argument and interest in the relationship between nineteenth-century political economy and Victorian anthropology. Rather than reducing archaic economies to versions of utilitarian capitalism or opposing the two economies as irreconcilable, I am interested in demonstrating the degree to which the tensions evidenced in debates on gift theory disclose the competing categories that structure capitalism. In this context, I

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³Caillé and Godbout argue that gift economies contradict the logic of capitalist equivalence and create a surplus-state of indebtedness (*World* 193, 211). Caillé distinguishes the role that interest plays in capitalism as opposed to gift economies. Capitalism encourage us to take an “interest in” something in order to further our self-interest whereas gift economies ask us to take an “interest for” something as an end in itself (34).
interpret the polarized debates among gift theorists as essentially transferring the fundamental dynamics of capitalist thought onto non-European cultures. The logic of the gift exposes a double narrative that runs through capitalist theories of value and exchange. Both the model of disinterested exchange practices that sacralizes social relations and establishes greater solidarity through the principle of reciprocity and the model of exchange as self-interested competition and rivalry that creates hierarchy and unequal accumulation of wealth coexist in capitalist economics. Political economists from Adam Smith onward have, of course, highlighted the motive of self-interest in economic life. Less acknowledged is capitalism’s emphasis on ideals of interdependence, communality, self-sacrifice, and distributive justice—ideals traditionally associated with models of gift-exchange. Capitalist theories of value and exchange, I argue, strive to balance self-sacrifice and self-interest in an interdependent system of reciprocal exchange. The ideal of balanced reciprocity—the equivalence that Mauss ascribes to simple gift exchange—underlies capitalist theories of exchange and such theoretical ideals within economic theory such as equilibrium. Yet, as mentioned earlier, alongside the equivalent and reciprocal gift is the economy of potlatch, in which competitive and rival gift-giving between parties allows them to display wealth and create hierarchies. Similarly, capitalism encounters an internal tension within its ideal of reciprocity and communality since the principles of competitive self-interest and self-sacrifice do not simply balance each other but, through alternating positions of excess, propel the economy’s growth and lead to states of inequality and disequilibrium. The apparent dissonance between reciprocal, equivalent gifts and potlatch’s rivalries found in Mauss can thus be traced to capitalism itself.\footnote{Annette Weiner claims that anthropologists like Mauss have retained the magical quality given to}
In addition to reproducing the tensions between self-interest and disinterest within capitalist thought, Mauss’s *The Gift* provides another touchstone for my argument. In *The Gift*, Mauss draws on the arguments of his uncle, Émile Durkheim, by reformulating Durkheim’s central claim in *The Elementary Form of the Religious Life* (1912) that totemic societies deem their totem sacred because it stands for a collective representation of society. Instead of the broader rubric of society, Mauss focuses on the microcosm of exchange as a “‘total’ social phenomena” in which “everything constituting the strictly social life” intermixes (3). In this totalizing view, Mauss extends to exchange the function Durkheim gave to collective representations: collective practices such as exchange reinvigorate ties of obligation and solidarity among individuals in a community and render those ties sacred to individual members of the community. As I will show in the first two chapters especially, both the uneasy alliance between self-interest and disinterest and the interpretation of exchange as a reciprocal system that sanctifies the economic system and results in greater interdependence articulate themes found in central arguments on value and exchange in nineteenth-century political economy.

The binary logic that opposes self-interest to disinterest, capitalist to gift economies, does not begin with Mauss or twentieth-century anthropology, but reflects a fissure that occurs earlier within political economy itself. In order to further its legitimacy as a mathematical science, late-nineteenth-century political economists, such as William Stanley Jevons, began to distance political economy from its sociological origins, privileging its narrative of self-interested competition and applying the model of reciprocity found in Adam Smith’s metaphor of the invisible hand and applied its rule to non-capitalism economies where the point of exchange is not to establish reciprocity but hierarchies (43).
physics to theories of economic exchange and behavior.\(^5\) As Jevons states in *The Theory of Political Economy* (1871), unless political economy redefines itself as a mathematical science and follows the principles of deductive logic rather than the inductive methods of the social sciences, political economy would be “a congeries of miscellaneous disconnected facts, or else it must fall in as one branch of Mr. Spencer’s Sociology” (xvi). Jevons’s position would become symptomatic of the tension in British political economy as it tried to balance the mathematical approach of continental economists and the sociological approach inherited from Adam Smith.

Due in part to such disciplinary disagreements within political economy, the dual narratives I have thus far attributed to capitalist logic increasingly separate, and the view of exchange as an act of reciprocal sacrifice through which agents establish a harmonic, interdependent network, becomes less and less pronounced within British political economic writings. At the same time that this internal disaggregation takes place within political economy, I argue that Victorian anthropologists such as E.B. Tylor, James Frazer, and William Robertson Smith, recuperate the sociological and religious preoccupations that political economy elides, exploring the logic of gift-sacrifice, reciprocity, and communality within non-European, pre-capitalist societies at the colonial periphery. Mauss’s arguments on gift-exchange thus represent the culmination of a trend that began in nineteenth-century anthropology, where the social formations of “primitive” societies represented the communality, interdependence, and reciprocity that anthropologists, like Henry Maine, contrasted to the self-interested individualism of modern, capitalist society. Mauss’s Durkheimian approach to exchange and the rift he

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\(^5\) Philip Mirowski has written extensively on this subject. See *Against Mechanism* and *More Heat Than Light*. 

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perceives between utilitarian self-interest and the social obligations and reciprocity that characterize gift exchange continues a series of elisions and displacements that can be traced to the nineteenth-century and the disciplinary contiguities between political economy and Victorian anthropology.

In the chapters that follow, I reconstruct these elisions and displacements within political economy and Victorian anthropology by examining seminal texts of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century political economy and anthropology alongside nineteenth-century fictional and non-fictional prose. Nineteenth-century writers such as John Ruskin, Anthony Trollope, George Eliot, Charles Dickens, and Rudyard Kipling, in particular, provide a conceptual bridge between my discussions of political economy and anthropology insofar as these writers isolate the fundamental problematic that preoccupies both disciplines and to which they respond: the problem of value. Victorian writers link the instability and increasingly abstract nature of economic value in a market society less and less anchored by concrete manifestations of value and wealth, such as land or intimate face-to-face relations, with the instability of social relations. In this context, both the political economic writings of Ruskin and the fiction by Eliot, Dickens, Trollope, and Kipling, respond to the problems of modernization and its effects on social cohesion by investing value with notions of the sacred.

This notion of the sacred, however, does not appear as an object of study in the manner that it does in Victorian anthropologists like James Frazer, William Robertson Smith, or later thinkers like Durkheim. Ruskin’s use of the term “holy,” novelistic descriptions of commodities as “household gods,” and Kipling’s depiction of energy as the magical force that gives to all things their value, represent the idiosyncratic array of
Victorian articulations on what I here, more generally, will refer to as the sacred. I interpret these articulations of the sacred as essentially revisiting the problem of value through religious language. These Victorian writers manipulate the contingency of the sacred in order to manage the contingency of value, reformulating relative value as absolute and sacred. Because they link the problem of relative value with social relations, their reformulation of value as absolute and sacred serves to anchor and stabilize the interconnected web of social relations.

This rearticulation of value as absolute and sacred among the Victorian writers I examine almost always involves a conception of labor as sacrifice. The act of self-sacrificing labor becomes significant for Victorian writers concerned with the problem of social cohesion since it allows them to pivot between the problem of value and collective forms of action such as exchange. Ruskin and Kipling, for example, conceive of exchange as a system of reciprocal sacrifices that results in an interdependent network. In this manner, labor’s sacrifice both secures value as sacred and results in a constellated network of stable social relations where individuals exchange sacrifice for sacrifice and tacitly sacralize the economic system. As in rituals of gift-sacrifice, wherein the act of sacrifice renders the object of sacrifice sacred, so labor’s sacrifice participates in a circular, self-referential act in which the act of sacrifice sacralizes its object: labor. Both Ruskin and Kipling deliberately compare these reciprocal acts of self-sacrificing labor, and the stable network of social relations they purportedly engender, to the social cohesion and communality effected by ritual.  

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6Susan Mizruchi discusses the long-standing relationship between sacrificial ritual, spiritual dependence, and reciprocity that runs through nineteenth- and twentieth-century anthropological theorizations of sacrifice. Mizruchi distinguishes the sociological function of sacrificial ritual from individual self-denial (23-76). But as I demonstrate in my discussion of Ruskin, political economy, and Victorian anthropology
attempt to stabilize value by drawing on versions of the sacred, but they also stabilize social relations by comparing exchange to the rituals of gift-sacrifice. My treatment of ritual in Ruskin and Kipling, like that of the sacred, attends to the distinct usage each writer gives to the term but also incorporates nineteenth- and twentieth-century anthropological discussion of ritual. Such a combined approach stays close to the specific role that ritual plays within the vision of each writer while still bringing into relief patterns in Victorian articulations of ritual that anthropological definitions of ritual repeatedly isolate, namely, ritual as the experience of communion with others.

The central claim of this dissertation is that the synthesis of value and exchange with notions of the sacred and ritual, respectively, articulates a pattern of thought that, not only appears among canonical Victorian writers, but also political economy. We thus return to the double narrative of capitalism that I earlier discussed in relation to Mauss. While Victorian writers like Ruskin and Dickens feared the unstable values and social dissolution caused by the insubstantiality of value and competitive exchange practices of capitalism, their alternative economy in which reciprocal self-sacrifice leads to greater mutuality and just distribution actually unfolds a narrative concealed within capitalism. This economic model is not openly explored by nineteenth-century political economists. Rather, just as Mauss investigated the ritualistic exchange practices that increase social solidarity and reciprocal obligation in non-European communities, so Victorian anthropologists considered the way in which “primitive” societies used the rituals of gift-sacrifice to establish communion with the gods, consolidate obligations to members of the tribe, and economize their interests. My examination of Victorian literature in

in chapter two, theories of value and exchange synthesize Weberian conceptions of capitalist self-denial with the performative and communal aspects of sacrificial ritual in exchange.
relation to nineteenth-century anthropology and political economy posits the possibility, however, that Victorian anthropologists addressed at the colonial periphery a set of social practices that political economy embedded in its theories of value and exchange. I interpret the obsessive interest among Victorian anthropologists in the economic and sociological implications of gift-sacrifice rituals within non-European communities, as evidencing a set of preoccupations that originate in British conceptions of economic value and exchange, most notably the emphasis given to notions of gift-sacrifice within labor theories of value and reciprocal exchange. Specifically I argue that, like their literary and anthropological counterparts, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century political economists, as diverse as Adam Smith, John Stuart Mill, William Stanley Jevons and Alfred Marshall, theorize value as the sacrifice of labor and exchange as a system of reciprocal sacrifices through which agents establish the sanctity of the economic and social system. In this context, exchange functions as a ritual that coordinates the acts of countless agents in a system that theoretically balances sacrifices and gains and tacitly sacralizes the economy.

The claim that exchange resembles ritual represents, perhaps, the most surprising claim that I make. On the surface, exchange systems lack features that we would traditionally associate with ritual: they neither self-consciously address religious deities, nor would participants of capitalist exchange systems necessarily characterize their actions as a ritual in the way that people participating in a baptism or Hindu rites of passage might view their actions as performing a religious ritual. Exchange also does not require participants to repeatedly perform, at fixed times, a strict and structured pattern of actions. Yet, as Catherine Bell makes clear, what constitutes ritual remains a slippery
category. While theorists repeatedly refer to formality, fixity, and repetition as the characteristic features of ritual, such features cease to be intrinsic to ritual when viewed as merely the strategies sometimes deployed in ritualized practices (Bell Theory 92). Theorists who conceive of a ritual as a performative practice or approach national ceremonies as a ritual, for example, tend to disregard Durkheim’s more restricted focus on ritual as addressing the sacred (Bell Theory 91). Ritualization of behavior, rather than being religious, can simply supply a social strategy to set up distinctions like the sacred and profane, legitimating certain social relations and exerting power and control through ritual activity (Bell Theory 89). If there is a consistent thesis to the variety of religious and non-religious social practices that are interpreted as ritual, Bell argues, it is that ritual integrates the opposition of thought and action, creating the experience of unity that Durkheim calls “collective effervescence” (Bell Theory 6, 13-29, Durkheim Elementary 268).

In my discussions of exchange as a ritual system, I am less interested in claiming that exchange functions as a ritual than I am in examining how anthropological discussions of ritual, in particular the repeated isolation of certain features in ritual, such as the experience of unity, reveal patterns that surface in economic theorizations and representations of exchange. By concentrating on specific consonances in form between nineteenth- and twentieth-century anthropological discussions of ritual and economic exchange, I seek to unveil a consonance in the preoccupations that underlie theorizations of economic exchange and ritual. Specifically, I argue that both ritual and economic exchange emphasize the performance of a collective act in which the mutual coordination of multiple actors into an interdependent whole establishes communality among the
various individual participants. This collective act objectifies and makes visible the shared values, beliefs, and customs upon which participants act and through which they communicate to each other that they share, and implicitly act upon, such information. Ritual and exchange function as a type of performative information system through which individuals gain a sense of their position in relation to the group and about the group itself. More importantly, the collective act—either the act itself or the visible effects the act produces—expresses the consensus of the group and mediates its experience of togetherness. In this manner, I interpret both ritual and exchange as theorizations of collective social practices in which collective action dissolves the temporal delay that separates values, beliefs, thoughts etc. from actions by making actions themselves the medium through which we come to know of a group’s system of values and beliefs. This experience of communality and interdependence, as well as the shared information that facilitates group consensus, invigorates the stability of the social group. In my discussion of Victorian writers, anthropology, and political economy, this performative information system, and the group solidarity that it engenders, either explicitly or implicitly, sacralizes the social order and thereby stabilizes its values. This is not to say that all thinkers that I discuss set out to sacralize the social order but that, at moments of pressure within their arguments, they succumb to the logic of sacrifice in order to assure social stability.

My focus on the relationship between theories of value and collective practices such as exchange and ritual dovetails with two lines of current Victorian scholarship on nineteenth-century political economy and anthropology: theorizations of “culture” and the discourse of relativism. Regenia Gagnier’s *The Insatiability of Human Wants* has
called attention to a paradigmatic shift in economic thought during the nineteenth century that increasingly relativized conceptions of economic value. The traditional narrative of the history of economic ideas presents the 1870s as a period wherein classical theories of value, expressed in terms of objective labor-costs, were displaced by theories of value rooted in patterns of consumption and demand, that is, by a subjective theory of value defined according to individual preferences and desires. Gagnier adapts this evolutionary narrative of a shift in economic ideas during the 1870s, what would later be referred to as the marginal revolution, to demonstrate the parallel emphasis on individual consumption, taste, and pleasure within nineteenth-century aesthetics. Similarly, Christopher Herbert’s *Victorian Relativity* interprets political economists like Jevons, who signaled the marginal revolution in Britain, with a new openness to relativity during the nineteenth century that extended to other areas of knowledge such as physics.

Herbert’s argument on relativistic thought in the nineteenth century hearkens back to his previous work, *Culture and Anomie*, which examines how the anthropological concept of culture as a “complex whole” in E.B. Tylor’s *Primitive Culture* constrains the illimitable desire that threatens the social fabric by imposing systematic wholeness, a logic that informs political economic constructions of value and exchange. Economic theories of value in Adam Smith, he argues, serve as symbolic representations of culture as a complex whole and provide a model of society as a stable and holistic system that effectively constrains desire. In *Victorian Relativity*, however, the interconnected matrix of relative values that Smith imposes in *The Wealth of Nations* in order to contain value’s mobility within a differential structure becomes the hallmark of progressive, relativistic thinking. Here Herbert claims that in contrast to images of absolutism and authoritarian
political rhetoric, Victorian writings on relativism stress reciprocity and the interconnectedness of relations within a holistic system like parts of an interdependent body (Relativity 9-10).

What appears like an inconsistency in Herbert’s recasting of relativistic structures reveals a key strategy of political economists during the nineteenth century, a strategy that they employ to alleviate the destabilizing effects of relative values. In this context, the shift from objective to subjective theories of economic value during the nineteenth-century was not as free from anxiety and dissent as Gagnier outlines. From Adam Smith to Alfred Marshall, British political economists struggled to synthesize the objective costs of labor and production with the subjective side of consumer demand in determining the price of goods. As late as 1890, Alfred Marshall presented his famous metaphor of the scissors, whose dual blades represented the joint influence of production costs and demand on the price of goods (Principles 348). Marshall’s position stood as a compromise between objective and subjective conceptions of value. This conflicted attitude toward the contingent nature of value on the part of nineteenth-century political economists occurs because theories of value not only articulate economic problems but also function as acts of self-representation. As with Victorian writers, theories of value become sites wherein theorists imagine ideal social relations and pressures on those relations. In this context, I interpret Herbert’s discussion of culture as a “complex whole” and his remark that relativistic thinking emphasizes interconnectedness and reciprocity as the elements that political economic models of exchange synthesize to stabilize value. The interdependent matrix of values that results from exchange constitutes a representation of social interconnectedness and reciprocity, a representation that mediates
an experience of communality where face-to-face contact remains absent. A relative structure of price values becomes, paradoxically, a vision of social stability and interconnectedness. While I draw on Herbert’s conceptualization of culture, as well as Catherine Gallagher’s analysis of Malthusian ideas of sexuality in political economic and anthropological theories of value and kinship, my analysis of the consonances between political economy and anthropology concentrations on notions of sacrifice, the sacred, and ritual, interpreting the “complex whole” of the economy as the idealized end point of ritualized systems of reciprocal exchange in which labor’s sacrifice renders both value and the “complex whole” of the economic system sacred.

Considered together, the first two chapters on nineteenth-century political economy and anthropology develop the theoretical framework of the dissertation and introduce many of the central themes that unfold in the literary examples discussed in chapters three and four. Given the interdisciplinary nature of the project, I spend some time in the first two chapters reconstructing the arguments within political economic and anthropological texts, paying attention to the way in which economists and anthropologists conceptualized their arguments rather than solely sifting through the metaphorical aspects of their language. At the same time, however, the aim of this project is not to determine the credibility of the truth-claims put forth by either political economy or anthropology. In this sense, I ultimately focus on the representational aspects and sociological implications of the non-literary disciplines with which I engage. Moreover, the intellectual patterns and representations I examine are textual rather than historical. While the themes of value, exchange, sacrifice, and ritual become objects of study during the nineteenth century through such disciplines as political economy and
anthropology—a thematic bundle that seems particular to the Victorian period and its preoccupations—given the temporal sweep of the texts I examine and the distinct voices articulated therein, I do not present a historical and necessarily causal relation between the intellectual pattern I identify in the dissertation and a specific set of events. In those instances where I do transition from historical context to text, I do so in relation to the particular writer under discussion rather than the dissertation as a whole.

The first chapter analyzes John Ruskin’s political economy, focusing on such texts as *Unto This Last* (1860), *Munera Pulveris* (1868), and *Time and Tide* (1867), alongside theories of value from Adam Smith, David Ricardo, John Stuart Mill, and William Stanley Jevons. I argue that Ruskin’s adoption of a labor theory of value entails a circular argument in which labor’s sacrifice expresses the absolute value of “life” and engenders a just society wherein the act of labor and the objects produced through labor denote the “holiness” of life and the social body “life” constitutes. In economic theories of value as well, labor’s sacrifice consecrates the economic system through its very circularity and promotes just economic relations. Ruskin’s writings highlight the circular, gift-sacrifice model that underlies labor theories of value. In this manner, the very argumentative structure of the labor theory of value facilitates the sacralization of labor as the foundation of the economic system. As with Ruskin, political economists from Adam Smith to William Stanley Jevons emphasize labor’s sacrifice in their theories of value because it furnishes a tool in their critique of just distribution.

The second chapter revisits Ruskin’s political economy and his early aesthetic writings such as *The Stones of Venice* (1851, 1853), *Modern Painters* (1843), and *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849) in relation to economists ranging from Adam Smith to Alfred
Marshall and Victorian anthropologists such as E.B. Tylor, Henry Maine, James Frazer, and William Robertson Smith. In this chapter I claim that Ruskin’s conception of exchange as a ritual rooted in reciprocal self-sacrifice underwrites eighteenth- and nineteenth-century political economies as well. Economic theories of equilibrium, famously depicted in Smith’s invisible hand, describe a theoretical state in which the discrete actions of countless individuals participate in coordinated networks of exchange. Such theorizations of equilibrium provide a representation of communality and enable individuals to imagine their participation within an interdependent framework. While nineteenth-century political economists ground the economic equilibrium of a just, harmonious society on acts of reciprocal exchange, Victorian anthropologists interpret sacrificial ritual in non-European societies as a collective act that reinforces the community’s social equilibrium, reciprocal obligations, and agricultural fertility.

The third and fourth chapters explore the theoretical paradigms elucidated in the first two chapters through Victorian fiction. In the third chapter I resituate the themes of sacrifice in relation to the ideology of separate spheres and the novel. The chapter focuses on how the term “household gods” in Anthony Trollope’s The Way We Live Now (1874-1875), Charles Dickens’s Dombey and Son (1846-1848), and George Eliot’s The Mill on the Floss (1860) represents the sacralization of commodities once they are removed from the marketplace and enter the domestic sphere. Feminine affections and self-sacrifice maintain the boundary between the profane realm of fluid values and the sacred realm of the domestic sphere, where values are rendered absolute. I locate the discussion of “household gods” and the crisis in values it signals within the historical shift from immovable possessions like land to an economic system reliant on movable possessions, fictions of credit, and imperialist
finance. Drawing on discussion of the taboo, totemism, and kinship among Victorian
anthropologists such as James Frazer and John Mclennan, I show that both Victorian novels
and anthropologists expressed interest in the relationship groups established between kinship
systems and property because they associate control over sacred objects and the patriarchal
transmission of property with control over women, fertility, and the absolute value women
symbolize. Losing control over household gods and the entry of market forces into the
home destabilizes the locus of absolute value as well as the economic and biological
reproduction of the patriarchal family.

The fourth and final chapter addresses the themes of sacrifice, reciprocity, and
ritual in the fictional works of Rudyard Kipling. In such texts as *The Day’s Work* (1898),
*Kim* (1901), * Traffics and Discoveries* (1904), and *Debits and Credits* (1926), Kipling
stresses the importance of Masonic rituals and sacrificial labor for an experience of
communality and brotherhood that advances the aims of empire. As in chapter three,
Kipling locates the threat to imperial dominance and the hierarchies it legitimates as arising
from unstable value. Rather than figuring value in terms of land or money, Kipling depicts
energy such as steam and electricity, as the magical prime mover and source of value that
empire must harness and redirect lest these magical powers overwhelm and destabilize its
political and economic order. Like Ruskin, Kipling presents an interdependent system in
which reciprocal self-sacrifice maintains social order yet, unlike previous literary figures,
Kipling brings the negative connotations of sacrificial rhetoric into view because he
connects communion through reciprocal self-sacrifice with the exertion of imperial
dominance. Kipling’s fiction provides a forum for addressing the tensions between self-
interested competition and disequilibrium and the disinterested model of reciprocal
exchange earlier discussed in relation to Mauss. His use of mechanical metaphors for imperial administration and economics as a highly coordinated system based on reciprocal, self-sacrificing labor, as well as his interest in ritual, stands in conflict with an imperialist rhetoric that favors hierarchies and domination. Furthermore, Kipling’s fiction provides a corollary to the tension between equilibrium and disequilibrium in the sociological and economic theories of Francis Edgeworth, Alfred Marshall, and Herbert Spencer. In these thinkers as well, the sacred energies that propel the economic and social system toward the ideal of equilibrium also potentially disrupt it and create disequilibrium.

I close the dissertation with a brief coda reflecting on Émile Durkheim’s *The Division of Labor and Society* (1893) and *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. Durkheim’s analysis of such binaries as the sacred and profane, as well as his functionalist interpretation of religion, provides a formal theorization of the relationship between fluid values and collective social practices that the Victorians had already been exploring. My examination of nineteenth-century literature, anthropology, and political economy thus exposes a line of thinking that explicitly culminates in Émile Durkheim’s sociology: society constitutes the sacred. For Victorians, the marketplace represents the site wherein agents stabilize values and confirm the sanctity of the social body by participating in coordinated rites of exchange.
CHAPTER 2

“PERSONS THEMSELVES ARE THE WEALTH”: A COMMON MEASURE FOR THE COMMONWEALTH IN JOHN RUSKIN’S POLITICAL ECONOMY

The property which every man has in his own labour, as it is the original foundation of all other property, so it is the most sacred and inviolable. (109)

The prodigal perverts in this manner. By not confining his expense within his income, he encroaches upon his capital. Like him who perverts the revenues of some pious foundation to profane purposes, he pays the wages of idleness with those funds which the frugality of his forefathers had, as it were, consecrated to the maintenance of industry. (302)

—Adam Smith, The Wealth of Nations

Adam Smith’s description of labor, property, and capital employs religious terminology for what, essentially, are economic processes. Such terms as “sacred” and “profane” appear in the midst of analyzing the freedom to sell the services of one’s labor and the importance of parsimony to the accumulation of capital. But why he ascribes religious connotations to such economic processes remains unexplained.7 An initial response to Smith’s use of religious rhetoric in an economic treatise might be that he incorporates the phrase “sacred and inviolable” because it appears in writings on the institution of private property in thinkers such as Locke and Hume. This in part is true,

7The description of labor as sacred occurs among other political economists of the classical period as well. Malthus, for example, denounces Godwin’s measures for equitable redistribution of wealth and labor because it interferes with an individual’s command over his or labor, which is “the first and most sacred property.” See Malthus 181. Once again, the priority earlier accorded to land has shifted to labor. In this context, Marx’s critique of capitalism exposes the ideological function served when political economists declare property and fundamental capitalist principles such as “the law of supply demand” to be sacred; yet, Marx does not question whether labor itself represents the inviolable basis of value precisely because labor (power) for him bears the imprint of its social character. With respect to Smith and other classical economists, the question then becomes if labor is the cause of value, whether its status as sacred expresses something in addition to the ideological investments of capitalism.
but to claim that the phrase presents the traces of an intellectual inheritance does not answer its persistence in an economic text that has separated itself from overtly religious concerns, nor what it means to employ such language in relation to labor. My suggestion here is that the appearance of religious language within discussions of labor and capital needs to be given a prominent position in how we interpret such fundamental economic concepts as the labor theory of value. What is sacred about labor and why is the squandering of the wealth accumulated as a result of labor considered profane?

With respect to the latter question, John Ruskin’s writings on political economy provide an interpretive framework to analyze an otherwise unacknowledged pattern of thought within economic theories of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century. Ruskin openly advances the claim that the basis of a labor theory of value lies in the physical and mental exertion of human bodies. The sacrifice of life energies in labor constitutes the foundation of economic value because it is life—the human bodies that make up the social body—that is “sacred and inviolable.” Thus the claim by classical economists that labor, more than any other element in economic production, provides an invariable standard by which to measure a commodity’s exchange value takes on new significance.

Ruskin’s claim that the basis of absolute value is life because life is “holy” reveals the sociological preoccupations underlying the abstract formulations within economic

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8In his chapter “Of Property,” from The Second Treatise on Government, Locke never specifically uses the phrase “sacred and inviolable” to describe labor and the property appropriated through the effects of labor. The phrase sacred, however, appears in his discussion of the law of self-preservation. One could argue, then, that if he deems self-preservation to be sacred then, pro tanto, property as a means to self-preservation would also be sacred since one has to appropriate the gifts of nature in order to survive. Since one’s life is also one’s property, it is sacred and inalienable—a line of thinking congruent with Ruskin’s emphasis on ‘life’ as sacred. See Locke 14-26. In Hume the phrase “sacred and inviolable” appears in relation to the question of property and questions of justice. Hume argues, unlike customs that deem a building sacred on one day but profane on another, property remains free of the reversible and fluid boundaries present in other sacred and profane entities because its sacredness arises not from superstition but as the indispensable condition for communal welfare, happiness, and justice. See Hume Discourses 13-27. In both Locke and Hume, the phrase arises in relation to social institutions and the supposed instability in social systems that would result if one did not maintain the hallowedness of all property and propertied relations.
theories of value. He explicitly conjoins the sacrosanct nature of the social body with his theory of value because for him the presentation of absolute value is the keystone for the representation of a just and holy society. Although Ruskin adopts this position in an effort to critique the moral deficiencies of political economy and demonstrate its failure to regard human life and the building of a just community as central to its theories, I argue that his arguments are in fact representative of the circular, sacrificial economy that underwrites the labor theory of value. Thus, Ruskin’s seemingly quixotic writings on political economy disclose the labor theory of value’s ethico-religious function. By understanding key ideas in Ruskin, where the concept of the sacred appears directly linked with theories of value and sacrifice, we can then reinterpret specific principles central to eighteenth- and nineteenth- century political economy as well.

I The Theory of Value in John Ruskin

From a purely economic standpoint, Ruskin’s definitions of wealth and value offer little instruction. Ruskin’s non-economic orientation, however, becomes advantageous when exploring the relationship between theories of value within the economic sphere and conceptions of the sacred. In his writings on political economy, the problem of absolute and relative value appears immanently tied to the formation of a just society, a society in which the sacrifice of labor forms not only the basis for economic value but tacitly sacralizes communal relations through the act of labor and the products of human labor. It is in this context—the conjunction established between value, justice, and the sacralization of society—that Ruskin offers us a promising direction to explain the insistence on a labor theory of value among eighteenth- and nineteenth-century economists and labor’s sacred character. Value, for Ruskin, is a sociological and moral
problem (Lee 72). Without agreement on a correct and stable definition for value and wealth we cannot presume to build a just society. The fact that Ruskin begins with the problem of defining value indicates this broader concern: individuals no longer share a common knowledge as to what constitutes value. In Unto This Last (1860) and the preface to Munera Pulveris (1868), for example, Ruskin mocks John Stuart Mill’s claim that everyone understands the meaning of wealth “sufficient for common purposes” (17: 18, 131).9 His dominant concern, the concern that motivates his writings on political economy, stems from his observation that people neither have a definition of value and wealth for common purposes, nor one that is correct. Citing Fawcett’s Manual of Political Economy, Ruskin claims Fawcett correctly articulates the core question of political economy, that is, what economic practices “tend to make a nation rich or poor” (17: 139)? How we define rich and poor, Ruskin argues, becomes the “basis for national conduct” (17:139). The problem of value thus immediately appears situated within a sociological problem of how individuals interact with one another, on what basis they make choices, and how their agency either promotes or destroys the foundation of a just society. Without both a common and correct understanding of what constitutes value, then, the social body unwittingly undermines the very tenets of its cohesion. Whereas political economy advances the claim that people act according to the principle of self-interest, which embodies the underlying and common principle by which individuals act and attribute value, Ruskin articulates an alternative theory of value. After elucidating the main elements to his theory of value, wealth, and labor, I will then demonstrate how, and

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9All references to the work of John Ruskin will refer to the Cook and Wedderburn library edition and will provide parenthetical citations with volume and page numbers.
to what degree, the core of Ruskin’s arguments brings into relief a similar strain of
thought within political economy as well.

Ruskin provides a physiological basis for his theories of value and wealth. In
Unto This Last, as well as Munera Pulveris, he defines value as that which supports life,
and justifies the definition of value along these lines by appealing to the etymology of the
word itself. “Valor, from valere, to be well or strong (υγιαινω);--strong, in life (if a man),
or valiant; strong, for life (if a thing), or valuable. To be ‘valuable,’ therefore, is to ‘avail
towards life’” (17:84).

Whether or not something “avail[s] towards life” depends on
both intrinsic and extrinsic qualities. Ruskin primarily conceives of intrinsic value along
agricultural and physiological lines because the necessaries of nourishment, air, and
water are essential to the maintenance and reproduction of life. Hence, he states in
Munera Pulveris that “[i]ntrinsic value is the absolute power of anything to support life.

A sheaf of wheat of given quality and weight has in it a measurable power of sustaining

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10The biological underpinnings to Ruskin’s theory of value have been pointed out by other critics, most
notably Willie Henderson, who claims that Ruskin’s notion of intrinsic value depends on the life-availing
qualities of such natural phenomena as air and light. See Henderson 57, 101. Similarly, James Sherburne
remarks that Ruskin argues for a “vital economics.” See Sherburne 124. In a related but slightly different
vein, Jeffrey Spear has argued that Ruskin’s view of the economic system depends on an organic model of
natural cooperation and that his view of the essential unity of economics and morals is inflected with an
ecological perspective. See Spear 145-146. Catherine Gallagher links Ruskin’s concept of “life” within a
larger political economic tradition that conceives of value in terms of vital power, what she terms
bioeconomics. See Gallagher Body 87-89.

11While Ruskin’s theory of value is vigilantly non-quantitative, this is not indicative of quixotic thinking on
his part since the problem of measurement appears in utility analysis as well. How does one measure,
exactly, the experience of bodily and mental pleasure or pain in mathematical terms except by a process of
translation where concrete data such as commodity consumption patterns stands in for mental phenomena
beyond quantitative measurement?

12It must be noted, however, that Ruskin does not exclusively offer environmental or biological examples
of things that are valuable. In Munera Pulveris, he discusses the importance of art, books, buildings and
mechanical instruments. But these are all specific examples of valuable things that belong to the larger
category of the life-availing. Though on the surface Ruskin’s inclusion of items not essential to the
biological maintenance of human life presents an unjustified expansion to the category of the life-availing,
he perceives such goods to be important in cultivating the kind of character that would choose the life-
availing and activate its qualities nobly even though books and art belong to a secondary order of goods.
See also Ruskin’s lecture “The Political Economy of Art,” where he distinguishes between property that
“produces” life and property that is the “object of life” (16:129).
the substance of the body….Used or not, their own power is in them, and that particular power is in nothing else” (17:153). The standard of life, as an absolute standard of value, stands apart from the contingencies and fluctuations of individual valuations. Yet, while the absolute value of life exists independent of the uses to which individuals may direct it, whether or not life as a power latent in goods such as wheat materializes itself depends on the individual in whose hands it finds application.

The intrinsic value latent in such goods can only be activated and made an “effectual value,” Ruskin argues, if individuals have the ability to make use of it. Land is of intrinsic value but if we do not know how to cultivate the land and harvest grain, we will not activate its effectual value. In this sense, Ruskin equates effectual value with wealth and wealth with that which avails to life. The argument is entirely circular but its circularity is central to the basic assertion that life and its reproduction form the basis of value as well as the goal of economics.

Perhaps it may even appear, after some consideration, that the persons themselves are the wealth….In fact, it may be discovered that the true veins of wealth are purple—and not in Rock, but in Flesh—perhaps even that the final outcome and consummation of all wealth is in the producing as many as possible full-breathed, bright-eyed, and happy-hearted human creatures. (17:55-56)

Wealth and value both derive their content from the physiological conception of life as “flesh.” Ruskin critiques the conception of wealth as the accumulation of money and exchangeable property because it loses sight of, quite literally, the human lives that are the ultimate object in discussions of value.13

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13These arguments on wealth present a critique of Adam Smith’s claim that wealth consists of command over laborers, insofar as wealth for the capitalist consists in how many men he can set to labor on his behalf. Ruskin also subtly critiques Mill’s statement in the Principles, namely, that human beings are those for whom wealth is created but they themselves do not constitute wealth.
Ruskin’s claim that the basis of wealth resides not, as the early mercantilists thought, in the accumulation of money but in the goods and conveniences that can be procured by them, expresses a position consistent with both classical and neo-classical economists. The crux of the disagreement between his value theory and that advanced by economists lies rather in the notion of use-value versus exchange-value. The categories of use-value and exchange-value, famously articulated by Smith in the diamond-water paradox, also appears in the writings of the Ricardo-Mill school as well. The distinction between use-value and exchange-value suggests value to be a question of scarcity and demand. Hence, while water has use-value as a necessity for survival, due to its ubiquity it has no exchange-value; on the other hand, the scarcity of diamonds and the resultant demand gives diamonds a high exchange-value while they have no use-value whatsoever. Use-value hinges then on the extent to which the commodity becomes a necessity for survival or serves a pragmatic purpose.

The problem Ruskin perceives in this distinction is two-fold: value is made subject to demand and, concomitantly, there exists no extrinsic and absolute standard by which to determine attributions of value and on what grounds. The latter issue surfaces in his criticism of Mill’s definition of usefulness as the “capacity to satisfy a desire, or serve a purpose” (17:80). If we pose the question in terms of the basis upon which things have value for us, then it becomes a social problem. What will we choose to desire and what purpose will the things that we value serve? Once phrased in the following manner, what we judge as valuable directly represents our character and the community to which we belong. Ruskin responds to this question, as indicated earlier, by stating that the
extrinsic standard by which to determine what we value is whether or not it supports life.

He argues in *Munera Pulveris* that

> [t]he material things, therefore, which it is the object of political economy to produce and use, (or accumulate and use), are things which serve either to sustain life and comfort the body, or exercise rightly the affections and form the intelligence. Whatever truly serves either of these purposes is “useful” to man, wholesome, healthful, helpful, or holy. By seeking such things man prolongs and increases his life upon earth. On the other hand, whatever does not serve either of these purposes,—much more whatever counteracts them,—is in like manner useless to man, unwholesome, unhelpful, or unholy; and by seeking such things man shortens and diminishes his life upon earth. (17: 150-151)

Ruskin repeatedly uses health, help, and holy together as a series or interchangeably in contrast to what does not promote life and is thus unhealthful, unhelpful, and unholy. The redefinition of the useful as the life-availing and hence, holy, implicitly relies on Ruskin’s consistent presupposition in his writings that the life-availing and holy imply moral categories. He claims, for example, that the promotion of life, the healthy, and holy within the economic sphere depends on whether we produce the ‘right’ things:

> “[w]hat have you found, or formed—the right thing or the wrong? By the right thing you shall live; by the wrong thing you shall die” (17:152). Ruskin obfuscates the problem at hand since his argument needs to demonstrate what constitutes the ‘right’ and how the latter stands inextricably bound with the life-availing and holy. His polyvalent deployment of terms such as ‘right’ and ‘just,’ while attempting to establish the ethical underpinnings to economic matters, simply begs the question since he assumes ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ to be self-evident even when the absence of an explicit consensus motivated his argument in the first place. Such ambiguity in terminology has led critics like Linda Austin to claim that Ruskin vacillates between absolute and relative value. This stance, however, misinterprets Ruskin’s position because it equates his attention to the important
role an individual’s choices and actions play in activating the life-availing properties of goods with the attitude of a relativist. When, for example, Pausanias proposes in Plato’s *Symposium* that neither the action of drinking nor singing “has any virtue in itself, for the outcome of each action depends upon how it is performed” (535), one would not presume that Plato had abandoned the category of the good as possessing an essential, absolute value within his philosophical system. A similar logic underpins Ruskin’s thinking and illuminates a distinction often obscured by critics of Ruskin’s economic formulations, that is, that the realms of value and action are not identical. It is one thing to claim that people’s actions, choices, character, and judgments are contingent upon what they deem to be valuable; it is another claim entirely to assert that the concept of value, by definition, is relative—a position Ruskin at no point adumbrates. The latter confusion leads critics like Linda Austin and John Sherburne to claim that Ruskin reflects the movement toward subjective theories of value and the demand-side economic theories heralded by marginalists like Jevons and Menger in the late-nineteenth century. While clearly Ruskin evinces sensitivity on matters relating to consumer preference and the impact of consumer demand on what a nation produces, unlike economists like Jevons, he never defines value per se as an abstract category devoid of essential qualities nor considers it identical with subjective consumer preference. Rather, it is precisely this protean conception of value he seeks to combat by distinguishing value in flux from fluctuating judgments and actions with respect to value. Life is of absolute value, but until one admits of this fact, actions and choices within the economic sphere will either destroy life or prevent its fruition.

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14 Sherburne explicitly states that Ruskin anticipates subjective theories of value and, on a more dubious note, that he rejected a labor theory of value. See Sherburne 137-140, 57, and 64. See also Linda Austin 11-12, 92-94, 174-175.
Life as a standard of value enables Ruskin to then introduce a critique of action in the economic sphere insofar as misapprehension of the correct standard of value leads individual agents to act either rightly or wrongly, that is, in a manner that promotes life. He presents a critique, for example, of classical economists who distinguish between productive and unproductive labor on the basis of whether labor contributes to the growth of the nation’s economy through increased accumulation of capital, pointing out that the concept of ‘productive labor’ omits all consideration as to the goals of labor and increased capital.

It is indeed possible that in the ‘comparative estimate of the moralist,’ with which Mr. Mill says political economy has nothing to do (III.i.2), a steel fork might appear a more substantial production than a silver one: we may grant also that knives, no less than forks, are good produce; and scythes and ploughshares serviceable articles. But, how of bayonets? Supposing the hardware merchant to effect large scales of these, by help of the “setting free”; of the food of his servants and his silversmith,—is he still employing productive labourers, or, in Mr. Mill’s words, labourers who increase “the stock of permanent means of enjoyment” (I.iii.4)? Or if, instead of bayonets, he supply bombs, will not the absolute and final ‘enjoyment’ of even these energetically productive articles (each of which costs ten pounds*) be dependent on a proper choice of time and place for their enfantement; choice, that is to say, depending on those philosophical considerations with which political economy has nothing to do. (17: 78-79)

This dramatic, if not inflammatory, example of bayonets and bombs showcases the banality of the distinction between productive and unproductive labor, terminology that leaves unacknowledged whether or not ‘productive labor’ results in the destruction of life through the very commodity it produces. It is here that our economic choices reflect either an awareness, ignorance, or disregard for life as the standard of value. Ruskin critiques Mill’s tacit inclusion of human dispositions in a social science that claims ethical questions operate outside its purview and illustrates, through a rather bombastic
example, that the production of life-availing things requires a complete shift in value judgments—a shift that begins with a recognition that life alone is of absolute value.

Ruskin’s theory of value responds to the problem of absolute and relative value by asking what at bottom is of insubstitutable value for us? The answer he offers to this question becomes the desideratum of Unto This Last: “THERE IS NO WEALTH BUT LIFE” (17:105). He, however, complicates the notion that life presents an invariable standard of value by repeatedly linking it with the moral question of the virtue of persons and, as a consequence, the community they constitute. Thus, while he claims that the productivity and wealth of a nation, contrary to political economy, resides not in the amount of labor employed or commodities produced but in “how much life it produces” (17:104), he has to resolve the very problem his reduction of value to a physiological basis introduces. If life alone is of absolute value, then one could potentially argue that life belongs to a biological, not moral, category. This seems unproblematic in relation to the example of wheat, but one must remember that he introduces the agricultural example as a stepping stone for the broader claim that, in particular, human life and the powers it possesses are of absolute value and human life cannot be seen as an amoral category.

For this reason, soon after claiming that there is no wealth but life and its (re)production, Ruskin presents the following statement linking virtue and the standard of life: “The maximum of life can only be reached by the maximum of virtue” (17:105). This articulation of the problem resembles the relationship between intrinsic and effectual

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15Ruskin was not alone in linking the education of a virtuous populous with economic welfare. Christian economists like Chalmers, influenced by Malthusian arguments of scarcity, emphasize the strong relationship between a “virtuous peasantry” and the effects on wages and population. Malthus’s arguments on prudential restraint to combat the effects of increasing population and limited agricultural productivity lead Chalmers to argue that the church can play a vital role in cultivating moral character which, unlike agriculture, is unlimited. See Thomas Chalmers’s On Political Economy.
value. The production of life and, by association, true wealth in a country only becomes possible in a nation comprised of virtuous men and women and a necessary component of virtue is the recognition of life as the absolute standard of value. Since the life-availing includes such goods as agricultural produce, land, air, books, buildings, and art, they are not in themselves moral. But only those who understand life to be of absolute value will exhibit the capacity to make moral choices that buttress the production and maintenance of those “noble and happy human beings” who embody the nation’s wealth and life (17:105). The word ‘noble’ is never far from Ruskin’s discussions of life and wealth because he does not simply want a nation of healthy human bodies but wants them to act nobly. And they can only act nobly if they appreciate life to be of absolute value.

Precisely because political economy, as a social science, will always address circumstances that are by nature indeterminate and contextual and thus will never lend themselves to apodictic certainties, he must articulate a theory of value and right action other than utilitarian “expediency” (17:25). This “rule of action,” he argues, is justice (17:28). Acting on the principle of justice requires that we recognize the sanctity of life—the human body that constitutes the fundamental and insubstitutable unit of the social body—as the inviolable basis of absolute value. Ruskin takes for granted that we all know what constitutes a just or unjust act, though we may not foresee all the consequences of our actions (17:28). He fails to realize that even if one were to grant him that the life-availing should be the standard of value, this does not foreclose disagreement on what specific choices and judgments we make and deem productive or unproductive of life. Rather than presenting a cogent exposition of how acting ‘nobly’ or producing the ‘right’ thing inheres a causal relation with the life-availing, Ruskin clusters
these terms and categories together and assumes this sufficiently reveals the life-availing
to be inexorably bound to “justice.” In this context, the example of bombs and bayonets
both highlights and obscures his point. On the one hand, he shows that economic (and
political) decisions belie his Christian audience’s appreciation of the sanctity of human
life. Yet, on the other hand, the example of bombs is too facile since it does not address
the less obvious and more ambiguous choices people face.

The interdependence of the right rule of action in the economic sphere and life as
the invariable standard of value develops its most coherent formulation in the concept of
the ‘holy.’ In his discussion of wealth and poverty, for example, Ruskin claims that the
confrontation between the rich and poor can either be “gentle and just, or convulsive and
destructive,” “blackness of thunderstroke, or continual force of vital fire.” Which of these
two options occurs “depends on both rich and poor knowing that God is their light;
…light, which is called in another of the books among which the merchant’s maxims
have been preserved, the ‘sun of justice,’ of which it is promised that it shall rise at last
with ‘healing’ (health-giving or helping, making whole or setting at one) in its wings.
For truly this healing is only possible by means of justice…” (17:59). The latter passage
first instructs his readers to recognize, through a Christian God, their shared divine
origins, an understanding that directs their choices and judgments and whether or not
intrinsic value becomes effectual value in their hands. Ruskin invokes the category of the
life-availing through the term ‘vital,’ a synonym he often employs to designate life’s
organic dynamism (Sherburne 127).\footnote{Sherburne links the use of the term ‘vital’ to an organicism that Ruskin inherits from the Romantics, though the Bible remains an obvious influence as well. See Sherburne 127.}
Once this has been established, the passage quickly introduces an association between the divine light in each person and “the sun of justice.” The sun of justice, he explains in a footnote, would be more accurately understood as righteousness.

Righteousness stands differentiated from justice, as it is commonly employed, in that the former involves respect for and acting according to the absolute character of the moral law whereas the latter denotes the contingencies according to which we vary our judgments, choices, and actions. This is an important distinction since it sets the stage for the concatenation of a series of claims, all of which eventually cohere in the concept of the holy. Having established the relationship between life (vital fire) and just action, he then declares that only “the sun of justice” makes help, healing, and the formation of a whole possible. But what exactly does he mean by such phrases? We have already seen, in relation to the critique of usefulness, Ruskin’s tendency to yoke help, health, and holy. Hence, it is no surprise that later in the very passage under discussion he links holiness and helpfulness with justice. “But this justice, with its accompanying holiness or helpfulness, being even by the best man denied in its trial time, is by the mass of men hated wherever it appears: so that, when the choice was one day fairly put to them, they denied the Helpful One and the Just; and desired a murderer, sedition-raiser, and robber, to be granted to them;—the murderer instead of the Lord of Life, the sedition-raiser instead of the Price of Peace, and the robber instead of the Just Judge of all the world”

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17Ruskin’s distinction is based on the original Greek word employed in the Wisdom of Solomon (Apocrypha) in contrast to the translation of it in the Latin Vulgate. More importantly, Peter D. Anthony remarks that Ruskin distinguishes righteousness, which is absolute and universal, from justice, which is contingent and specific. Anthony claims that the distinction buttresses Ruskin’s criticism of Victorian society where judge’s justice (contingent) has replaced king’s justice (absolute). It also marks, Anthony suggests, the difference between respecting the moral law and the equitable laws/rules instituted by society. Jaywalking, for example, breaks an equitable law but it does not offend any moral laws. In the context of the present argument, “the sun of justice” as righteousness links the holy, interdependent structure of society with absolute justice. Whenever Ruskin speaks of justice, then, it must be understood in relation to the absolute character of “righteousness.” See Anthony 31.
Here we arrive at the principal goal of the entire passage. To perceive the sacred character of persons, the light of God in them, is to know that life is ‘holy,’ and only when this is admitted can one act justly and choose the life-availing. It is this just action of choosing and activating the powers of the life-availing that then results in a holy, healthful, and helpful society and which results finally in a “whole.”

This leads us to the next pertinent question: what is the nature of this whole, the holiness it entails, and its relationship to the concept of help? Ruskin provides an early definition of the “holy” in *Modern Painters* which, he claimed, expressed the sum of his political economy (17:75). The “holy” provides a quasi-religious conception for what consists primarily in a sociological description of organic unity. The “holy” denotes a state in which all parts participate in an interdependent whole and it is through this interdependence that life becomes manifest. Just as the sanguinity of organic life forms depends on the efficiency of interdependent parts, so Ruskin argues in “The Law of Help” from *Modern Painters* that an agonistic society undermines holiness, helpfulness, and life.

If any part enters into a state in which it no more assists the rest, and has thus become “helpless” we call it also dead. The power which causes the several portions of the plant to help each other, we call life. Much more is this so in an animal. We may take away the branch of a tree away from it without much harm to it; but not the animals’ limb. Thus the intensity of life is also of helpfulness—completeness of depending of each part on all the rest. The ceasing of this help is what we call corruption….What matter is either consistent, or living, we call it pure, or clean; when inconsistent or corrupting (unhelpful), we call it impure, or unclean. The greatest uncleanliness being that which is essentially most opposite

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18In his letter “To Mrs. John Simon,” written in Nuremberg on July 5th 1859, Ruskin denounces the diluted usage of the word “holy” by his contemporaries. Ruskin distinguishes his understanding of the word holy from the Latin “sanctus,” to set apart, and from a state of innocence. Instead, Ruskin claims that “holy” should be understood as “Life-giving” and is the word applied to God or the “Lord of Life,” who gives “help” to all living creatures. In this context, God as the giver of life is ‘helpful.’ Thus, Ruskin instructs Mrs. John Simon to “[r]ead ‘life-giving’ for helpful.” The holiness of life, he argues, explains why blood is sacred, i.e. because blood is life. The notion of impurity, so often found alongside discussions of the sacred, appears in Ruskin’s thinking as that which destroys life or corrupts life. (36: 307-308)
to life. Life and consistency, then, both expressing one character (namely, helpfulness of a higher or lower order), the Maker of all creatures and things, “by whom all creatures live and all things consist,” is essentially and forever the Helpful one, or in softer Saxon, the “Holy” One. The word has no other ultimate meaning: Helpful, harmless, undefiled: “living” or “Lord of life.”...A pure or holy state of anything, therefore, is that in which all its parts are helpful or consistent. They may or may not be homogeneous. The highest or organic purities are composed of many elements in an entirely helpful state. The highest and first law of the universe—and the other name of life is, therefore, “help.” The other name of death is “separation.” Government and co-operation are in all things and eternally the laws of life. Anarchy and competition, eternally, and in all things, the laws of death. (7: 205-207)

Ruskin takes the natural world as the model for the social world: each organic entity is composed of highly coordinated and complex elements and processes that work to sustain the life of the organism. Thus ‘life’ expresses the vital order of the system and ‘help’ the interdependent unity that the parts form together. The holy, as a state rather than simply a descriptive adjective, remains contrasted with its polar opposite: the unholy, unhelpful, unhealthy, impure, and corrupt. Seen within the context of our earlier discussion of the “sun of justice,” where justice is accompanied with holiness or helpfulness, it now appears clear that only a just society embodies life and the pure, holy state. Additionally, Ruskin’s statement that one achieves the maximum of life only with the maximum of virtue can now be resituated within his notion of the holy and the helpful since a just society alone acts in such a way as to preserve the interdependence of parts expressive of life.19 The appearance of the holy, just, and life together in the depiction of an

19The conjunction between justice and a healthy, holy, helpful society reflects the influence of Plato in Ruskin’s thinking, especially his conception of a just society in the Republic. In the Republic, Plato presents a parallel between the harmonious equilibrium established between the three parts of the soul with the harmony of the three parts of the society. Harmony within the tripartite division of the soul, where reason supervenes over spirit and the appetites, is justice and justice, Socrates argues by analogy, is to the soul as health is to the body. Acting unjustly then is analogous to unhealthy things for the body. The latter analogy of the just, harmonious, healthy soul as the analogue for the just, harmonious, healthy society clearly influences Ruskin definition of the ‘holy’ state of a society since he concludes that only a just society is capable of achieving a harmonious interdependence of parts, i.e. helpfulness, healthiness and holiness. John Henderson provides the fullest treatment of Platonic influences in Ruskin and his emphasis
interdependent whole makes acting justly indispensable to his political vision; it represents the bedrock of his critique of capitalist competition whose ethos conceals the parasitic destruction of life in the pursuit of monetary wealth. Hence, the depiction of an interdependent organic structure—the “pure or holy state of anything”—explicitly functions as an analogue for the social order as well since Ruskin links it with proper government and cooperation. Capitalism, by atomizing individual relations, inflicts death and destroys the very life its purpose should be to sustain. This view of the ends of economic life as essentially the biological reproduction of life and the sociological reproduction of the communal body becomes the basis for Ruskin’s argument that since human life and the community it forms is what is sacred or, as he phrases it “holy,” the aim of political economy is to support and strengthen the basis of this holy structure.

The binary opposition between life and death, holy and unholy, serves to correct the problem of relative value but in actuality is symptomatic of it. The only reason Ruskin feels the need to present a strict separation between the holy and unholy, life and death, is because value is contextual and relational—subject to the choices and actions of each individual. The shifting and fluctuating nature of value motivates Ruskin to define wealth and value through a primarily biological conception of life and present an invariable means by which to judge the value of all other things as either productive of life or death. Life is of objective and absolute value since it is, quite literally, the *sine qua non* of material existence. Intrinsic value becomes effectual value in the hands of a “noble person” and is converted into wealth (17:154). While value is intrinsic, wealth by contrast is relational. The relational character of wealth surfaces in the distinction

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on justice with respect to economic relations, although the specific relationship between Ruskin’s use of holy, health, and help to Plato is not treated. See Henderson 86-106.
between wealth and illth, another characteristically binary formulation that only
demonstrates the degree to which value consists of an abstract formulation, attaining
relevance only in application by individuals.

Wealth, therefore, is “THE POSSESSION OF THE VALUABLE BY THE
VALIANT”; and in considering it as a power existing in a nation, the two
elements, the value of the thing, and the valour of its possessor, must be estimated
together. Whence it appears that many of the persons commonly considered
wealthy, are in reality no more wealthy than the locks of their own strong boxes
are, they being inherently incapable of wealth; and operating for the nation, in an
economical point of view, either as dead water, and eddies in a stream (which, so
long as the stream flows, are useless, or serve only to drown people, but may
become of importance in a state of stagnation should the stream dry); or else, as
dams in a river, if which the ultimate service depends not on the dam, but the
miller; or else, as mere accidental stays and impediments, acting not as wealth,
but (for we ought to have a correspondent term) as ‘illth’, causing various
devastation and trouble around them in all directions…. (17:88-89)

By defining wealth as the subsequent effect of the intrinsic value of a thing in the hands
of its possessor, Ruskin contradicts economists like Mill who claim that questions as to
the production, distribution and consumption of wealth are distinct from questions of
virtue (Mill 2: 4). He tacitly implicates the character of a person and a nation since only
a person and nation of virtue, according to Ruskin, would choose the correct standard of
value: life. This is important since it means that whether or not something becomes
wealth or illth depends on the nation recognizing the correct standard of value by which it
acts and forming their judgments whether as consumers of goods or as employers. In this
context, the determination of an invariable standard of value is, ipso facto, a social and
moral problem.

The argument Ruskin advances can be simplified in the following manner: 1)wealth consists of things that are of intrinsic value; 2) intrinsic value consists of the life-
availing; 3) but whether the life-availing becomes wealth or illth depends. Upon what
does it depend? It depends on the character of the individual—a character nurtured by the community—which influences the degree to which intrinsic value becomes wealth for the individual or nation. It is character that determines the actions of agents, the choices they make, and the ends toward which things of intrinsic value are directed. Character represents a larger social phenomenon; at stake is not an individual subjectivity so much as the values and habits of a nation that inculcate certain modes of behavior. Thus, the life-availing thing in the hands of a person of immoral or uneducated character can direct ‘life-availing’ goods toward destructive purpose—wealth becomes illth. The introduction of the consumer’s agency determines the extent to which anything either supports or destroys life and presents a serious stumbling block to Ruskin’s argument. If it is necessary for a community to recognize that life is of absolute value in order to act and choose rightly such that they transform the life-availing into wealth rather than illth, and this recognition of life as the ultimate standard simultaneously indicates a virtuous character and disposition, then any project of social critique must begin with the standard of value—a standard of value that the community assents to and holds in common.

The importance of individual judgment in determining how an individual uses a product indicates Ruskin’s recognition and struggle with the fact that even if one alights on an invariable standard of value, a separate problem arises when we demand that it be shared. The project before him, then, is first to set out the standard of value, demonstrate to what degree a rule of right action depends on the theory of value, and finally, how the two together represent the indispensable foundation for a just, helpful, and holy society. Given the nature of the task before him, the question is not simply that value in itself is relative since he believes he has already established an invariable standard. Rather, the
problem lies in the fact that even judgments as to what the invariable standard constitutes varies and, as a result, what constitutes right action will also differ. Utilitarianism, for example, articulates a theory of value it deems invariable: a pleasure-pain calculus. Ruskin’s critique of both utilitarianism, and the political economic ideals associated with it, targets the theory of right action he perceives as arising from its erroneous theory of value—both of which he considers irreconcilable with the creation of a just society. Thus, because right action depends on accepting the right theory of value as the invariable standard, the focus of his critique becomes the education of the public and the formation of an individual and national character that chooses the right things and employs them in the right manner.

Though we may arrive in a world already replete with intrinsic goods—goods that retain their life-availing qualities “independent of opinion, and of quantity” (17:85)—goods, and the world they belong to, would be of little interest to us unless, in the course of their itinerant lives, they did not flourish or depreciate according to the uses of their varied owners. This concern underpins the analysis of consumer preference and buying practices. Ruskin insists, for example, that “material utility depends on its relative human capacity” and that “economists have never perceived that the disposition to buy is a wholly moral element in demand: that is to say, when you give a man half a crown, it depends on his disposition whether he is rich or poor with it” (17:81). The problem consists in people’s failure to recognize that life is of intrinsic value and holy. As a result, their actions in relation to one another and the community to which they belong are also not recognized as holy.
This presents a crucial point and returns us to the problem of a shared value structure. Only those who possess a correct understanding of value will choose the life-availing thing and use it appropriately. While Ruskin has established life’s intrinsic value and wealth as comprised of the life-availing thing, he has not as yet offered an economic principle by which each person would tacitly acknowledge that life was the basis of value. Justice as a rule of action fails to articulate a cogent theory since it presents the desired effect of right action as the guiding principle and assumes agreement as to what is just or unjust to be self-evident when the absence of such agreement motivated Ruskin’s critique of political economy. In relation to this vexed issue, we can interpret the adoption of a labor theory of value as a potential reply to the need for a shared and public expression of the intrinsic value of life. Simply claiming that life is of intrinsic value is not enough. A just society demands that the actions we perform in the economic sphere denote a shared value structure—one grounded in the recognition that the social body itself is holy.

The presentation of a labor theory of value functions as a resolution to exactly this problem of a shared value structure and, as will later become apparent, becomes a solution that eighteenth- and nineteenth-century economists also fall back upon. Ruskin, along with eighteenth- and nineteenth-century economists from Smith to Jevons, presents sacrifice, either in the form of labor or in the renunciation of our wants, as the via negativa through which value articulates its positive properties. The sacrifice, suffering, and literal loss or giving up of life that labor entails, forms the basis of its value and requires each individual in the economic sphere to recognize, however implicitly, that life is the basis of value. Paradoxically, life as intrinsic value appears on the economic
landscape not as life but as its renunciation and sacrifice. Thus, in *Munera Pulveris*, Ruskin claims that the true cost or price of something can only be known when one determines what constitutes labor.

I have already defined Labour to be the Contest of the life of man with an opposite. Literally, it is the quantity of “Lapse,” loss, or failure of human life, caused by any effort. It is usually confused with effort itself, or the application of power (opera); but there is much effort which is merely a mode of recreation, or of pleasure. The most beautiful applications of the human body, and the highest results of the human intelligence, are conditions, or achievements, of quiet unlaborious—nay, of recreative,—effort. But labour is the *suffering* in effort. It is the negative quantity, or quantity of de-feat, which has to be counted against every Feat…. In brief, it is “that quantity of our toil which we die in.” (17:182-183)

Distinguishing labor from opera, or the mere application of a skill, Ruskin presents a labor theory of value that has its basis in how much ‘life’ is spent and sacrificed by the individual. He, like Smith, offers a cost theory of value—a theory of value that relies on labor as the dominant variable in a commodity’s cost of production (Schumpeter 590). The more we suffer and sacrifice, the greater the cost *for us*, and hence, the value. Thus, an object’s value denotes a physiological and psychological sacrifice endured by the laborer, a sacrifice that then becomes concrete within the object produced. The physiological basis for Ruskin’s labor-embodied theory of value, at its surface, mirrors the logic of disutility present in economic definitions of labor. He designates the sacrifice inherent in labor as the invariable standard of value precisely because it has its base in the physiological and psychic expenditure of human bodies. Ruskin’s vitalism, his ‘life’ philosophy, presents parallels to economic definitions of labor insofar as both

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20Ruskin’s distinction between labor and opera is not, as James Sherburne claims, a separation between happy, creative work and suffering in labor. What Ruskin achieves by the distinction is to separate labor from anything that does not involve sacrifice such as mere application (opera) because it is only sacrifice of life that transmits itself as value in labor. It is for this reason that in other works he worries over the value of art since, according to his theory, if the artwork did not require suffering in effort it would not have real value, even if it was a renowned work. See Sherburne 130. For a critique of Sherburne’s analysis of labor see Anthony 161.
the notion of labor as toil and the hedonic calculus assume as its base the body’s physiological responses. He highlights what classical economists had already appreciated but from a different perspective. Labor, as an invariable standard of value, represents the fundamental basis of all value for us: human life. Since we sacrifice a portion of our lives in labor, labor’s value is absolute and insubstitutable.

The advantage in defining the cost or price of something according to the invariable measure of labor is that the exchange-value of a commodity now denotes its cost as an embodiment of life. Both in the realms of production and exchange, the labor theory of value provides a standard that engages with the central claim that ultimately life is of intrinsic value. If life is holy, then labor as the expenditure of bodily energies is also holy. The recognition of labor as the embodiment of life opens up the possibility of differentiating between unjust and just forms of labor. The quality and ends of labor matter precisely because true labor, as that which leads toward life, “is a divine thing, to be honoured with the kind of honour given to the gods” (17:95). Ruskin’s criticism of political economy contends that because labor defines value and measures the expenditure of a person’s energies and passions, political economy must address the moral and spiritual dimension of commodities and those who produce them. Labor expresses the soul of persons and insofar as labor denotes the holy dimension of individuals, the products of these labors are also holy. Thus when Ruskin argues that political economy divests itself of its relationship to the bonds between persons and the moral dimension this adds to their calculations, he demands we recognize the “soul” rather than “skeleton” that animates social bonds and serves as the impetus for economic exchanges in the first place (17:26). In separating good labor from bad, “holy” labor that
cultivates the worker’s self-respect and value from “ unholy” labor that literally degrades her physical and mental health, he can present a version of self-sacrifice and self-denial in labor without it being equivalent to the conception of labor as degrading toil, as represented by Mill and Smith. James Sherburne, for example, argues that Ruskin dissents from Smith’s and Mill’s conception of labor as toil and contrasts the sacrifice and pain required by labor with an ideal state of leisure (131). While it is true that Ruskin disagrees with the ascription of meaningless and excessively stultifying toil to labor, he does not believe that labor should be free of suffering, sacrifice, and trial.

In this context, Linda Austin astutely reveals Ruskin’s portrayal of the laborer as a martyr, one who embodies the model of sacrifice from the Bible (60-61); however, she suggests that this represents a complete alienation of the body and the creation’s disappearance. This is true, perhaps, of Marx’s alienated labor but not of the sacrifices Ruskin imagines, which would engender a sense of integrity and social belonging. For Marx, the rhetoric of sacrifice that dominated classical economy’s discussion of labor reflected labor’s alienation within capitalism.

External labour, labour in which man externalizes himself, is a labour of self-sacrifice and mortification. Finally, the external character of labor for the worker shows itself in the fact that it is not his own but someone else’s, that it does not belong to him, that he does not belong to himself in his labor but to someone else. As in religion the human imagination’s own activity, the activity of man’s head and his heart, reacts independently on the individual as an alien activity of gods or devils, so the activity of the worker is not his own spontaneous activity. (Marx Writings 80)

Ruskin would agree with Marx’s characterization of industrial and capitalist labor practices as essentially accumulating wealth and solidifying its social system on the bodies of the laboring men it sacrifices (Kemple 93-94). In contrast to Marx’s description of self-sacrifice as essentially alienating, however, Ruskin makes self-
sacrifice and self-mortification the ground for his theory of value and exchange. By distinguishing between “holy” and “ unholy” labor, Ruskin places the alienating activity of Marx describes under the rubric of “ unholy,” “unhealthy” labor. Especially revealing in Marx’s comments, in relation to Ruskin, is his analogy between the disjunction apparent in alienated labor and religious experience. The animistic view of religion here implicated resurfaces in Marx’s treatment of fetishized commodities, but there as well he interprets it as a negative phenomenon. Ruskin’s treatment of labor and exchange as expressions of the ‘holy,’ I want to suggest, demonstrates rather that capitalist theories consistently misrecognize their religious function, which is why labor and exchange have an alienating, unjust social effect. Not only do they jettison moral concerns from their discourse, but they also obscure the sacrosanct nature of the social system to which their theories of value are dedicated.

Motherhood becomes a model for both selfless sacrifice and the positive fruition at the end of months of that self-sacrificing labor—the child. The ideal of the self-sacrificing mother whose labor brings forth a child encompasses several key principles in Ruskin’s conception of labor: self-sacrifice, suffering, duty, love, virtue, and life. “It is strange that men always praise enthusiastically any person who, by a momentary exertion, saves a life; but praise very hesitatingly a person who, by exertion and self-denial prolonged through years, creates one” (17:97). The relationship between mother and child, the very physical extent to which the child is part of the mother—as an olive branch is to the vine (17:97)—expresses the productive nature of sacrifice. Ruskin envisions a workspace where the self-sacrificing labor of the supervisor is recognized and responded to by the self-sacrifice of the laborer. The key in the example of the mother is
that in the case of the mother and child, there is immediate recognition of a bond that cannot be alienated. Even as the child grows and separates from the mother, the community and child recognize the indissoluble link between the two. This sacred bond between mother and child, the self-sacrificing yet life producing activity in ‘labor,’ parallels the bond between the laborer and her work, a bond commodity exchange sunders. While Ruskin’s emphasis on labor and sacrifice initially appears as a critique of political economists of his era, as I’ll show in the next section, sacrifice, labor, and value also enable classical and neo-classical economists to address the absence of a shared value structure, the social reformation of character, and the creation of a just society based on the principle of sacrifice.

II The Search for An Invariable Standard

Ruskin’s definition of labor as sacrifice and suffering highlights a similar preoccupation found in classical and neoclassical political economy of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century. While often the word sacrifice itself is used, economists also speak of sacrifice in terms of abstinence, self-denial, or restraint, expressing a degree of asceticism Elie Halévy states approaches the religious (qtd. in Hilton 32). Sacrifice achieves a prominent role both in labor theories of value and in the exercise of parsimony and the willingness to sacrifice immediate wants in hopes of accumulating capital.21 An investigation into the repeated allusion to sacrifice and abstinence in political economic

21 This feature of classical economic thought has not gone unnoticed. Max Weber most famously critiqued the rationale of asceticism within capitalism’s imperative to accumulate wealth. The conception of labor as a “calling” (Beruf), Weber argues, presents an acceptable form in which to express ascetic virtue and achieve salvation while still engaging in economically productive activities (80-81). Though Calvinists and Wesleyan Methodists frown upon self-indulgent acquisitiveness, they legitimate the desire for wealth within a religious framework by equating the labor and self-denial required to accumulate capital with the expression of piety and ascetic virtue (Weber 172). Similarly, R.H. Tawney suggests that Puritanism attached a “halo of ethical sanctification to the appeal of economic expediency” by incorporating into capitalism a practical asceticism that presented the economic system itself as a means to glorify god (240).
theories reveals, as it did in Ruskin, an identification of labor’s physical and psychical sacrifice with the problem of absolute and relative value. This formulation of the labor theory of value as the sacrifice of life energies presents, in Ruskin, a value that the community can hold in common and ultimately refers back to the notion that life is of absolute value. Ruskin wholly asserted that economic principles mirror the interdependent structure of communal relations and the values, just or unjust, the community acts upon. Hence, insofar as labor’s sacrifice enacts a value system and thereby expresses the degree to which economic relations are morally just, the labor theory of value presents a self-referential structure.

In a similar vein, Christopher Herbert demonstrates through the example of Adam Smith how the concept of value in political economy, like the anthropological idea of “culture,” offers a “science of symbolic representation” (Culture 78). Herbert argues that just as anthropologists like Tylor define culture as a “complex whole,” Smith’s political economy presents value as relationally embedded within the totalizing complex whole of the economic system. However, Herbert’s analysis of the parallel between anthropological notions of culture and Smith’s theory of value and exchange interprets the appearance of complex wholes as constraining desire, specifically the fear of uncontrollable desire found in the original sin theology of John Wesley. Wesley’s fear of uncontrollable desire, he claims, initiates the need for order within Evangelical thinking, an order imposed through ideas of complex wholes that sacralize human society and institutions as the site where anarchic impulses achieve regularity (Herbert Culture 39). More importantly for the present argument, Herbert contends that Smith’s inscription of value on gold through the processes of minting, for example, indicates the relationship
between theories of value and “the activity of sacralizing symbolic transference” (Culture 92-93). Furthermore, Smith’s notion of sacrifice anticipates Georg Simmel’s argument that value’s relativity expresses itself as sacrifice in exchange (Herbert Culture 95, 120). Following Ruskin, however, I would like to sharpen the focus on how labor’s sacrifice sanctifies the social and economic system through its very circularity, and in so doing, promotes an ideal vision of just social relations. Ruskin’s writings suggest that though economic life, like society as a whole, indeed represents an interdependent and holy structure, the sacralization of society occurs through the very principle of sacrifice and the labor theory of value that political economy promulgates, which was why, despite its inefficiency as an economic principle, it held sway. The circularity of labor theories of value enacts both symbolically and in economic production and exchange, the self-referential, self-sacralizing nature of value.

It is precisely this self-referential aspect to economic ideas that an analysis of classical and neoclassical economic theories reveals once viewed through the lens of Ruskin. Though on the surface the search for an invariable standard by which to measure changes in the relative values of commodities seems to address purely economic problems such as relative prices or decreases in agricultural production, political economy conceals an interest in questions of economic justice and the formation of an ideal community whose value structure hinges on the ethic of self-sacrifice through labor. This self-referential nature of value theory in the nineteenth-century, especially given the circularity of labor theories of value, demonstrates the extent to which economic theories of value are as much an act of self-representation as they are theoretical investigations into economic welfare. Theories of value become sites wherein economists articulate
both the ideal set of social relations and threats to those relations when the question of an invariable standard remains open and ambiguous. Thus, as in Ruskin, such issues as absolute and relative value, labor and sacrifice, inevitably become entangled with sociological concerns as to the just distribution of wealth and the moral character of consumers who may or may not choose to labor and sacrifice for the right things.

In *The Wealth of Nations*, for example, Smith’s labor theory of value begins with the supposition that labor consists of “hardship endured” (Smith 27). He consistently defines labor as “the toil of our own body” that we must either endure or from which we save ourselves by imposing it on others (Smith *Wealth* 26).²² As with Ruskin, Smith emphasizes labor as the original foundation of value precisely because it relies on physical and psychical sacrifices. There is one marked difference, however; Ruskin’s conception of labor as sacrifice presents itself in a positive light because it refers back to the intrinsic value of life whereas Smith presents labor as toil to be avoided. Labor is seen as a disutility, as a sacrifice that one wants to avoid by imposing it on others (Blaug *Retrospect* 52). While the moral attitude toward the toil of labor may differ, both thinkers choose a labor theory of value for a similar reason: the sacrifice and suffering that labor requires presents a universal measure of value that is binding for all individuals.

As a generalized theory of value, labor offers an invariable and absolute measure because, as Smith argues, the sacrifice labor requires remains of equal value to the laborer at all times and places. This becomes a crucial maneuver on Smith’s part in the

²²As Catherine Gallagher notes, political economists from Smith to Jevons emphasize the sensory aspects of painful labor. Political economy’s “somaeconomics,” she argues, links its emphasis on pain with the source of national wealth because the pain of labor is ultimately productive. See Gallagher *Body* 50-60, 123-125.
course of his argument because it suggests that labor represents the same sacrifice for all individuals. Because labor’s sacrifice represents an identical value for all, it can then stand for a universal measure of value.

Equal quantities of labour, at all times and places, may be said to be of equal value to the labourer…. The price which he pays must always be the same, whatever may be the quantity of goods which he receives in return for it…. Labour alone, therefore, never varying in its own value, is alone the ultimate and real standard by which the value of all commodities can at all times and places be estimated and compared. (Smith *Wealth* 28)

This definition of labor as entailing at all times and places sacrifice and loss gives it universality as a measure of value. Smith not only searches for an invariable standard, but also one that transcends historical and geographical boundaries because without it one cannot judge economic changes from one moment to the next: he needs some index to penetrate beyond the abstract relations of prices and actually assess social relations of production as well as the standard of living.

It is important to trace the ways in which Smith confronts the fluctuating and abstract nature of value in order to fully explain why he, despite signs to the contrary, returns to labor as an invariable measure. Smith recognizes at the outset, for example, that though he claims equal quantities of labor remain of equal value to every person, all labor is not of equal value on the market and, moreover, certain labor requires more skill and dexterity than others. He resolves the problem by referring to the “higgling and bargaining of the market” as the means by which a rough measurement of the value of various commodities and the labor required to produce them are resolved into competitive prices on the market (Smith *Wealth* 27). The division between intrinsic and extrinsic, or absolute and relative value, already analyzed in Ruskin, reappears in Smith’s admission that all labor does not require the same sacrifice and, moreover, it is the law of
supply and demand on the market that determines, in part, the ratio at which the products
of various labors will exchange.

This leads us to another problem in Smith’s labor theory of value, namely, the
confusing shift between a theory of value based on the amount of labor one can purchase
through the exchange of commodities as the “real measure” of the value of a commodity
and a theory of value that claims value qua value materializes itself in a commodity as
labor. “The value of any commodity, therefore, to the person who possesses it, and who
means not to use it himself, but to exchange it for other commodities, is equal to the
quantity of labour which it enables him to purchase or command. Labour, therefore, is
the real measure of the exchangeable value of all commodities” (Smith *Wealth* 26).

Smith conflates value as determined by command over labor through the exchange of
commodities with the quantity of labor embodied by a commodity in production. As
Ronald Meek states, Smith concludes that the real measure of value is not the quantity of
labor embodied in the other goods for which it would exchange but the quantity of labor
it would exchange for on the market. Smith introduces a fork in his value theory: the
labor *embodied* in a commodity determines the extent to which a given commodity can
*command* the amount of labor it does in exchange, which is then the “real measure” of its
value (Meek *Labor* 62-63).

There seems, then, to be several value theories at once: value as the sacrifice of
labor; value as the labor embodied in a commodity; value as the labor one can command
in exchange. What are we to make of this confused array of theories? Smith puts forth
the labor theory of value with the recognition that the labor embodied in goods is the
product of a physical and psychical sacrifice; this sacrifice gives them their value. But
while labor is the principle of value, it is not the means by which to measure the rate at which commodities exchange because, in industrial capitalist society, price does not always reflect the quantity of labor necessary to produce them. The direct correlation between a commodity’s exchange value and the quantity of labor it takes to produce something is only true for a “rude” state of society where laborers own their labor and not a state of society where capital and workers’ wages has added value to the products of their labor. For this reason, Smith transitions from a labor-embodied to a labor-commanded theory of value in exchange: wages, profit, and rent, and the three classes that they represent, determine the price of goods in modern society rather than labor alone (Schumpeter 188-189, Meek *Labor* 81). What is important, for the purposes of our discussion, with respect to Ruskin, is that Smith’s theories of value dramatize the disjunction between an intuitive sense that a cost of production theory of value inevitably grounds itself in the sacrifice of labor while a measure of value must, in essence, account for fluctuations in the market of commodities whose prices are not identical with the cost of the labor sacrificed in producing them. The universal value of labor, the portion of one’s ease and happiness all must lay down, says little about the rate of exchange between various commodities in industrial capitalist societies.

This problem leads Smith to reject gold and silver, or other precious metals, as an invariable standard because they, as commodities subject to the fluctuations of exchange, cannot then measure the value of other commodities. Thus, alongside the claim that labor is an invariable measure of the exchange value of commodities, Smith at times claims that corn, whose price is relatively stable in the long-run from century to century, can be a measure of exchange value. Corn becomes a potential measure for variations in the
prices of other commodities since it also stands for the subsistence wage of the laborer and roughly mirrors the price of equal quantities of labor over long periods of time (Smith *Wealth* 30). But this too proves itself to be an unreliable standard of measure since the price of corn varies from year to year at a much higher rate than the price of labor. It is at such moments that Smith reasserts his earlier statement that labor “is the only universal, as well as the only accurate measure of value of different commodities at all times, and at all places” (*Wealth* 32). Labor is the only way to measure the “real value” of commodities from year to year and from century to century, the real value being the quantity of labor a commodity commands. Smith’s distinction shows that labor as a measure of value moves beyond prices and describes value in terms of social relations. Like most classical economists, Smith was concerned with economic growth and general economic welfare in a changing economy; the “real measure” is real insofar as it concerns overall economic welfare and the degree of effort required to gain subsistence rather than abstract relationships between prices.23

Even when Smith wants to discuss how wages, rent, and profit determine the price of commodities, for example, he claims that the value of these three components which make up the price are measured by the quantity of labor they can command. Labor, Smith argues, “measures the value not only of that part of price that resolves itself into

23Mark Blaug criticizes Smith and Ricardo for their notions of absolute value, claiming that the ascription of intrinsic value to commodities independent of any economic use they serve constitutes welfare economics not value theory. But that is precisely the point, and one which Ruskin’s critique of classical political economy reveals. Value theory for him, as for classical economists, remains intertwined with questions of social welfare. While theoretically the choice of a labor theory of value as a means to index price variations proved flawed, Blaug’s teleological view of the history of economic analysis chastises classical economists for exactly what my argument highlights. The rift between pure economic theory and welfare economics or social policy had yet to occur in economic analysis. In this context, the labor theory of value functioned in a double context in classical political economy because economists refused to segregate theoretical questions of price and value from notions of social welfare and equitable distribution. See Blaug *Retrospect* 115.
labour, but of that which resolves itself into rent, and of that which resolves itself into profit" (*Wealth* 44). Thus, in the context of his distinction between the “natural price” as opposed to the “nominal price” of commodities on the market, the natural price is the cost of production price made up of wages, rent, and profit necessary to bring the commodity to the market. But, as has already been stated, Smith reduces all three components to labor so that labor as a commodity can measure all facets that make up a price. He, in essence, wants to use a theory of the cost of production where all elements of cost resolve themselves into labor units in order to explain the relation of commodity prices and the changes in their relative values.

While Smith’s theory of value presents logical inconsistencies to his argument, the cause of such confusion proves relevant in relation to Ruskin. An allure persists in the definition of value as what we sacrifice to bring something into existence. What it costs for us is why it has value for us. To some degree, then, Ruskin shows why Smith would conflate the categories of cost and value through his articulation of it as sacrifice. This leads us back to the initial quotes with which our discussion of value began. If labor is presented as a sacrifice that purchasing power can either help us avoid or impose on others, then why is it deemed sacred? Sacrifice literally means to consecrate or make sacred (a compound of the Latin roots *sacer* and *facere*); in the context of labor, this begs the question as to what labor’s sacrifice consecrates. I want to suggest here that Smith treats labor as sacred not just because it refers back to ideas of liberty and the right to sell

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24Joseph Schumpeter argues that Smith did not really have a labor theory of value and that he was actually interested in explaining the prices of commodities through a cost of production theory of value. However, the fact that he claims that the sacrifice of labor presents a universal measure of value remains significant, however, muddled the labor theory of value may be. See Schumpeter 188-189.

25Catherine Bell also makes this etymological point as well, connecting the circularity implicit in the Latin root to the sanctification process that objects undergo when sacrificed. The work of Hubert and Mauss focuses specifically on this aspect of sacrificial ritual: the function of sacrifice is to consecrate the sacrificial offering. See Bell *Ritual* 112. See also Hubert and Mauss 3, 9-10, 13.
one’s labor as a commodity, clearly a feature of his thinking, but that he deems labor sacred because the sacrifice it requires is also the source of the nation’s wealth.

The first sentence of *The Wealth of Nations* makes this point: “The annual labour of every nation is the fund which originally supplies it with all the necessaries and conveniences of life which it annually consumes, and which consist always either in the immediate produce of that labour, or what is purchased with the produce from other nations” (Smith *Wealth 1*). Smith treats labor as sacrosanct because it produces the foundation of the economic social structure and is indistinguishable from the wealth and progress of the society. He equates the source of value (labor) and the measure of value (the sacrifice of labor) with the fund of a nation’s wealth (labor). This is done because he wants a theory of value that will measure economic welfare and reflect changing economic relations. To return to the quotes with which we began, we can now see that Smith claims squandering labor is “profane” because the “pious foundation” to which the sacrifice of past labors were “consecrated” is the economic social system itself. This not only shows that Smith’s value theory remains caught up in questions of economic welfare rather than simply presenting an abstract measure of value, but more importantly, that the sacrosanct nature of labor and its produce sanctifies the social structure. Thus, Smith’s assessment that all commodities are subject to fluctuations can now be understood as reflecting a second, more veiled problem than predicting economic welfare in the long run. The concept of value refers back to the sacrosanct nature of the social system of which the economic was fast becoming its most all-encompassing feature. The circularity in Ruskin’s argument about life as the basis of absolute value and wealth allows us to reinterpret Smith’s circularity regarding the centrality of labor to reveal its
propitiatory qualities: we sacrifice ourselves in our labor in order to have the gift of ourselves in return. This Biblical principle, which Ruskin openly conveys in his political economy, implicitly frames Smith’s exploration of labor and value as well and offers us a renewed understanding as to why classical economists especially relied on the concept of sacrifice in discussing value.

While Marx attended to the unjust social relations implicated by a capitalist system and the relational aspect of value, he overlooked the central role sacrifice plays within the labor theory of value in its connection to issues of economic justice and the sanctification of the community. He rightly criticized the concept of sacrifice as obscuring the literal sacrifice of laboring bodies for a capitalist economic system, but he failed to acknowledge the extent to which an exploitative conception of sacrifice coexisted with an idealization of community as well. Marx’s criticism of Smith in the Grundrisse pointedly attacks the principle of renunciation as a source of value.26

Labour considered purely as a sacrifice and therefore as establishing value, labour as the price to be paid for things and thus giving them a price according as they cost more or less labour, is a purely negative definition….An individual may mortify the flesh and make a martyr of himself from morning to night, like the monks, but the amount of sacrifice that he makes will get him nowhere. The natural price of things is not the sacrifice made to obtain them. This is reminiscent of the pre-industrial era, in which riches were to be obtained by sacrifices to the gods. (Marx Writings 368-370)

As was apparent in Ruskin’s writings, labor’s sacrifice does have this quasi-religious function, more veiled among economists. Except, rather than sacrificing to gods, the circularity of labor theories of value make the economic life of society the object of sacrifice and reward.

26Regina Gagnier discusses Marx’s critique of political economy as a “science of renunciation.” Gagnier argues this ascetic discipline relies, paradoxically, on the creation of ever-increasing wants. See Gagnier 20, 97.
By attacking the negative definition of labor as sacrifice, Marx’s analysis proves inattentive to the way in which the labor theory of value indicates a concealed preoccupation with economic justice and the need for a shared value structure in which the labor theory of value references shared moral principles that in turn promote economic growth. As Hont and Ignatieff have argued, one of the central problems Smith tackles in *The Wealth of Nations* is that of justice; specifically, how to reconcile sufficient provisions for the laboring poor with the unequal accumulation of stock and property in the hands of the wealthy. Smith claims that the stimulation of agricultural production could, in a free market system, satisfy the subsistence needs of the poor without recourse to charity and thus without governmental interference resolve the “antinomy between rights and needs” (Hont and Ignatieff 25). A healthy agricultural industry, combined with the effects of Smith’s ‘invisible hand,’ responds to issues of distributive justice within the economic system independent of individual moral feeling. While Hont and Ignatieff argue that this preserves the principle of self-interest as the primary motor of human action (11-12, 24), Smith in effect surreptitiously introduces an ascetic standard of virtue by linking issues of distributive justice and economic growth with the self-sacrificing act of labor. In this context, the sacrosanct character of labor not only sanctifies the economic system, but through its privileged position within his

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27 Similarly, Athol Fitzgibbons argues that Smith’s political economy synthesizes moral principles influenced by the Stoics and Hume in pursuit of the ideal political state. The impartial spectator of the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* appears in political economy as the prudent worker who labors disinterestedly with respect to present enjoyment. The cultivation of a self-sacrificing, dispassionate attitude represents virtues inherent to the ‘man of self-command’ that are applicable both to moral philosophy and political economy. In this manner, the principles of political economy incorporate the pursuit of wealth into the pursuit of virtue. He further argues that Smith saw the foundation of society to be justice, not self-interest. The laws of the state are meant to constrain the extent of our self-regarding motives which, if left unimpeded, would undermine the very foundation of society. See Fitzgibbons 137-152. For a discussion of the polarity between sacrifice and self-interest in relation to Victorian morals, see Stefan Collini’s discussion of altruism and egoism in *Public Moralists* 60-90.
argument stimulates the industry necessary to better the conditions of laborers, thus linking sacrifice, the sacred, value, and economic justice into one central principle that conciliates self-interest with virtue.

Smith’s *The Wealth of Nations* ascribes concepts such as the sacred and profane to economic ideas in order to consecrate the foundation of the nation’s wealth, health, and progress: labor. The sanctification of labor and its appearance within a theory of value as the sacrifice of labor also subtly alludes to sociological, if not ethical, questions such as to the distribution of wealth. This latter problem—how value theory can accurately assess the accumulation and distribution of profits among the three classes of England—remains buried within Smith’s rhetoric but occupies the forefront of Ricardo’s investigations into an invariable standard. Ricardo begins *The Principles of Political Economy* (1817) with a lengthy chapter on value in which he criticizes Smith for restricting the labor theory of value to the “rude” state of society rather asserting it as the rule of value in a market society as well. Ricardo assumes a state of perfect competition in order to show that the true cause and measure of value resides in labor quantities, a position that countered value theories that relied on the principle of supply-demand and scarcity, such as that advocated by Malthus, for the source of a commodity’s value (Schumpeter 592-593). In addition to identifying the cause of value in labor, Ricardo, also needs to identify a measure to determine changes in the value of commodities over time. It is in this sense that labor has a dual function at times within his economic system, both representing the cause and the measure of value.

In addition to critiquing Smith for circumscribing embodied labor as the rule of value for “rude” societies, Ricardo assails Smith for his muddled treatment of labor-
embodied and labor-commanded theories of value as equivalent. More importantly, Ricardo attacks the use of commandable labor as an invariable standard since the demand for labor, as well as what it can or cannot purchase at any given moment, remains subject to fluctuations like other commodities. By contrast, Ricardo asserts in the *Principles*, as he would reassert at the end of his career in the unfinished essay “Absolute Value and Exchangeable Value” (1823), that the cause and measure of a commodity’s value resides in “difficulty or facility of production” (1: 275) and the only criterion for its value is by the “sacrifices of labor made to obtain it” (1: 397). By concentrating on the suffering and sacrifice involved in labor as the origin of value, Ricardo differentiates the cause of value from wealth or riches. This continues his critique of Smith’s treatment of a labor-commanded theory of value because it blurs the boundary between how much of the “necessaries and conveniences of life” a person can purchase with what gives a commodity its value on the market (Smith *Wealth* 1). Like Ruskin, he deems wealth relative and value absolute.

Ricardo’s labor theory of value as sacrifice forms the central component to his theory of distribution. His treatment of the law of diminishing productivity and rent patently shows the connection between sacrifice, labor, value, and the just distribution of profits. As population increases, less fertile lands are cultivated with increasing difficulty by laborers in return for a diminishing yield in produce. Hence, the value of agricultural goods rises as the amount of labor necessary to yield produce on the least favorable land increases. As a result of the increasing price of corn, a necessary for subsistence, the wages of laborers must rise and farmers have that much less profits. In this context, the increasing sacrifices of the laborer and the loss of profits due to increasing wages paid by
the farmer leads to Ricardo’s critique of the landlord class and the resultant economic injustice. While the use of less fertile lands increases the unit price of corn for all lands due to increasing labor expenditures, the excessive profits on the fertile lands, which require less effort, proceed to the landlord in the form of rent. The landlord, Ricardo argues, stands particularly benefited since he gains both an expensive product and an increased rent (Ricardo 1: 83).

It is within this context of the falling rate of profit and rising wages due to diminishing agricultural returns that the labor theory of value becomes integral. The theory hinges on real value as grounded in difficulty or facility of production and increasing sacrifices of labor. The additional amount of food needed for an advancing society can only be had with more and more labor sacrificed (Ricardo 1: 120). Ricardo, like Smith, parallels the sacrifices of the laborer with the sacrifices of land. “The labour of nature is paid, not because she does much, but because she does little. In proportion as she becomes niggardly in her gifts, she exacts a greater price for her work. Where she is munificently beneficent, she always works gratis” (Ricardo 1: 76). Those things which exist in abundance and which we gain without any sacrifice would have no price. Ricardo reiterates this point especially in relation to the ‘gifts’ of nature that exist in abundance. Only when scarcity of resources, such as fertile lands, threaten natural abundance do we begin to pay a price for nature’s goods. Thus the land, like the laborer, only affixes a high price to its productions when more sacrifices and efforts are required. Ricardo’s emphasis on sacrifice in labor occupies a salient feature in his critique of the landlords who benefit from land, which Ricardo regards as “gifts of nature,” and requires no bodily or psychical sacrifice to produce (1: 69). Thus, as with Ruskin, the sacrifices
inherent to labor not only determine real value but ground his argument for economic justice and the fair distribution of profits. The labor theory of value’s reliance on a notion of sacrifice reveals Ricardo’s concern with distributive justice: landlords do not have a right to benefit from the protectionism of Corn Laws or from the exclusive possession of fertile lands because value, absolute value, grounds itself in the sacrifices of labor.

Since Ricardo’s theory of value enables him to assess the distribution of profits among the varied classes, any threat to the stability of a labor theory of value undermines the extent to which such a value theory effectively mirrors altering economic relations through changes relative prices. Ricardo recognizes the gravity of this problem most notably when he analyzes how the rise and fall of wages, effected by varied proportions of fixed and circulating capital, alters value. His own insights into the effects of capital showed that all those commodities made with more durable machinery (fixed capital), for example, would fall in their relative values whereas those that can quickly be produced and brought to market would rise in value since they have less labor costs to recoup in a market where labor goes at a high price (Ricardo 1: 39). Thus, due to the varied effects of fixed and circulating capital, commodities will not exchange in proportion to labor expenditures, and a change in distribution will itself result in a new set of exchange relationships without any changes in the amount of labor expended (Peach 152).

A disjuncture appears between economic movements ‘on the ground’ and what the labor theory of value actually represents since the invariable standard would be utilized to develop the laws of distribution within the nation and, more specifically, the rate of profit. As Piero Sraffa argues, Ricardo was attentive to the rise and fall of wages
because he needed a measure that could assess changes in distribution and profit movements among the three classes.

The ‘principal problem of Political Economy’ was in his view the division of the national product between classes and in the course of that investigation he was troubled by the fact that the size of this product appears to change when the division changes. Even though nothing has occurred to change the magnitude of the aggregate, there may be apparent changes due solely to change in measurement, owing to the fact that measurement in terms of value and relative values have been altered as a result of a change in the division between wages and profits….Thus the problem of value which interested Ricardo was how to find a measure of value which would be invariant to changes in the division of product; for, if a rise or fall of wages by itself brought about a change in the magnitude of the social product, it would be hard to determine accurately the effect on profits. (Sraffa “Introduction” xlviii)

According to this interpretation, then, Ricardo’s main problem consisted in the fact that distribution may alter relative prices and these prices must be known in order to determine the value of the national product (Peach 25). The self-referential nature of the economic system, the extent to which it effectively represents and refers back to both the values and degree of economic justice established within the community, appears entirely thwarted.

It is for this reason that Ricardo insists, against the results of his own careful analysis, that labor as sacrifice must be the source of absolute value. While economic historians like Stigler and Schumpeter claim that Ricardo adopts the labor theory of value simply as an empirical expedient to approximate value since he was, as Schumpeter states, otherwise “free from either emotionalism or philosophical preconceptions,” the choice of a labor theory of value has deeper connections to the moralizing connotations of sacrifice (Peach 25, Schumpeter 595). 28 Sacrifice links the problem of economic

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28Schumpeter evidences a consistent prejudice among modern economists who see the labor theory of value as either confusing metaphysics with economics, like Joan Robinson, or conflating questions of justice with
justice with the need for a stable referent to a value system—a linkage found in Ricardo as much as in Ruskin. Ricardo reiterates in letters to McCulloch and Trower that finding the rule for exchange value would leave them one step away from an understanding of absolute value. The sacrifice of labor is the source of a commodity’s “positive value” and this positive value regulates exchange value (Hollander *Ricardo* 264). Ricardo concentrates on labor, as do Smith and Ruskin, because it inheres a physiological and psychic sacrifice. It is this sacrifice upon which all value ultimately grounds itself and, furthermore, offers the common unit of measure. “That commodity is alone invariable, which at all times requires the same sacrifice of toil and labor to produce it” (Ricardo 1: 275). And again at the end of his essay “Absolute Value and Exchange Value,” bereft of any other explication of value he states: “I may be asked what I mean by the word value, and by what criterion I would judge a commodity has or had not changed in its value. I answer, I know no other criterion of a thing being dear or cheap but by the sacrifices of labor made to obtain it. Every thing is originally purchased by labour—nothing that has value can be produced without it…” (Ricardo 1: 397). Sacrifice, its toil and labor, stands outside of and remains unaffected by the matrix of exchange values the commodity enters into once it appears on the market. While Ricardo noticed fissures in his value theory, he asserts time and time again that all other things being equal, unless more labor were required to produce a commodity, the commodity could not rise in value (1: 30).

Unlike Marx, whose exploitation theory of labor stressed the discrepancy between the absolute value of labor embodied in commodities and the monetary price affixed to them, Ricardo instead concentrates on the logical tension his theoretical formulation

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theories of value. This presents an interesting parallel to Ruskin, whose political economy was ridiculed for its excessive display of emotion. See, for example, Dinah Birch’s essay “Ruskin’s Womanly Mind.”
presents, namely, how to reconcile a theory of value that claims labor quantities represent
the source of a commodity’s absolute value and yet acknowledges that value expresses
itself relationally in an exchange ratio (Schumpeter 591). The invariable standard must
answer the following questions: how can values rise and fall simultaneously and yet have
an absolute value represented by labor quantities; if values rise and fall, in terms of what
do they rise and fall (Dobb 47)? Hence, in his essay “Absolute Value and Exchange
Value,” Ricardo still pursues an invariable measure to ascertain, when there is a change
in value among commodities, whether “it is the value of labour which has undergone a
change or whether it is the commodity which rises or falls” (Ricardo 1: 372). Here labor
expresses an intrinsic value that stands apart from and is anterior to the commodity’s
price, which fluctuates according to demand. Among commodities that vary in their
relative values, the only way to assess which commodity either rises or falls in its “real
value” would be to have an invariable measure by which to compare all relative values
against one another. Its absolute, or “real value,” would then be the value that it would
have when measured by an invariable standard (Meek Labor 111). He argues, however,
that such a measure does not exist.

Of such a measure it is impossible to be possessed, because there is no
commodity which is not itself exposed to the same variations as the things, the
value of which is to be ascertained; that is, there is none which is subject to
require more or less labour for its production. But if this cause of variation in the
value of a medium could be removed—if it were possible that in the production of
our money for instance, the same quantity of labour should at all times be
required, still it would not be a perfect standard or invariable measure of value,
because, as I have already endeavored to explain, it would be subject to relative
variations from a rise or fall of wages, on account of the different proportions of
fixed capital which might be necessary to produce it, and to produce those other
commodities whose alteration of value we wished to ascertain. (Ricardo 1: 44)
Ricardo attempts to find as close an approximation to an invariable measure of value when he “removed” the variations that impact the medium of gold, which he admits is also a commodity subject to “the same contingencies as every other commodity” (Ricardo 1: 44). Since he considers the quantity of labor to be the main determinant in the commodity’s value he hypothesizes that if this variable were removed, then gold could be a standard of measure. He then suggests that gold offers a nearly perfect standard if we see it as presenting a mean of the quantity of labor necessary to produce it and the ratio of fixed to circulating capital with respect to all other commodities. The recourse to gold as a standard that represents the mean labor quantity and capital proportions allows him to rescue his labor theory of value while accommodating the effects of capital and wages on the measure (Ricardo 1: 198).

This contrast between the absolute value of labor’s sacrifice and the fluidity of value in exchange represents for Ricardo, as it did for Ruskin, the potential absence of a stable point from which to objectively evaluate what has value and what transforms value. A system of exchange values mutually impacting one another would signify, presumably, an economic system in which value was unmoored from any stable referent. Exchange value would manifest itself within an interdependent network insofar as the permutations of one commodity’s value can only be known in relation to another commodity whose value in exchange has not varied.29 Thus the invariable measure of value should allow Ricardo to judge changes in the relative value in other commodities by recourse to a commodity whose value has not changed, i.e. which requires the same amount of labor over time. Ricardo thus traffics between a relational conception of value.

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29Christopher Herbert makes a similar point in relation to Adam Smith, arguing that value does not inhere in objects but in “the institutionalized system of relations which enables exchange to occur.” See Herbert Culture 95.
as expressed in exchange ratios and labor quantities as identical with the absolute value of the commodity. The latter becomes a fear only insofar as the economic system stands as an analogue for the social system as a whole, representing the foundation of its relations.

Ruskin’s argument brings this analogic function that theories of value serve in classical political economy into relief. As with distribution, here the disjunction between absolute and relative value indicates a parallel rift between the economic system and the structure of communal relations it represents. Thus when Ricardo retreats from the fluidity of exchange values to his dictum on the sacrifice of labor as the ultimate measure of value, he chooses a measure, as did Ruskin, that roots value in human cost. Human cost, as the word sacrifice itself indicates, consecrates the very thing it offers up as both the cause and the measure of absolute value. Thus whenever Ricardo puzzles over the question of how to consistently measure a commodity’s rise and fall in value, he retreats to the secondary question of what causes value as the locus of an invariable measure: labor. The question of how to measure the rise and fall of a commodity’s value consistently led Ricardo into a muddle precisely because, unlike Ruskin, he was unaware as to what motivated his circular argument on value. This circularity enables him to claim that the relational matrix in which commodities attain value measure varying degrees of sacrifice and this sacrifice refers back to the absolute value of sacrifice in labor, a stable measure of value by which one can reassess the just distribution of wealth. Just as commodities exist in a system of relations based on sacrifice, so too the human relations they mirror.
As in Ricardo, Mill also employs a theory of value rooted in labor’s sacrifice and the cost of production to develop his critique of the landlord class and the just distribution of wealth. His theory of value, in retrospect, presents a point of transition between the labor theories of value of classical economists and the subjective theories of value based on demand and consumer economics signaled, most notably in Britain, by William Stanley Jevons. Mill departs from Ricardo when he emphatically announces that value is a “relative term” and that “the value of a commodity is not a name for an inherent and substantive quality of the thing itself, but means the quantity of other things which can be obtained in exchange for it. The value of one thing, must always be understood relatively to some other thing, or to things in general” (Mill 3: 479). While Ricardo also recognized value’s relational character, he remained attached to the notion of absolute value as expressed in embodied labor quantities. By contrast, Mill insists throughout that whenever he speaks of value, he speaks of exchange value, as a concept that arises when commodities come into a relation of exchange and not, as was sometimes the case with Ricardo, an abstract investigation into the nature of absolute value.

Yet, while Mill claims value is a relative term, his theory of value vacillates between value based on cost of production, which includes labor and capital, and value rooted in the law of supply-demand. It is in this context that Mill occupies a “half-way house” in the history of value theory (Schumpeter 603). Mill’s theory of value remains conflicted since he makes the law of supply and demand the “antecedent law” of value whenever cost of production proves an insufficient explanation (Mill 3: 596). The split in his theory of value appears early in his definition of the causes of value: anything of use value, he argues, has the “capacity to satisfy a desire, or serve a purpose” (Mill 3: 456)
while the exchange value of a commodity arises either from its use value or the “difficulty in its attainment” (Mill 3: 462). The latter requirement remains most important because those things that “can be obtained without labour or sacrifice” will have no exchange value (Mill 3: 456). Relying heavily on De Quincey, Mill argues the difficulty or sacrifices necessary to acquire or produce something present the primary condition for a commodity’s exchange value while utility determines the extreme limit. The ‘difficulty’ Mill speaks of resides in the cost of production as well as the hurdles overcome in acquiring scarce commodities. These two sources of ‘difficulty’ reference, in essence, two sources of price: the price that represents cost of production and the price resulting from market driven demand for scarce commodities whose quantity cannot be increased by greater expenditure of labor or capital. Price does not simply reflect the desire for commodities but effectual demand, that is, the amount of money people are willing and able to pay for those goods.

It would seem then that price of scarce commodities depends on the ratio of effectual demand to available supply. However, how much people demand depends on the price; expensive commodities, for example, will create less demand. This leads to a conundrum: value depends on demand and demand depends on value. “From this contradiction how shall we extricate ourselves? How solve the paradox, of two things, each depending on the other?” (Mill 3: 466). Why, when Mill has already admitted that value constitutes a “relative term,” should the mutual interdependence of value and demand prove a difficulty? The question he poses reflects not, as one might think, a worry regarding the relativity of value but the manner in which supply-demand
determines prices. In response to this problem, he argues the relationship between value and demand becomes clear if we use the mathematical analogy of an equation.

Thus we see that the idea of a ratio, as between demand and supply, is out of place, and has no concern in the matter: the proper mathematical analogy is that of an equation. Demand and supply, the quantity demanded and the quantity supplied, will be made equal. If unequal at any moment, competition equalizes them, and the manner in which this is done is by an adjustment of the value. If demand increases, the value rises; if the demand diminishes, the value falls: again, if the supply falls off, the value rises; and falls if the supply is increased. The rise and fall continues until the demand and supply are again equal to one another: and the value which a commodity will bring in any market, is no other than the value which, in that market, gives a demand just sufficient to carry off the existing or expected supply. (Mill 3: 467-468)

For scarce goods then, the law of supply-demand functions as the law of value insofar as it determines prices at equilibrium. However, even while Mill acknowledges that supply and demand influence the permutations of value with respect to scarcities, for most other goods value correlates with cost of production and things exchange at a ratio of their natural value or “Cost Value” (Mill 3: 497). The main ingredient in the cost of production is labor; thus, the value of commodities largely depends on the quantity of labor they require. Mill still considers the cost of production to largely consist of labor quantities though he, like Ricardo, admits capital effects relative values. But since Mill defines capital simply as ‘past labor’ accumulated through abstinence and saving, capital remains a function of labor. Having defined cost of production in this manner, he then states that supply and demand “obey a superior force, which makes value gravitate towards Cost of Production” (Mill 3: 476). In the long run, when supply adjusts to demand at equilibrium, prices conform to natural values, thus ultimately anchoring value in labor and the costs of production.

30Christopher Herbert takes this position, interpreting Mill’s statement as typical of a wider discourse in the Victorian period on relativity that preceded Einstein’s theoretical findings in physics and reaches back as far as Protagoras. See Herbert Relativity 4-6.
The persistent reliance on a cost of production theory of value rooted in labor despite an underlying awareness that utility governs relative values reveals more than inconsistency or parochial fealty to forebears, as Jevons would claim. Rather, cost of production and sacrifice continue to surface in Mill’s treatment of value and capital because it forms the cornerstone of his arguments on economic justice, most specifically, his critique of the institution of property. If he had wholly embraced a theory of value based on the law of demand-supply, he would have stripped the moral component his theory of value needed to criticize the unequal distribution of wealth. Here the ordering of the *Principles* proves instructive since the theory of value follows Mill’s critique of the institution of property, a critique that relies on the principles of sacrifice and abstinence to present arguments on the just redistribution of wealth and limits to inherited privilege.

While Mill does not argue for an end to the institution of private property, his emendations to it would have seriously altered its status. Like most British theorists of government since Hume and Locke, Mill begins by asserting the indissoluble link between the institution of property and the maintenance of social order. Private property was not, he claims, the result of present concern for utilities but simply an expedient that ended the Hobbesian state of violence and plunder, an institution without which none could secure the “fruits of previous labour” (Mill 2: 215). Mill stops short of decrying private ownership altogether since it underlies his basic assertion of a person’s right to possess the fruits of her sacrifices or labors. Whereas capitalists, for example, do not produce the commodities they profit from, they have a right to a portion of the laborer’s produce because they advanced them the capital with which they work and that capital was “created by their labour and abstinence” (Mill 2: 216). The question before Mill then
is the following: having determined that sacrifice and abstinence constitute the basis of a commodity’s value and that the ownership of the fruits of one’s sacrifice and abstinence represents a right the state must protect, to what extent is ownership of either property or revenue that was not a product of one’s sacrifice an injustice to others? Thus, Mill suggests rights such as inheritance should be limited since property gives “the right of producers to what they themselves have produced” and any advantage gained from gift or bequest of land should be limited by the government since it is not a product of that individual’s sacrifice or abstinence but that of others (Mill 2: 215). This criticism of inheritance and bequest extends to the ownership of land. “The essential principle of property being to assure to all persons what they have produced by their labour and accumulated by their abstinence, this principle cannot apply to what is not the product of labour, the raw material of the earth” (Mill 2: 227). Radical as this position remains even today, Mill softens his position by suggesting that the only justification for private ownership of land resides in the fact that the private proprietor often farms the land more productively. Yet, Mill warns, if the land is not cultivated productively, the state could act as a “universal landlord” and seize control of idle properties. The “sacredness of property” represents at best an expediency and at worst an injustice (Mill 2: 227-230). The principal target here, as it was with Ricardo, remains the landlord classes who benefit from high agricultural prices and rents when poorer and poorer lands are cultivated. More importantly, Mill’s emphasis on sacrifice, abstinence and labor as the premise upon which individuals rather than families lay claim to property allows him to restructure the distribution of wealth along the lines of the just recompense of equitable sacrifices.
Mill refuses to abandon a cost of production theory of value in which sacrifice and abstinence form the chief source of economic value because, firstly, individual sacrifice determines the just distribution of wealth and, secondly, the capacity to sacrifice cultivates the character of citizens who contribute to and strengthen the wealth and progress of a just nation. The liberal subject is both one who experiences the multiplication of new wants and, as a rational agent, is able to sacrifice present wishes in hopes of future remuneration (Gagnier 51). Progressive nations and the character of its laborers are distinguished by their capacity for self-denial.

The effective desire of accumulation is of unequal strength, not only according to the varieties of individual character, but to the general state of society and civilization. Like all moral attributes, it is one in which the human race exhibits great differences, conformably to the diversity of its circumstances and the stage of its progress….All accumulation involves the sacrifice of a present, for the sake of a future good. (Mill 2: 103)

Sacrifice and abstinence represent moral characteristics as well as being twin traits of the most important economic elements, namely, labor and capital. In some sense, the circularity in Ruskin’s and Smith’s definition of value and wealth reappears here in Mill’s understanding of labor’s sacrifice and capital’s emergence from abstinence. Something has value because of the labor sacrificed in producing it or the past sacrifice that was incurred to save present capital. It is on the basis of sacrifice and abstinence that people receive just remuneration and the principle by which unjust wealth accumulated without sacrifice may be curtailed. In cultivating this inward discipline and character of sacrifice, we establish the foundation of the society—its health and progress—through accumulated acts of renunciation. The nation we win back as a product of our renunciations stands materially bettered and embodies the principles of an equitable society in which sacrifice has its just reward. Moreover, this offers a shared value
structure much as Ruskin demanded, a value structure that utilizes the principle of sacrifice to determine economic value, just distribution of wealth, and a common means to cultivate a nation’s character.

Sacrifice exerts a continuing importance even in utilitarian theories of value such as that articulated by William Stanley Jevons towards the end of the nineteenth-century. Jevons’s *Theory of Political Economy* (1871) signaled the mathematical turn political economy would thereafter take and has since become associated with the ‘marginal revolution’ of the 1870s in which he, as well as several economists across Europe, developed mathematical models wherein theories of (marginal) utility functioned as the principal determinant of value. In developing his theory of value and exchange, Jevons returns to a Benthamite conception of utility in order to treat the problem of value mathematically. Yet, despite his efforts to evade the traditional rhetoric and methodology of political economy, the emphasis on a subjective theory of value based on individuals maximizing utilities only brings the sociological implications of individual value judgments to the fore. Moreover, the problem of how to measure utilities and the concrete manifestation of utility in the form of wages and profits reveals that Jevons’s economic theory still retains a theory of value in which sacrifice and abstinence remain foundational. Not only do sacrifice and abstinence determine relative amounts of utility, but they also indicate the choices of individuals: what they will sacrifice and for what reward. Thus, Jevons cannot distance himself from questions of social reform since the subjective choices of individuals reflect their character and, as a result, indicate the degree of wealth, progress, and values of a nation.
In order to show that economics is a mathematical science, Jevons adopts Bentham’s calculus of pleasure and pain and makes all elements of economics, whether value or labor, quantitative expressions of pain and pleasure. The expression of value as utility coincides with Jevons’s consistent and open attack of the labor theory of value: not only is value relative, as Mill earlier suggested, but value denotes an abstract, measurable quantity and not a material substance. “In the first place, utility, though a quality of things, is no inherent quality. It is better described as a circumstance of things arising out of their relation to man’s requirements” (Jevons 43). Jevons’s definition of utility critiques Mill by shifting the burden of value from the “thing” it exchanges for to the relation between individuals and the wants they seek to satisfy: value denotes an insubstantial, ever protean, quantitative relation. But while Mill claimed value was relative, he did not ground value in utility as Jevons did, an approach he asserts frees economics from “the thoroughly ambiguous and unscientific character of the term value” (76). Hence, rather than the claim by classical economists that labor ‘causes’ value, Jevons makes value simply a function of fluctuations in utility. The subjective desires of individuals—what they are willing to labor for and the pleasure they acquire and pain they avoid in satisfying their wants—determine utility and define the abstract character of value.

Jevons analyzes labor, like all other economic phenomena, along the lines of utility. As in Smith, labor entails a disutility: it is “the painful exertion we undergo to ward off pains of greater amount, or to procure pleasure which leave a balance in our favour” (Jevons Theory 167). Inasmuch as labor does not lead toward other pleasures or avoid greater pains, it presents suffering we should avoid. Jevons thus continues to
regard labor, as did previous economists, along the lines of the physical or psychic suffering we undergo. In considering labor as a disutility or negative utility, any activity done with ease and pleasure does not enter the calculus of labor; it is only when an activity entails a disagreeable level of effort that labor becomes an object of economic analysis. Labor must be defined by its suffering or “the painfulness of the effort” because labor can only be measured negatively, that is, as quantities of pain (Jevons Theory 170).

As with the consumption of a commodity, Jevons analyzes human decisions to labor utilizing marginal utility analysis. What Jevons terms the “final degree of utility” refers to the pleasure derived from the last incremental addition of any good or activity. Since the utility of anything decreases as we have more and more of it, there exists a certain point with respect to each individual wherein an incremental addition of a good will no longer bring her pleasure but pain. Thus, according to the law of diminishing marginal utility, a hungry person eating food will take greatest pleasure in the first morsel that she eats but each additional amount will generate less and less pleasure until the point of satiety. If one were to continue to eat after the point of satiety, the individual would likely experience pain rather than pleasure. Jevons applies the same law of diminishing marginal utility to individual decisions to labor. People labor toward a greater reward until they reach an equilibrium point where the pain of labor equals the pleasure gained by the reward; thereafter, any incremental addition of labor results in greater pain than pleasure such that the motivation to endure overly intense or prolonged periods of labor diminishes. With respect to labor, the final degree of utility represents a relational quantity since it must establish the utility of additional increments of labor in relation to the prospective reward. The goal of every laborer is to work toward a gain and
produce a commodity of greatest utility, but how hard she will labor and how long
depends on both her need and the relative utility of what she produces.

While labor ceases to be a cause of value, it remains “the determining
circumstance” of value (Jevons Theory 165). Jevons distinguishes himself from Ricardo
by not generalizing labor as equally valuable and, more importantly, by stating that not
only is labor variable but “its value must be determined by the value of the produce, not
the value of the produce by that of the labor” (Theory 166). He thus places emphasis on
the utility derived from the produce in relation to demand rather than reducing value to a
function of generalized labor quantities. After rejecting the labor theory of value, Jevons
offers his own theory of the cause of value: “Cost of production determines supply;
Supply determines final degree of utility; Final degree of utility determines value” (165).
But if value depends on final degree of utility, and final degree of utility on the amount of
commodity we consume, then the only way we can get more or less of something is by
laboring toward supply of that commodity. Jevons appears then to return to a cost of
production theory of value if, in the series of causal factors, cost of production determines
final degree of utility. Sandra Peart argues that this apparent contradiction disappears if
one recasts cost of production as negative utility (Peart 116). But Peart’s solution
amounts to stating that negative utility determines value, a definition that emphasizes the
loss, sacrifice, and suffering requisite for the accumulation of capital and exertions of
labor. As Margaret Schabas succinctly points out, “Jevons appears to have gone full
circle” (Number 47). This circularity essentially reduces value to negative utility, i.e. the
suffering and sacrifice of labor.
Both labor and capital in Jevons entail a disutility since labor requires pain and suffering while capital is the product of abstinence. Drawing on Nassau Senior, Jevons defines abstinence as “that temporary sacrifice of enjoyment which is essential to the existence of capital” (Jevons Theory 233). Capital requires abstinence insofar as we renounce consumption of a desired object in order to accumulate. The theory of abstinence reveals that

abstinence is the endurance of want….Now the degree of intensity of want is measured by the degree of utility of commodity if it were consumed. Great degree of utility simply means great want, so that one dimension of abstinence must be U, and time being also obviously an element of abstinence, the required symbolic statement of its dimensions will be UT. This result satisfactorily corresponds with Senior’s definition, for he says that abstinence is to profit as labour is to wages. (Jevons Theory 234)

Thus, economically speaking, profits measure the degree of abstinence while wages measure the degree of suffering and pain in labor. Economic elements such as wages and profits measure degrees of renunciation and suffering the individual either chose or felt compelled to undergo. While with Ruskin the objects of labor bore the stamp of human suffering—the bodily and mental sacrifices of which the material object seemed but a transitory index—in Jevons renunciation and suffering together bring into relief the positive values of wages and capital. Returning to Jevons’s causal argument on value, we can now restate the formula so that the combination of labor’s sacrifice and capital’s abstinence determine value, i.e. utility. Jevons may have turned political economy

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31This line of thought continues to appear in British political economy, specifically in Marshall, who heavily criticized the marginalist school. Marshall claims that “[w]hile demand is based on the desire to obtain commodities, supply depends mainly on the overcoming of the unwillingness to undergo “discommodities.” These fall generally under two heads:—labour, and the sacrifice involved in putting off consumption. It must suffice here to give a sketch of the part played by ordinary labour in supply. It will be seen hereafter that remarks similar, though not quite the same, might have been made about the work of management and the sacrifice which is involved (sometimes, but not always) in that waiting which is involved in accumulating the means of production.” See Marshall Principles 140.
toward a quantitative, subjective theory of utility, but his argument remains fully ensconced in notions of suffering and sacrifice as the determining features of value.

The continuing importance that sacrifice and abstinence play in Jevons’s political economy also reflects the extent to which sacrifice and abstinence denote, in negation, the positive values of the individual and society. The remuneration of labor’s sacrifices in the form of wages and the capital accumulated through abstinence indicates the character and values of a country and its laborers. “Every person whose wish for a certain thing exceeds his wish for other things, acquires what he wants provided he can make a sufficient sacrifice in other respects” (Jevons Theory 141). How long and at what occupation people labor, as well as what wants they choose to satisfy as a result of their labors, conveys to others their values and judgments. Thus, the satisfaction of our wants, Jevons argues, participates in an ever-increasing scale of desires. “The highest grade in the scale of wants, that of pleasure derived from the beauties of nature and art, is usually confined to men who are exempted from all the lower privations. Thus the demand for, and the consumption of, objects of refined enjoyment has its lever in the facility with which the primary wants are satisfied” (Jevons Theory 42-43). Jevons links the nation’s accumulated wealth and economic progress with the development of higher wants since only those nations that have already satisfied the basic needs for self-preservation among its citizenry can contemplate the development of higher-order desires. Here we see the problem of character, with which Ruskin expressed concern, appear in patterns of consumption. One can detect the degree of an individual’s and nation’s progressiveness by the order of wants it pursues. This points to an important issue since it shows that, while the theory of value has completely shifted to a subjective notion of individual
utility, it is a theory that places the question of what people desire at the forefront. Just as Ruskin worried over how best to educate workers to value the ‘right’ thing, Jevons’s later forays into public reform undermine the utilitarian aspects of his argument which posits self-interest to be the inherent motive of human action since the poor have to be educated into valuing their economic interests in the pursuit of wealth and its accumulation (Peart 34-36, 163-165).

Jevons’s utilitarian theory of value highlights the sociological consequences arising from varied value judgments and the requisite satisfaction of lower wants in order to engender a society whose wealth and progressiveness manifests itself through the preponderance of higher-order desires. Thus when Jevons claims that “it is the inevitable tendency of human nature to choose that course which appears to offer greatest advantage at the moment” (Jevons Theory 59), not only does he articulate the law of self-interest but the cause of error in human judgments. As in Ruskin, where the existence of absolute value (life) stood apart from ambivalence about the variety in human judgments and right action, Jevons maintains utility as an invariable standard but confronts the problem of poor decision-making behavior (Peart 89, 91). Precisely because humans are more compelled by present desires than future ones, they make poor economic choices with respect to the accumulation and investment of their earnings. We can see the broad application toward social reform, especially among the poor, that Jevons has in mind. Here, as with Mill, the program of social reform draws on the very principle it seeks to modify: human wants (Gagnier 51).

A poor savage would be content to gather the almost gratuitous fruits of nature, if they were sufficient to give sustenance; it is only physical want which drives him to exertion. The rich man in modern society is supplied with all he can desire, and yet he often labours unceasingly for more. Bishop Berkeley, in his Querist,
has very well asked, ‘Whether the creating of wants be not the likeliest way to produce industry in a people? And whether, if our (Irish) peasants were accustomed to eat beef and wear shoes, they would not be more industrious?’ (Jevons Theory 183)

There are several significant issues at stake. Firstly, Jevons expresses the perennial Victorian problem of how to educate its citizenry and nurture the development of a specific set of values and dispositions so that poor and rich alike do not, as Smith feared, squander through their prodigality the very consecrated foundation of the nation’s wealth and progress. Secondly, insofar as aggregate utility reflects social welfare, it assesses the interdependence of a strong self-sacrificing ethos and the cultivation of higher-order desires. Hence, though Jevons begins *Theory of Political Economy* by claiming he will only analyze the baser feelings in order to avoid the problem of qualitative differences between higher- and lower-order pleasures Mill encountered in *Utilitarianism*, his concern for aggregate social welfare forces him to confront inconsistencies in human judgment (Peart 144-146). As with Ruskin, arguments on economic welfare and progress inevitably circle back to sociological questions about the impact of character and education on individual choice. Individuals need to be educated to labor and sacrifice the ‘right’ things in pursuit of the ‘right’ wants, namely, those things that promote human society itself.

The self-referential nature of value theories, earlier analyzed in the classical economists, appears in the neoclassical economics of Jevons insofar as individual choices in the economic sphere and the welfare of various social groups refer back to the values upon which they act. But since Jevons embraces a subjective theory of value and deems comparisons between individual mental experiences to be untenable, he must present a theory of the public sphere that overcomes the isolated occurrence of individual utilities.
As will be shown in the next chapter, for Jevons especially, this problem of a shared value structure remains inseparable from the sphere of exchange where individuals perform their values and where their values find representation within an idealized, interdependent system of communal exchange.

In the political economic writings of the classical period and the neoclassical example of Jevons, there appears a progressive distancing from the overt religious rhetoric found in Adam Smith’s description of labor. The increasing need to define political economy as a science on par with physics leads thinkers like Jevons to utilize the term ‘sacred’ only in relation to the hallmark of good science: objective truths. “In science and philosophy nothing must be held sacred. Truth indeed is sacred; but as Pilate said, “What is truth?” Show us the undoubted infallible criterion of absolute truth, and we will hold it as a sacred inviolable thing” (Jevons Theory 276). Yet, the analysis of Jevons’s political economy, like that of Mill and Ricardo, indicates that while references to the sacred and profane in relation to labor may not appear as pronounced as they did in Smith, sacrifice continues to shadow their theories of value and adumbrates the relationship between the sacralizing function of labor’s sacrifice in theories of value with the formation of a just society. Ruskin’s critique of political economy, as well as his alternative theory of value demonstrates the central role given to sacrifice within economic theories of value, even when they depart from the classical labor theories of value. Labor’s sacrifice responds to the problem of absolute and relative value and links the human dimension of loss inherent to all sacrifice to questions of economic justice and the distribution of wealth. But if political economy consistently formulates value negatively as sacrifice that is because, as in the Biblical paradox, it is only by renouncing
what they want that they gain: a just and economically bettered society. The self-referential nature of value theories, most explicitly uttered in the circularity of labor theories of value, lays the foundation for the experience of communality through exchange. As will be shown in the next chapter, if value defined as the sacrifice of labor sacralizes the social body and articulates the principle by which we build a just society, exchange enacts this value in a system of interdependent, reciprocal sacrifices and thus imagines the experience of communality in an economic system otherwise defined by agonistic relations.
CHAPTER 3
THE VISIBLE HAND: COMMUNALITY AND THE RITES OF EXCHANGE IN RUSKIN, POLITICAL ECONOMY, AND VICTORIAN ANTHROPOLOGY

Adam Smith’s concept of an “invisible hand” that leads individuals unconsciously to promote social interests even as they pursue self-interested ends represents one of the most popularized and compelling images of capitalist economic forces. Smith’s enigmatic description of the invisible hand continues to influence contemporary economic discourse. Central problems of modern economic literature such as equilibrium are but mathematical proofs of an economic process for which Smith provides the simple metaphor. The imaginative force of the invisible hand is paradoxical insofar as, in its invisibility, it provides a representation for the invisible processes of economic exchange. While the vast matrix of relations in modern industrial society disaggregates labor and exchange into the discrete acts of the imperceptible many, the metaphor of the invisible hand allows us suddenly to “see” all these actions participating within a harmonized whole even though we can never “see” the actions themselves. The invisible hand not only makes the invisible visible but, in so doing, provides an image of economic exchange as an interconnected, harmonized network of

32 Alejandro Nadal makes this point as well, suggesting that the influence of Smith’s invisible hand ranges from contemporary theories of general equilibrium to the social theories of Hayek, Rawls, and Nozick (181).
relations that overcomes the atomized relations of capitalist society. What is seen, then, is a representation of communality, a communality that results from people unconsciously acting in concert with each other and about which they only become aware through the abstract fiction of the invisible hand. Thus the concept of the invisible hand, like that of equilibrium, offers a mode of communicating to the nameless, faceless many that they daily participate in an interdependent, coordinated system of acts and that all these acts, moreover, arise from a shared principle of action and value: self-interested utility.

Though self-interest is the stated principle of exchange, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century capitalist economies theorize exchange systems that are driven by a combination of self-interest and self-sacrifice and whose end result is balanced reciprocity. Economic exchange functions as an interdependent system in which individuals share knowledge about the values on which they act. Such economic phenomena as wages, prices, profit rates, or the theoretical ideal of equilibrium serve as visible indices of social relations and refer back to the collective acts of labor and exchange that produce such objective data. In this manner, individuals experience

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33 The idea of harmony through economic exchange appears among other political economists as well. Frédéric Bastiat, for example, presents economic exchange under laissez-faire as naturally creating social harmony between competing individual interests. See Bastiat’s *Harmonies of Political Economy*, 42-58. For a discussion of models of balance, harmony, and mechanical analogies in seventeenth-century political economy, see Andrea Finkelstein’s *Harmony and the Balance*. See also Mirowski’s *More Heat Than Light* for the influence of physics on economic thought. Lionel Robbins critiques the frequent charge of mysticism against classical political economy’s emphasis on the harmony that results from exchange in a system of perfect freedom. What the Germans call “Harmonienslehre,” he claims, does not mean that classical political economists presented a mystical theory of exchange that resulted in social and economic harmony. Whatever harmony resulted was under the aegis of governmental intervention and was a limited social harmony. In the long run, he states, they understood society tended toward disharmony. See Robbins 22-29.

34 As Ingrao and Israel argue, one of the central concepts to equilibrium theory is price. Individuals in the market try to satisfy their subjective tastes and preferences by choosing from a set of scarce goods. Prices
communality through abstract representations of exchange that dramatize their role in collective, coordinated acts. The experience of communality through participation in coordinated acts of exchange, I argue, structures exchange as a ritual ultimately founded on principles of self-sacrifice and reciprocity. This ideal of exchange as a ritual rooted in reciprocity and self-sacrifice, while concealed beneath the rhetoric of pure self-interest in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century political economy, is openly articulated in the political economic writings of John Ruskin. Ruskin treats labor and exchange as the problem of coordinating manifold actors according to the shared values of reciprocal self-sacrifice and conceives of sacrifice as a “rite.” Ruskin presents labor as a ritual in which individuals experience communality and affirm the sacrosanct nature of the social body by coordinating their actions in a system of reciprocal self-sacrifice. Furthermore, his open synthesis of economic and religious categories such as exchange and ritual offers us a way to re-read the relationship between nineteenth-century anthropology and political economy, specifically the parallel between economic exchange and ritual. While these anthropologists study sacrificial ritual and communality in primitive societies, their political economists counterparts enact these practices in their theories of value and exchange. Economic exchange offers a theoretical representation of an interdependent social structure, an “imagined community” in which reciprocal exchange and sacrifice coordinate individual actions within a harmonic system. In the first section of this chapter, I will focus on the invisibility of actions as it relates to the performance of values and collective social practices. In this section, the work of John Stuart Mill and Edward Burnett Tylor will serve as primary examples of how political economy and anthropology act as objective “indicators” that measure the relative scarcity of goods on the market and act as a “channel of information” about such scarcity between various markets (4-5, 101).
struggle to explain the cohesion of individuals acts into collective economic or cultural practices. In the second section, I turn to John Ruskin’s articulation of the relationship between collective action and collective values within the context of his political economy. Ruskin’s conception of labor and exchange as a rite of reciprocal sacrifice will be treated as a response to this key sociological question. His notion of sacrifice as a rite will be discussed in conjunction with anthropological theories of sacrifice in the nineteenth-century. In the third and final section, I examine representations of communality and interdependence within nineteenth-century anthropology and political economic theories of equilibrium.

I Value of Actions, or Acting on Values

Nineteenth-century political economy and anthropology both investigate the problem of collective action. How do individuals coordinate their actions so as to form a consensus? How do actions, either singly or as a group, articulate values? While this by no means exhausts the preoccupations of the two disciplines, it does pose a central concern and forms, as I will show, a basis for the interconnections between the two. Christopher Herbert has already demonstrated the similarities between political economy and anthropology through the concept of culture. Such metaphors as Smith’s invisible hand, for example, provide an interpretive symbol through which the vast economic organization appears to us in an intelligible form, that is, as culture (Herbert Culture 99). Though Herbert provides an important point of reference, I want to shift the focus from systems of signification that restrain desire to the social practices anthropologists and economists discuss as modes of communality and collective action. In both nineteenth-century political economy and anthropology, the invisibility of individual actions within
the aggregate poses a special problem: though the face-to-face relations were no longer
typical of social interaction in an increasingly atomized society, the discrete actions of
individuals paradoxically participate in an interdependent social system. Whereas
individuals face the challenge of conceiving the effects of their acts within an
interdependent social network, the political economist and anthropologist must
conceptualize cultural and economic practices of the present or past as the result of many
discrete individual acts. This transitional point, wherein individual acts become
transformed into collective social practices, presented a pivotal methodological difficulty
for both disciplines. In response, both disciplines conjectured a common set of values or
uniform laws to thought and action that integrates individual acts into a whole.

Explaining the generation of collective economic or cultural practices raises the
problem of visibility. In an essay aptly entitled “That Which is Seen, and That Which is
Not Seen” (1850), nineteenth-century French economist Frédéric Bastiat directly poses
the problem of visualizing the multifarious economic transactions and their subsequent
effects as they unfold within the abstraction of the marketplace. As a libertarian
polemicist, Bastiat addresses the consequences of government intervention in laissez-
faire policy by stating that “[i]n the economic sphere an act, a habit, an institution, a law,
produces not only one effect, but a series of effects. Of these effects, the first alone is
immediate; it appears simultaneously with its cause—*it is seen*. The other effects emerge
only subsequently—*they are not seen*; we are fortunate if we *foresee* them” (*Essays 1*).
The goal of the economist is to track the attendant consequences of any given economic
action whose visible effects carry with them a corollary set of effects that remain
invisible. By way of illustration, Bastiat offers a case of a shopkeeper whose son breaks
a window and whose immediate economic effect is to mobilize a portion of the workforce by employing a glazier to fix the broken window. While we may immediately “see” that the accident of the window puts the glazier to work and places the six francs used to pay him into circulation, what we do not see are the trades from which the same six francs are withdrawn had the window not been broken and the shopkeeper spent his money through other channels. What is “not seen” focuses on the real or hypothetical consequences of a given event or choice that is only foreseen by abstract reasoning.

While Bastiat restricts himself to the unseen, unintended effects of our actions, Smith’s *The Wealth of Nations* articulates another crucial feature to what remains unseen with regard to our daily economic acts in his example of the day laborer’s woolen coat: the vast network of the division of labor. Smith instructs the reader to “observe the accommodation” possessed by any laborer and she will realize that something as simple as the woolen coat a day laborer wears is the result of innumerable operations that “exceeds all computation” (Smith *Wealth* 10). A shepherd has to gather the wool, others have to sort, weave, spin and dye it, while still more must produce the tools and machinery needed for such processes. Thus, while the final product of the coat is all we see, on further reflection we become aware of the many operations we do not see but must be in effect in order to produce the coat. After such reflection, Smith claims, “we shall be sensible that, without the assistance and co-operation of many thousands” none would possess the most basic necessities (Smith *Wealth* 11). Yet, the very moment that we “observe” and become “sensible” to the interdependent network needed to produce the most basic commodity, what we acknowledge is that we cannot in fact observe this or become sensible to it in any perceptible way except through a mental abstraction.
The dilemma posed by Bastiat and Smith is that neither all the consequences of an act nor how these acts participate in any coherent system can be ‘seen.’ Bastiat and Smith here isolate two aspects to action’s visibility that Frances Ferguson has analyzed in relation to Bentham and utilitarian social structures. In contrast to many Foucauldian interpretations that emphasize punishment and coercive self-surveillance engendered by the continuous threat of visibility within the panopticon, Ferguson concentrates on the objectification and perceptibility of acts that are “seen” once they enter into schemas that evaluate acts in relation to other acts (1-4, 20-21, 24). Within these evaluative schemas, acts only attain value in relation to other acts, a value rooted not in intentions but in an act’s consequential effects (Ferguson 72). Utilitarianism, she argues, takes human action rather than beliefs or character as its main focus so that it can objectify these acts and, through evaluation, presents the value of acts within a coordinated, relational system. The techniques of such utilitarian social structures as the panopticon and educational examination give to human acts a perceptible value through a system of constant evaluation and report, hierarchically classing acts in relation to one another (Ferguson xv-xvii). In this manner, Ferguson argues, utilitarian social structures produce objective and shared information about individual acts (4).

I want to emphasize two aspects of Ferguson’s reading of utilitarian social structures relevant to my discussion of the problem of visibility in relation to an act’s performance: the coordination of acts (and their effects) within a relational system of values and the objectification of an act’s value through evaluation that then produces shared information. Returning to Bastiat’s example of the shopkeeper’s broken window, the economic value of what is seen (the money gained by the glazier) immediately
appears linked with a series of unseen, unintended consequences that may cause us to reevaluate whether an economic opportunity was supplied by the accident or another opportunity lost. While Bastiat’s example highlights the relative values of an act in relation to other acts and their unintended effects, Smith’s example of the day laborer’s coat provides tangible evidence of the interdependent network of labor and exchange that, like the evaluative reports within utilitarian social structures, creates shared information for individuals who otherwise would remain unaware of the innumerable acts that make the market possible. The creation of such shared information is crucial for a discipline that deals, as Bastiat was keenly aware, with human actions and “what is not seen.” Thus, visible examples of collective social action mediate between individuals in a community and, by mediation, create shared knowledge among members of the community that all are implicitly engaged in that collective act. As we will see in the second and third sections of this chapter more fully, these collective acts serve as public expressions of values, values upon which individuals act and which they know to be shared through their publicity. It is not only utilitarian social structures that objectify the value of acts within a relational system but economic structures identify the value of commodities relationally and objectively express this relation through a relative price structure.35 These relative prices refer back to the individual preferences that cause individuals to value those commodities. Whether we take the example of the invisible hand or the day laborer’s coat, the constellated, relational matrix of acts doubles as a matrix of values through the metaphorical representations Smith provides. But by

35Christopher Herbert raises a related point with respect to the controversy over relative values in political economy in which the products of actions are linked in a network of corresponding values such that each is convertible to the other, thus threatening the notion of absolute values. See Culture 123.
appealing to a metaphor, Smith avoids explicating how actions become integrated into a collective whole and how these actions refer back to values.

By contrast, John Stuart Mill and Edward Burnett Tylor serve as two useful examples of nineteenth-century thinkers who try to address the harmonization of individual acts into a whole. Mill openly poses the problem of how individual actions generate collective social practices. To what extent could political economy succeed as a predictive science without presupposing a normative theory of human action? Does the explication of social phenomena in the aggregate rely on an understanding of the laws of individual motives and character? The methodological hurdles that faced political economy inevitably rehearse the epistemological divide between the subjective motives prompting individuals to act as opposed to the objective laws that govern economic production, distribution, and exchange—an intractable problem that, as Catherine Gallagher and Amanda Anderson have shown, was part and parcel of Victorian debates on character formation, free will, and determinism.36

A classic exposition of this methodological quandary appears in Mill’s *A System of Logic* (1843, 1872), specifically the chapter entitled “Ethology” where Mill outlines the theoretical foundations for a ‘science of character.’ In this chapter, as Janice Carlisle points out, the problem of methodology and specifically the conflict between objective and subjective approaches to agency preoccupy Mill’s argument on the possibility of a science of character (137). Psychology, he argues, constitutes specific “Laws of Mind”

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36 According to Gallagher, reformists like Owen and industrial novelists from Gaskell to Kingsley found it difficult to marry their notion of free will and providence with a deterministic view of the causes that shape and delimit the worker’s character and agency. See Gallagher *Industrial* 4-87. In a similar vein, Anderson discusses Mill’s attempt to reconcile his commitment to individual autonomy and free will with his doctrine of philosophical necessity wherein action can be predictably inferred on the basis of such determinate conditions as character, disposition, and social circumstance. See Anderson *Tainted* 23-34.
which the theorist arrives at by induction and psychological introspection; character is formed through the dynamic interaction of these laws with the individual’s environment (Mill 8: 850). Though Mill conceives of character as resulting from the play of environment and the “Laws of Mind,” he remains acutely aware of the indeterminate nature of causal arguments.

The laws of causation according to which a class of phenomena are produced may be so various and complicated that it shall be impossible to trace any regularity whatever completely through them. For the phenomena in question may be of an eminently modifiable character; insomuch that innumerable circumstances are capable of influencing the effect, although they may all do it according to a very small number of laws. (Mill 8: 863)

The problem of causality becomes further complicated by the lack of an accurate methodology to reproduce, in any given experiment, the circumstances that help to create a particular type of character. The individuality of subjects and the element of ambiguity that pervades self-knowledge and knowledge of others stand closed to objective analysis. This does not prevent Mill from asserting that there exist “universal laws of the Formation of Character” which, though they cannot be narrowed to exactness in each individual case, can be observed “en masse” (8: 866). A study of differences in the national character of the French and English due to differing institutions, customs, beliefs etc. could then be explained by causal laws regarding differences in individual character (Mill 8: 868). The deduction of a priori principles as to the type of character a given circumstance engenders is supported a posteriori by the specific cases in which the law is verified.

Mill’s ethology informs both his sociology and his political economy since he assumes that the laws of character govern the formation of society as well. When Mill’s analysis shifts in A System of Logic to sociology and the actions of a collective, he
surmises that the “laws of the phenomena of society are, and can be, nothing but the laws of
the actions and passions of human being united together in the social state” (8: 879). Because “the immediate causes of social facts are not open to direct observation,” Mill makes the laws that gives rise to “a state of society” contiguous with the laws of
individual thought, feeling and action (8: 908). The sociologist inquires into the laws of
these states of society by addressing either the area of “Social Statics” or “Social
Dynamics” (Mill 8: 917). Adopting the latter terminology from Auguste Comte, Mill defines “Social Statics” as “the conditions of stability and union” while “Social
Dynamics” deals with progressive stages of societies—a division analogous to the
difference between stable equilibrium and movement in mechanics (Mill 8: 917). The
static state describes society in its fixed form, that is, as the result of a “consensus”
expressed in the customs, laws, knowledge, economic practices, and beliefs of a society
at any given time. Mill understand “consensus,” following Comte, not simply as
individuals agreeing with one another but as a physiological concept wherein society, like
the body, functions through modes of “mutual interdependence” and “mutual co-
ordination” (qtd. in Mill 8: 918).

There is no social phenomenon which is not more or less influenced by every
other part of the condition of the same society, and therefore by every cause
which is influencing any other of the contemporaneous social phenomena. There
is, in short, what physiologists term a consensus, similar to that existing among
the various organs and functions of the physical frame of man and the more
perfect animals, and constituting one of the many analogies which have rendered
universal such expressions as the “body politic” and “body natural.” It follows
from this consensus, that unless two societies could be alike in all the
circumstances which surround and influence them, (which would imply their
being alike in their previous history), no portion whatever of the phenomena will,
unless by accident, precisely correspond; no one cause will produce exactly the
same effects in both. (Mill 8: 899)
While social statics describes the “consensus” achieved by a society as a state of mutual interdependence, social dynamics studies the laws that govern the progress from one social state to the next, that is, from one “universal consensus” to the next (Mill 8: 900). These states of consensus are, as Mill himself alludes, analogous to equilibrium states where society functions as a balanced, internally calibrated organism. Hence, in studying the movement from one state of consensus to the next, sociologists are essentially plotting the progressive movement from one equilibrium state to another. These successive equilibrium states of society can be explained by “connecting them with the psychological and ethological laws on which they must really depend” (Mill 8: 908).

Despite Mill’s distinction between static and dynamic studies of social states, the consensus he describes also denotes a dynamic process in which each cause has its attendant effect. At issue is how the mutually coordinated and balanced forces of one static equilibrium state gives rise to the next state as society progresses.

In *A System of Logic*, Mill repeatedly struggles with the infinite circumstances that form individual character and social phenomena and yet remains wedded to the notion that the laws that govern individual action and character are the same laws that determine the successive states of society. It is this problem of the relationship between individual and collective action that E.B. Tylor’s *Primitive Culture* (1871) expresses so clearly in relation to the laws of cultural development. In *Primitive Culture*, Tylor’s definition of culture as “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other habits and capabilities” is part of a larger project which aims to elucidate the “laws of human thought and action” (1). Tylor marries an evolutionary model of civilization with a theory of human thought and action wherein
cultures are seen as passing through developmental stages, much like Mill’s ethology, “the uniform action of uniform causes” (*Origins* 1). More importantly, Tylor’s interpretation of culture specifically explores “the motives which lead to human action” and how these motives result in the cultural formations under review (*Origins* 4). Like Mill’s study of the relationship between successive social states and the laws of character, Tylor encounters the methodological problem of trafficking between individual motives and acts and the analysis of the aggregate social formation he terms the “complex whole” of culture.

There are people so intent on the separate life of individuals that they cannot grasp a notion of the action of a community as a whole—such an observer, incapable of a wide view of society, is aptly described in the saying that he ‘cannot see the forest for the trees.’ But, on the other hand, the philosopher may be so intent upon his general laws of society as to neglect the individual actors of whom that society is made up, and of him it may be said that he cannot see the trees for the forest.…The history of an invention, an opinion, a ceremony, is a history of suggestion and modification, encouragement and opposition, personal gain and party prejudice, and the individuals concerned act each according to his own motives, as determined by his character and circumstances. Thus sometimes we watch individuals acting for their own ends with little thought of their effect on society at large, and sometimes we have to study movements of national life as a whole, where the individuals co-operating in them are utterly beyond our observation. But seeing that collective social action is the mere resultant of many individual actions, it is clear that these two methods of enquiry, if rightly followed, must be absolutely consistent. (*Tylor* *Origins* 12-13)

Like Mill, Tylor identifies the mutual relations between the individual and collective, where both act and are acted upon by the other. Additionally, he too conceives of the laws governing the “movements of national life as a whole” to be consistent with the laws that govern individual motives. In short, Tylor’s and Mill’s methodological exploration of the interdependent action of the individual and the collective whether

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37 As George Stocking argues, *Mill’s Logic* had an enduring impact on anthropologists like Tylor, McLennan, and Lubbock precisely because it grounded the study of civilizations in an examination of human nature and the explanation of cultural practices through their use-values (*Stocking Victorian* 37-41, 171-172).
described as “consensus” or “culture,” is another way of asking the following question: what laws operate such that each individual’s act becomes coordinated with that of others and manifests itself in the “collective social action” evidenced in religious, economic, and cultural institutions? How do social practices manifest individual human motives and actions that are “utterly beyond our observation”? 

Though Mill never succeeds in identifying the many laws operating in the formation of individual and national character, he maintains both in *A System of Logic* and in the *Principles of Political Economy* that the law governing individual and social phenomena within the restricted sphere of political economy is the “universal object of human desire,” wealth (2: 3).

There is, for example, one large class of phenomena, in which the immediately determining causes are principally those which act through the desire for wealth; and in which the psychological law mainly concerned is the familiar one, that a greater gain is preferred to a smaller…. By reasoning from that one law of human nature, and from the principal outward circumstances…which operate upon the human mind through that law, we may be enabled to explain and predict this portion of the phenomena of society…. (8: 901)

Like Bentham and Smith before him, Mill posits self-interest as the “Law of Mind” governing the economic system as a whole. Self-interest responds to the theoretical problem of how the motives of individual actors could be made consistent with the laws that govern collective social action within the economic realm. In this context, self-interest becomes the fulcrum by which political economists like Mill and Bentham pivot back and forth between explaining individual human behavior and the operation of economic laws that coordinate these individual acts into a coherent whole. When Bentham defends the ambiguous position of political economy as being, like all disciplines, both a “field of thought and action,” he simultaneously reduces all disciplines
to the same foundation as political economy since he makes eudaemonia, well-being, the
“object of every branch of art, and the subject of every branch of science” (1: 81, 82-83).
By making well-being the “Common Hall, or central place of meeting” for all the
sciences, Bentham’s argument on the unity of the disciplines crystallizes, in parallel
form, the core theoretical problem within political economy. As the “common hall” of
the disciplines, eudaemonia is also the common hall of human actions and the means by
which individual actions come to have any semblance of unity and coherence. The
principle of self-interest alone offers a solid foundation for political economy since its
influence is “the most powerful, most constant, most uniform, most lasting, and most
general amongst mankind” (Bentham 3: 433). It is only on the basis of such a uniform
motive that political economists can explicate how individuals create, through their acts,
a social body. If, as Bentham claims, a political body constitutes itself as “the
concurrence of many members in the same act” and it is “the power of agreeing in the
same intellectual act which constitutes the principle of unity in a body,” then the principle
of self-interest establishes the basis for the coincidence of individual human motives as
an aggregate, a coincidence that enables them to act in concert (1: 95-96). Since all acts
can be interpreted as the pursuit of individual utilities, acts makes visible an individual’s
preferences and values in terms of pleasures and pains.

The principle of self-interest, while denoting the general motive for human
actions, also expresses human rationality. The reasons for an act, as well as our capacity
to reason, derive themselves from the principle of utility. Insofar as “all men calculate”
pleasures and pains according to the principle of utility and all our reasons for acting are
derived from utility, the only rational behavior is that calculated on the basis of utility
(Bentham 3: 434). Though distanced from the physiological emphasis Bentham gave to the pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain, such tautological reasoning forms a fundamental aspect of modern rational choice theory. As a normative theory of human behavior, contemporary rational choice theory conceptualizes the rationality of human desires as determined by whether or not they consistently lead to choices that maximize utilities (Elster 1-3, 15). Desires that cannot be fulfilled, are ill-adjusted to available options, or clearly damage our interests, constitute irrational behavior. The pitfalls of such a restricted view of choice and preference are well-documented elsewhere.38 What is relevant for the present discussion is how twentieth-century rational choice theory brings into relief a central issue in Bentham’s view of self-interest: self-interest presents the common principle by which economic agents are able to coordinate their actions as a social body because it offers both a theory of value and a theory of action at once. As Gary Becker states, summarizing the central assumption of rational choice theory, “the economic approach [to human behavior] assumes the existence of markets that with varying degrees of efficiency coordinate the actions of different participants—individuals, firms, nations—so that their behavior becomes mutually consistent” (5). Becker’s economic approach to human behavior depicts an agent who makes rationally calculated decisions and allocates resources so as to optimize utilities. This assumption

38In Freedom and Rationality, Amartya Sen critiques the assumption in rational choice theory that agents’s decisions be internally consistent in order to explain their behavior and preferences. This, he argues, relies on the position that acts of choice on their own can either contradict or be consistent with one another. Rational choice theory and revealed preference theory ignore the dependence of choices on such things as social norms and roles. See especially pages 122-205. Some emendations to this approach are found in recent discussions of “bounded rationality,” where the agent is no longer viewed as possessing perfect information of the market in order to maximize her desires but possesses a limited/bounded rationality. See, for example, Geoffrey Hodgson’s essay “Calculation, Habits and Action” in The Economics of Rationality. See also Hollis and Nell’s Rational Economic Man for a critique of rationality in neoclassical economics. Derek Parfit’s essay “Prudence, Morality, and the Prisoner’s Dilemma” shows that, in the case of the prisoner’s dilemma, the individual pursuit of self-interest is collectively self-defeating and altruism might be the better alternative. See Rational Choice 34-59.
of a universal motive for all human actions and choices enables him to postulate the existence of a market where their discrete, potentially competing, interests are coordinated and made “mutually consistent.” For Bentham, pleasure, and the avoidance of pain, is the measure of value, the motive of action, expresses one’s interests, and makes actions consistent.

The identification of rationality with the motive of self-interest lends predictability to agency and helps explain how individuals coordinate their actions even if they do not encounter one another. David Lewis’s analysis of “coordination problems” in game theory illuminates this relationship between rationality, shared knowledge and collective action. Game theories assess rational actors who try to resolve “the problems of interdependent decisions” by relying on the assumed rationality of other actors (Lewis 13). Coordination occurs when agents make decisions that depend on “concordant mutual expectations” that others will decide to behave in a way that conforms to conventions that are shared and constitute part of their common knowledge (Lewis 26). Lewis claims that such expectations do not rely on face-to-face contact and that, even if “we are windowless monads,” we can transpose ourselves into the other’s position and “replicate” their reasoning in order to predict their behavior (Lewis 32). In order for a convention to exist, behavior must be regular, there must be a mutual expectation of conformity, actors must prefer that all conform to that convention, and most importantly, it must be common knowledge that these conditions be fulfilled (Lewis 58). Common

39 Michel Callon calls this resolution to uncertainty in the market “a focal point”: shared common knowledge guarantees coordination and predictable human behavior (7). Such an approach, he argues, presents the agent and the network in which she acts as separate entities rather than seeing economic activity as embedded in social networks. Callon prefers to interpret the market as the ‘performation’ of calculative agencies, where agents use calculative tools that the economy provides to predict and coordinate their behavior with others. Thus, the market is both produced by and producing calculative agencies. See Callon’s “Introduction” to The Laws of the Markets 2-51.
knowledge requires that actors know the convention, expect others will conform to it, and expect that others will expect that they conform to the preferred convention. These various orders of shared knowledge enable them to act in concert.

We can now understand why Adam Smith’s famous statement in The Wealth of Nations that it is “not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their interest” appears in the midst of his discussion of the rise of the division of labor (13). The very tendency in human nature “to truck, barter, and exchange one thing for another,” which gives rise to the division of labor, also results in an interdependent society in which we cannot obtain the most basic necessities without “the co-operation and assistance of a great multitude” (Smith Wealth 12, 13). The interdependence that the division of labor engenders simultaneously asserts individual self-interest as its social glue. Without knowledge of this essential motive to human acts, a motive from which all other acts are epiphenomenal, no individual could either predict another’s behavior or engage her in a mutually contracting relationship that advanced the other’s interests. Self-interest as a theory of value and principal motive of action offers but a tool to address a larger problem: how does the market coordinate actions into a consistent whole?

The latter problem appears in anthropological writings in terms of culture and the development of civilizations. This was especially true of Tylor, whose primary objective in studying culture as a “complex whole” was not simply to delineate the development and modification of a set of practices over time but, as Bentham and Smith make clear in their writings on political economy, to investigate how individuals coordinate their actions as one social body to produce an interdependent whole. Culture’s practices and
institutions merely result from “that remarkable tacit consensus or agreement which so far induces whole populations to unite in the use of the same language, to follow the same religion and customary law, to settle down to the same general level of art and knowledge” (Tylor Origins 10). On the one hand, Tylor claims that culture results from a “tacit consensus” and, on the other hand, that culture operates according to “the uniform action of uniform causes” whose explication reveals “the laws of human thought and action” (Origins 1). Tylor encounters the similar hurdle faced by Mill: how can we account for a process, whether the interdependent system of exchange or “the complex network of civilization,” which is the product of countless imperceptible acts unless there exists a continuous law that coordinates all these actions into the “complex whole” known as culture (Origins 17)?

Just as eighteenth- and nineteenth-century political economists presents self-interest as the fundamental human motive that ties the self-interested actions of many into a cohesive web, Tylor appeals to the fundamental rationality of all human beings to explain the developmental stages of cultural formation and the collective social actions they produce. In adopting this position, Tylor rejects the hypothesis of polygeneticism, popular among ethnologists of the nineteenth-century, and embraces a monogenticist position that argued for the unity of all races. Prior to the evolutionary arguments by Darwin in the 1860s, British ethnologists were divided in their explications of the diversity of the human species. Philologists like Max Müller stressed the study of linguistic families and, on that basis, argued for an original unity of languages that had become diffused over time and through migration. The argument for the unity of the human species assumed all humans evolved from the original pair of Adam and Eve,
irrespective of cultural difference. Early nineteenth-century studies in comparative anatomy and racial diversity, however, argued against this unity, claiming instead that “savages” represented a separate species all together. Against the latter polygenism, nineteenth-century ethnologist James Prichard defended the monogenism of the human species by presenting the independent invention of similar institutions, cultural practices, and linguistic affinities as evidence of the “psychic unity” of mankind (Stocking Victorian 24-25, 49-51).

Tylor espouses the position of human “psychic unity” in order to show that the laws of thought and action operate uniformly in all civilizations. As George Stocking argues, man’s psychic unity presents a methodological necessity for evolutionary theorists of civilization like Lubbock, Tylor, and Lang, who could not explain the purpose of “primitive” social practices or their continued performance in modern society unless they could assume a shared rationality (Victorian 154-156). This was especially true for Tylor who was critical of what Stocking terms “the double image of savagery,” which appeared rational when it suited evolutionary anthropologists and irrational whenever a foil to the progressive nature of western civilization was in need (Victorian 187). As in David Lewis’s analysis of coordination problems, anthropologists could not “replicate” the reasoning behind the conventions of other races unless they made the first-order assumption of uniform rationality where practices serve a utilitarian purpose.

Tylor argues that races at every stage of development are rational and that many religious practices and beliefs which appear irrational in the present once had a utilitarian purpose and can be understood as “survivals” of primitive practices that have simply become a force of habit for the contemporary practitioner. Tylor’s doctrine of survivals and
psychic unity establishes a clear line of continuity between the past and the present. The theory of survivals relies on his claim that all religions originate in primitive animism. Animistic doctrine results from the tendency to transfer the psychical attributes and motives of human beings onto inanimate objects and immaterial forces. Religious rites and ceremonies are the byproduct of what was initially a rational impulse to explain the phenomena observed in nature and human life cycles. While such rites as funeral offerings, for example, have their origin in animistic thinking, they leave “surviving remnants, more or less dwindled in form and changed in meaning” (Tylor *Religion* 76).

It becomes clear, in the context of survivals, why the presumption of uniform laws of thought and action represented a methodological necessity for Tylor. He could neither explain the rationale of ‘primitive’ thinking nor their continuance into modern civilization unless he argued that all behavior, past and present, arises from a uniform set of rational impulses. Tylor’s initial definition of the science of culture as the study of a “complex whole” in effect presents culture in its varied and calcified forms as the traces of collective social action. The theory of survivals analyzes visible traces of evolving cultural practices as sites wherein anthropologists discern the “tacit consensus” by which individual acts have resulted in a “complex whole.”

Where political economists analyze exchange as a representation of the countless individual acts of ‘rational’ agents that make up the economic system as an interconnected whole, anthropologists study culture. Mill’s and Tylor’s explication of how social coordination is effected, however, is incomplete insofar as self-interest and psychic unity account for the unconscious coincidence of wills but not how individuals consciously act in concert to form the cultural practices that they do. Moreover, the
claim that self-interest presents a unifying principle of cohesion carries within it an inherent contradiction that Smith overlooks but Bentham and Mill confront. As Mill asserts in *A System of Logic*, the progress of civilization essentially records the increasing cultivation of reason and intellectual faculties, a cultivation that is attended with the suppression of those selfish tendencies that “disunite mankind” (8: 926). Similarly, at the same time that Bentham purports self-interest to be the uniform motive of all action, he accedes that “[t]he greatest enemies of public peace are the selfish and dissocial passions:—necessary as they are…. Society is held together only by the sacrifices that men can be induced to make of the gratifications they demand: to obtain these sacrifices is the great difficulty, the great task of government” (2: 431). Hence, while rational self-interest motivates agents and unites their actions into a cohesive whole, it is also the seed of social disintegration. This threat can only be offset by cultivating the value of self-sacrifice in the citizenry. As we will see, Ruskin’s political economy explicitly develops this ethos of self-sacrifice and reciprocity as the principles upon which society achieves its social cohesion.

II Ruskin, Ritual, and Reciprocity

In his 1867 publication, *Time and Tide*, John Ruskin collected and published twenty-five letters addressed to the cork-cutter Thomas Dixon of Sunderland in which he outlined his views on the demand for parliamentary reform by laborers in England. Typical of Ruskin’s distrust of political agitation as a solution to social inequities, *Time and Tide* discredits the demand made by laborers for greater parliamentary influence as a means to improve their welfare and instead calls on them to unite as a separate body by reaching a consensus on their values and goals. Transforming their economic conditions
would not occur, Ruskin claimed, through the intervention of government but through the
decision made by laborers to govern themselves according to the shared principles of
honesty and cooperation in labor and exchange (17: 316-318). Ruskin distinguishes the
efforts by laborers to establish cooperative firms with greater profit sharing from his
notion of “co-operation” wherein economic agents “form one society” on the basis of
publicly established prices and uniform laws for all (17: 317). If, as Adam Smith
contends, commerce should be “among nations, as among individuals, a bond of union
and friendship” rather than “the most fertile source of discord and animosity,” Ruskin
insists that there has to be transparency, regularity, and honesty in trade for a truly
cooperative economic system to emerge (Smith Wealth 435). 40 Hence, while Bentham,
Mill and Tylor analyze the uniform laws of thought and action that give rise to even the
most “tacit consensus,” Ruskin argues that in order to establish a new set of principles in
the marketplace, this consensus must not be tacit but explicitly upheld and acknowledged
so that the cooperative nature of the “complex whole” society forms is less likely to be
violated by competitive practices.

Rather than self-interest, Ruskin presents self-sacrifice and reciprocity as an
alternative organizing principle for collective action, values, and choices. In Time and
Tide, Ruskin analogizes the cooperative, self-sacrificing efforts made by the crew of a
boat to economic practices.

40 Willie Henderson analyzes the influence of Xenophon’s household economies and management on
Ruskin’s political economy. Ruskin, he claims, rejects Adam Smith’s metaphor of the invisible hand and
emphasizes, like Xenophon, “the visible hand of management” in order to create a predictable setting
wherein members of society interact harmoniously. While Ruskin, like Smith, was interested in social
harmony, he does not think the economy produces such harmony magically of its own accord but requires
the coordinated efforts of administrative branches of the government. In this regard, he resembles the
structuralist economics of the 1960s, which emphasized the coordinated actions of governments to
encourage growth and the global redistribution of wealth. See Henderson 84-85, 104-106.
When the crew of a wrecked ship escape in an open boat, and the boat is crowded, the provisions scanty, and the prospect of making land distant, laws are instantly established and enforced which no one thinks of disobeying. An entire equality of claim to the provisions is acknowledged without dispute; and an equal liability to necessary labour. No man who can row is allowed to refuse his oar;... any child, or woman, or aged person, who was helpless, and exposed to great danger and suffering by their weakness, would receive more than ordinary care and indulgence, not unaccompanied with unanimous self-sacrifice on the part of the labouring crew....There is no point of difference in the difficulties to be met, nor in the rights reciprocally to be exercised. (17:372)

Like the boat’s crew, economic agents should also act collectively and with “unanimous self-sacrifice” (17:372). Yet, Ruskin presents the open boat as an analogue for labor and exchange precisely because the principles upon which the crew act are not, in Victorian society, “acknowledged without dispute” (17:372). For this reason, *Time and Tide* begins by advising laborers to openly establish common values and principles as a necessary preliminary step to acting as a unified body. The collective action of rowers on the open boat crystallizes a core problem in Ruskin’s political economy: in order for individuals to unite their actions according to the principle of self-sacrifice—whether it be on a boat or in the marketplace—self-sacrifice and reciprocity must form the foundation of their value systems. In this regard, Ruskin’s example of rowers parallels Hume’s discussion of each rower in a boat trying to row at the same rhythm as others—an early articulation of coordination problems (Hume *Treatise* 542). In the case of Hume’s rowers, Lewis argues that the rowers row at a certain rhythm by a tacit convention evidenced in the very act of rhythmic rowing (63). Continued and successful rowing in this rhythm serves as shared, visible evidence and confirms to each rower that each expects the other to

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41David Lewis attributes this formulation to Hume in *Convention* (5-6). Interestingly, Hume raises the example of two rowers in *A Treatise on Human Nature* while discussing private property as a “convention” that members of society agree to in order to stabilize social relations. Private property, like other conventions, arises when a “common sense of interest is mutually express’d, and is known to both.” Hume adds that such conventions exist without a promise since all our actions “have a reference to those of the other, and are perform’d upon the supposition, that something is to be perform’d on the other part” (*Treatise* 541-542).
continue rowing at that rhythm (Lewis 63). Once this common knowledge is established, they can continue to row in unison. The generation of such common knowledge, as Michael Chwe states, implicitly relies on a “shared symbolic system” that allows individuals to receive information and agree on its signification (7). It is by means of this shared symbolic system that we generate common knowledge and coordinate our acts collectively.

While there is no evidence that Ruskin read Hume’s discussion of rowers trying to row at the same rate, the example of the open boat presents a striking parallel. Ruskin envisions rowers who possess common knowledge insofar as all know, and know the others know, that they will act according to the principle of self-sacrifice. Because they acknowledge this “without dispute,” they are able to act in unison (17:372). Yet, Ruskin appreciates the limitations of his analogy for the capitalist marketplace where we do not have face-to-face contact with everyone. He concedes “that while labour at oar or sail is necessarily united, and can attain no independent good, or personal profit, the labour undertaken by the several members of a political community is necessarily, and justly, within certain limits, independent; and obtains for them independent advantage…” (17:374-375). Like Mill and Tylor, Ruskin must explain how the countless invisible agents acting independently of one another could act collectively on the basis of self-sacrifice and reciprocity. In some sense, Ruskin is more explicit than political economists about the relationship between acts and values. He sees clearly that acts encode our values and it is not simply a question of how we can act in concert but how these collective actions represent collective values. As in Ferguson’s analysis of Bentham, actions make values visible. The relationship between acts, values, and
visibility becomes clear in *Munera Pulveris* where Ruskin divides government into the visible and invisible.

The visible government is that which nominally carries on the national business; determines its foreign relations, raises taxes, levies soldiers, orders war or peace, and otherwise becomes the arbiter of the national fortune. The invisible government is that exercised by all energetic and intelligent men, each in his sphere, regulating the inner will and secret ways of the people, essentially forming its character, and preparing its fate. (17:244)

We see here a reiteration of the problem discussed in the previous section: how do the invisible interiorities and singular acts of individuals manifest themselves in visible social institutions? Much like Mill, Ruskin presents education and character formation as the bridge between the visible and invisible. Education teaches people to revere the absolute value of life and to develop customs and habits that are “vital” (17: 232). Playing on the etymology of the word “noble,” Ruskin connects the cultivation of right values through education with the presence of an authoritative standard. Noble, he claims, literally means “the ‘known’ person,” the person whose honor has lifted him above others and is recognized as such. “All men,” he states, “ought to be in this sense ‘noble’; known of each other, and desiring to be known” (17: 378). The play on the word noble articulates the relationship between a crisis in values and shared knowledge. However, even if all are educated to value the ‘right’ things and to act on those values, the modern market would still fall short of replicating the intimate conditions of collective action found on the boat where individuals not only act on the same values but share the knowledge that they do so.

It is with respect to this latter problem that Chwe’s analysis of ritual as a problem of social coordination proves useful. Ritual, he argues, provides a compelling example of how people form common knowledge for the purposes of social coordination and social
integration (Chwe 26). Whether it is by repeating words or performing a patterned series of acts, the formalization and publicity of rituals and ceremonies offer a predictable set of practices by which to convey meaningful messages to its participating members and communicates this information to spectators as well. The common knowledge generated by rituals facilitates individuals in acting as a social body and, through its publicity, constructs an imagined community in which they are aware of others participating in the same act as well (Chwe 8). Like the acts evaluated and observed by utilitarian social structures, ritual’s publicity produces shared information, information that enables collective action. Using Chwe’s definition of ritual, I argue that Ruskin presents labor and exchange as a sacrificial “rite” in which individuals experience communality and affirm the sacrosanct nature of the social body by coordinating their actions in a system of reciprocal self-sacrifice. 42 Ruskin’s example of the rowers, however, exposes a shortcoming in Chwe’s discussion of common knowledge and social coordination in relation to ritual. Chwe takes the “symbolic system” we rely on to generate common knowledge as a given and does not analyze its development or transformation according to various historical and cultural contingencies. But as Ruskin was painfully aware, values and symbolic systems are subject to contestation and flux since they are historically produced phenomena. The challenge is to conceive of a theory of value in

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42It must be noted, however, that Ruskin’s actors are not assumed to be rational, calculative agents in order for them to share values and act on them jointly. In fact, Ruskin opposes such a mechanistic view of agency which, as he states in *Unto This Last*, reflects the “negation of a soul” and depicts the individual as a “covetous machine” (17:25, 26). Rational choice theorists and game theorists rely on a flattened understanding of human nature. While it is possible, within these theories, to conceive that agents with conflicting interest coordinate their actions and achieve an equilibrium where the outcome is best for each, it is not possible to conceive of agents as non-rational, non-calculating. In this respect, the uniformity of self-sacrifice suggests that Ruskin is also flattening human agency as a way to envision coordination. This is true, to a certain extent. But Ruskin understands self-sacrifice as an act that makes immanent life’s absolute value and envisions life as a dynamic process articulated through such self-actualizing activities as labor. Labor as a rite thus instantiates life’s potentiality and is not grounded in a priori rationality.
the economic sphere that can then be the basis of collective action—collective acts that serve as public articulations of values. Whereas Bentham presents pleasure as the measure of value and the motive of action, for Ruskin the sacrificial rite of labor and exchange functions as a communal act that expresses life’s absolute value. In Ruskin, sacrificial rites are public performances of values, values that become encoded in visible signs such as architectural edifices, wages, and prices. These visible signs denote the community’s values and, in communicating these values, reaffirm them.

The treatment of labor and exchange as a sacrificial rite is not peculiar to Ruskin. In *Primitive Culture* (1871), E.B. Tylor’s discussion of gift-sacrifice rituals culminates with his suggestion that the logic of gift-sacrifice still operates within the modern marketplace. Tylor’s analysis of the “survival” of rites and practices becomes a means to inform his Victorian audience of the specific instances in which the rationale of primitive sacrificial practices survive in British culture, specifically in the controversy over ritualism within the Anglican Church and the English marketplace. In relation to the

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While Ruskin’s presentation of labor and economic exchange as forms of ritual are novel within the context of Victorian economic discourse, discussion of ritual per se was not. The term ritual/rite in nineteenth-century Britain either denoted the rituals and ‘primitive’ religious practices of non-European communities or the rituals of the Catholic Church. The terms ritualism and ritualists, however, specifically referred to the controversy surrounding the Anglican Catholic Revival and its recuperation of the ceremonial and liturgical practices the Anglican Church had discarded after the Reformation. The revival of ceremony within the Anglican Church is traditionally interpreted as a result of efforts by Tractarians like John Henry Newman and Edward Pusey, who wanted to resituate the Anglican Church’s relationship to the Catholic Church and claimed the Anglican Church had never fully rejected Catholic forms of worship and sacrament. The incorporation of Catholic rituals and practices consisted in several, though not simultaneously present, features: the use of the eastward position at the Eucharist, confession, the mixed chalice, vestments similar to Catholic priests, hymns, candles, and incense in divine service, to name a few (Bentley 21). The eastwardly position at the Eucharist, for example, was controversial due to its doctrinal significance since it indicated the position of the sacrificing priest and claimed that Christ’s body and blood were actually present in the form of bread and wine. It was this notion of the Eucharistic meal as a sacrifice of the mass rather than a spiritual sacrifice that was anathema to the majority of Protestants. The hullabaloo over ritualism in the Anglican Church spread into the political arena when Disraeli, echoing the sentiments of Queen Victoria, portrayed the rise of ritualism as yet another instance of ‘papal aggression’ and successfully instituted the Public Worship Regulation Act of 1874 (Bentley 41-45). While ritualism has been seen as an outgrowth of or response to the Oxford movement, there was significant disagreement among those influenced by the movement as to the incorporation of ritual practices. Newman, for example,
Eucharistic meal, for example, Tylor claims that it is simply the assimilation of the primitive sacrificial ceremony in which the food and drink offered as a gift at the altar is consumed by the priest and worshippers. He gingerly suggests, at the end of his discussion of sacrificial rites, the relevance of the survivalist doctrine for his Protestant audience. “The natural conclusion of an ethnographic survey of sacrifice is to point to the controversy between Protestant and Catholics, for centuries past one of the keenest which have divided the Christian world, on this express question whether sacrifice is or is not a Christian rite” (Tylor *Religion* 496). Not only did the suggestion of the Eucharist as a sacrificial rite undermine the distinct difference between Catholicism and Protestantism, it also left it open to comparison with the sacrificial rituals of irrational “savages.” This is the bold consequence of Tylor’s doctrine of survivals: Christianity and metaphysics participate in a genealogical continuity with primitive animism (Tylor *Religion* 81-86, Stocking *Victorian* 195). More importantly, this genealogical continuity establishes the survival of a gift-sacrifice economy in the economic practices of the English marketplace. Tylor argues that gift-sacrifice functions according to an anthropomorphic model in which gifts are offered either to benefit a deity, as if he were a man, or in order to pay homage and expiate our sins. The gift- and homage-theory of sacrifice finally evolves into an abnegation-theory of sacrifice wherein we sacrifice something costly to ourselves

distinguished himself from the more extreme forms of ritual innovation, stressing that while the return to the lost Church and revival of the traditions of the past were “rational,” the invention of new rituals by Pusey, whether Roman or foreign, were not (Ward 236, Bentley 26). This presents a parallel to Tylor’s approach to “survivals,” that are interpreted as the evidence of a continuous and rational impulse from the past to present. Nigel Yates attributes the rise of ritualism as a reaction against industrialism’s stultifying effects and, most importantly, the challenge to traditional hierarchies (2-4, 68-69). It is no accident that many ritualists were members of the wealthier classes, though they found themselves marginalized by parliament. Ritualists not only emphasized the reintegration of rites, sacraments, and baroque architecture, but they also argued for greater hierarchy in the clergy (Yates 153-154). Services and daily communion would lend a spectacular aspect to the church and the clergy would play a more prophetic role.

44 Tylor, in this regard, seems influenced by Comte’s tripartite, hierarchical division of science as progressing from religion to philosophy and culminating in the empirical sciences.
(Tylor *Religion* 461-62). It is gift as abnegation, he claims, that can be readily found in contemporary economic practices. “Our language displays it in a word, if we but compare the sense of presentation and acceptance which ‘sacrificium’ had in a Roman temple, with the sense of mere giving up and loss which ‘sacrifice’ conveys in an English market” (Tylor *Religion* 485). Not only is sacrifice a “Christian rite,” it is one we find in modified form in the market.

Ruskin develops a pattern in his political economy that, as Tylor mentions, already operates within capitalist logic. In the previous chapter, the central role Ruskin gives to sacrifice and loss in the labor theory of value highlights how labor’s sacrifice sacralizes the economic system. Ruskin now faces an additional problem. How are acts of labor and exchange coordinated in the marketplace according to a reciprocal system of self-sacrifice as envisioned on the open boat since he concedes that the marketplace is much larger in scope and constituted by individual, not unanimously executed, acts? In response to this problem, Ruskin conceives of labor as a sacrificial ritual that synthesizes the interiorized experience of asceticism with labor as a public act. Rather than simply addressing the methodological problem of how individual actions are made consistent such that they form a “complex whole,” Ruskin’s explicit development of labor as a sacrificial ritual stresses the communality that such collective action enables individuals to experience. Ruskin imagines economic agents who openly acknowledge and assent to mutual self-sacrifice as the basis of economic action. We do not share collective values solely by acting according to the same values; Ruskin stresses that we must also acknowledge to each other that these are our values. It is for this reason that labor as a sacrificial ritual becomes important since it represents a public act and this publicity
communicates the values upon which each acts to others in the community. Since life is of absolute value and what is “holy,” the public act of labor’s sacrifice is the concrete expression of what is inviolable and “holy:” human beings and the community we constitute. The public performance of labor as a sacrificial ritual communicates to those who may not consciously engage in a united act the holiness of life as a shared value. It denotes a social system in which each labors and sacrifices with and for others and, as a result, enables the experience of communality.

Ruskin’s treatment of sacrifice as a communal rite develops gradually and appears in his aesthetic writings as a gift-sacrifice economy.\(^{45}\) In such works as *Modern Painters* (1843) and *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849), Ruskin emphasizes labor and the products of human labor as participating in a sacrificial act of communal propitiation. In *Modern Painters*, for example, he suggests that the glory of human endeavor and accomplishment in art had been achieved through our singular awareness of a superior entity, an entity that requires the gift of our labors.

Man was a creature separated from all others by his instinctive sense of an Existence superior to his own, invariably manifesting the sense of the being of a God more strongly in proportion to his own perfectness of mind and body; and making enormous self-denying efforts in order to obtain some persuasion of the immediate presence or approval of the Divinity. So that, on the whole, the best things he did were done as in the presence, or for the honour, of his gods; and, whether in statues, to help him to imagine them, or temples raised to their honour, or acts of self-sacrifice done in the hope of their love, he brought whatever was best and skillfullest in him into their service, and lived in perpetual subjection to their unseen power. (5: 196)

Ruskin here presents a *do ut des* economy, which underscores his adoption of the classical conception of sacrifice as gift, as a propitiation offered to the gods to persuade

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\(^{45}\)Paul Sawyer argues that Ruskin’s political economy and social thought relies on a patronage system in which money, affections, and art publicly and metaphorically express the ties of affection as gift-giving. See 165.
them to act in our favor. Yet, given Ruskin’s evangelical background, this assimilation of a classical conception of sacrifice is not total. He is not advocating, for example, that we labor as a means by which to attain influence with the gods. Rather, the self-sacrificing labor of each individual acknowledges her subjection to a higher being and, insofar as she acknowledges this through self-sacrificing labor, is an expression of worship and thus pleases the gods. Ruskin introduces the example of self-sacrificing labor as a contrast to the utilitarian attitude of his contemporaries. The Victorian, far from living with a consciousness of a divinity, exists in perpetual doubt; and human work, he argues, is done “either to benefit mankind, or reach some selfish end, not (I speak of human work in the broad sense) to please the gods” (5:198). Thus, human work would be disinterested if its ultimate object no longer involved the material interests that preoccupy us in day to day life but instead takes an interest in self-sacrificing labor as an act of worship pleasurable for its own sake.

The question of interest and disinterest in relation to self-sacrifice, however, remains subordinated to the following sociological question: how can the performance of self-sacrificing labor and duties be the means by which to organize a cohesive society? This sociological concern becomes clearer in the chapter “The Lamp of Sacrifice” from The Seven Lamps of Architecture, where Ruskin combines the public act of sacrifice as gift or offering with the private experience of sacrifice as self-denial. Ruskin suggests that we can experience social connectedness through labor’s sacrifice since it bridges the private and public realms of experience. The product of such labors would stand as a public rejection of utilitarianism’s economizing motives and self-interested value system. In The Seven Lamps of Architecture, Ruskin argues for excess in art and architecture, an
excess that memorializes something beyond its mere ‘use’ since it is an edifice raised to worship God. The spirit of sacrifice, he argues

offers for such work precious things, simply because they are precious; not as being necessary to the building, but as an offering, surrendering, and sacrifice of what is to ourselves desirable….It is a spirit, for instance, which of two marbles, equally beautiful, applicable and durable, would choose the more costly because it was so….Of this feeling, then, there are two distinct forms: the first, the wish to exercise self-denial for the sake of self-discipline merely, a wish acted upon in the abandonment of things loved or desired, there being no direct call or purpose to be answered by so doing; and the second, the desire to honour or please some one else by the costliness of the sacrifice. The practice is, in the first case, either private or public; but most frequently, and perhaps most properly, private; while in the latter case, the act is commonly, and with greatest advantage, public. (8:30-31)

There are two, interconnected issues in this passage that I want emphasize: the appeal to a gift-sacrifice economy and the distinction between the “private” experience of renunciation and the “public” nature of gift-sacrifice. Ruskin emphasizes throughout the chapter both the non-utilitarian function of art and architecture as well as the necessity that the sacrifice, in order to be a sacrifice worthy of an offering to God, be excessive, costly, and elaborate. The costliness of the thing offered emphasizes what it costs for us, both monetary and physical. Ruskin emphatically states “it is not the result of labor…but the bare and mere costliness—the substance and labor and time themselves” (8:32). At this juncture, the architectural edifice enters the reciprocal relationship of a gift-sacrifice economy. The costliness of the sacrifice is relational: it is not simply that the offering be extravagant and marked by excess but that it embody all we have sacrificed in making the offering. This gift-sacrifice economy is intimately tied to the public and private forms of sacrifice that the passage mentions. Just as the “inner will” that shapes individual characters and acts remains invisible to the outsider, the only visible expressions of
sacrifice are the public monuments that remain once the acts themselves have been completed.

All else for which the builders sacrificed, has passed away: all their living interests, aims, and achievements. We know not for what they labored, and we see no evidence of their reward…But of them, and their life and their toil upon the earth, one reward, one evidence, is left to us in those grey heaps of deep-wrought stone. (8:53)

Ruskin underscores the public nature of self-sacrifice as an offering made to the deity, an offering whose very publicness realizes itself in the costliness of the edifices we build in worship of that deity. The costliness of the architectural offering publicly expresses and is efficacious as an offering because it stands as a concrete index of what otherwise would be intangible: the value the community places on sacrifice now visibly evidenced in the excess of its architecture. The spirit of sacrifice moves from private renunciation to the public rite of labor’s sacrifice, a movement chronicled in the costly edifices that testify to the nation’s values. As the product of collective labor, architecture also functions as an emblem of communal values.

For Ruskin’s Victorian audience, however, the comparison of architecture and labor to sacrificial offerings carries with it an unwelcome association with Catholic religious practices. It seems surprising that after discussing the non-utilitarian function of art and the need for the spirit of sacrifice in architecture as a public act of worship that Ruskin should then abruptly turn to a discussion of Levitical sacrifice in the Old Testament. Ruskin’s concern over the sacrificial rites in the Old Testament are two-fold: first, he wants to suggest that labor can serve as a non-violent analogue for the bloody sacrifices of the Old Testament; second, he presents the very notion of sacrificial rites to his Protestant audience in an acceptable light. In order to prove that labor, time, and
materials are acceptable as an offering to God, Ruskin illustrates the continuities between the Old and the New Testament by offering, as George Landow argues, a typological reading of ritual sacrifice in the Old Testament (339-341). While Ruskin claims that the God of the New Testament is the same as the Old Testament, he asserts at the same time that God never wanted the bloody sacrifices of the Old Testament. Rather, these carnal sacrifices merely prefigure the one true sacrifice of Christ and foreshadow the scheme of redemption. Ruskin makes these claims in order to distinguish between the ritualistic aspects of the Old Testament and the emphasis on an internal and spiritual relation to God within the Protestant tradition. Though in the past God received and was worshipped through a “typical and material service or offering,” all that is asked now is a sacrifice “of the heart” (8:33).

In this manner, Ruskin presents a seamless transition from a religious community that emphasized the public performance of sacrificial rituals to a community that prizes an internal experience of sacrifice as the expression of spiritual devotion. But Ruskin’s entire purpose in presenting this argument on the continuity of the Old and New Testament is to convince his audience that labor and its visible products can now stand as a public and private expression of a sacrificial rite consistent with its religious heritage.

So, therefore, it is a most safe and sure principle that, if in the manner of performing any rite at any time, circumstances can be traced which we are either told, or may legitimately conclude, pleased God at that time, those same circumstances will please Him at all times, in the performance of all rites or offices to which they may be attached in like manner…(8:33)

Ruskin retains the function of sacrificial rites while distancing himself from the bloodier aspects of ancient sacrificial rituals. He can then claim that labor, as the private experience of an internal renunciation, exists simultaneously with the public act of labor
as a sacrificial rite through which we make an offering to God. Through the comparison to Levitical sacrifice, he exhorts his readers to see that the Bible requires sacrifice and the costliness of labor offers the special rite of sacrifice for the modern age (Landow 340).

Labor as a sacrificial rite and the monuments in which we memorialize our sacrifices, are manifestations of the covenant made with God and the “external sign of its continuance,” an external sign that demands we undertake a sacrifice and offer as “tithe” our time, skill, toil, and treasure (8:37). While Ruskin claims that offering the tithe of time, labor and wealth brings them into a “sacred service,” ultimately the products are a memorial of what is of chief importance—the act of sacrifice itself. “It is not the church we want, but the sacrifice; not the emotion of admiration, but the act of adoration; not the gift, but the giving” (8:37). Repeatedly, Ruskin isolates labor as a rite of self-sacrifice whose express value lies in its nature as a public act. He distances the act of labor as a self-sacrificing rite expressing worship from the suggestion that he advocates a ritual society akin to Catholicism, where material offerings establish a relation to the divinity rather than an interiorized asceticism.

In his earlier aesthetic writings, Ruskin’s conjunction of the private and public experience of self-sacrifice appears to be strategic: his position advocates labor and the costliness of its undertakings as akin to ancient sacrificial rituals, but in order to appease Protestant evangelicals who may bristle at the comparison to a ritual based society, he presents the rite of labor as originating in an interior disposition that then manifests itself in a public act. The ethos of self-discipline and self-restraint that epitomized middle class Protestantism and Ruskin’s own strict religious education becomes paired with the emphasis on labor. Recognition of the spiritual dimensions of labor is, of course, not
peculiar to Ruskin. Carlyle speaks in a similar vein when he claims that “[w]ork is of a religious nature:--work is of a brave nature; which it is the aim of all religion to be” (199). Though Ruskin, like Carlyle, reiterates the redemptive power of labor, he explicitly discusses an element to the self-sacrificing dimensions of labor that in other Victorian thinkers remain submerged. In The Seven Lamps of Architecture and elsewhere, Ruskin identifies labor as the pre-eminent form of ritual in modern society. Labor, as ritual, enacts a subjectivity that prizes ascetic self-denial and attains an active, physical language by which to express this interior state through a public act. This public act has relevance for Ruskin’s later development as a social critic insofar as labor participates in a social network. Labor becomes the act through which the private and public realms are bridged and indicates both the interior disposition of an individual who experiences a spiritualized asceticism and expresses this state through her social function as a laborer.

In the later social criticism, Ruskin adapts the sacrificial economy developed in his aesthetics, where a deity is the recipient of our sacrifices, into a sacrificial rite in which other men are the recipient of our sacrifices. In so doing, the rite of labor engenders communion through a system of reciprocal sacrifices. Sacrifice as a mode of communion rather than simply an anthropomorphic model in which sacrificial gifts attain influence with a deity articulates another strain in nineteenth-century anthropological writings on sacrificial ritual. William Robertson Smith’s The Religion of the Semites (1889) focuses exclusively on the social cohesion effectuated by sacrifice among the ancient society of the Semites. Sacrifice, he argues, was a public and “social act” in which members of the same kinship group solidified their bonds with a deity and with each other through the sacrificial meal (Smith Semites 265). Smith’s view of sacrificial
ritual stems from a more general understanding of religion as an expression of kinship bonds, a view he substantiates by sanctity of blood within Semitic communities. “[T]here are many evidences that all Arabic deities were originally the gods of particular kins, and that the bond of religion was originally coextensive with the bond of blood. A main proof of this lies in the fact that the duties of blood were the only duties of absolute and indefeasible sanctity” (Smith *Semites* 47). The sanctity of the kinsman’s blood as the basis for the bond of religion gives to religious formations a sociological emphasis that Durkheim would later analyze more fully. The gods represent the sanctity of the kinship group itself, its blood.

Smith develops the sociological relevance of Semitic religious formations elsewhere in his argument. He argues, for example, that we can understand the development of polytheism as a religious development that reflects changing social organizations. While each kinship group originally functions in relative isolation and worships a deity that represents it, polytheism results when animosity between various groups subsides. As groups coalesce, so do their gods. This “commonwealth of gods” represents nothing other than the commonwealth of Semitic communities once they form a unified empire (Smith *Semites* 39). Smith reads the rite of sacrifice as a way to consolidate the ties of the community, whether that be within a kinship group or in order to expand the kinship group and transform it into a greater “commonwealth.” In this interpretation of religious organization, rites and beliefs become a social expedient that ensures the order and stability of the community. “Religion is not an arbitrary relation of an individual man to a supernatural power, it is a relation of all the members of a community to a power that has the good of the community at heart, and protects its laws
and moral order” (Smith *Semites* 55). While a deity is still present in this conception of religion, the emphasis shifts from reverence for the deity to the deity as the means through which the kinship group confirms its stability and membership.

According to Smith’s interpretation of religious praxis, sacrificial rites represent the most typical forms of worship.46 He critiques Tylor’s gift-model of sacrifice, claiming that this is an attenuated form of sacrifice that emerges after the institution of property. The introduction of private property displaces sacrifice as a mode of communion with a gift-sacrifice economy because, as he states, “property materializes everything that it touches” (Smith *Semites* 396). This critique of sacrifice’s shift from communion to a gift-sacrifice economy reveals the economic preoccupations that had driven Smith’s interest in sacrificial rites. The theory of sacrifice as gift or abnegation conceives of the sacrificer as one who renounces a portion of his or her property to god rather than offering an intrinsically holy thing that already belongs to god (Smith *Semites* 390-393). As Tylor himself points out, gift as abnegation precipitates a shift in sacrificial rituals that transforms them into “an economic rite” insofar as sacrificers try to offer efficient substitutes for the costly thing they know should be given (*Religion* 486). Smith objects to the materialization of sacrifice as the exchange of property and its economizing motives and, instead, interprets sacrifice’s earliest form as a public rite of communion.

With this it accords that every complete act of worship—for a mere vow was not a complete act till it was fulfilled by presenting a sacrifice—had a public or quasi-public character. Most sacrifices were offered on fixed occasions, at the great communal or national feasts, but even a private offering was not complete without guests, and the surplus was not sold but distributed with an open hand. Thus every act of worship expressed the idea that man does not live for himself only

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46 Andrew Lang also wrote a great deal on ritual but, as Stocking points out, he remained within the tradition of Tylor and emphasized the utilitarian aspects of gift-sacrifice and held beliefs to be prior to ritual practices. In William Robertson Smith, by contrast, sacrifice was fundamentally social in its origins. See Stocking *After Tylor* 78-83.
but for his fellows, and that this partnership of social interests is the sphere over
which the gods preside and on which they bestow their assured blessing. The
ethical significance which thus appertains to the sacrificial meal, viewed as a
social act, received particular emphasis from certain ancient customs and ideas
connected with eating and drinking. According to antique ideas, those who eat
and drink together are by this very act tied to one another by a bond of friendship
and mutual obligation. Hence when we find that in ancient religions all the
ordinary functions of worship are summed up in the sacrificial meal, and that the
ordinary intercourse between gods and men has no other form, we are to
remember that the act of eating and drinking together is the solemn and stated
expression of the fact that all who share the meal are brethren, and that the duties
of friendship and brotherhood are implicitly acknowledged in their common act.
(Smith *Semites* 265)

I want to underscore several aspects to Smith’s reading of sacrifice relevant to the shift
we find in Ruskin’s work where sacrifice first appears as a gift offered to please the gods,
as in *Modern Painters*, and a public act that enables the experience of communality as in
“The Spirit of Sacrifice.” The publicness of the sacrificial meal confirms the ethical
nature of sacrifice as a “social act” that establishes principles of mutuality and fellowship.
This view of sacrifice as a reciprocal act of social obligation stands as a direct critique of
the economical view of a sacrifice that is offered in order to win favor with the gods—the
interpretation propounded by Tylor. Instead, the sacrificial meal expresses the sanctity of
the kinship group and acknowledges that the group consists of “reciprocal family duties
to one another” (Smith *Semites* 30). In this context, the publicness of sacrifice presents a
crucial feature in its efficacy, since it is an act through which each member of the
community conveys to the other through joint participation in the sacrificial ritual that
“the only thing that is sacred is the common tribal life” (Smith *Semites* 289). Of
importance here is not whether Tylor’s or Smith’s interpretation of the genesis of
sacrifice is more historically accurate, but that both anthropologists situate their
discussion in relation to the economic practices of their day: Smith presents a form of
sacrifice that predates, and thus implicitly critiques, the logic of self-interested utility while Tylor suggests that modern economic practices are ceremonial “survivals” of gift-sacrifice’s primitive economizing logic.

Smith’s theorization of sacrifice as a public and communal rite that establishes reciprocity and cohesion amongst the members of a social group outline crucial features to sacrificial ritual that Ruskin openly correlates with labor and exchange. In early works such as Modern Painters and The Seven Lamps of Architecture Ruskin developed his conception of sacrifice as a public rite and as a gift. Once he shifts his focus to writing social criticism, however, these concepts become linked to economic issues such as labor and exchange in the marketplace. As P.D. Anthony argues, architectural criticism represents a transition for Ruskin from aesthetic to social criticism precisely because it reflects public values, requires social organization, and the proper allocation of resources (19). Hence, Ruskin’s critique in The Stones of Venice (1851, 1853), as in his critique of utilitarian values in Modern Painters, rests on his understanding of architecture as a visible, public sign of the nation’s dominant values. In opposition to the mass produced objects of the factory system and its labor conditions, Ruskin idealizes gothic architecture in The Stones of Venice because it presents a perfect analogy for the dynamic nature of the social body in which each sacrifices with and for others such that the singularity of each is both recognized and memorialized in the living architectural monument. Though physically static, gothic architecture paradoxically commemorates the dynamic nature of social labor. In its “active rigidity,” it has vital force and movement—“a stiffness analogous to that of the bones of a limb, or fibres of a tree; an elastic tension and communication of force from part to part, and also a studious expression of this
throughout every visible line of the building” (10: 239). In short, gothic architecture expresses the organic, interdependent, and dynamic nature of “life,” which indicates “the pure or holy state of anything” (7: 205-207). As a living monument to the organic interdependence and cooperation that is the basis and potential of all life, the structure of gothic architecture remains marked by its unfinished, or imperfect, nature. It is “fretwork still, and it can neither rest in, nor from, its labor” (10: 214). Playing on the word “still,” Ruskin emphasizes the way in which architecture serves as a mirror for social relations whose permanence is established through continuity in time and yet whose “life” is expressed as a dynamic and open structure.47 This vital, interdependent model of social relations becomes the matrix in which Ruskin embeds labor as a rite of reciprocal sacrifice.

In “The Nature of Gothic,” for example, the model of social labor is based on mutuality and reverence for the humanity of others expressed through reciprocal self-sacrifice. In contrast to the machinery of self-interest that motivates capitalist manufacturing practices, the social model of gothic architecture allows for the experience of recognition through reciprocity. It is not simply sacrifice per se but sacrifice as gift that establishes recognition through reciprocity.

And therefore, in all ages and all countries, reverence has been paid and sacrifice made by men to each other, not only without complaint, but rejoicingly; and famine, and peril, and sword, and all evil, and all shame, have been borne willingly in the causes of masters and kings; for all these gifts of the heart ennobled the men who gave, not less than the men who received them, and nature prompted, and God rewarded the sacrifice. But to feel their souls withering within

47David Wayne Thomas claims that Ruskin espouses a position similar to Mill’s liberal individualism where society is simply composed of a collection of individuals (62). While it is true that Ruskin values the expression of individuality in labor and thus skirts the boundary between valuing individual genius and the emphasis on individuality in liberalism, his organic, interdependent view of society and “life” is contrasted to the perception of agents as autonomous actors coming together as the result of a social contract.
Like many Victorians, Ruskin never abandoned a commitment to the value of deference and a paternalistic social hierarchy where those who were inherently better suited to rule governed those who were best suited to being ruled. What remains important to Ruskin in his conception of “reverence,” is that it implies someone for whom we are willing to sacrifice. While the specific manner in which they express reverence may differ, neither the worker nor the master would be willing to make sacrifices for each other without the sense that they participated in a shared value system wherein the insubstitutability of each was guaranteed. As in “The Spirit of Sacrifice,” Ruskin here claims that the sacrifices are “gifts of the heart.” But unlike his statements in “The Spirit of Sacrifice,” Ruskin shifts the recipient of the sacrifice from God to other men. The sacrifice and reverence are paid “by men to each other” and in making this sacrifice to each other God rewards them with recognition. Their souls are no longer “sunk into an unrecognized abyss.”

Gothic architecture, like Ruskin’s example of identical and mass produced glass beads, represents the community’s ethos. Rather than valuing perfection and machinelike reproduction of goods, gothic architecture recognizes the singularity of each worker. In its savageness, it expresses more than just the character of northern races; it is “an index, not of climate, but of religious principle” (10:188). And the principle that gothic architecture visibly indexes is sacrifice, the sacrifices of those men who work together on the architectural edifice and a populace who practice “determined sacrifice” each time they forego the convenience of glass beads (10:196).
Labor as a rite of sacrifice affirms our singularity and the sanctity of the social body, its “life,” through a system of reciprocal sacrifices. This ethic of reciprocity forms the cornerstone of Ruskin’s political economy, where sacrifice expresses a shared value and the rite we perform in order to establish communion with others. In *Munera Pulveris*, for example, he complains that operatives in modern manufacturing conditions are “all alike under this great dominion of gold” and all “‘perform’ their rite for pay” rather than out of a sense of duty (17:269). Ruskin’s emphasis on the word “perform” displays his view of labor as a rite that we publicly perform and whose performance expresses a set of values. Ruskin envisions an economic system in which agents both share and act according to the principle of sacrifice, and in performing this “rite,” they receive in return not simply pay, but recognition, not excess wealth, but a “holy,” interdependent society.

As a contrast to the modern worker, Ruskin utilizes the figure of the self-sacrificing soldier as a symbol for what each worker should strive for insofar as he, more than any other laborer, experiences daily “that quantity of our toil which we die in” (17:183). Just as the soldier lays down his life for others without self-regard, so the master should sacrifice himself for the worker.

I have already alluded to the difference hitherto existing between regiments of men associated for purposes of violence, and for purposes of manufacture; in that the former appear capable of self-sacrifice—the latter, not; which singular fact is the real reason of the general lowness in which the profession of commerce is held, compared to that of arms. (17:36)

Society continuously reinforces this low view of merchants by their unquestioned presumption that commerce consists in self-interest. Ruskin calls for a reconceptualization of the merchant’s role in the nation as one willing to accept “the idea of voluntary loss;…that the market may have its martyrdoms as well as the pulpit; and
trade its heroisms as well as war” (17:39). Though each performs her duty selflessly within her prescribed station, the value of each person’s sacrifice remains equal insofar as we all participate in a reciprocal system in which we exchange life for life.

The latter formulation of reciprocity as the exchange of life for life, however, does not mean that life can be commodified and exchanged. If labor’s sacrifice refers back to life’s holiness then it cannot enter circulation like other commodities. Labor is priceless because life is priceless. “Everything else is bought or sold for Labour, but Labour itself cannot be bought nor sold for anything, being priceless” (17:183). This poses a problem since laborers must require some payment and Ruskin must explain how this payment does not commodify labor. Despite Ruskin’s hierarchical social organization, the qualitative difference in duties does not signify a graduated monetary recompense for each person’s sacrifices since that would mean one person’s sacrifice possessed greater or lesser worth than another’s. The just remuneration of labor should neither rest on what employment the person performs nor should fluctuate with the varying supply of laborers. According to the “law of justice,” the payment of “just or due wages” should be based on an equitable exchange of labor-time (17:65). If the laborer sacrifices “a quarter of an hour of his life… then at some future time I am bound in equity to give a quarter of an hour, and some minutes more, of my life” (17:66). While the “law of justice” requires absolute exchange to prevent imbalances of power and unjust profits, Ruskin’s sense of the just stresses the moral feeling and bonds exchange symbolizes which is why we give in return a little more. Money, in this type of exchange, is “an acknowledgment of debt,” a promise that each will reciprocate the sacrifices of the other (17:50). In addition to equitable repayment, the money price of labor represents a fixed
wage irrespective of the employment or its quality. This just wage does not violate the absolute value of each person’s labor since all are rewarded equally, the reward being essentially a minimum hourly wage according to shifting subsistence levels. As such, the fixed wage Ruskin proposes is the nominal expression only of a more fundamental equality. A true political economy, he claims in *Unto This Last* depends on the “balances of justice” and “justice consists in absolute exchange” (17:28, 65). Justice is the equilibrium created by a system of parallel and reciprocal sacrifices. Since sacrifice is reciprocated with sacrifice in an interdependent society wherein all workers receive the same subsistence wage, Ruskin believes his argument avoids the commodification of labor.

A national economy based on labor and exchange as a rite of reciprocal sacrifice achieves “balances of justice” that appear in objective and public economic phenomena such as the fixed, subsistence wage and price. While in the aesthetic criticism architectural edifices stood as a visible monument to national values and the principles upon which its citizens act, the abstraction of the marketplace signals values through the equilibrium or balance the economy establishes. At equilibrium, the supply of goods equals its demand in that the production cost of goods is neither more nor less than its money price on the market. Ruskin translates mutual self-sacrifice through labor and exchange into a price structure in which goods exchange at their cost values, that is, for labor sacrificed. In this manner, the economy at equilibrium represents the “balances of justice.” It becomes an abstraction that communicates the values upon which the nation acts. The problem, of course, is that the market generates profit when price exceeds labor
and production costs, a divergence driven by shifting demand-supply cycles. For this reason, Ruskin distinguishes cost from price.

Price depends, therefore, not only on the cost of the commodity itself, but on its relation to the cost of every other attainable thing. Farther. The power of choice is also a relative one. It depends not merely on our own estimate of the thing, but on everybody else’s estimate; therefore on the number and force of the will of the concurrent buyers, and on the existing quantity of the thing in proportion to that number and force. (17:186)

Cost expresses how much life is spent in labor, but price reflects how much people are willing to pay for that product. As an expression of a person’s choice for one commodity over another, price expresses demand for a commodity in relation to all other commodities that the person may choose to purchase over others. As in Ferguson’s analysis of the relational values of acts within utilitarian social structures, the matrix of prices reflects the relative costs of all goods and the choices of all individuals. It is not just my willingness to pay at a given price but the coordinated choices of all others in the “complex whole” of the market—choices that are objectively and visibly represented in the price structure at which goods sell. When price does not diverge from cost at equilibrium, the interconnected web of prices stands as a mirror for social relations based on reciprocal sacrifices.

Since the divergence between cost and price arises from the influence of demand, Ruskin conceives of a hypothetical marketplace wherein goods sell at their labor costs and demand is constant. He offers a rudimentary example of two workers who require what the other produces for daily subsistence. One worker produces a unit of bread in one hour while the other produces a unit of fuel in three hours. Exchange occurs at labor quantities: three units of bread trading for one unit of fuel. Ruskin concludes that, “if the demand is constant, the relative prices of things are as their costs, or as the quantities of
labour involved in production” (17:188). Where labor costs and prices are equivalent, exchange results in a balanced transaction where each acquires the necessities for survival at a price that denotes labor sacrificed. The relative price structure in this market mirrors a society in which exchange occurs at the reciprocal of labor costs, that is, sacrifice for sacrifice. In this representation of exchange, money functions as an arbitrary medium that expresses the relative costs and demand for goods. Money’s worth is not based on gold or what it is given for it in exchange, but symbolizes the consumption patterns of a nation.

The worth of gold, of land, of houses, and of food, and of all other things, depends at any moment on the existing quantities and relative demands for all and each; and a change in the worth of, or demand for, any one, involves an instantaneously correspondent change in the worth of, and demand for, all the rest;—a change as inevitable and as accurately balanced (though often in its process as untraceable) as the change in volume of the outflowing river from some vast lake, caused by change in the volume of the inflowing streams, though no eye can trace, nor instrument detect, motion, either on its surface, or in the depth. Thus, then the real working power of the currency is founded on the entire sum of the relative estimates formed by the population of its possessions; a change in this estimate in any direction (and therefore every change in the national character), instantly alters the value of money, in its second great function of commanding labor. (17:189)

Ruskin invokes a common metaphor for equilibrium in exchange: the balanced influx and outflux of water. As Jerome Sherburne points out, the interdependence of economic forces in Ruskin resembles the “circular flow of goods” in French physiocrats like

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48Ruskin’s model of reciprocity and just exchange echoes that found in Aristotle’s discussion of just exchange in the Nicomachean Ethics. Aristotle gives the example of a builder and a shoemaker, where each exchanges the goods the other produces to achieve proportional equality and reciprocity. This has a sociological relevance since Aristotle claims that “if this sort of reciprocity were not possible, there would be no community” (75). Currency in this regard measures such reciprocal exchange and expresses a community in which such mutual obligation operates. Or, as Aristotle states, “everything must have a price; for in that way there will always be exchange, and then there will be community” (76).

49Spear argues that Ruskin’s use of water as an economic metaphor for circulation differs from political economic texts because Ruskin analogizes the circulation of water to that of blood in the human body, thus connecting economics with life. The body politic, in this regard, parallels the Biblical image of the body of Christ and the members of the Church (148).
François Quesnay who describe economic processes through organic metaphors like water (129). The price structure of the economy expressed in money terms acts like a calibrated system that registers every alteration in demand as it reverberates through the economy. More importantly, the equilibrium established through reciprocal exchange at labor costs and expressed in the money price of goods also expresses a nation’s values. Since Ruskin understands wealth or effectual value as dependent on character and the capacity to transform intrinsic value (life) into effectual value (wealth), each alteration in the self-adjusting set of prices also registers collective values and character. Price is “dependent on the human will” and the sum of individual choices; price is the objective manifestation of collective values (17: 186). Thus, a price structure in which goods exchange at their labor costs represents the values of a community built on just exchange, reciprocity, and mutual sacrifice—an equilibrium undisturbed by fluctuating demands or base desires. Alternatively, a price structure driven by surplus values denotes profiteering, self-interest, and money as a means to express power over others by “commanding labor” rather than a public pledge of mutual obligation. As discussed in the first chapter, Ruskin’s distinction between the “holy” and “helpful” state of society in which all parts are integrated into a vital, interdependent whole expresses the social and economic equilibrium of a just, cooperative society and stands contrasted to the “ unholy,” “unhelpful,” and disequilibrating forces of competitive capitalism.

III Models of Communality

50 As Linda Austin remarks, Ruskin’s description of money as a “token of right” (28:135) contrasts exploitative power over men within a capitalist economy from just authority over others within a paternalistic hierarchy. See Austin 77. Similarly, Paul Sawyer states that Ruskin’s theory of fixed wages prevents money from being a sign of fluctuating market forces and instead makes it a standard of value and social ties. Money acts as a symbol of a just economic system. See Sawyer 202-205.
Ruskin’s fusion of sacrifice and ritual with economic issues does not contradict, as he himself believed, capitalist economies. Rather, his political economy demonstrates a common preoccupation of nineteenth-century anthropology and political economy: communality. Both disciplines explore how agents establish common knowledge and coordinate their actions. Instead of analyzing models of communality within ‘primitive society,’ however, political economy represents communality through capitalist systems of exchange. Ruskin’s political economy allows us to interpret exchange as a ritual structure, ritual here understood as the coordination of individual actions into a “complex whole.”\(^{51}\) The communality that characterizes ‘primitive’ society in anthropological writings appears in political economic texts as the holistic system of exchange based, as in Ruskin, on reciprocity and sacrifice. The theoretical state of economic equilibrium serves as an abstract representation of communality through reciprocal exchange.

Whereas nineteenth-century economists imagine capitalist exchange practices as representing an ideal of communality, anthropologists of the period often associate communality with ‘primitive,’ or ancient, societies.\(^ {52}\) Henry Maine, for example,

\(^{51}\)Culture as a system of desire appears, for example, in Adam Smith’s political economy, which conceives of society as a system whose purpose is to maintain equilibrium “through coordinated agencies of exchange and through what these presuppose, agencies of the construction of value […]” (Herbert 79).

\(^{52}\)Maine was not alone in depicting ownership in ancient society as communal. The American anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan’s *Ancient Society* (1877), likewise conceived of ancient society’s gens as ruled by blood bonds, primitive communism and reciprocity, ironically idealizing the social organization of the Iroquois tribe for epitomizing the democratic principles of “liberty, equality, and fraternity” (85). Morgan praises the councils of the Iroquois tribes for effectively modeling representative government. Rather than majority rule, the council required “unanimity” in all their decisions and public acts and, by an intricate process of cross-consultation among various portions of the tribe, would “become of one mind” (143). Morgan’s conception of ancient society as one in which private property did not exist was crucial to Engels’s argument on property. Morgan contradicts Maine’s patriarchy theory of ancient kinship. Instead, kinship was first matriarchal and the institution of property results in patriarchy replacing matriarchy. This argument was most influential on Marx and Engels who argued that communal ownership was undermined by the transition from barbarism to the increasingly complex forms of division of labor and industry that dominates modern civilization (Engels 112, 149-150).
critiques the ahistoricism of political economists and utilitarians like Jeremy Bentham for presenting self-interest as the universal motive of action when anthropological studies had shown that this conception of the individual developed over time.\(^5^3\) By contrast, Maine presents blood kinship and communal ownership as characteristic of ancient society, where the sanctity and social cohesion of the family and kinship group was paramount.\(^5^4\) In *Ancient Law* (1861), Maine contends that ancient society was not what it is assumed to be at present, a collection of *individuals*. In fact, and in the view of the men who composed it, it was an *aggregation of families*. The contrast may be most forcibly expressed by saying that the unit of an ancient society was the Family, of a modern society the Individual. We must be prepared to find in ancient law all the consequences of this difference….Above all it has a peculiarity of which the full importance cannot be shown at present. It takes a view of *life* wholly unlike any which appears in developed jurisprudence. Corporations *never die*, and accordingly primitive law considers the entities with which it deals, i.e. the patriarchal or family groups, as perpetual and inextinguishable. (Maine *Ancient* 104)

If the “life” of the community is inextinguishable, it is because ancient kinship equates blood ties with social ties. Instead of abstract rights and contracts, ancient society relies on the fiction of a common ancestral father, a fiction ultimately rooted in the family’s patriarchal organization and the father’s rule over the household as law-giver (the theory of patria potestas). Such communities as the Indian village and German *mark* exemplify the rule of communal ownership and reciprocity; for them property remains indivisible because the community as a whole is indivisible (*Village* 127, *Ancient* 223). Like W.R. Smith, Maine links the shift from a society based on kinship to one composed of

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\(^{53}\)As George Stocking points out, Maine saw elementary kinship as patriarchal and perpetuating the sanctity of the community through sacrifice, ceremony, and pledges. Maine explains the difference between progressive and stationary societies through the emergence of property laws and contracts, which did not exist in ancient societies (Stocking *Victorian* 122-125).

\(^{54}\)As Burrow and Collini point out, the influence that Maine’s treatment of ‘primitive’ communality had on subsequent historians is ironic since he disapproved of those who critiqued private property. Nevertheless, Maine’s depiction of primitive communalism inspired such historians as M. de Laveleye and Cliffe Leslie to idealize communal values and tendencies in modern society as a movement towards such a state co-proprietorship in the future. See Collini, Burrow and Winch 218-219.
individuals with the appearance of legal contracts and private property. While ancient society emphasizes the status of members within the corporate life of the family, modern society replaces the family with the individual and, in so doing, “replaces by degrees those forms of reciprocity in rights and duties which have their origin in the Family” with contract (Maine *Ancient* 140). Thus the shift from “status to contract” substitutes a kinship based on blood bonds with individual freedom of contract, reciprocity and communality with private ownership (Maine *Ancient* 141).

Maine’s historical account of ancient and modern jurisprudence makes evident that social cohesion is the primary concern in ancient and modern society. This fundamental motive surfaces in the legal adaptations and inventions societies introduce to insure stability, specifically in the natural law tradition that persists from ancient to Victorian society. Maine critiques natural law theorists for positing an Edenic state as grounds for their abstract theory of justice and equality (Kuper 25). Through this fictional past, natural law conceives of itself as “the recovery of a lost perfection—the gradual return to a state from which the race had lapsed” (Maine *Ancient* 58). In opposition to this view, Maine interprets natural law as an example of how laws were quietly adapted to shifting historical circumstances by introducing legal fictions that conceal these changes, what Maine calls “equity” (*Ancient* 22-23). Roman natural law, in particular, displays the instrumental role equity plays in both forming and preserving the community.

All ancient societies ran the risk of being overthrown by a very slight disturbance of equilibrium, and the mere instinct of self-preservation would force the Romans to devise some method of adjusting the rights and duties of foreigners, who might otherwise—and this was a danger of real importance in the ancient world—have decided their controversies by armed strife. (Maine *Ancient* 40)
Generalizing Roman society to that of all ancient societies, Maine argues that the chief threat to the stability of ancient societies was the presence of foreigners who were not guaranteed equal rights and ownership since kinship in ancient society was founded on common blood ties (Maine *Ancient* 39). In this regard, Maine surmises that natural law was simply an expedient to create legal status for foreigners, assimilating them into the community and neutralizing the potential for conflict. The “fiction of adoption” stretched the rule of *patria potestas* so as to include outsiders and assimilated them into the kinship group (Maine *Ancient* 110). Within this corporation of the archaic family, members met regularly “for the purpose of acknowledging and consecrating their association by common sacrifices” (Maine *Ancient* 108). The communal performance of ancient sacrificial rituals consecrates the social body precisely because it could be endangered by the slightest “disturbance of equilibrium.” The law, as a record of continuous adaptation and emendation, is also a record of the efforts made to create an interdependent society and preserve its internal “equilibrium.”

It is this effort to maintain the equilibrium and social cohesion of the community through the adaptation of legal codes that Maine then links with Bentham’s ameliorative social reforms. The primacy placed on improvement and communal welfare found in the Roman natural law tradition is “the ancient counterpart to Benthamism” (Maine *Ancient* 64-65). While labeling Bentham as a natural law theorist may be erroneous, of greater importance is the continuity Maine perceives between Roman and Victorian legal reforms whose aim is to better the well-being of its citizens and improve social cohesion. Such legal genealogies attest to the inheritance of modern practices and indicate that “[c]ivilization is nothing more than a name for the old order of the Aryan world,
dissolved and perpetually reconstituting itself” (Maine Village 230). An example of such inheritance occurs in Village Communities in the East and West (1871), where Maine contends that the antipathy Britons express toward the principle of self-interest stems from earlier prejudices rooted in competition against those within one’s kinship group. Modifying the Hobbesian state of violence, Maine claims that such violence in ancient societies occurred between rather than within communities. There existed a neutral region between tribes where competitive barter took place. Maine asserts that the universalized principle of competition is actually a modern phenomenon and “seems to be the universal belligerency of the ancient world which has penetrated into the interior of the ancient groups of blood-relatives. It is the regulated private war of ancient society gradually broken up into indistinguishable atoms” (Maine Village 228). The negative response to Benthamite hedonism and competitive economic practices is further indication that Victorians, like ancient society, are ultimately concerned with preserving social equilibrium. Though Maine does not elaborate on how Aryan society would reconstitute itself in the modern marketplace, an interpretive possibility appears within his developmental narrative of progressive societies. According to this theory, the ancient family gives way to its aggregation in the gens, the aggregation of gens into the tribe, and finally, the aggregation of tribes into the modern commonwealth (Maine Ancient 106). But since modern society is made up of individuals and not families, these developmental phases actually present a double movement of disaggregation and reaggregation. Modern society thus transmutes the internal cohesion of various independent families in ancient society to the organization of discrete individuals into one community, corporate in its character.
The social equilibrium and reciprocity consecrated by sacrificial rites in Maine’s version of ancient society, I will show, actually grounds economic theories of exchange where individuals interact so as to produce the equilibrium of the market. Moreover, Maine’s emphasis on balanced social forces, reciprocity, and sacrifice represents a pattern of thought that had already been developed in political economy. As Ingrao and Israel argue, seventeenth-century French physiocrats like François Quesnay and Anne Turgot synthesize the mechanical analogies of balance in Newtonian physics with the natural laws that govern the balance of harmonious and disharmonious forces in society that Enlightenment social theorists like Montesquieu address (Ingrao and Israel 38-42). Later political economists add to this scientific and sociological concept of equilibrium an anthropological narrative of economic progress. As Ronald Meek states, early political economists present a developmental narrative of social organization in terms of modes of subsistence rather than successive stages of political organization (Ignoble 6). The four stages theory describes how societies progressed from hunting-gathering, pastoral, and agricultural societies to commercial societies. The sociological implications of the four stages theory were later recuperated by comparative anthropologists and sociologists who linked the concept of the ‘savage’ with modes of subsistence as a way to determine the progressive development of various societies (Meek Ignoble 224).

Though Meek primarily associates the four stages theory with Smith, it influences later economists like John Stuart Mill and Alfred Marshall as well.55 While in Maine and

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55 Interestingly, Marshall attributes his narrative of the progressive techniques of subsistence to Tylor’s anthropological writing on early systems of wealth (221). This discussion occurs in Tylor’s *Researches into the Early History of Mankind* (191-273). Marshall also cites Bagehot’s discussion of the difference between primitive tools and capitalist accumulation. The chief difference between ‘primitive’ and capitalist economies, Bagehot asserts, is that capital is the result of sacrifice and the abstinence from immediate pleasures—a feature not found in ‘primitive’ societies (161-182). Marshall’s attribution of such a narrative to an anthropologist demonstrates the degree to which the anthropological theories of
other anthropologists the atomized relations of competitive capitalism replace the communality, interdependence, and reciprocity of ancient societies, this developmental narrative becomes inverted in political economic texts. Mill links the accumulation of wealth and advancing modes of subsistence to increasing levels of interdependence and sacrifice. In the “Preliminary Remarks” to the *Principles of Political Economy*, Mill claims that unlike the “savage state,” the demands of an increasing population in progressive societies cause scarcities and unequal distribution of goods that can only be offset by more labor and sacrifice (2: 11-12). Both in the *System of Logic* and the *Principles*, Mill connects the progress of society with co-operation and the ability to restrain selfish impulses. “What is lost in the separate efficiency of each, is far more than made up by the great capacity of united action. In proportion as they put off the qualities of the savage, they become amenable to discipline….The peculiar characteristic, in short, of civilized beings, is the capacity of co-operation….” (3: 708). Advanced capitalist societies are more interdependent whereas, in the “savage state,” individuals can survive in isolation. Unlike the ‘savage’ who has few wants and lacks the capacity for self-restraint, the English are successful because of their capacity for productiveness and self-denial (Mill 2: 103-104). This view is echoed by Marshall, who claims that in those societies where “a tribal sense of duty in strengthening the tribe” is strongest, self-sacrifice is “deliberately adopted as a basis of action” (Marshall *Principles* 243). Those races win the Darwinian struggle for survival wherein “the individual is most willing to sacrifice himself for the benefit of those around him […]” (Marshall *Principles* 243).

Not only is the progress of a society dependent on its capacity for self-sacrifice and

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civilization and wealth, so pervasive to political economy, had become alienated from its own discourse and associated with a separate discipline.
mutual interdependence, but they are the principles of equilibrium as well. As Bentham was quoted as stating earlier, self-sacrifice offsets the potential diffusion of social ties caused by self-interest. In Mill’s static and dynamic states of society, the static state of “consensus” depicts a social organism in which all parts are interdependent and mutually effect and react upon one another whereas the dynamic analysis investigates the laws that influence a society’s progress from one static state to the next. Similarly, Mill divides political economy into static and dynamic analyses. Static economic laws like value, exchange, price, or production establish equilibrium (consensus) while the dynamic analysis of societies illustrates their progress as a result of willful sacrifice and mutuality. But as was pointed out earlier, the static state of “consensus” also describe a reciprocal action of social forces. If economic progress rests on the ability to sacrifice personal interest and act cooperatively, the progressive movement from one equilibrium state to the next illustrates increasing states of reciprocity, interdependence, and self-sacrifice.

While not as explicit as Mill, Smith’s *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) also depicts capitalist society as a model of interdependence and reciprocal sacrifice. Smith’s narrative of progress and increasing interdependence contrasts the division of labor with the “rude” state of society where each individual functions in isolation and provides for himself.

> In that rude state of society in which there is no division of labor, in which exchanges are seldom made, and in which every man provides everything for himself, it is not necessary that any stock be accumulated or stored up beforehand in order to carry on the business of the society. Every man endeavors to supply by his own industry his own occasional wants as they occur. (Smith *Wealth* 241)

The “rude state” of society functions independent of capital or the division of labor and characterizes a state of civilization in which individuals can successfully survive in a
state of isolation. Unlike the “rude state,” capitalist exchange promotes increasing levels of interdependence since each relies on others to procure basic necessities, so much so that it is impossible to survive without the aid of others.

While capitalist societies epitomize interdependence, the labor theory of value originates in the “rude” state. Because the “rude” state precedes private property, capitalist accumulation and the division of labor, the value of goods represents the labor quantities sacrificed in producing them. “In that early and rude state of society which precedes both the accumulation of stock and the appropriation of land, the proportion between the quantities of labour necessary for acquiring different objects seems to be the only circumstance which can afford any rule for exchanging them for one another” (Smith *Wealth* 41). By contrast, exchange value in capitalist society represents the sum of profits, rent, and wages. Thus, the model of reciprocal exchange according to labor quantities sacrificed cannot hold in capitalist societies. Despite this apparent difference, reciprocity through exchange persists in capitalist theories of equilibrium. In Smith’s discussion of price, for example, a commodity’s ‘natural price’ represents its total production cost in terms of wages, profits and rent. The actual selling price is the market price, which may be either above or below the natural price. Whether or not goods sell at their natural price depends on the balance between the supply and demand for those goods on the market.

The natural price, therefore is, as it were, the central price, to which the prices of all commodities are continually gravitating….But whatever may be the obstacles which hinder them from settling in this centre of repose and continuance, they are constantly tending towards it. The whole quantity of industry annually employed in order to bring any commodity to market naturally suits itself in this manner to the effectual demand. It naturally aims at bringing always a precise quantity thither which may be sufficient to supply, and no more than supply, the demand. (Smith *Wealth* 51)
Equilibrium functions as a social ideal that the economy is always “tending towards.” At equilibrium, the convergence of demand and supply results in goods selling at their natural prices and restores the ideal of reciprocity that marked exchange in the “rude” state. This reciprocity denotes sacrifice as well, since the real price of anything is “the toil and trouble of acquiring it” (Smith *Wealth* 26). The “rude” state thus occupies a double position within Smith’s economic theory since it is both the state capitalist society has advanced from and the state we are constantly tending toward: an equilibrium state wherein exchange value reflects the sacrifices made to produce a good.56

Ruskin’s system of reciprocal self-sacrifice appears in the theory of equilibrium since the convergence of market and natural price at equilibrium indicates goods exchanging at their cost of production, that is, the sacrifices of labor and capital made to bring that product to market. In this manner, equilibrium represents exchange as an interdependent harmonic system, an “imagined community” in which buyers and sellers establish reciprocity such that goods sold at their natural prices represent an exact proportion between individual gain and sacrifice: the matrix of equilibrium prices doubles as a measure of social equilibrium.57 This is the effect of Smith’s “invisible hand” (*Wealth* 399), wherein the self-interested actions of individuals tacitly promote the

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56With respect to Smith and the four stages theory of historical progress, Maureen Harkin argues that Smith articulates contradictory responses to the “primitive,” both asserting and questioning narratives of progress. At the same time that Smith presents the typical portrait of the “savage” as dissolute and insensible, he realizes that the bravery and subsistence techniques of the North American “savage” did not coincide with the four stages theory. Harkin argues that Smith’s frequent portrayal of the “savage” as model of stoic self-discipline, usually associated with modern man, reflects his vacillation between history as progressive modernization and his nostalgia for past forms of social organization.

57Alejandro Nadal argues that in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, the “impartial spectator” governs the social system through “a network of interlocking jurisdictions” and leads to an unintended outcome. Smith’s concept of the “jurisdiction” in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, links internal self-evaluation with the evaluation of one’s conduct as mirrored in others (183). In this manner, society is comprised of linked and self-regulating impartial spectators. Nadal states that, in *The Wealth of Nations*, Smith substitutes this conception of society as a series of interlocking jurisdictions with “a matrix of relative prices’ whose balance is the unintended effect of the invisible hand (190-191).
good of society and establish equilibrium. The pursuit of individual advantage results in the prosperity of the community and these individual efforts are eventually harmonized in the economic system such that total demand equals total supply. The principle of self-interest under conditions of perfect liberty naturally results in a state of equilibrium and balanced trade where all parties equally gain and the annual produce of a nation equals its annual consumption (Smith *Wealth* 430, 439). Yet, while it is ‘common knowledge’ that all act according to the principle of self-interest, coordination occurs without conscious knowledge (Chwe 98). Smith offers a vision of communality and social coordination akin to Ruskin’s open boat where individuals simultaneously pursue self-interest and propel the economy toward an equilibrium state anchored in reciprocity and sacrifice.

Smith’s classical model of equilibrium posits the tendency of prices to converge such that demand meets supply and goods sell at their natural prices. This convergence coincides with competition’s equalization of profit rates so that each sector of the economy receives the “ordinary profits of stock” necessary to reproduce the economy in the next production cycle (Walsh 13, Walsh and Gram 75-76). Determination of the “ordinary profits of stock” varies according to numerous exigent circumstances: the risk and uncertainties capitalists incur, the price of commodities, and the rate of interest in the country (Smith *Wealth* 78-79). Smith’s famous comment that “public mourning raises the price of black cloth” alludes to the temporary effects to price and profits caused by a sudden rise in demand (*Wealth* 52). This rise is temporary and prices and profit rates eventually fall back to their averages along with demand. More importantly, Smith estimates the rate of profit separately from the hardship and sacrifices of labor. The profits of stock, he argues, are not another species of wages for the labor that the
capitalist incurs in directing capital. “[The profits of stock] bear no proportion to the quantity, the hardship, or the ingenuity of this supposed labour of inspection and direction. They are regulated by the value of the stock employed, and are greater or smaller in proportion to the extent of this stock” (Smith *Wealth* 42). The profit rate in different manufacturing trades may be equal, but what determines profits is the amount of capital advanced plus the wages expended on labor and materials. This poses a special problem and one that Ricardo addresses: if the economy reproduces itself at equilibrium with the result that market price equals natural price (quantities of labor sacrificed), then how can the uniform rate of profit depend on a principle other than the sacrifice and hardship expended in labor? For Ricardo, the labor theory of value represents an analytical tool to address questions of distribution. If different principles govern the uniform rate of profit, wages, and prices, then the economy’s price structure at equilibrium would cease to function as a representation of the correspondences between the sacrifices of labor, distribution, and a uniform profit rate.

Before turning to Ricardo’s economic system in the *Principles*, however, it is essential to analyze the circular reproduction of the economy found in classical theories of equilibrium and how this becomes married with the concept of labor’s sacrifice. As Vivian Walsh and Harvey Gram have argued, since classical economists were concerned with economic growth, their model of equilibrium placed more emphasis on the reproduction of the economy through the generation of physical surpluses unlike neoclassical models of equilibrium subsequent to Jevons and Léon Walras, wherein scarce resources are allocated to maximize individual satisfaction, a static model in which the dynamic effects of time and production are largely discounted (Walsh and Gram 63,
76). By contrast, the classical model of equilibrium is concerned with the profits that arise from surpluses, surpluses that replace the capital that was initially invested in the production process and furnish the capitalist with the “ordinary profits” needed to promote growth through accumulation and reinvestment. Walsh and Gram trace the classical model of equilibrium to the French physiocrat François Quesnay whose *Tableau Économique* influenced Smith, Ricardo and Mill but whose logic was only explicitly analyzed by Marx in his equilibrium concepts of simple and extended reproduction (Walsh and Gram 28).

Quesnay’s table describes the economy of a nation whose territory is cultivated so that its annual gross product is five milliards worth of produce. These five milliards are divided in the economy among three classes: productive (farmers), proprietor (landlords) and the artisan or sterile class (laborers). The productive class is advanced two milliards’ worth of produce necessary for production to take place while the proprietor class receives two milliards in revenue (rent). The artisan class receives one milliard as an advance for its means of production. The productive class regularly expands their two milliards into five milliards as a result of production. But since each class is dependent on the other for subsistence, the replacement of raw materials for production, and rent, etc., once exchange takes place between the three classes at the end of each production cycle the farmers again have two milliards of produce, the landlords two milliards in rent, and the laborers one milliard. 58 Within this agricultural model, whatever the economy produces is either immediately consumed or recycled for the next harvest so there is neither accumulation nor expansion of the economy. In modern economic terms,

58 For a summary of Quesnay’s *Tableau Économique*, see Blaug *Retrospect* 25-28, Walsh and Gram 28-40, Roll 131-133.
agricultural goods serve as both ‘inputs’ and ‘outputs’ of the economic system. Quesnay’s table depicts the thorough interdependence of the three classes and the circular pattern that characterizes classical theories of equilibrium in which the produce of the economy is immediately consumed and a uniform surplus reproduces the economy at the same scale as in previous periods of production (Blaug *Retrospect* 25, Walsh and Gram 29-32).

According to Joseph Schumpeter, Quesnay’s table describes the economy as a synchronized process in which “the fundamental flow of goods (and money) that constitute the economic process consist of a flux and an (augmented) reflux of ‘advances’” (564). It is this circular and synchronic process of flux and reflux that Marx describes as “simple reproduction” and which many classical economists referred to pessimistically as the “stationary state” since it was a permanent equilibrium without growth.59 For Marx, however, simple reproduction did not represent the threat of a real state in the future where the economy’s growth stalled but was an abstraction (Schumpeter 965). In *Capital I*, Marx describes the process of economic production and capital circulation as a “circular movement” (35: 564). The means of production create articles of consumption whose value exceeds the capital and wages advanced to produce them. This surplus value, expressed in money terms, is transformed into capital so that the process can repeat itself. Marx describes simple reproduction’s synchronic and circular process in the following manner:

> Whatever the form of the process of production in a society, it must be a continuous process, must continue to go periodically through the same phases. A

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59While most classical political economists had a negative view of the stationary state, Mill views it as a positive state in which society has developed its economy to the utmost and energies can be diverted to the development of intellectual faculties and to the refinement of civilization and people can concentrate on the “Art of Living” (Mill *Works* 3 756).
society can no more cease to produce than it can cease to consume. When viewed, therefore, as a connected whole, and as flowing on with incessant renewal, every social process of production is, at the same time, a process of reproduction. The conditions of production are also those of reproduction. No society can go on producing, in other words, no society can reproduce, unless it constantly reconverts a part of its products into means of production, or elements of fresh products. All other circumstances remaining the same, the only mode by which it can reproduce its wealth, and maintain it at one level, is by replacing the means of production — *i.e.*, the instruments of labour, the raw material, and the auxiliary substances consumed in the course of the year—by an equal quantity of the same kind of articles; these must be separated from the mass of the yearly products, and thrown afresh into the process of production. (Marx 35: 565)

Marx succinctly summarizes the circularity graphed by Quesnay’s table and the process of “incessant renewal” through which the economy reproduces itself at equilibrium as a “connected whole.” But Marx’s ideological critique of political economy is that simple reproduction is a fiction insofar as an equilibrium state where there is no accumulation of capital contradicts the modus operandi of a capitalist economy which must accumulate surpluses in order to reproduce the economy at an ever enlarging scale. The latter circular process implicitly relies on “the production and reproduction of the means of production so indispensable to the capitalist: the laborer himself” (Marx 35: 572). The economy reproduces itself through the sacrifice of human labor/laborers, which must be replaced or reproduced alongside the more durable machinery in order for the system to continue. In *Capital II*, Marx critiques Smith for the very circularity I identified in the first chapter, where Smith valorizes labor as the “fund” of the nation’s wealth and labor’s sacrifice enacts a circular process that sacralizes the economy and confirms its perpetual regeneration. Marx complains that Smith fails to account for the origin of capital and labor in the economic process and describes capitalist accumulation *as though* it were simple reproduction. Smith fails to recognize that the process of reproduction on an extended scale is not synchronic since it always relies on advances from past periods of
production, resources which have already been distributed along class lines and over which the laborer has no control though it is his labor that constitutes the “fund” of the economy’s viability and growth (Marx 36: 361, 375, 384).

The extension of the economy impinges on the accumulation of labor as surplus value. In extended reproduction, the economy not only replenishes the means of production and necessaries for subsistence but actually produces more than is necessary of both so that they can be reconverted into capital. In this manner, Marx states, “[t]he circle in which simple reproduction moves, alters its form, and, to use Sismondi’s expression, changes into a spiral” (*Works 35* 580). Unlike simple reproduction, where articles for consumption were simply consumed, in order for the economy to grow it must reinvest its revenue to form more capital. In Marx’s model of simple and extended reproduction he divides social production into two departments: Department I produces the means of production and Department II produces the articles of consumption. Exchange between these two departments takes place at labor values so that a balance (equilibrium) between the two departments is maintained (Walsh and Gram 110). The ‘output’ of Department I serves as ‘input’ for department two, and vice versa. In simple reproduction the surplus value created in the first department is spent entirely in Department II. The only difference in extended reproduction is that revenue from the first department, rather than being consumed by Department II, is reinvested in Department I for more means of production. As in Mill’s discussion of the progressive movement from one state of “consensus” to the next, the stationary equilibrium of simple reproduction evolves in extended reproduction into an economy that continuously reestablishes equilibrium in a continuous spiral.
We are now in a position to see how the circularity in classical theories of equilibrium appears in Ricardo’s economic system. As discussed in the previous chapter, Ricardo critiqued Smith for his muddled labor theory of value and for his erroneous assumption that the labor theory of value only applied to the “rude” state of society and not the modern marketplace as well. Ricardo’s *Principles* must both substantiate the labor theory in the marketplace and establish the interconnections between the uniform rate of profit and the theory of value at equilibrium. Ricardo agrees with Smith that, in the long run, the economy reaches an equilibrium in which the market price of goods do not diverge from their natural price (labor quantities) and profit rates are uniform throughout the economy. Unlike Smith, however, Ricardo provides a theory of uniform profit rates and distribution by analyzing the effects of rent on the profit structure and distribution of shares throughout the economy. In making this argument, he also demonstrates that the sacrifices of labor in the agricultural sector determine the rate of profits in the economy. If agricultural goods are determined by the quantity of labor sacrificed and the value of these goods governs the relative prices of all other goods, when all other goods adjust their price and profit rates to harmonize with that of the agricultural sector, the entire economy adjusts to the sacrifices of labor in agriculture. As a result, exchange at equilibrium occurs at the reciprocal of labor embodied quantities. The circularity noticed in the labor theory of value appears in classical theories of equilibrium as the reproduction of the economy with a uniform, positive rate of profit where goods exchange at the reciprocal of the labor sacrificed in producing them.

Ricardo's early writings on the Corn Laws depict an economy in which agricultural goods such as corn, wheat, and barley constitute what the economy produces
as ‘output’ and consumes as ‘input.’ While this earlier model of economic equilibrium may be seen as inconsistent with Ricardo’s later development of a labor theory of value, I argue that the logic of sacrifice presents a continuous thread running from the early and late works, conjoining Ricardo’s theory of value and distribution to the uniform profit rate of the economy at equilibrium. Ricardo confronted a historical situation in which the economic disturbances of the Napoleonic wars and the deleterious effects of the Corn Laws had created high rents in the economy but depressed profits for the capitalists whose efforts at accumulation were integral to the progressive growth of the economy. Ricardo wanted to show that it was the profits in the agricultural sector that determined the rate of profit in all other areas. In a letter to Hutches Trower (1814), Ricardo famously asserted that “it is the profits of the farmer that regulate the profits of all other trades” (6: 104). He largely maintains this position in the Essay on Profits where he states that “the general profits of stock [are] regulated by the profits made on the least profitable employment of capital on agriculture” (Ricardo 4: 13). Given the fact that the landlord’s share of rent was taken out of the profits of the farmer, however, Ricardo had to separate rent from profits to show the rate of profit in the economy as separate from rent. It is here that the theory of marginal productivity proves useful, since it allows Ricardo to argue that the least favorable land cultivated is rentless, and it is the profit on this rentless land that regulates the profits in all other sectors of the economy.

According to the theory of marginal productivity, as capital grows and population concomitantly advances, more produce must be supplied for the subsistence of the enlarging population by recourse to farming less fertile lands. The application of additional amounts of capital to less and less fertile lands generates lesser profits since
more labor is required to return the same amount of produce as on the more fertile lands. As a result, both the price of corn and wages rise due to increasing labor costs but the profits from rising prices only benefit the landlords on more fertile tracts of land who receive the profits of the farmer as rent. Ricardo claims that if, for example, the percentage profit on the first tract of land is fifty percent (hundred quarters of wheat profits for 200 quarters of capital), that return will stay the same when lesser fertile lands are cultivated. If the second tract of land requires 210 quarters of capital to produce a hundred quarters of wheat, the rate of profit would fall from 50% to 43%. In the above example, where the rate of profit falls in the least productive tract of land to 43%, the profits in excess of that percentage in the first tract of land would go to the landlord as rent (Ricardo 4: 13-14). As less fertile lands are used, rent rises for the landlord just as profits fall for the capitalists. But even if landlords recoup high rents, the overall effect of cultivating lands on the margin is to depress profits and diminish the rate of economic growth because “the profits on all capital employed in trade would fall to forty-three percent” (Ricardo 4: 14). The rate of profits in the manufacturing sectors are harmonized with that of agriculture so that a uniform rate of profit is once again achieved and, moreover, it is the rate of profit in the agricultural sector that governs the rate of profit everywhere else. The only way in which an advancing society with increasing capital and population could not have a depressing rate of profit is if new agricultural techniques were developed or cheap corn was imported (Ricardo 4: 23). Here, the polemical aspect of the Essay as an argument against the Corn Laws is clearly evidenced: the only people who benefit are the landlords but the economy’s growth as a whole is harmed.
The unique position of the agricultural sector of the economy arises from the fact that corn provides a basic necessary of subsistence for laborers and, more importantly, forms a wage good within the economy. As Sraffa argues, Ricardo’s economic system prior to the *Principles* develops a corn model in which corn is both what the economy consumes and what it produces. Summarizing the corn model, Sraffa states that in agriculture, the same commodity, namely corn, forms both the capital (conceived as composed of the subsistence necessary for workers) and the product; so that the determination of profit by the difference between total product and capital advanced, and also the determination of the ratio of this profit to the capital, is done directly between quantities of corn without any question of valuation. It is obvious that only one trade can be in the special position of not employing the products of other trades while all the others must employ its product as capital. It follows that if there is to be a uniform rate of profit in all trades it is the exchangeable values of the products of other trades relatively to their own capitals (i.e. relatively to corn) that must be adjusted so as to yield the same rate of profit as has been established in the growing of corn; since in the latter no value changes can alter the ratio of product to capital, both consisting of the same commodity. (Sraffa “Introduction” xxxi)

The corn model represents a logical strain applicable to Ricardo’s work prior to his theory of the invariable standard found in the *Principles*. The corn model explains the distribution of profits in the economy without developing a theory of value to assess the relative prices of numerous commodities: the only commodity is corn and this serves as a convenient simplification for the rest of the economy. More importantly, the circular process of the corn model shows how the economy sustains itself through, to use Sraffa’s phrase, the production of ‘commodities by means of commodities.’ Corn is what the economy produces; corn is what the economy advances as capital to engage in production; and finally, corn is what is paid out as wages and what the economy consumes.
I want to suggest that the circularity of the corn model and classical equilibrium describes a sacrificial logic in which corn is what is sacrificed, reproduced, and consumed. Not only does this model of classical equilibrium parallel the circular logic in labor’s sacrifice, as discussed in the first chapter, but the perpetual regeneration of the economy at equilibrium through rites of sacrifice signals the stability and sanctity of the community. This submerged theme in Ricardo becomes explicit in James Frazer’s _The Golden Bough_ (1890), which explores how the logic of sacrificial rites insures agricultural fertility and the regeneration of agricultural economies. Where Tylor points to parallels between sacrifice and economics, Frazer reads sacrificial practices through the lens of political economy. The principles of self-interest and self-sacrifice, both of which are integral to political economy, are rooted in sacrificial rites. As in Smith’s principle of self-interest, Frazer interprets ‘primitive’ magic and sacrificial propitiation as appealing to the deity’s “interests, his appetites, or his emotions” in order to achieve personal ends (Bough 59). Early forms of gift-sacrifice reveal the principle of self-interest and the sacrificial rites associated with agricultural fertility indicate the roots of modern day capitalist accumulation. Frazer argues that the erroneous assumption in primitive society that chastity would lead to agricultural fertility demonstrates a limited form of asceticism that subsequent civilizations would strengthen. “For strength of character in the race as in the individual consists mainly in the power of sacrificing the present to the future, of disregarding the immediate temptations of ephemeral pleasure for more distant and lasting sources of satisfaction” (Frazer Bough 161). Frazer merely rehearses the descriptions given of the ‘savage’ by political economists like Mill and
Jevons, who claim that the ‘savage’ is unable to abstain from present pleasures for the sake of future gains (Mill 2: 103-104, Jevons *Theory* 35).

This synthesis of sacrificial rites and economic rhetoric appears most prominently in his discussion of agricultural fertility and rites in which a god is sacrificed. As Catherine Gallagher argues, Frazer combines Malthus’s emphasis on sexuality and fertility with the problem of the food supply by demonstrating how primitive societies controlled agricultural fertility through acts of sacrifice (*Body* 169). Thus the European harvest ceremony in which the last person to reap, bind, and thresh the corn is dressed in sheaves to resemble corn and is ceremonially drowned, mimetically performs a sacrifice that was once literal (Frazer *Bough* 496-500). The persons sacrificed are either chosen because they are the last to thresh the harvest or because they are “passing strangers” to the community who are “regarded as manifestations of the corn-spirit escaping from the cut or threshed corn, and as such were seized and slain” (Frazer *Bough* 509). This is an important aspect to the rationale of the agricultural rite since, as with Robertson Smith, they conceive of sacrifice as a way to insure the community’s stability. Agricultural fertility is represented as a power that is vital to the community’s survival and yet, when personified as “passing strangers,” is seen as a threat to the community that only sacrifice

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60 This applies to Ruskin’s concept of “life” as well, which Gallagher sees as symptomatic of a Victorian tendency to associate value with vital power (*Body* 87). Ruskin contrasts the healthy reproduction of life with capitalist hoarding which only seeks to reproduce more capital. Rather than consume the fruit of its labors, political economy’s emphasis on a surplus redirected for the sake of more production, epitomizes an unnatural process in which seed beget seed, shadow embraces shadow (Swyver 219).

61 For a discussion of English calendar rituals, see Bushaway 107-166. Bushaway interprets harvest rituals as promoting social cohesion and expressing the conditions of cooperative labor between farmer and laborer that were slowly displaced by advancing industrialism in the mid-nineteenth-century. The harvest rite in which the laborer received the last sheaf as a token of customary right, for example, was eliminated and replaced with money payment. Bushaway attributes the disappearance of customary relations and rights in agriculture to the criminalization of such practices as ‘gleaning’ and ‘wood-gathering’ in the late-eighteenth- and nineteenth-century that went along with private property.
can control. As in the circular process of economic equilibrium, the sacrifice of corn assures the agricultural fertility of the economy and the consumption of the corn spirit reveals “the sacramental character of the harvest supper” (Frazer *Bough* 536). Whether it be the ritual killing of the corn god in Mexico, harvest rites in Yorkshire, or the Egyptian rites of Osiris, the logic of sacrifice everywhere mirror the Christian paradigm of sacrifice and resurrection, so much so that the corn-god is read as a Christ figure. “The corn-god produced the corn from himself: he gave his own body to feed the people: he dies that they might live” (Frazer *Bough* 437). More important than Frazer’s Christocentric worldview is the economy of sacrifice he delineates: corn is sacrificed, corn is resurrected and regenerated, and corn is consumed. Through repeated rites of sacrifice the community regenerates the economy and sacralizes its social well-being.

This sacrificial logic permeates Ricardo’s corn model and the classical model of equilibrium and explains why sacrifice becomes explicitly linked to a labor theory of value in the *Principles*. Due to objections raised by Malthus, Ricardo distances himself from the thesis that corn determines the general rate of profit and develops a labor theory of value to discuss the rate of profit in relation to relative prices. The movement to a labor theory is already intimated in the *Essay on Profits*, where the reliance on the corn model is attenuated by reference to the difficulties of production.

Profits then depend on the price, or rather on the value of food. Every thing which gives facility to the production of food, however scarce, or however abundant commodities may become, will raise the rate of profits, whilst on the contrary, every thing which shall augment the cost of production without augmenting the quantity of food will, under every circumstance, lower the general rate of profits. (Ricardo 4: 26)

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62 Malthus complains that Ricardo ignored the influence of the manufacturing sector and money by reducing the entire economy to agriculture. See Sraffa xxx-xxxii.
As Sraffa points out, this shift from a corn model to labor theory simply substitutes labor for corn. Instead of ratios of corn, profits are determined by the proportion of the labor required to produce the subsistence goods for that labor to the total labor required in the economy as a whole (“Introduction” xxxii). Here the labor theory continues a trajectory already established, except that instead of sacrifices of corn we have sacrifices of labor as both ‘input’ and ‘output.’

As we saw in the previous chapter, the invariable standard of labor was challenged by Ricardo’s sense that varying capital compositions change the relative value of goods even if the labor quantities are fixed. As a result, he postulates that gold could serve as a standard since it possesses the average amounts of fixed and circulating capital for the economy in general and so its value, determined according to labor quantities, remains stable despite the rise or fall of wages. Ricardo’s assumption of uniform capital compositions makes gold an accurate measure of relative values for all those goods “produced under the same conditions precisely as itself” (2: 45). This represents a crucial maneuver on Ricardo’s part since he wants to argue that profit is determined inversely by the rise of wages, wages being a portion of surplus produce taken out to pay laborers from the farmer’s profits. Hence, if money’s value was not stable, any change in wages due to the rise or fall in money’s value would say nothing about the rate of profit. But as Mark Blaug claims, Ricardo’s unstated assumption as he develops gold as the invariable standard is that corn is a good produced “under the same conditions” as gold. As a result, gold’s relative value is also solely determined by labor quantities and unaffected by shifts in the relative value of other goods or a rise in money wages (Blaug Retrospect 112). This implicit substitution of corn for gold as the invariable standard is substantiated by
the fact that Ricardo relies on the annual production cycle of agriculture as the typical production period for the economic system as a whole (Blaug *Ricardo* 19).

Since the standard is identified with the wage good of corn, a necessity for subsistence, when wages rise and profits fall as a result of more labor being applied to poor lands to net the same amount of produce, this rise in labor quantities and wages has a collateral effect in the relative structure of prices for all other goods expressed in terms of the standard, thus bringing the lowered profit rate into agreement with that of one product, namely corn (Blaug *Ricardo* 18, 24). Thus Ricardo claims in the *Principles* that “[t]here are few commodities which are not more or less affected in their price by the rise of raw produce, because some raw material from the land enters into the composition of most commodities” (Ricardo 2: 117). According to Terry Peach, the reasoning seems once again to be that the profit rates of farmers and manufacturers would conform to one another (94). This is significant and shows that despite Ricardo’s apparent movement away from the corn model to a labor theory of value in the *Principles*, he locates shifts in relative prices and a uniform profit rate as ultimately determined by the sacrifices of labor in agriculture such that at equilibrium goods exchange at the reciprocal of their labor values and a uniform profit rate occurs.

Ricardo’s entire point is to show that due to the Corn Laws, this constant readjustment at equilibrium to the profit rate in agriculture would continuously depress the economy until it arrived at a stationary equilibrium where no accumulation occurred since there were no profits to be had. The economy could avoid the stationary state, he maintains, if and only if one of two things occur: technological advances in agriculture or

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63 For a critique of this interpretation of Ricardo, see Hollander *Ricardo* 255-267. Hollander sees the corn model interpretation of Ricardo’s economics as unsubstantiated. He sees Ricardo’s economics as presenting an analytical framework for distribution based on such variables as money wages and profits.
importation of cheap corn (Ricardo 2: 132, 4: 23). The positive impact on the profit rate, however, will only occur if the economy imports goods necessary for subsistence. Hence, Ricardo states in his discussion of foreign trade in the *Principles* that “if the commodities obtained at a cheaper rate, by the extension of foreign commerce, or by the improvement of machinery, be exclusively commodities consumed by the rich, no alteration will take place in the rate of profits” (2: 132). Because the profit rate is determined by subsistence wage goods like corn, cheap luxuries consumed by the rich have no impact. The uniform positive rate of profit stands as a concrete mirror for the wealth and progress of a nation. Unlike the equilibrium of the stationary state, Ricardo conceives of a progressive society as moving, to use Marx’s phrase, in a spiral where the growth of the economy continually reestablishes equilibrium as it expands.

As in Smith, the key is that equilibrium in a progressive society can only occur under a regime of laissez-faire policy which it was the express purpose of the Corn Laws to impede. And like Smith, Ricardo distinguishes market price (money value) from natural price (labor embodied quantities). Within a system of free competition, when fluctuations in demand cause a divergence between the two either by lowering or increasing the profit rate from other sectors of the economy, this effect will only be temporary because the “restless desire on the part of all the employers of stock, to quit a less profitable for a more advantageous business, has a strong tendency to equalize the rate of profits of all […]” (Ricardo 2: 88). At equilibrium, the principle of competition allocates capital in the perfect amount in each industry so that the market never has a “glut,” demand equals supply, market price equals natural price, and profit rates are
But, Ricardo avers, “[t]he present time appears to be one of the exceptions to the justness of this remark” (2: 90). The latter comment obviously targets the effects of the Corn Laws which have disturbed the natural equilibrium that would occur in a progressive society if free competition reigned.

Under a system of perfectly free commerce, each country naturally devotes its capital and labour to such employments as are most beneficial to each. This pursuit of individual advantage is admirably connected with the universal good of the whole. By stimulating industry, by rewarding ingenuity, and by using most efficaciously the peculiar powers bestowed by nature, it distributes labour most effectively and most economically: while, by increasing the general mass of productions, it diffuses general benefit, and binds together by one common interest and intercourse, the universal society of nations throughout the civilized world. (Ricardo 2: 134)

Competition fosters the very conditions of equilibrium where self-interests are harmonized with the whole. The economy under free competition would still be governed by the profit rate and labor sacrificed in the agricultural sector but since excessive labor would not be expended in farming poorer lands, the profit rate in the agricultural sector would not be continuously depressed nor would the profit rate of others economic sectors as they adjusted to it. In this sense, Ricardo’s *Principles* presents a diagnosis of economic policies that have diverted the economy from its ‘natural’ movement toward equilibrium. Prices, wages, and profit rates serve as visible indictors of the concentration of wealth in the hands of landlords. By contrast, under a system of free competition the economy tends toward an equilibrium state in which goods exchange at the reciprocal of their sacrifices and the economy achieves a positive, uniform profit rate. The social equilibrium and economic regeneration anthropologists identify with the sacrificial rites of ‘primitive’ society occur in political economy as the

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64 Ricardo here accepts Say’s Law, namely, that there can never be an oversupply of goods within a barter economy where money is the only medium of exchange.
rites of reciprocal exchange wherein the equilibrium of the market refers back to the equilibrium of the social body. Equilibrium functions as a representation of the interconnected whole or “universal society of nations” that the economy continuously reproduces from one equilibrium state to the next as it advances up the spiral of progress.

In contrast to classical economists from Smith to Mill, who emphasize physical costs and surpluses in their models of equilibrium, marginalists like William Stanley Jevons and Léon Walras concentrate on the balance between supply and demand as consumers pursue the satisfaction of their subjective desires. Additionally, Jevons and Walras distance their models of equilibrium from real market conditions in order to develop an analytical framework of the laws of exchange with greater scientific validity. Classical economists had tried to synthesize a static and dynamic view of the economy by explaining both how the economy achieves equilibrium at a fixed moment in time and how the relative prices of goods, exchange, and growth continuously shift. The flow of time injects uncertainty and flux into economic questions and makes it difficult to ascertain the laws of exchange with the regularity found in fields like physics and mathematics. Though Jevons concedes that the static and dynamic dimensions of the economy express “[t]he real condition of industry,” he confines his treatment of exchange to “a purely statical problem….Holders of commodities will be regarded not as continuously passing on these commodities in streams of trade, but as possessing certain fixed amounts which they exchange until they come to equilibrium” (Jevons Theory 93).

The latter simplification along with the quantitative measurement of value and exchange in terms of utility, he argued, would transform political economy into a mathematical science. “The Theory of Economy thus treated presents a close analogy to the science of
Statical Mechanics, and the Laws of Exchange are found to resemble the Laws of Equilibrium of a lever as determined by the principle of virtual velocities” (Jevons Theory vii). Jevons’s exclusion of time from the equations of value and exchange brings the discipline closer to physics. Jevons fears the conflation of economic, sociological, and anthropological questions found in Mill. His argument for a mathematical and statical approach to economic questions hinges on the viability of political economy as a scientific discipline. The continued treatment of economic questions as an empirical science would cause political economy to “fall in as one branch of Mr. Spencer’s Sociology” (Jevons Theory xvi). Despite these methodological differences, Jevons’s theory of exchange and equilibrium still retains traces of classical notions of sacrifice and reciprocity. Moreover, the sociological question of how the collective phenomenon of the economic system arises from the coordinated acts of individual agents persists in Jevons’s analysis of the market, where visible data such as price lists refer back to the choices of individuals. Though isolated from others, the modern agent need only look to the evidence of varied economic phenomena in the market place to glimpse the collective activity in which she daily participates.

In Jevons’s Theory of Political Economy (1871), the ideal conditions of equilibrium require free trade and complete transparency. As Sandra Peart argues, Jevons conceives of a theoretically perfect marketplace in which such empirical problems as imperfect information about the market or irrational motives are eliminated and emphasis is placed on individuals sharing information (Theory 98-100).

The traders may be spread over a whole town, or region of country, and yet make a market, if they are, by means of fairs, meetings, published price lists, the post office, or otherwise, in close communication with each other…By a market I shall mean two or more persons dealing in two or more commodities and
intentions of exchanging are known to all. It is also essential that the ratio of exchange between any two persons should be known to all others. It is only so far as this community of knowledge extends that the market extends. (Jevons Theory 85-86)

As in Ruskin, the marketplace institutes ethical standards that all act upon and it is only when these standards operate that the equilibrium conditions of exchange apply. By sharing information, traders establish honest economic practices. The “law of indifference,” for example, disallows traders from selling the same commodity at different prices (Jevons Theory 91). If sellers could manipulate prices in the marketplace by selling the same good for varied prices, it would violate the uniform playing field and the equilibrium conditions of exchange. Hence, traders in the market must explicitly form a “complete consensus” on market prices by possessing perfect knowledge of the supply and demand and the ratios of exchange (Jevons Theory 87). The market, as a “community of knowledge,” expresses the ethical principles all traders abide by. This community replaces the physical community to which traders belong but in which they do not encounter each other.

Transparency and perfect knowledge only fulfill some of the conditions for trade at equilibrium; traders must also anticipate the behavior of others. This is especially relevant in cases of bargaining where traders decide how much to offer for a good on the basis of non-economic knowledge. In such situations, Jevons contends one must possess “the power of reading another man’s thoughts” by ascertaining “the disposition and force of character of the parties” (Jevons Theory 124). This problem is simplified by Jevons’s assumption that all agents are motivated by self-interested rationalism since it is “the inevitable tendency of human nature to choose that course which appears to offer the greatest advantage at the moment” (Theory 59). This model of *homo economicus* and
rational agency makes common knowledge possible since all agents possess the same motivations. As in Bentham and contemporary rational choice theory, Jevons’s economic agents anticipate and coordinate their behavior with that of others based on the universal motive of self-interest and the economist can interpret economic behavior as an objective representation of individuals maximizing their self-interest. As a result of this common knowledge, actions become harmonized within a coordinated network of exchange.

There is, however, a paradox in Jevons’s economic theory. While he assumes everyone acts from self-interest, he also claims that we cannot know other minds. “Each person,” he states, “is to other persons a portion of the outward world […]. Thus motives in the mind of A may give rise to phenomena which may be represented by motives in the mind of B; but between A and B there is a gulf. Hence the weighing of motives must always be confined to the bosom of the individual” (Jevons Theory 14). If we cannot compare one mind with another, how do we know that everyone acts from self-interest? What seems like a contradiction actually reveals a central preoccupation in Jevons’s model of exchange: coordinated acts of exchange reconcile the very “gulf” his economics presupposes and is objectively represented in the prices at which traders buy and sell. While each person’s mental state cannot be compared, the reciprocal act of exchange mediates the gulf between traders so that each individual balances sacrifices and pleasures and, in so doing, balances the system as a whole.

Having rejected the labor theory of value, Jevons measures exchange value quantitatively as the balance of individual utilities. Though one cannot measure pain and pleasure directly, one can correlate price to subjective mental states.
A unit of pleasure or of pain is difficult even to conceive; but it is the amount of these feelings which is continually prompting us to buying and selling, borrowing and lending, labouring and resting, producing and consuming...we may estimate the equality or inequality of feelings by the decisions of the human mind. The will is our pendulum, and its oscillations are minutely registered in the price lists of the markets. (Jevons Theory 11-12)

Jevons interprets economic behavior as analogous to mechanical physics, viewing traders like a pendulum coming to rest between pains and pleasures. Price thus represents both individual and collective preferences as well as the mental calibration process that precedes exchange. Price serves as a medium of communication since it indicates what people will sacrifice to satisfy which want and, as a result, generates common knowledge through exchange.

Not only does price objectively manifest mental processes and overcome the “gulf” between individuals, but price also represents a reciprocal act of exchange rooted in sacrifice. Jevons assumes that traders possess fixed amounts of goods that they continue to exchange at incremental amounts until their sacrifices equal the pleasure gained from exchange. According to Jevons’s law of exchange, “[t]he ratio of exchange of any two commodities will be the reciprocal of the ratio of the final degrees of utility of the quantities of commodity available for consumption after the exchange is completed” (Theory 95). The “final degree of utility” measures the pleasure experienced from the last incremental addition of any good or activity. But as was established in the previous

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65Michael White discusses the mechanical metaphors that Jevons utilizes to describe exchange. White claims that Jevons essentially presents a theory of action in which the “correlation of forces” found in mechanical theories of levers, for example, becomes transposed to human action. For Michael White’s discussion of Jevons, see Mirowski’s Natural Images in Economic Thought 198-199. Harold Maas traces the influence of de Morgan’s logic on Jevons’s logical machine as an early mechanical understanding of the mind’s processes. Here, thought processes are formally represented without reference to psychological introspection. This was important because, like Mill, Jevons also faced the problem of free will and determinism that comes with a mechanistic view of the human mind. In this context, Maas claims that the notion of a “correlation of forces” from physiologists like William Carpenter helped Jevons’s approach to bodily states as expressions of mental states that could be measured objectively as utilities. See Maas 123-181.
chapter, final degree of utility ultimately measures value in terms of sacrifice and abstinence. We can thus reinterpret the law of exchange as individuals exchanging goods at ratios that are the reciprocal of their sacrifices and abstinence. However, since interpersonal comparisons cannot be made, the equality of utilities after exchange is not between individuals but for the same individual. “The general result of exchange is thus to produce a certain equality of utility between different commodities, as regards the same individual….Every person whose wish for a certain thing exceeds his wish for other things, acquires what he wants provided he can make a sufficient sacrifice in other respects” (Jevons Theory 142). Each trader stands in a reciprocal relation to others at equilibrium having established equality between sacrifices and gains, a reciprocal relation signaled in the equilibrium price. This equilibrium price further depends on the equilibrium price of other goods since individuals distribute their incomes to equalize the final degrees of utility for everything they consume, thus linking prices into a vast interdependent matrix. The ‘complex whole’ of prices at equilibrium stands as an analogue for the reciprocal exchanges through which individuals equalize their pleasures and sacrifices and offers a representation of communality where otherwise a “gulf” between minds persists.

The market, conceived as an abstract representation of communality and economic justice, achieves its fullest articulation in the work of Swiss economist Léon Walras, who many economic historians credit with first formulating the mathematical

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66Sandra Peart points out two metaphors for equilibrium in Jevons: the pendulum and water. Jevons imagines individuals allocating income so as to maximize their satisfaction and wealth. Jevons states that “[a]s water runs into hollows until it fills them up to the same level, so wealth runs into all branches of expenditure” (140). In this metaphor, unlike the pendulum, Peart claims that Jevons shows the interdependence of all prices since water, if prevented from flowing in one direction, will flow and fill up another. Incidentally, Ruskin uses the same image of water for the flow of wealth in Unto This Last. See Ruskin 17:60.
model of general equilibrium and inaugurating modern economics. While Walras represents a departure from the methods of classical political economy within economic history, he continues a pattern delineated in this chapter wherein equilibrium functions as a representation of interdependent social relations. As Schumpeter remarks, Walras discovered the fundamental problem of economics, namely, “that there is a pervading interdependence of all economic phenomena” (242). Unlike previous economists who had discussed the nature of equilibrium, Walras tackled the mathematical proof for “how things hang together” (Schumpeter 242). Thus, though sacrifice does not have as overt a presence in Walras as in British economists, he reveals the social vision that underlies theories of modern equilibrium and makes evident why the invisible hand has gripped the economic imagination.

As a member of the ‘marginal’ revolution, Walras developed similar theories of relative value and exchange. Like Jevons, Walras’s *Elements of Pure Economics* (1874, 1877, 1889, 1900, 1926) defines value according to the pleasure derived from the last incremental addition of a good, what he terms rareté. Maximum satisfaction occurs when the equilibrium price of goods is equal to the ratios of raretés (Walras 145). Whenever there is a shift in raretés, this shift will be registered in the prices of all goods and equilibrium will have to reestablish itself. Unlike Jevons, however, Walras was more successful in presenting a mathematical theory of how the economy simultaneously determines the stationary equilibrium price for all goods in terms of the invariable standard such that demand equals supply and the cost of production equals the selling price. Walras’s innovation was to present production and exchange as a set of simultaneous equations where the number of equations corresponded to the number of
variables in the economic system, what is now referred to as general equilibrium. The
question was how the relative prices of goods emerge through a system of free
competition such that the relative prices are identical to the unknown variables in the
equations (Blaug Retrospect 577-578). These variables consist of the quantities of goods
exchanged and their equilibrium prices. Walras integrates a theory of exchange and
production to form four systems of equations: 1) equations for each trader that equates
the rareté of goods consumed with their relative prices; 2) equations that equate the total
quantity of goods demanded with that supplied; 3) equations for each product that equate
its selling price to cost of production; and 4) equations for each productive service (e.g.
labor) where its demand equals its supply (Jaffé 228-229). In this manner, the equations
represent the interdependence of variables that determine equilibrium prices for all goods
in a static model of the economy (Daal and Jolink 30). Walras famously asserts that the
economy tries to solves these equations and determine a unique equilibrium price for all
goods through the “process of groping” or, “par tâtonnement” (170). The Paris stock
market serves as Walras’s real world model for the automatic adjustment of prices, where
traders under conditions of perfect competition call out prices until the equilibrium price
for all goods is achieved and demand equals supply (Walras 84-85, Daal and Jolink 8-9,
110).

Walras explicitly states, however, that the theory of general equilibrium describes
a social ideal the economy tends toward if and only if two conditions operate: perfect
competition and land reform. Walras saw his theory of general equilibrium under
conditions of perfect competition as addressing issues of commutative and distributive
justice by eliminating monopoly incomes (Walsh and Gram 154). As William Jaffé
states, Walras’s static theory of general equilibrium is an “ideal fiction of ‘commutative justice’” under conditions of perfect competition, a “terrestrial utopia” in which the economy achieves social justice (Jaffé 346, 349). He interprets the uniform, equilibrium price to be a “condition of social justice” and relies on the perfect market to perform the moral functions of eliminating unjust profits and establishing balances of justice (qtd. in Jaffé 328, 330).

The theory of exchange establishes commutative justice while land reform establishes distributive justice. In order for perfect competition to occur, the state would have to intervene by becoming, as Mill suggests, the “universal landlord.” Through a program of land nationalization, the government taxes individuals for land rent and eliminates income taxes (Jolink 118). By eliminating land monopolies, each individual has equal opportunity and all function as capitalists in an ideal, “rational society” where the economic framework supports perfect competition (Cirillo 215). Social laws create distributive justice while reciprocal exchange eliminates unjust profits and results in commutative justice. At the beginning of the Elements, Walras distinguishes his scientific analysis of economic phenomena from human sciences that deal with the relationship between persons which requires the consideration of the ends and aims of many individuals in a society wherein “these ends and aims have to be mutually co-ordinated” (63). The ‘pure theory’ of exchange represents this mutual coordination in the abstract realm of economic exchange, an abstraction that is made realistic when synthesized with Walras’s social project and governmental changes. We can see in Walras the full realization of exchange as the coordination of multiple actors who represent an imagined communality, a community that, like Ruskin’s boat, achieves social justice through interdependence and mutuality.
From Smith’s early metaphor of the invisible hand to Walras’s system of simultaneous equations, the marketplace functions as a virtual community in which our acts become transformed into a consistent, harmonic whole based on the values of justice and reciprocity in exchange. The concept of equilibrium, whether conceived as a real or theoretical state, denotes an economic system grounded on principles of reciprocal exchange even as it promotes agonistic motives. While political economists like Bentham and Mill conceive of self-interest as the means by which individual actions are transformed into a collective whole, they equally attribute social cohesion to the progressive capacity for self-sacrifice. Economic equilibrium, in this regard, denotes the social equilibrium of a society whose economic life is ultimately guided by the values of self-sacrifice and social solidarity. The marketplace, however, not only serves as a canvas on which political economists paint social ideals but also functions as a medium for sharing information. Though the vastness of the modern capitalist marketplace delimits the intimacy experienced in face-to-face interactions, objective phenomena such as wages and prices publicly communicate to all that they participate in the joint act of exchange. The matrix of relative prices visibly manifests the result of countless, invisible actions and implicitly indicates the values, preferences, and principles upon which individuals act and in which their actions remain inextricably connected. Nineteenth-century anthropologists explored the social equilibrium, solidarity, and reciprocity that ‘primitive’ societies upheld and consecrated through rites of sacrifice—practices that, in their own society, were enacted in the context of economic exchange. In this regard, Ruskin’s work highlights the displacement of political economic themes onto the perceived communality and sacrificial practices of ‘primitive’ society. His synthesis of
reciprocity, self-sacrifice, and just exchange as a “rite” of reciprocal sacrifice reveals a logic latent to nineteenth-century political economy: exchange, like ritual, coordinates our actions as one social body and engenders the experience of communality based on the values of reciprocity and self-sacrifice. Capitalism offers an idealized representation of society in which individuals imagine their discrete economic transactions as participating in a larger communal framework through reciprocal acts of exchange.
Where would Britons be, the narrator of Eliot’s *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) asks, if the “loves and sanctities” attached to old things did not counterbalance the drive for self-betterment that distinguishes the Briton from “the foreign brute” (133)? While Eliot distinguishes the attachment to objects laden with memories from the propulsive movement of capital, the self-conscious relationship to things she identifies actually arises within the culture of capitalism rather than occupying a position either prior or counter to it. The description of beloved objects as “household gods,” or Lares, in novels such as *The Mill on the Floss, The Way We Live Now* (1874-75), and *Dombey and Son* (1846-48) indicates an effort to utilize the materiality of things and their attendant associations to secure value within the home. In an era in which the abstract and insubstantial nature of exchange value had replaced an earlier economy reliant on the stable, intrinsic value of land, the phrase “household gods” illustrates a straddling

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67 In pursuing the configuration of things as “household gods” in several mid-Victorian novels, I will be interpreting “household gods” as an aspect of what Elaine Freedgood has called “Victorian thing culture” (8). The Victorian culture of things, argues Freedgood, exceeds Marx’s description of commodity fetishism. Victorian representation of things in realist novels, while influenced by the abstraction of exchange value and the spectacularization of things in a consumer culture, also functions as a “metonymic archive” that references an array of social relations that commodity fetishism does not encapsulate (7-8, 84). The present argument follows the intuitions of critics such as Elaine Freedgood and Bill Brown in deemphasizing the reduction of human relations to things as a type of commodity fetishism by investigating the other values ascribed to objects within Victorian culture and, specifically, how “household gods” gestures toward notions of the sacred, relative values, and kinship in Victorian novels. For Bill Brown’s comments on the restricted analysis of object relations as commodity fetishism, see *A Sense of Things* 13-14, 27-30.
between two economic models. The novels by Eliot, Dickens, and Trollope demonstrate how the circulation of commodities, rather than presenting a contrast to the stability of land and its intrinsic values, can be sacralized as a household god and then used to refer back to the very land-based economy that the culture of the commodity had displaced.

The connection between household gods, land, and national culture is longstanding in literature. In the famous example of Virgil’s *The Aeneid*, for example, Aeneas flees the razed city of Troy bearing the family’s Lares and Penates, the household gods, and transplants them anew in Italy. Remarking on Aeneas’s relocation of his household gods, James Buzard states that in novels like Bronte’s *Villette* (1853), British movables become “household gods” and powerful symbols of collective identity that individuals can carry with them when estranged from the locus of national culture (257). In *Waverley* (1814), Scott also draws on this connection in *The Aeneid* between household gods, land, and national culture. When Baron Bradwardine returns to his estate and sees that it has been restored by Colonel Talbot, he acts surprised and tells Talbot that “I cannot but marvel that you, Colonel, whom I have noted to have so much *amor patriae*…should have chosen to establish your Lares, or household gods, *procul a patriae finibus*, and in a manner to expatriate yourself” (Scott 486-487). Of course, rather than expatriate himself, the Colonel has restored the land and estate to the Baron and the marriage of alliance between Waverley and Rose signals the reconciliation of England and Scotland. Jonson’s estate poem “To Penhurst” expands the association of land and household gods by linking it to the hearth as well. Jonson offers a seemingly unperturbed and idyllic relationship between the “Penates” of Sidney’s hearth and its ties to the rural countryside.
In the mid-Victorian novels I discuss, however, the connections between land, household gods, and hearth grow strained. Though Victorian writers also rely on the classical import that the term household gods or Lares confers, they are more freewheeling in their applications. Thus, for example, rather than present the countryside, hearth, and lares as inextricably tied (as in Johnson), Dickens applies the term to the pleasures of the hearth alone. Commenting on his literary success after *The Pickwick Papers* (1836-37), Dickens says that “[t]o be numbered amongst the household gods of one’s distant countrymen, and associated with their homes and quiet pleasures; to be told that in each nook and corner of the world’s great mass there lives one well-wisher who holds communion with one in the spirit, is a worthy fame, indeed” (M. Dickens 66). Dickens relates “household gods” to the home and hearth and the fellowship he establishes with a community of readers who, presumably, read his serialized work by the fireside. Similarly, reviewers of Dickens’s work praised him for his depictions of domestic life, his “deep reverence for the household sanctities, his enthusiastic worship of the household gods.”

In addition to its ties to the hearth, household gods also came to be used as an expression of aesthetic taste. In a short story published in *Household Words*, the narrator begins the story by stating that “[o]f all the false household gods, that are not gods, but demons—of all the hideous skeletons that mope and mow in corners of peaceful dwellings, there is nothing more detestable than a thoroughly bad and new piano” (“Pianoforte” 58). Compared with the gravitas the phrase Lares and Penates

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denotes in the classical world, such clichéd Victorian usages seem comical, if not empty.\textsuperscript{69}

This loose and polyvalent usage of the phrase “household gods” reflects the method of Victorian writers, as well as the problem they seek to address. Victorian writers exploit the mobility of commodities and the relativity of value itself in order to resignify commodities as emblems of the sacred and intrinsic value once they enter the home and become associated with the hearth and land. In dramatizing the process by which commodities becomes sacralized into household gods as they enter the domestic space Victorian novels rely on, what James Thompson has referred to as, “an ideological regrounding of intrinsic value” in the domestic sphere and in love (21). As the economy shifts away from notions of absolute value, symbolized in inalienable possessions like land, the deification of the home into a “sacred place” becomes a crucial ideological step in the reconstitution of fluid values. Ruskin’s \textit{Sesame and Lilies} (1865), in particular, explicitly ties the phrase household gods to the ideology of separate spheres and the separation of the sacred space of the home from the polluting forces of the public sphere. Home, Ruskin famously states, is

\begin{quote}
the place of Peace; the shelter, not only from all injury, but from all terror, doubt, and division….so far as the anxieties of the outer life penetrate into it, and the inconsistently-minded, unknown, unloved, or hostile society of the outer world is allowed by either husband or wife to cross the threshold, it ceases to be home….But so far as it is a sacred place, a vestal temple, a temple of the hearth watched over by Household Gods…it vindicates the name, and fulfills the praise, of home. (18:122)
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{69}Alexander Welsh remarks that the worship of “household gods” in Victorian novels seems pre-Christian, but became connected, especially in Dickens, with the sanctity of the domestic and affections. The religion of the domestic redeems individuals from the disaffected modern city and substitutes the home for Augustine’s city of god (147-148). The association with domesticity, however, conceals the phrase’s pre-Christian overtones. Unlike her contemporaries, George Eliot’s \textit{Sils Marner} acknowledges that the nineteenth-century’s religion of the hearth continued an ancient form of fetishism (Welsh 160-162).
The irony of Ruskin’s statement about household gods is that the outer world does continuously “cross the threshold” through the commodities that enter the home from the marketplace. The doctrine of separate spheres, while by no means deployed historically with the rigor of its paradigmatic divisions, reinscribes the problem of absolute and relative value within the division of private and public spheres. As critics such as Mary Poovey and Nancy Armstrong have noted, the rhetoric of separate spheres indicates a prevalent Victorian middle-class construct in which the deification of the home and the non-working, middle-class wife functions to delimit the incursion of capitalist market forces even as the domestic realm was constituted by capitalist economics (Armstrong Desire 47-48, Poovey Uneven 76-78). The identification of the middle-class woman’s role in the domestic sphere and her intrinsic virtue transforms the home into a locale where the alienated experience of the self in the marketplace could be unified through feminine affection and self-sacrifice (Poovey Uneven 2, 77).

The fiction of the home as a sacred refuge figuratively transforms the status of commodities from profane goods in the marketplace to sacred objects inhabiting the home. Feminine self-sacrifice and wifely devotion, the hallmarks of Patmore’s domestic angel, provide the rhetorical means by which Victorians imagine the transformation process that objects undergo as they move from the profane realm of fluid and circulating values to the sacred realm of the home where things are no longer alienable and the patriarchal organization of the home stabilizes value. Here we see, in modified form, a repetition of the pattern found earlier in my analysis of Ruskin and nineteenth-century political economy: in order to stabilize value, these thinkers conjoin value with versions of the sacred and notions of labor as self-sacrifice, emphasizing the social relations such
sacrifice enables in addition to the profit generated for the individual. Victorian novels articulate this paradigm through the disinterested labor and self-sacrifice of the middle-class woman, whose sacrifice facilitates the transformation of relative value into absolute value, the profane into the sacred. Ruskin’s use of the phrase “household gods” thus enables us to read the movement of commodities from the market to the home as silently undergoing a sacralization process—a process that then reestablishes a locus for intrinsic value in the home.

The narrator’s comment in *The Mill on the Floss*, with which I began, presents another element to Victorian fascination with household gods. While Britons may have used the slogan of progress and capitalist expansion to distinguish themselves from “the foreign brute,” anthropologists at the time expressed great interest in the relationship such ‘foreign brutes’ established between their groups and things. Tylor’s object lessons in *Researches into the Primitive History of Mankind* (1865) and Pitt-Rivers’s *The Evolution of Culture and Other Essays* (1906) offer utilitarian analyses of objects, ranking groups in the progressive hierarchy of civilization based on the sophistication of the objects they made. Yet, in addition to the analysis of tools and weapons within the teleology of progress, anthropologists were also interested in the meaning of fetishes and totems. In the arguments that raged between McLennan, Tylor, Frazer, Lang, and Robertson Smith over the significance of the totem and its difference from the fetish or idol, Victorian anthropologists interpret totems as the means by which groups organized sexuality, fertility, group obligations, and economic reproduction. But like Eliot’s false opposition of the attachment to things and capitalism’s rhetoric of self-improvement, the values that British anthropologists ascribe to totems represent a set of relations that reflect British
rather than primitive concerns regarding the relationship between family, sexuality, property, value, and the sacred—a set of relations that Victorian novels articulate through their treatment of household gods. Hence, the household god not only signals a process of sacralization wherein the woman’s position within the home allows her to transform commodities from the profane realm of the public sphere into markers of intrinsic value and the sacred, it also demonstrates how household gods functioned as totems, insuring sexual and economic reproduction through its linkage to the ideology of separate spheres. The entry of the marketplace into the home in the novels by Eliot, Dickens, and Trollope, ushers in forces of contamination that threaten the endogamous, patriarchal family arrangements and the very separation of spheres that household gods commemorate. Thus, whenever these contaminating elements take over the home, alienating household gods from their seclusion within the domestic space, they also initiate a process that undermines, if not wholly destroys, the family’s sexual and economic reproduction. Value, the separation of spheres, and the gendering of roles needed to sacralize objects within the home, become destabilized.

In tracking the movement of household gods in the three novels by Dickens, Eliot, and Trollope, this chapter will pursue several interrelated lines of thought: the problem of intrinsic vs. relative value, the processes of contamination and resacralization that the space of the home and commodities undergo in novelistic efforts to secure intrinsic value and transform commodities into households gods, the gendered role that women play in families and how this enables them to sacralize things and domestic spaces, and the connection between household gods and anthropological discussions of the totem and taboo in figures like Frazer, McLennan, and Robertson Smith. The goal of the chapter is,
then, two-fold. I not only want to identify the specific synthesis of economic and religious ideas that novelists forge in their use of the phrase “household gods” as they try to secure value and the familial arrangements that underwrite it, but I also want to show how this reveals the economic and sociopolitical underpinnings of anthropological arguments on fetishes and totems. To what degree are both novelists and anthropologists exploring how a group’s relationship to sacred objects stabilizes value and familial arrangements so as to control economic and sexual reproduction? In pursuing these concerns, I will begin by discussing the problem of value in Eliot, Dickens, and Trollope—a problem that they articulate in terms of the intrinsic value of land and the fluid values associated with capitalist speculation, figured through other organic substances such as water or sand. In the second section, I outline how the entry of fluid values into the home results in its contamination, the loss of household gods, and a state of fallenness that marks both woman and home. While these narratives attribute the loss of household gods to external forces, they in fact unearth the instability of the sacred. Just as the household god conceals that it was once a commodity, so it conceals the sacred’s mutual relation to the profane. In the third and final section, I discuss the strategies that Trollope, Dickens, and Eliot employ to reconstitute household gods once they have been threatened by contaminants. In yoking the problem of value, sacred objects, patriarchal inheritance, and issues of gender and sexuality, these novels illuminate the ways in which Victorian anthropologists examined the cultural concerns of their time. Instead of depicting British relationships to things, however, anthropologists investigate how non-European communities stabilized value and the transmission of
property through patriarchal kinship and controlled both sexual and economic
reproduction through their relationship to sacred things.

I The Problem of Value

The novels by Eliot, Dickens, and Trollope represent the transition from an
economy founded on the inalienability of land to a system of capitalist exchange
grounded in commodity circulation, speculation, and imperial finance through the
contrast established between the organic metaphors of land and that of water or sand. In
The Mill on the Floss Eliot relates the familiar tale of modernization and its disruptive
effects through her symbolic portrayal of the Floss and the Tullivers’s mill in the village
of St. Ogg. While St. Ogg appears to be a “continuation and outgrowth of nature,” a
community symbolizing the eternal process of organic unfolding, Eliot repeatedly
undercuts the durability of such a nostalgic vision of the past by depicting the trade and
capitalist industry that intrude on St. Ogg (Eliot 101). As Joshua Esty remarks, Eliot
dramatizes the transition between pre-modern to capitalist St. Ogg in the opening passage
of the novel (102), wherein “black ships—laden with the fresh-scented fir-planks, with
rounded sacks of oil-bearing seed, or with the dark glitter of coal” interrupt the
Wordsworthian description of nature and the natural embrace of the Floss’s waves (Eliot
7). As an emblem of Heraclitean flux, Eliot contrasts the fluidity of economic values
associated with water to land’s intrinsic value and fixity. Yet, the Floss plays a dual role
in the novel, simultaneously denoting permanence and impermanence: the river and mill
that Maggie memorializes as the refuge of her youth also becomes the conduit for the
very financial upheavals that later leave the Tullivers bankrupt. Even as the narrator
recollects the fixture of Dorlcote Mill, she envisions the “unresting wheel sending out its
diamond jets of water” (Eliot 8). Eliot’s nostalgic portrait of St. Ogg and the Floss that runs through it is double-voiced throughout, consecrating the stable world of the past through the narrator’s retrospective gaze, yet continuously reminding the reader in its nostalgia that, as Mrs. Deane laments, “this is a changing world” (Eliot 181).

In the midst of this changing world, Eliot presents the varied avenues taken by the members of the extended family in response to the abstract nature of value and exchange in an increasingly capitalist culture. While Mr. Glegg and Mr. Deane rise economically through manly self-reliance, saving, and speculation, the gentleman farmer Mr. Pullet adheres to an old-fashioned conception of investment, not seeing how “a man could have any security for his money unless he turned it into land” (Eliot 85). Edward Tulliver stands between the Deanes and Pullets. Though he owns land, the location of the mill by the river and its dependence on water for power metaphorically suggests that, unlike Pullet, he cannot remain impervious to economic or technical changes. The flood that concludes the novel heightens the liminal and transitional position of the mill and the Tulliver home, which is both fixed and threatened by the destructive force of the river. During the flood, Maggie rows home and “[begins] to discern the objects that she knew must be the well-known trees and roofs” (Eliot 456). But when she finally arrives, she is unsure of what she sees. “And the roof of the Mill, where was it? Those heavy fragments hurrying down the Ripple—what had they meant? But it was not the house—the house stood firm: drowned up to the first story, but firm—or was it broken in at the end towards the Mill?” (Eliot 457). The narrator undermines the assuredness with which Maggie perceives the house’s fixity, leaving the reader uncertain whether the house was broken by the flood or not. As Tom explains to her on her arrival, part of the mill had fallen with
crashing trees and drifted with the detritus of the passing flood. Despite this clear statement on the status of the mill, Eliot leaves the fate of the home unclear. Even at the very end of the novel, for example, the narrator states that Dorlcote Mill was later rebuilt, but she does not mention the fate of the home. Eliot’s allegorical treatment of the Tullivers’s land, mill, and home as a stable referent for intrinsic value and an older agricultural economy stands in contrast to the fluid circulation of values that govern capitalist speculation represented by the Floss. Within this newer economy, Maggie’s misperceptions of the mill and home after the flood replicate the pattern of misapprehensions that leads to the Tullivers’s economic downfall.

A successful transition into the changing economy, Eliot suggests, requires an understanding of and comfort with the watery world of fungible capital that the Tullivers do not possess. By contrast, Bob Jakin becomes a model of capitalist enterprise through his prosperity as a packman and his exportation of Laceham linens. This ability to manipulate the relativity of values in a capitalist economy, as Knoepfelmacher points out, corresponds to Bob’s amphibian-like adaptability to both land and water (210). Bob’s capacity to shuttle between two models of value manifests itself in the chivalry and deference he expresses toward Maggie and Tom based on their earlier status as landowners and yet his ability to turn the ten sovereigns he was given for putting out a fire into capital. Rather than adapting to the “changing world,” however, Mr. Tulliver resists change and battles it legally through a series of lawsuits that ruin him financially. Eliot makes clear that Tulliver does not understand the new economy that Pivart’s irrigations and the introduction of steam-power represent. As Tulliver himself remarks, “water’s a very particular thing—you can’t pick it up with a pitchfork. That’s why it’s
been nuts to Old Harry and the lawyers. It’s plain enough what’s the rights and wrongs of water, if you look at it straightforward; for a river’s a river, and if you’ve got a mill, you must have water to turn it…” (Eliot 137). But of course, it is not straightforward and Tulliver’s dictum that “water was water” (Eliot 139), actually evinces his ignorance. The insubstantial nature of water—that you cannot pick it up with a pitchfork—distances the logic of agricultural farming with which Tulliver remains familiar from the new economic system and dematerialized values that the flux of water symbolizes.

Tulliver’s misapprehension that “water was water” parallels his misapprehension of capitalist finance and the abstract nature of exchange value within capitalism. This poor facility with abstractions leads him to mismanage his funds since he neither fully comprehends, nor keeps careful notation of, loans and interest. In contrast to Mrs. Glegg, who he satirically claims does not “give” anything but only lends at 5% interest, Tulliver loans his money without attending to either its interest rate or the payment of its capital. After he loans £300 to his sister Gritty and her husband, Tulliver allows the interest to accumulate and never collects on the principal. Tulliver later visits the Mosses, intent on collecting payment for the loan, but vacillates on his decision. Tulliver remains caught between two economic systems: on the one hand, he gives his money as a loan and retains a promissory note, but on the other hand, he sees his money as a gift to his sister that should never be collected. Tulliver’s decision not to collect on his loan, as well as his decision to have Tom burn the promissory note, expresses his struggle to reconcile gift and capitalist economies (Blake 219). Mr. and Mrs. Glegg, who epitomize thrift, self-interest, and Smilesian self-help, can only shake their heads at his foolish economic behavior and decry “such recklessness as destroying securities or alienating anything
important enough to make an appreciable difference in a man’s property” (Eliot 191). Eliot presents an ironic contrast between Tulliver’s loyalty to his sister and economic sacrifice to Mrs. Glegg’s unwillingness to compromise her avariciousness despite her self-congratulatory remarks on her loyalty to “kin.”

Though the novel valorizes Tulliver’s emotional attachment to his sister, it also underscores his poor financial reasoning. Tulliver’s “gift” to his sister would not have been a problem if it did not add to his legal debts: the £2000 mortgage on his house, the unpaid investment of £50 that Luke gave towards the mill, and the £250 surety on Riley. In the midst of this, Tulliver commits himself to paying £100 for Tom’s education, hoping that it would lead to a financially lucrative career. He takes out loans to pay loans, not realizing that eventually his debts would outweigh his assets. Tulliver has no sense of how much money he has, and his later attempts in the novel to speculate in corn result in losses. He conceives of money only in its materiality, as the medium of simple exchange, but not as the means to increase capital. This is why Tom did not want to appeal to him for help in his speculative investments.

He would rather not have consulted his father, but he had just paid his last quarter’s money into the tin box, and there was no other resource. All the savings were there; for Mr. Tulliver would not consent to put money out at interest lest he should lose it. Since he had speculated in the purchase of some corn and had lost by it, he could not be easy without keeping the money under his eye. (Eliot 274)

Tulliver only feels secure in his finances when he can see the money physically before him. The abstractions required for capitalist speculation are beyond his reach and, as his bankruptcy proves, lead to accounting errors (Blake 222-223). Like his reaction to water, then, Tulliver thinks money is money, and yet this too seems to be something he cannot pick up with a pitchfork. In denoting the “mysterious fluctuations of trade,” the
insubstantiality of water parallels the impenetrability of money, capitalist speculation,
and the nature of value itself.

Equally concerned with the impact of modernization, Dickens’s *Dombey and Son*
presents the railway boom of the 1840s, rather than steam, as the newest industrial agent
transforming Britain’s landscape and economy. Written in the wake of the 1844 Bank
Act, the 1846 Repeal of the Corn Laws, and rampant railway speculation, Dickens’s
*Dombey and Son* questions the nature of economic value in an era shifting from
traditional forms of wealth, such as landed property, to one guided by speculative capital,
credit, and free trade.70 As in *The Mill on the Floss*, this growing system of public credit,
debt, and speculation contributed to the increasing abstraction of exchange value.71 Mary
Poovey argues that the growing system of financial speculation led to the emergence of
financial journalism in the nineteenth century, which became a crucial appanage to the
financial practices of the banks and stock-markets. The listings of prices and exchange
rates, governmental blue books, and journalistic essays on financial policy and trading all
aimed at greater transparency in order to bolster public confidence in the financial
system. At the same time that they effected greater transparency, these financial writings
deftly balanced the disclosure of facts to the public with protecting details of financial

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70 Dickens composed his novel during the railways panics of 1847-1848, which ensued after excessive
speculation in railways. The collapse of railway shares in 1847, concomitant agricultural failures, and the
vulnerable credit system based on bills of exchange were factors that undermined the stability of the
economy and increased fears of insolvency (Weiss 25). Moreover, unlike the period depicted in Trollope’s
novel, companies like Dickens’s Dombey and Son were not as yet protected by the 1855 Limited Liability
Act, which restricted the financial responsibility of companies to shareholders should the company falter on
its debts. In contrast to investors like Fisker and Melmotte, Dombey represents an old-fashioned model of
the ‘man of business,’ which emphasizes personal pride and honesty in commerce. Hence, Dombey
embraces bankruptcy rather than making shareholders of his company subject to his debts.

71 This increasing insubstantiality of value arising from a culture of debt and credit, Brantlinger argues, gave
rise to the ‘imagined community’ of the British nation state, which was founded on the fetishized belief in
public credit. Thus, like the fetish itself, the nation state arises from an originary state of debt and absence.
See *Fictions of State* 20-26.
dealings.\textsuperscript{72} Despite Poovey’s historical claims about the transparency generated by such financial writing, in novels such as \textit{The Mill on the Floss} and \textit{Dombey and Son}, characters repeatedly grapple with the intangible aspect of speculative investment and credit that such writings strive to elucidate. Thus, for example, Captain Cuttle “felt bound to read the quotations of the Funds every day, though he was unable to make out, on any principle of navigation, what the figures meant, and could have very well dispensed with the fractions” (Dickens \textit{Dombey} 439). Dickens’s humorous characterization of Cuttle’s state of incomprehension proves to have graver consequences when the incomprehensible maze of speculative finance enables individuals to engage in duplicitous dealings. When Morfin describes to Harriet how Carker orchestrated the demise of Dombey and Son, Morfin states “[i]n the midst of the many transactions of the House, in most parts of the world: a great labyrinth of which only he has held the clue: he has had the opportunity…of keeping various results afloat…and substituting estimates and generalities for facts. But latterly—you follow me Miss Harriet?” To which Harriet provides the less than credible response, “[p]erfectly, perfectly” (Dickens \textit{Dombey} 843-844). As the convoluted passage conveys, neither Morfin nor Harriet understand Carker’s financial maneuverings, trafficking as he does in the insubstantial values of financial speculation rather than concrete entities. In a comment that exemplifies the novel’s attitude toward the mysteries of the stock exchange and credit culture, Sol Gills, the old-fashioned proprietor of the Wooden Midshipman, describes his bond in the following manner: “[i]t’s here and there, and—and, in short, it’s as good as nowhere” (Dickens \textit{Dombey} 184). Characters like Cuttle, Sol, and Harriet, cannot even grasp the

\textsuperscript{72}See Mary Poovey’s article “Writing about Finance in Victorian England: Disclosure and Secrecy in the Culture of Investment.”
language of the financial writings they come across, much less distinguish between information withheld and that made available to them. Instead, like Tulliver, they struggle to understand “the riddle of this world” (Eliot 316).

Similar to Eliot, Dickens responds to the increasing dematerialization of value by presenting the sea as a symbol for both the liquidities of capitalist speculation and its predication on imperialist trade. The “dark unknown sea that rolls all around the world” acquires varied symbolic meanings in the novel precisely because of its protean nature, never exclusively symbolizing death, the plenitude of sexual desire, or love, but exemplifies, in its various shifts of meaning, the problem of intrinsic value (Dickens Dombey 60). Dickens chronicles the movement from stable to less stable forms of value, from land to sea, in the walk Walter Gay takes to Captain Cuttle’s lodgings after learning of his uncle’s debts.

Captain Cuttle lived on the brink of a little canal near the India Docks, where there was a swivel bridge which opened now and then to let some wandering monster of a ship come roaming up the street like a stranded leviathan. The gradual change from land to water, on the approach to Captain Cuttle's lodgings, was curious. It began with the erection of flag-staffs, as appurtenances to public-houses; then came slop-sellers' shops .... These were succeeded by anchor and chain-cable forges....Then came rows of houses..... Then ditches. Then pollard willows. Then more ditches. Then unaccountable patches of dirty water, hardly to be descried, for the ships that covered them. Then, the air was perfumed with chips; and all other trades were swallowed up in mast, oar, and block-making, and boat-building. Then, the ground grew marshy and unsettled. Then, there was nothing to be smelt but rum and sugar. (Dickens Dombey 178-179)

Dickens organizes the shops, houses, commodities, and landscape into a series that unfolds contiguously in space and sequentially in time in order to manage the dizzying effects of free trade, which have swallowed up non-mercantile trades in the area. More significantly, Dickens’s narrative technique allows him to convey the threat of imperial trade and speculative finance, as the ground beneath Walter’s feet literally grows
“marshy and unsettled” at the periphery, where one smells nothing but the rum and sugar imported from the colonies. Dickens conveys his anxieties about the shift from an economic system rooted in land to less durable forms of wealth by connecting value’s instability to money’s origin in imperial trade and its ability to absorb everything that enters its purview like a “wandering monster.”

The troubling connections between unstable value, imperial trade, and money become clear in the famous passage in which Paul asks his father “Papa! what’s money?” (Dickens *Dombey* 152). Paul’s question about money is syntactically homologous to the one he later poses to his sister, “Floy…where’s India?,” a homology that points to the direct relationship the novel positions between money and empire (Dickens *Dombey* 171). If, as Dombey tells Paul, “money…can do anything [and is] a very potent spirit, never to be disparaged on any account whatever,” the effects of its fetishized powers remain unclear. Thus, just as Paul expressed dissatisfaction with Dombey’s equation of money with precious metals, Paul’s second question demands more than factual knowledge of India’s location. He wants “to understand what it was the waves were always saying and would…look toward that invisible region, far away” (Dickens *Dombey* 171). What the waves are saying, Dickens suggests, is that the sea that enables trade and connects nations to one another can also be a conduit for death and contamination when individuals fail to properly manage money’s fetishized powers. Financiers like Dombey do not fully understand the potency of money, driven as they are by self-interested pride, importing and exporting not only goods but contagion that infects both the British domestic spaces and foreign nations.
In what reads like a sudden polemic about the unjust effects of poor public health on the laboring poor, Dickens contends that the various forms of pollution that engulf English homes and “blight the innocent and spread contagion among the pure,” also contaminate the globe (Dickens *Dombey* 738). “Then should we see how the same poisoned fountains that flow into our hospitals and lazarhouses, inundate the jails, and make the convict-ships swim deep, and roll across the seas, and over-run vast continents with crime” (Dickens *Dombey* 738). Dickens begins the passage by questioning whether Dombey’s pride and desire to subdue Edith represented natural character traits, but he expands the question of nature to issues of public health. In what the narrator calls “this round world of many circles within circles” (579), London’s “poisoned fountains” participate in a centrifugal movement that spreads the corrupt and unnatural forces that have contaminated the British family to the seas around the world. Through the sudden shift in the narrative from Dombey’s character to issues of global contamination, Dickens suggests that contamination not only enters Britain from the colonies, but that the “unnatural” organization of Dombey’s family also contributes to the corrupt forces that travel the circuits of imperial finance and trade. Dickens views Dombey’s possessive hoarding of Fanny, Edith, and Paul as representative of the self-interested mindset that contaminates both the British domestic space and international waters. Similar to Dickens’s anxiety over the instability of value in a capitalist economy that relies on the infinite circulation of goods, however, he does not ascribe a privileged point of origin to the circulation of contaminating forces, which at some moments emanate from the colonies and at others from Britain.
Dickens’s portrayal of Dombey suggests that, without realizing it, Dombey becomes a carrier of contamination through the way he treats his family and conducts his business. Ironically, Dombey misrecognizes the possible source of contamination as emanating from the working classes rather than himself. When walking into the counting house, for example, Dombey sees himself as above contact with “the common world” of vendors who sell commodities in front of his firm, so much so that, as he nears the entrance to the building “the dealers in those wares fell off respectively” (Dickens Dombey 238, 237). Dickens contrasts Dombey’s avoidance of the ‘common world’ with his office and furniture, which appears “from the world without as if they were assembled at the bottom of the sea” or “a cavern of some ocean-monster” (Dickens Dombey 237). Not only do all items in Dombey’s office become metonymically associated with the sea and trade, but Dickens characterizes the specific type of deference that employees show Dombey as befitting someone titled “Caliph Haroun Alraschid” or “Sultan” (Dombey 238). Thus, while the offices of Carker and Morfin spatially function so as to delimit the common world’s access to Dombey’s office “through the medium of the outer office” (Dombey 238), Dickens’s application of an Arab name to Dombey reveals that, rather than evading the contamination of the common vendors, Dombey embodies the contaminants associated with empire.

The novel reiterates the negative connotations of empire as a source of contamination and the sea of fluid values through the villainous figure of Carker whose face resembles the pliability of “India-rubber” (Dickens Dombey 375). Carker is everywhere associated with the transmogrification of value, a man who conceals his feline stealth throughout a mask of deference and flattery. After Carker has run away
with Edith and ruined Dombey’s firm, he appears “transformed into the worst of villains” in Dombey’s eyes (935). Carker’s ability to transform himself according to the required context or interests identifies him with the transformative potential of money and capital. In Dombey’s confrontations with Edith, for example, Dombey calls on Carker to be a “medium of communication” (Dickens Dombey 745). As in Marx’s analysis of the transformation of simple commodity exchange in a barter economy to one mediated by money, Carker here functions as the third-term, transgressing the sanctity of domestic relations and mediating the most intimate of marital disturbances. Carker’s ability to change from context to context is symptomatic of capital’s fungibility and a culture in which perceived and real value have become difficult to distinguish.

The distinction between perceived and real value articulates the dominant concern of Trollope’s The Way We Live Now, which contrasts the fictive nature of stocks, credit, and public reputation to the moral and economic values tied to Britain’s aristocratic tradition and landed property. From the very beginning of the novel, Trollope connects the problem of reputation with the false foundations of the credit culture, where the mercurial belief in the value of persons and their accomplishments stands in marked contrast to their intrinsic values. Hence, the novel opens with Lady Carbury writing to Nicholas Broune, editor of the Morning Breakfast Table about the publication of her new book, Criminal Queens. Lady Carbury’s desire for good reviews of her book and her diatribe against those who achieve a greater literary reputation through a “system of puffing” rather than true accomplishment appears ironic in the novel since it is precisely this type of puffing that Lady Carbury hopes to gain by writing to Broune and other
influential editors (Trollope 14). Trollope’s characterization of Augustus Melmotte epitomizes this split between reputation and intrinsic value. Melmotte’s wealth, arising as it does from speculation, remains the subject of speculation throughout the novel. Trollope portrays the worth of Melmotte’s name, despite his ill-reputed character, and his reputation for wealth, despite any concrete foundation, as parallel phenomena and indicative of the pervasive credit culture. In this regard, Melmotte represents the latent logic between speculation and credit: in order to achieve credit and reputation with the London public, Melmotte has to have the appearance of wealth that only his “expenditure without limit” can accomplish (Trollope 178). If seeing is believing, Trollope warns, the trappings of wealth procured through credit lead people into a false confidence in Melmotte’s wealth. This connection between belief, credit, and the false foundations of wealth appears most forcefully in the novel’s treatment of the South Central Pacific and Mexican

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73 For a discussion of the connections between Lady Carbury’s literary production as a type of profiteering and counterfeit that mirrors the forgery committed by Melmotte and the Beargarden’s IOUs, see Brantlinger 166-167.
Railway, a project initiated by Melmotte and the company of Fisker, Montague, and Montague. “The object of Fisker, Montague, and Montague was not to make a railway to Vera Cruz, but to float a company. Paul thought that Mr. Fisker seemed to be indifferent whether the railway should ever be constructed or not. It was clearly his idea that fortunes were to be made out of the concern before a spadeful of earth has been moved” (Trollope 68). Paul Montague’s conflicted moral response to his role in the firm, as well as his general ignorance as to where the money for such ventures comes from, reveals the general problem with speculation that the novel poses: money gained through speculation relies on the belief that investors have in the venture itself and in the reputation of the firm. This belief lends Melmotte the air of reliability despite suspicion that there was no foundation to his wealth. “Mr. Melmotte was indeed so great a reality, such a fact in the commercial world of London, that it was no longer possible for such a one as Montague to refuse to believe in the scheme…But still there was a feeling of doubt, and a consciousness that Melmotte, though a tower of strength, was thought by many to have been built upon the sands” (Trollope 74). Similar to the anxieties expressed in Eliot and Dickens about the relativity of value in a capitalist economy, Trollope critiques an economy “built upon the sands” of belief, which has taken the place of the stable referent associated with land-based economies. The exploitative practices and fraud that occur in the era of stocks and speculation would never have taken place when “properties were properties” (Trollope 674). As Audre Jaffe remarks in her discussion of Trollope’s The Prime Minister, stocks can falter when founded on “irrational exuberance,” a kind of magical thinking in which people’s beliefs about the value of shares alone stands as a surety of their value.74 In the context of The Way We Live Now, the appetite for shares in

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74Jaffe takes the phrase “irrational exuberance” from Alan Greenspan, who coined the phrase to describe
Melmotte’s firm arises from the baseless belief in his wealth, but this belief incites actual investment and the accumulation of wealth from others. When Paul asks Fisker where the money for the railway will come from, for example, Fisker responds by saying, “[m]oney to come from, sir? Where do you suppose the money comes from in all these undertakings? If we can float the shares, the money’ll come quick” (Trollope 69). The novel suggests through Fisker’s statement that speculation, which relies on the belief in money that has no material existence, is synonymous with theft and gambling.

Trollope reiterates the typical bias against speculation as a form of gambling by comparing the circulation of Melmotte’s railway shares in London’s financial district with the idle young aristocrats at the Beargarden club who float IOUs for their gambling debts without exchanging “ready money.” The implicit parallel between the world of stock-exchange and the club surfaces in the name, Beargarden. Robert Tracy claims that “in commercial slang bear means stock that exists purely for speculation (the phrase “sell a bear,” means to sell something one does not possess), and a garden is a place where one is betrayed and defrauded” (Trollope 165). Such negative connotations persist in Trollope’s novel despite David Itzkowitz’s claim that the increased deregulation of speculation and increasing regulation of gambling from the 1860s to 1880s purged speculation of its association with gambling, domesticating speculation into another reputable form of investment like land (123-129). The historical shift that Itzkowitz analyzes, however, does not emerge in Trollope’s portrayal of British finance in *The Way We Live Now*, committed as it is to a nostalgic portrait of an old economy in which

the overvaluation of emotions and positive feeling that motivate individuals to invest in the stock market (Jaffe “Trollope” 45).
intrinsic value arises from investment in property rather than the fluctuations of stocks and speculation.

Melmotte, better than anyone in the novel, understands how much the shifting ground of public belief controls credit and his ability to spur the investment and exchange of real money and property. When Paul Montague threatens to publish a statement in the newspapers stating that he could not vouch for the sound financial foundations of the company, Melmotte warns him that “unanimity is the very soul of these things” (Trollope 313), demonstrating the extent to which any doubt as to his wealth would ruin him financially. This is precisely what happens at the end of the novel when rumors of Melmotte’s forgery spread and create a panic, which drives down the ticket value for his grand dinner party and the shares of his railway firm. Melmotte recognizes that public opinion is the scale on which the values of shares, like his own reputation, fluctuate. Explaining the deleterious effect the rumor of his impending arrest for forgery has had on his shares to Lord Nidderdale, Melmotte states “…you don’t understand how delicate a thing is credit. They persuaded a lot of men to stay away from that infernal dinner, and consequently it was spread about town that I was ruined. The effect upon shares which I held was instantaneous and tremendous” (Trollope 566). Trollope’s novel narrates Melmotte’s rise and fall to expose the risks of a credit culture where wealth is rooted in the flux of speculation rather than land, which stands for the “real” in Trollope’s novel (Brantlinger 171). Precisely because Melmotte consciously manipulates public belief in stock values, he is aware that “real wealth” lies in land and not in the very shares he circulates. Yet, it is only through the appearance of wealth that he can have access to real wealth. Melmotte’s excessive expenditure allows him, like Lady Carbury, to “puff” up
his reputation and through the acquisition of such a reputation to acquire real property. It remains Melmotte’s goal throughout the novel to use his reputation and influence to marry his daughter Marie, believed to be an “heiress,” to a titled gentleman who owns property. As he tells Felix, “property cannot be destroyed.” Despite Melmotte’s recognition of land’s security, the novel bars him from ever attaining the mark of legitimacy that ownership of land confers and, in so doing, denies him the status of a gentleman.

Trollope not only contrasts the intrinsic value of land and its fixity to the fictional value of stocks and baseless credit, but he also equates the way in which people accumulate and handle money with gentlemanly character (Jaffe “Trollope” 46). Roger Carbury represents a model of gentlemanly character and one of the few landed families that had not recently acquired the land but, the narrator claims, had possessed it since the War of the Roses.

Now the Carburys never had anything but land. Suffolk has not been made rich and great either by coal or iron. No great town had sprung up on the confines of the Carbury property. No eldest son had gone into trade or risen high in a profession so as to add to the Carbury wealth. No great heiress had been married. There had been no ruin,—no misfortune. But in the days of which we write the Squire of Carbury Hall had become a poor man simply through the wealth of others….The Longestaffes of Caversham,—of which family Dolly Longestaffe was the eldest son and hope,—had the name of great wealth, but the founder of the family had been a Lord Mayor of London and a chandler as lately as in the reign of Queen Anne. The Hepworths, who could boast good blood enough on their own side, had married into new money. The Primeros,—though the good nature of the country folk had accorded to the head of them the title of Squire Primero,—had been trading Spaniards fifty years ago, and had bought the Bundlesham property from a great duke. The estates of those three gentlemen, with the domain of the Bishop of Elmham, lay all around the Carbury property, and in regard to wealth enabled their owners altogether to overshadow our squire. (Trollope 45)
Roger represents the only character in the novel who unswervingly adheres to absolute values, a moral solicitude that Trollope links to his relationship with land. Neither Roger nor the property his family has passed down since the fifteenth century, have ever become tainted by any association with trade or speculative finance. Roger’s unwillingness to engage in commercial trade and his continuation of a feudal economy explains his lack of economic growth. Roger Carbury does not “puff” up his reputation for wealth through expenditure or marry wealth. Unlike the Melmottes, Beargarden members, and the neighboring families in Suffolk, Roger believes that “a man’s standing should not depend at all upon his wealth” (Trollope 46). Trollope uses the figure of Roger to show that the ethical management of one’s finances and how one acquires wealth does say something about a man’s standing. The difference between a land-owner like Carbury and a man with mere wealth is, as Audre Jaffe comments, the “absence of care” (“Trollope” 52). Ruby Ruggles, for example, realizes that John Crumb’s honorable treatment makes him the real gentleman and not Felix, despite the latter’s baronetcy. Yet, Trollope wants to have it both ways: he wants to say that simply accumulating the trappings of wealth does not make a gentleman. At the same time, however, Trollope uses Roger to denote an evanescent value system in which wealth and social status are synonymous with moral character. Whereas Trollope initially presents a critical portrait of Melmotte for disentangling gentlemanly character and wealth, Trollope must do the same in order, ironically, to show that Roger’s character and wealth is tied to the durability of land.

II The Destruction of Household Gods
The natural metaphors of water and sand represent but one means by which writers like Dickens, Eliot, and Trollope figuratively represent the transition from an economy founded on the sacred and intrinsic value of land as an inalienable property to a fluid system of capitalist exchange, speculation, and imperial finance. The polarized depiction of land versus water, intrinsic versus relative values, however, parallels an equally important narrative strain whereby characters either successfully or unsuccessfully manage the labile nature of value in their efforts to reconstitute absolute value. Specifically, the novels by Dickens, Trollope, and Eliot rely on an ideological separation of public and private spheres wherein the woman’s separation from the market transforms commodities into household gods, making them markers of intrinsic value and the sacred rather than the profane realm of the marketplace and its unstable values. These novels demonstrate how characters manipulate the contingency of value and the sacred only then to erase such efforts. Yet, in doing so, the phrase household god discloses the contradiction inherent in such oppositions: only because the forces of the market already inhabit the home and only because value constitutes itself in a relational context can a commodity in one context connote the filth of money or commercial life and in another the sacred space of the domestic. As a result of this contradiction, the household gods and the sanctity of the domestic space they symbolize are continuously threatened with contamination—a contamination that the novels locate as the entry of capitalist forces into the home from without. Such contamination, when figured, coincides with the interpenetration of the sexual and economic realms that leave both woman and home in a state of fallenness and bereft of the household gods that symbolize the family’s healthy economic and sexual reproduction.
Because the reconstitution of absolute value and the sacred in the form of household gods implicitly relies on the malleability of value, the sacralization of objects remains tenuously contingent, subject to the very reversibility that agents try to manipulate. The contingency of the sacred becomes the focal point of James Frazer’s discussion of the taboo and the double process that renders objects either sacred or profane. In his 1878 *Encyclopaedia Brittanica* entry “Taboo,” Frazer defines the taboo as something made sacred, either by bringing it into relation with a god or separating it from its common usage; the taboo, he states, “might be general or particular, permanent or temporary” (“Taboo” 15). After identifying the contingency of the sacred, Frazer goes on to describe the mutual implication of the sacred and accursed. “The opposition of the sacred and accursed, clean and unclean, which plays so important a part in the later history of religion, did in fact arise by differentiation from the single root idea of taboo, which includes and reconciles them both and by reference to which their history and mutual relation are intelligible” (Frazer “Taboo” 16-17). While both Frazer and Robertson Smith view the progressive polarization of clean/unclean, sacred/accursed as a sign of advancing civilization, Frazer alludes to the taboo’s enduring significance for his audience by commenting that “even in advanced societies, the moral sentiments…derive much of their force from an original system of taboo” (“Taboo” 17). In the context of our discussion of household gods, Victorian writers narrate the way in which the very commodities that were produced in the profane realm of the public sphere become sacred

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Frazer’s description of “taboo” resembles the effect of the fetish insofar as the double process and state of contingency that characterize the taboo appears in Freud’s definition of the fetish form as the oscillation “between the disavowal and the acknowledgement of castration” (157). Derrida similarly concentrates on the indeterminacy of the fetish as it shuttles between contraries. In their representation of the individual’s relationship to things, the Victorian writers I examine manipulate the state of indeterminacy in order to reposition the taboo object in a determined state of being sacred (Pietz 125).
once they are brought into relation with women in the domestic realm. In doing so, they contradict the privileged position given to immovables like land over less fixed forms of property. As the eighteenth-century legal historian William Blackstone remarks on the distinction between immovables like land and movable chattels, early British legislators regarded personal property such as money, household goods, and jewels with less esteem because they represented a “transient commodity” (354). Whereas laws deemed land to be sacred and inviolable property, movable wealth was marked by its “precarious duration” (357). Household gods deftly manipulates such contingency and mobility, as well as the mutual relation of the sacred and accursed exemplified by the taboo, in order to consecrate accursed things such as money and commodities as sacred. The very object that relies on the “mutual implication of the sacred and accursed,” however, is then deployed to reference a value system that starkly contrasts absolute from relative value, sacred from accursed.

This transformation of everyday commodities into sacred objects represents a prevalent strategy of the middle-class within Victorian consumer culture. In Household Gods, Deborah Cohen argues that the Victorian middle-class sculpted its identity through the things it accumulated and the cultivation of taste. During the mid-1800s, increasing middle-class affluence led Victorians to marry their evangelicalism with consumerism in order to justify the expenditure of their disposable income on luxury goods and furniture. By emphasizing the moral virtues of domestic possessions, Cohen claims that Victorians drew on evangelical incarnationalism and invested things with spiritual attributes and thus transformed secular things into the sacred (12-13). Things not only became an index

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76 Asa Briggs’s Victorian Things offers a densely researched catalogue of Victorian commodity culture, analyzing the material contexts of various common household things and the architecture of the home itself as “emissaries” of the Victorian period’s historical and cultural contexts.
of class position, but the profusion of handbooks on decoration that influenced middle-
class women’s consumption practices linked taste with morals—individual identity
became represented in the aesthetic and moral characteristics attributed to objects (Cohen
xi). The process by which individuals sacralized commodities and made them
inalienable, however, carries risks. Unlike the household gods of societies that Frazer
examines, the household gods belonging to individual middle-class families were not
uniformly recognized by the community as sacred. On the contrary, just as tabooed
objects can become sacred by removing them from their functional usages, so economic
events like bankruptcy and panics allow the market to penetrate the home, not only lifting
objects out of their sacred relation but bringing them back into the accursed space of the
public sphere and capitalist circulation.

This is exactly what happens in Eliot’s *The Mill on the Floss*. The Tulliver’s
bankruptcy disrupts the intimate identification of the land and mill with Mr. Tulliver’s
sense of self and family genealogy once the property belongs to Wakem. Consequently,
Tulliver’s bankruptcy inaugurates a process of dispersal suffered by Mrs. Tulliver as
well, who experiences a loss of self once her linen, china, and furniture—her household
gods—are auctioned. Set between the 1820s and early 1830s, well before the 1882
Married Woman’s Property Act, Bessy has no control over her possessions and must
simply accept the bill of sale that Tulliver had secretly given on the furniture as collateral
for his debts. It is not only because of the laws of couverture, however, that Bessy’s
portable property and Edward’s loss of the land and mill occur simultaneously. Situated
in a “changing world,” Eliot describes the loss of both forms of property in the novel as
consequent to the invasion of capitalist forces, and its associated instabilities and
contaminants, into the Tulliver home. Thus, for example, when Tom and Maggie return home after hearing of their father’s bankruptcy, Maggie enters the house and is “startled by a strong smell of tobacco. The parlour door was ajar—that was where the smell came from. It was very strange […]” (Eliot 176). Eliot makes the violation inherent in having “the bailiff in the house” more vivid by placing it in the parlor. As Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall claim, the increasing emphasis on the sanctity of the home as a refuge from the public sphere, led middle-class families to move business offices away from the private realm of the home. Familial intimacy became symbolized in images of a home’s open fires and hearth while the Victorian parlor became designated as the space reserved for social intercourse (Davidoff and Hall 377, 380). As the most important room in the Victorian house, the parlor was both a feminine space wherein the family sought privacy and the room in which a museum-like collection of commodities were set on display (Logan 7, 23). In some sense, the parlor stood on the dividing line between private and public space. On the one hand, families gathered together there in an intimate fashion; on the other hand, families also received guests there to whom they displayed the parlor’s decorative enhancements (Logan 27). Thad Logan argues that despite this openness to guests, the parlor occupied an uneasy position in relation to the private/public split since Victorians perceived it as an “inner sanctum” that tradesmen never entered and servants only did so when called upon (27).

We can thus understand Tom’s repulsion at seeing the bailiff in the house as representative of both the taint of “sinking into the condition of poor working people” and the fact that the commercial world, specifically the taint of bankruptcy, has entered
the home (Eliot 177). Eliot more subtly symbolizes the entrance of the commercial world into the home through the tobacco smoke that startles Maggie before she even sees the bailiff. Throughout the novel, tobacco becomes associated either with debased poverty or the business world, in addition to its status historically as a colonial import.

When Edward Tulliver rides to Basset to see his sister, for example, the “center of dissipation” is a pub with a “cold scent of tobacco” (Eliot 68-69). More significantly, Tom’s efforts “towards getting on in this world” at Guest & Co. begin “in a room smelling strongly of bad tobacco” (Eliot 214). Given the negative connotations that tobacco carries in the novel, we can reinterpret Kezia’s determination to clean “the parlour, where that ‘pipe-smoking pig’ the bailiff had sat” as her effort to rid the home of the taint of bankruptcy and the scent of the commercial world (Eliot 207).

The entry of the profane, symbolized through the bailiff’s contaminating presence in the parlor, culminates a series of events that render the traditional English farming life of the Tullivers untenable. Kezia’s attempts to erase the traces of the bailiff prove impotent; the transgression of the parlor’s sanctity and the subsequent loss of Mrs. Tulliver’s household gods remain forever irremediable. In the chapter entitled “Mrs. Tulliver’s Teraphim or Household Gods,” Eliot both satirizes and nostalgically laments Bessy’s loss. Eliot’s comical portrayal of the Dodson family’s preoccupation with

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77 Weiss discusses the bailiff’s violation of the hearth’s sanctity in relation to the general moral stigma and disgrace attached to bankruptcy during the nineteenth century which, in novels like *The Mill on the Floss*, *Dombey and Son*, and *The Way We Live Now*, levels identity, emasculates men, and often acts on individuals and families as an uncontrollable natural force that threatens to annihilate them. See Weiss 15, 86, 92, 95, 103.

78 Elaine Freedgood analyzes the recurring reference to “Negro head” tobacco in Dickens’s *Great Expectations*. Freedgood claims that the phrase memorializes Australia as both the source of colonial wealth and the horror of Aboriginal genocide that had been the subject of heated debate in Victorian periodicals (81-110). Published only a few years earlier, it is possible that Eliot’s novel also draws on the connections between imperial trade and tobacco. Nancy Henry’s examination of empire in Eliot’s oeuvre shows, for example, how Eliot figures empire at the periphery of the imagination in *The Mill on the Floss*—yet another element disrupting St. Ogg’s self-enclosed continuity (81).
inheritance and ‘kin,’ while demonstrating their materialism, also exposes an underlying anxiety in the novel on how to facilitate a transition into a new economic and social order. The self’s inability to see itself reproduced in objects emblematizes the disintegration of the family’s link to the past and their failure to envision a future. Furthermore, Eliot’s depiction of the value accorded to “household gods” demonstrates that land is not the only sacred and inalienable possession that confers identity and historical continuity. Contesting the tendency in western political theory to privilege land’s sanctity over movables, Annette Weiner argues that movables can also embody the sacred. Inalienable possessions express the subjective identity and history of the owner and community and thus cannot enter the circuit of exchange. Such possessions epitomize, according to Weiner, the logic of “keeping and giving away”—goods circulated and exchanged refer back to what an individual or group deliberately keeps out of circulation (6-8). To retain control of inalienable possessions is to preserve one’s social position and expand one’s identity, whereas to lose these possessions is to have an alien force appropriate one’s identity, ancestral genealogy, and social position (Weiner 33). Thus, when Wakem usurps the Tulliver land and mill, he initiates a chain reaction that forces the Tullivers to alienate both their land and Bessy’s possessions. Like Tulliver’s land, Bessy’s household things also take on a sacrosanct character and represent an extension of her self and the inheritance she intended to pass on to her children.

‘To think o’ these cloths as I spun myself…and Job Haxey wove ’em, and brought the piece home on his back, as I remember standing at the door and seeing him come, before I ever thought o’ marrying your father! And the pattern as I chose myself, and bleached so beautiful, and I marked ’em so as nobody ever saw such marking,—they must cut the cloth to get it out, for it’s a particular stitch. And they’re all to be sold, and go into strange people’s houses, and perhaps be cut
with the knives, and wore out before I’m dead. You’ll never have one of ’em, my boy,’ she said, looking up at Tom with her eyes full of tears, ‘and I meant ’em for you. I wanted you to have all o’ this pattern. Maggie could have had the large check—it never shows so well when the dishes are on it.’ (Eliot 178)

Bessy’s comments regarding the loss of her furniture and household items reveals the complicated relationship between persons and things. As objects of reverence or divination, Eliot’s appellation of Bessy’s things as “teraphim” or “household gods,” renders Bessy’s materialism both an object of critique and valorization. While Eliot presents Bessy’s grief comically, by claiming that she “was not a woman who could shed abundant tears, except in moments when the prospect of losing her furniture became unusually vivid” (Eliot 181), she avoids a facile admonition of female consumerism by demonstrating the way in which Bessy’s labor and consumer choices become the means by which she encodes things with aspects of her identity. Not only had she spun the fabric for her linens, but she had stitched her name into the items. Bessy’s acts of labor, her pattern choices, and “the mark ‘Elizabeth Dodson’ on the corner of some table cloths” (Eliot 177), are all acts of self-inscription devised to transform alienable and portable properties such as china and furniture into the inalienable appendages of her vital personality. These acts of inscription expresses the possibility that commodities can become, as Arjun Appadurai phrases it, “ex-commodities” through a process of “enclaving” that relocates things into a zone where they cannot be commodified and subject to resale (16, 25-26). Similarly, in Igor Kopytoff’s analysis of commodities, objects can undergo a process of “singularization” as they move between the poles of the sacred and profane, wherein individual acts such as gesture or signature dehomogenize a commodity’s exchange value and make them into signs of the sacred that reflect the peculiar life history and personality of the owner (76, 88).
In *The Mill on the Floss* the separate spheres that distinguish commodity and gift exchange overlay the gendering of public and private spheres as well. As the ideological locus of intrinsic value, the domestic space serves as a zone for enclaving things and as a place in which the sacred can be hoarded. Yet, as the case of Bessy makes clear, such individual acts of singularization and enclaving prove less stable than collective acts of singularization. This becomes especially troubling given that Bessy’s things encode both her personal history and, like Tulliver’s land, family inheritances. As her sister Pullet states, “it’s very bad—to think o’ the family initials going about everywhere. It niver was so before: you’re a very unlucky sister, Bessy!” (Eliot 186). Not only are selves reproduced through the insignia of names on household items, but the inalienable possessions of land and goods become identified with the fracturing of identities and the end of the family’s lineage. As a symptom of modernity, the alienation of Bessy’s things announces the end of such outmoded notions as clan and kin, as well as the rural economies associated with them. The loss of household gods underscores the volatility earlier ascribed to the taboo, in which the mutual relation of the sacred and accursed makes the sacra both difficult to control and a potential contaminant of the very domestic space it had intended to demarcate.

The entry of fluid values into the home and the loss of household gods transgress the separation of spheres and leaves the home and the woman associated with it in a state of sexual fallenness. While acts of singularization enable individuals to secure the sacred, they also risk an over-identification of self with things and cultivate the desire for possession that a consumer society only intensifies. Such over-identification becomes especially problematic once inalienable possessions enter the market and subject the
desires that individuals channeled into them to the pendulum of possession and loss that underlies a consumer mentality.\textsuperscript{79} Eliot signals the emergence of such a mentality in St. Ogg through the fancier “plate-glass in shop windows” that replace the unpretending shops of the Dodsons’s youth (103).\textsuperscript{80} As Andrew Miller argues, plate-glass windows participated in “the dynamic of desire and disenchantment” that underwrites Victorian consumer culture; objects on display incite consumer desire and appetite for goods but such appetites quickly translate into a knowledge that any act of possession will lead to its inevitable loss (Eliot 18-19, 22).\textsuperscript{81} If all objects are consigned to loss in commodity culture, any identification of the self and desire with things leads to a parallel fate.

This dynamic of desire and loss surfaces in Deborah Cohen’s discussion of William Gladstone’s bankruptcy as well. When financial difficulties forced Gladstone to sell his house, art, and china, for example, he described the process as a “\textit{little death}” (qtd. in Cohen, xi). Gladstone’s comment reveals his fetishistic libidinal attachment to things, wherein the loss of self consequent to erotic fulfillment parallels that experienced with the loss of his home and things. Unlike Gladstone and Edward Tulliver, however, Bessy does not have access to public life or a mill in which to channel her desires for self-actualization. Just as Maggie complains that Tom, as a man, “[has] power, and can

\textsuperscript{79}Bessy’s predicament directs the reader to the uncertain position of heritable objects within a democratized culture. Bill Brown argues that the democratized access to commodities within the marketplace makes the exclusive heritability of objects questionable since, theoretically, all are free to own what others own (\textit{Sense} 48). In decommodifying things through such acts as signature, Bessy tries to restore to them their exclusiveness since they now refer back to her rather than their exchangeability.

\textsuperscript{80}Here, the presence of plate-glass anticipates the “era of spectacle” and a consumer society that Thomas Richards argues arose with events like The Great Exhibition in 1851 (3). The Crystal Palace itself was a “gigantic glass case” inside which various commodities were displayed in order to aggrandize their value (23, 55-59). For Miller’s discussion of Eliot’s use of “plate-glass” see \textit{Novels Behind Glass} 5.

\textsuperscript{81}Jeff Nunokawa makes a similar argument in \textit{The Afterlife of Property} 8-9. Susan Stewart’s \textit{On Longing} also foregrounds such loss in the supplemental play of desire that occurs as individuals try to objectify themselves/desires in things such as souvenirs and collections.
do something in the world” (Eliot 305), Bessy possesses little alternative than to divert her desires into things. Moreover, the sale of goods marked by Bessy’s repeated acts of erotic self-inscription are seen as potentially shameful: “and to think o’ its being scratched, and set before the travellers and folks—and my letters on it—see here—E. D.—and everybody to see ’em” (Eliot 186). Not only will Bessy not be able to hand these goods down to her children as inheritance but, more significantly, the auction fulfills Mrs. Pullet’s earlier warning that things “with [her] maiden mark on, might go all over the country” (Eliot 84). The fact that Bessy’s initials stand for her maiden name is significant. The auction of her things suggests a state of sexual fallenness, as though things display not their status as objects but Bessy’s desire and pre-marital chastity. Consequently, the auction sullies her chastity and virtue by openly circulating the commodified body of her desires through numerous hands. If, as Jeff Nunokawa argues, commodities, prostitutes, and slaves participated in the sphere of circulation, while the virtuous angel in the house was regarded as “inalienable treasure” and escaped the vicissitudes of the market (12-13), then the identification of Bessy with her possessions means that both she and her possessions participate in the velocity of exchange. After the entry of the bailiff and the sale of her things, neither the home nor Bessy signal embodiments of intrinsic value. It is ironic, then, that Maggie thinks she can redeem her actions with Stephen by returning to St. Ogg, to “[h]ome…—the sanctuary where sacred relics lay—where she would be rescued from more falling” (420). The taint of fallenness that colors Maggie after she runs off with Stephen has already entered the

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82 John Kucich argues that characters in *The Mill on the Floss* repeatedly overestimate the connection between their identity and the usefulness of things. The circulation of Bessy’s name appears scandalous since it entails the public exposure of an identity that Bessy encoded with private associations. For the Dodsons, Kucich claims, objects take on a “totemic value” so that their entry into the public domain appears “dangerous, polluted” (“Objects” 328).
family through the bankruptcy, debt, and sale of her mother’s things. The sacred relics that once inhabited the sanctuary of the Tulliver house, the “sum of dear familiar objects” which to both Maggie and Tom represented “home” had been washed away by the flux of trade and changing economies even before the flood had drowned its floors (Eliot 341). The realms of the economic and sexual, previously segregated, interpenetrate as the Tullivers’s “sacred relics” enter the marketplace and the house stands marked in its state of fallenness. The presence of the bailiff and the fallenness that subsequently shadows the Tullivers further evidences what Frazer’s discussion of the taboo sought to unveil: that the sacred and accursed, like the economic and sexual, impinge on one another, and that value, like the taboo, is relational.

In contrast to Eliot, who presented capitalism as a force that destabilizes the domestic locus of absolute value and the inalienability of land by exposing the household gods and female sexuality to the logic of exchange, Dickens does not conceive of the market and the domestic as entirely irreconcilable. Instead, he contrasts the model of the family and economy Florence establishes to that put forward by Dombey. Dickens views Dombey’s model as a failure because the strategies Dombey deploys in bridging marriage and market neither secures intrinsic value nor purifies money of its imperial associations, but instead results in the destruction of household gods. The specific interpenetration of the sexual and economic in Dombey’s model of the economy and family allows the sea of imperial expansion and capitalist exchange to infect the home and transform everything within the domestic into the filth of money.83 In *Dombey and Son*, Dombey’s bankruptcy, the death of little Paul and Fanny, as well as his failed marriage to Edith,

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83 For a discussion of money as a source of filth in Victorian literature see Christopher Herbert’s article “Filthy Lucre: Victorian Ideas of Money.”
participate in a causal chain that the novel traces to Dombey’s alienated relationship with his daughter Florence. Dombey could have avoided both the ruin of his business and family if, as Florence’s governess Susan Nipper, surmises “he knew her value right” (Dickens *Dombey* 704). Dombey’s failure to appreciate Florence’s value as “the spirit of the home” demonstrates his ignorance of the domestic ideology that underwrites capitalist expansion—an ignorance that eventually destroys the domestic space and its household gods (Dickens *Dombey* 587). According to David Toise, Dombey conjoins the sexual and economic because he synthesizes capitalist and early modern models of value, wherein the two realms were not segregated (324). Dombey combines a system of alliance that emphasizes family lineage, blood, and social status with marriage as a sexual contract that facilitates capitalist expansion. Drawing on Foucault, Robert Clark similarly argues that Dombey tries both to reproduce the social structure through the “deployment of alliance” and expand the economic base through the “deployment of sexuality.” Dombey not only requires a male heir who will reproduce the family’s lineage, but he also wants his son to expand the imperialist trade and fortunes of the firm (Clark 78). These two models of marriage appear interfused in the opening scenes of the novel where his wife Fanny has just given birth to Paul. While on the one hand Dombey describes his relationship with Fanny as a “matrimonial alliance” that confers honor on her through association with the house of Dombey and the privilege of “giving birth to a new partner in such a house,” in the very next sentence the marriage assumes the form of a sexual contract. “…Mrs. Dombey had entered on that social contract of matrimony: almost necessarily part of a genteel and wealthy station, even without reference to the perpetuation of family firms: with her eyes fully open to these advantages” (Dickens
As with his second wife Edith, Dombey’s alliance with Fanny allows him to combine his distinction of wealth with Fanny’s distinction of blood to attain social status plus wealth.

Dickens’s exploration of how to integrate marriage and market leads him to contrast the dysfunctional and economically unsuccessful family that emerges under the patriarchal rule of Dombey with Florence’s ability to make the affections and self-sacrificing duty serve sound economic growth. Dombey’s attempt to play the role of Maine’s despotic patriarch, who thinks that his “will is law” (Dickens *Dombey* 684), quickly translates into a form of possessive individualism that regards others as alienable property. He thus fails at manipulating the doubleness of the taboo. Instead of reforming accursed things such as money and commodities into the sacred, he allows money’s accursed powers to enter the home, reifying personal relations into commodity relations. On the impending death of Fanny, for example, Dombey begins to regard her as “something gone from among his plate and furniture, and other household possessions which was well worth the having, and could not be lost without sincere regret” (Dickens *Dombey* 54). Just as earlier Dombey’s marriage mingled alliance and heterosexual exchange, here Fanny assumes a position parallel to commodities circulated and exchanged on the market. Similar to Fanny, Edith’s position as symbolic capital quickly transforms into the language of sexual contract, a transaction sealed with Dombey’s deed of settlement. As Edith herself acknowledges to her mother “[y]ou know he has bought

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84C.B. Macpherson’s *Possessive Individualism* claims that seventeenth-century political philosophy conceived of individuals as owners of their personhood and capabilities cut off from others rather than belonging to a larger social whole. Ownership, individual liberty, and independence from others go hand in hand in liberal-democratic theory; political society thus becomes a means to protect the right to property. While this conception of “possessive individualism” reflected the market relations of the seventeenth-century, Macpherson argues that its assumptions no longer coincided with society in the nineteenth century when the cohesion of working class interests opposed those of landowners and democratization undermined the exclusive political authority of landowners (3-4, 263-277).
me...He has considered of his bargain;...; he thinks that it will suit him, and may be had sufficiently cheap; and he will buy to-morrow....There is no slave in a market: there is no horse in a fair: so shown and offered and examined and paraded...as I have been, for ten shameful years” (Dickens Dombey 473-474). Edith’s marriage demonstrates the parallels between the marriage market, prostitution, and economic exchange—a parallel revealed through Edith’s hidden kinship to Alice Marwood, the novel’s fallen woman. Dombey and Son links capital with promiscuity and exhibitionism, contrasting the traffic of women which Edith and Alice epitomize with Florence (Nunokawa 13). Dombey’s rejection of Florence as “base coin that could not be invested—a bad Boy—nothing more” reveals his ignorance of the domestic ideology that underwrites capitalist expansion: it is Florence not Paul who is the source of intrinsic value and the guarantor of the company’s and family’s reproduction, Florence whose position within the home effectively reconciles the domestic and the economic, Florence who must be kept while all other things are given away (Dickens Dombey 51).

Dombey’s ignorance proves fatal as the interpenetration of the sexual and economic realms destroys, as Ruskin warns, the domestic haven of intrinsic value. Rather than being a temple “watched over by Household Gods,” Dombey’s heartless marriage of contract erects a luxurious, renovated house but not a home. “The saying is home is home, be it never so homely. If it hold good in the opposite contingency, and home is home be it never so stately, what an altar to the Household Gods is raised up there!” (Dickens Dombey 580). Dickens’s satiric use of “stately,” code word throughout the novel for Dombey’s pride and valorization of money over disinterested affections, underscores the absence of an altar to the household gods once Dombey allows market
forces to inhabit it. “[T]he working world had broken into it” (Dickens *Dombey* 500). By allowing the working world to break into the home, Dombey makes the home and others subject to money’s potent powers to transmogrify, transforming the sacred space of the domestic into its accursed counterpart. In the scene where Paul asks his father what money is, for example, the fireside changes from a place of domestic affections into a “ghostly puppet show” as Paul begins to resemble a “goblin” (Dickens *Dombey* 154). As in Marx, the abstraction needed to transform use-values into exchange-values leaves nothing but the ghost of value as its residue.85 If commodity exchange renders people and their labor substitutable, it also gives to them a phantasmic character. Thus, Paul is described as resembling “little Beings in the Fairy tales, who, at a hundred and fifty or two hundred years of age, fantastically represent the children for whom they have been substituted” (Dickens *Dombey* 151). The narrative links Paul’s status as a changeling and substitute by describing him as Dombey’s “little image” while Dombey, sits “entertaining complicated worldly schemes and plans; the little image entertaining Heaven knows what…Mr. Dombey stiff with starch and arrogance; the little image by inheritance and in unconscious imitation. The two so very much alike, and yet so monstrously contrasted” (Dickens *Dombey* 151-152). The abstraction of exchange that money mediates becomes linked to Dombey’s view of his son and heir as a substitute for himself. The repeated reference to Paul as his “little image” demonstrates the incestuous process by which, as Marx comments, money begets money. Capital’s ability to reproduce itself through interest thus parallels the mimetic reproduction of Paul as a “little image” who becomes more goblin-like the more his father tries to hoard him as the firm’s future capital.

85 For a discussion of the commodity in Marx as a “ghost” that reduces all values to exchange values, see Keenan. See also Derrida’s *The Specters of Marx*.  

210
The destruction of household gods turns the home into a place of mimetic reproduction rather than sustained and healthy economic and sexual reproduction. The disruption to the family’s proper economic and sexual reproduction through the movement of cherished household gods to the auctioning block, poignantly figured in Eliot’s novel, appears in *Dombey and Son* as well. Dickens concatenates the insubstantiality of mimetic reproduction and capital’s destructive impact on the domestic space with the dislocation of furniture from the hearth in Brogley’s used furniture shop. Brogley’s shop presents an array of furniture “of combinations the most completely foreign for its purpose…[a] set of window curtains with no windows belonging to them, would be seen gracefully draping a barricade of chest of drawers, loaded with little jars from chemists’ shops; while a homeless hearthrug severed from its natural companion the fireside braved the shrewd east wind in its adversity…and various looking-glasses accidentally placed at compound interest of reflection and refraction, presented to the eye an eternal perspective of bankruptcy and ruin” (Dickens *Dombey* 177). The used-furniture shop allegorizes the disorder that occurs when the market separates the hearthrug from the hearth and, by association, unsettles the familial bonds therein associated. Here, the mimetic reproduction of images reflected in mirrors parallels the self-replication of capital through interest and implicitly attributes Dombey’s future “bankruptcy and ruin” to his disordered home. Dombey may be able to hoard the ‘image’ of little Paul, but the reification of such characters as Paul and Fanny leads to both economic and sexual sterility, as well as the taint of fallenness that befalls him and his home subsequent to Edith’s departure with Carker.\(^8\) Additionally, the separation of the

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\(^8\) Hilary Schor states that Edith’s apparent adultery “has a contaminant force in the novel, radiating outward into both plot and thematics” (59). Dombey also describes Edith after her ‘fall’ as a “polluted creature
hearthrug from the hearth in Brogley’s shop connects capital to imperial trade by alluding to the dangers of “the shrewd east wind.” Just as Paul’s innocent questions paralleled the mystifying nature of money and the mists that enshroud England’s empire, so Dickens connects Dombey’s financial ruin to the entry of empire into the home. When bankruptcy subjects Dombey’s home to the liquidities of economic transactions, Dickens figures the desecration of the home through an outsider, a “Mosaic Arabian,” who appraises and auctions Dombey’s estate until “[t]here is not a secret place in the whole house” (Dickens Dombey 928). The sea of fluid values and imperial trade floods the home, turning everything and everyone into a commodity to be appraised and sold.

The contaminating effects of money and empire, in Dombey and Son, destroy the hearth and its household gods because Dombey fails to redirect the accursed powers of taboo objects such as money and commodities by bringing them into contact with the embodiment of intrinsic value and the sacred, Florence. In The Way We Live Now, however, Trollope locates the contaminating forces that threaten the sanctity of the home in the culture of speculative investment and, more specifically, the figure of Augustus Melmotte. Melmotte highlights the close relationship between the clean and unclean, sacred and accursed, epitomized in Frazer’s analysis of the taboo. Only because such polarities are mutually implicated do characters like Lord Nidderdale think that they can continue a life of gambling and unethical financial dealings and then, by marrying an heiress, start over “with whitewashed cleanliness” (Trollope 436). It is precisely this

(Dickens Dombey 935).

Barbara Weiss makes a similar point, stating that the sacrilege of selling such “household gods” shows how bankruptcy is a violation of personal identity and the sanctity of the hearth and home. Brogley’s shop represents the destination of beloved possessions when bankruptcy befalls on families. The severance of things from their natural functions and place offers an allegory for the alienation of individuals from their ‘natural’ roles in the home (104). See also Waters 55.
reversibility that Trollope presents as a point of concern. While the malleability of value enables individuals like Bessy Tulliver to reshape commodities that once circulated in the marketplace into inalienable household gods, Trollope’s anti-Semitic portrait of Melmotte displays his fear that anyone can exploit the malleability of value to both reinvent themselves and reconstitute something accursed into the sacred. Melmotte symbolizes the threat of contamination associated with the profane world of fluid values not only because of his spurious financial dealings, which exploit the instability of values for a profit, but also because of his status as a foreigner and Jew. Like Mr. Alf, another Jewish character in the novel, Melmotte operates under an air of suspicion because “[n]o one knew whence he came or what he had been” (Trollope 13). The novel repeatedly relegated the economic culture of speculation, fluid values, and contamination to either Jews or American investors like Fisker, two cultures that are contrastively positioned to Roger’s infallible virtue as an Englishman.88 Unlike Virgil’s Aeneas in exile, Trollope positions Melmotte as a dangerous outsider, a Jew whose itinerant lifestyle undermines the stability of economic, moral, and national values that Aeneas’s “household gods” represent. Even Melmotte’s Jewish ancestry eventually proves false. “The general opinion seemed to be that his father had been a noted coiner in New York,—an Irishman of the name of Melmody,—and, in one memoir, the probability of the descent was argued from Melmotte’s skill in forgery” (Trollope 747). Melmotte’s talent for forgery and counterfeit now becomes assigned to his possible Irish ancestry and the disreputable practice of money coinage itself. As in Dombey and Son, when tabooed objects like money are mishandled or placed in the wrong hands altogether, they contaminate.

88For Trollope’s portrayal of Americans as individuals with an uncertain past and America as a nation of risk in which speculation thrives, see Annette Van.
Roger remains the only character in the novel who correctly assesses Melmotte’s fraudulence and recognizes him as the product of England’s diseased culture of speculation and easy money (Kincaid 167). Unlike characters like Georgianna, Lady Monogram, and Lady Carbury, Roger does not ignore his own sentiments and regard Melmotte as a necessary evil for financial advancement but associates him with filthy contaminants that endanger feminine virtue and the home.

And to Roger Carbury…there was no second way of looking at it…. The old-fashioned idea that the touch of pitch will defile still prevailed with him. He was a gentleman;—and would have felt himself disgraced to enter the house of such a one as Augustus Melmotte. Not all the duchesses in the peerage, or all the money in the city, could alter his notions or induce him to modify his conduct. But he knew that it would be useless for him to explain this to Lady Carbury. He trusted, however, that one of the family might be taught to appreciate the difference between honour and dishonour. Henrietta Carbury had, he thought, a higher turn of mind than her mother, and had as yet been kept free from soil. (Trollope 61)

In his absolutism, Roger connects the fluid economic and moral values that Melmotte signals with “the touch of pitch” that threatens the separation of sexual and economic and, more specifically, Hetta, who as yet remains “free from soil” and “pure” (Trollope 64). Hetta’s refusal to obey Roger’s wishes and stay away from the Melmottes, her defiant assertion that “[i]f that is contamination, I suppose I must be contaminated” (Trollope 63), exposes the frightening possibility that the home is not a secure sanctuary. As in the ascription of the term “household gods” to objects, Roger attempts to secure what cannot be secured: absolute value. His self-imposed question, “[w]ould not the touch of pitch at last defile her” (Trollope 113), acknowledges the possibility that the unstable value structure Melmotte denotes could penetrate the domestic interior, undermining the symbols of absolute value in the novel: land and Hetta.
Roger is not the only character in the novel who suggests that Melmotte contaminates the private sphere. Characters like Georgianna Longestaffe and Lady Monogram perceive Melmotte to be a necessary evil in the public sphere but shun the thought of interacting with him in the private sphere, or even the countryside. When the Melmottes visit the Longestaffe home in the country, for example, Georgianna complains that she would not have endured their visit had it not been for her father’s promise that she could go to London for the season. “She would not have contaminated herself with the Melmottes but for that promise” (Trollope 163). While the Melmottes represent something taboo that threatens to contaminate the Longestaffes by leveling distinction and social hierarchies, they are also necessary to express social hierarchy and wealth. At the end of the Melmotte visit, Georgianna exclaims: “[w]hat makes me most angry in the whole thing is that we should have condescended to be civil to the Melmottes down in the country. In London one does those things, but to have them here was terrible” (Trollope 165). To have them in London was acceptable because London represents, as Hetta states, selfishness (Trollope 244). The self-interested motivation that guides individual values and actions should not contaminate the countryside, which represents a value structure rooted in landed property and paternalistic social relations.

The contaminating effects of contact with the Melmottes outside the public sphere become evident once Georgianna decides to live with the Melmottes and have access to the London season.

But Miss Longestaffe already perceived that her old acquaintances were changed in their manner to her….There had been little flirtations between her and Nidderdale—meaning nothing, as every one knew that Nidderdale must marry money; but in none of them had he spoken to her as he spoke when he met her in Madame Melmotte’s drawing-room. She could see it in the faces of people as they greeted her in the park—especially in the faces of the men. She had always
carried herself with a certain high demeanour, and had been able to maintain it. All that was now gone from her, and she knew it. (Trollope 196-197)

As with Bessy and Edith, contact with the contaminating forces of capital results in an attendant loss of virtue and a state of fallenness. Desperate for a husband, Georgianna disregards the separation between private and public conduct that would have preserved her character of taint. Lady Monogram clearly distinguishes between personal contact with the Melmottes and going to their house for a public event such as a party wherein people further their self-interests. “People are going to see the emperor, not to see the Melmottes….Somebody chooses to get all of London into his house, and all of London chooses to go. But it isn’t understood that that means acquaintance” (Trollope 250).

Georgianna shares Lady Monogram’s hypocritical position, acutely aware of the distinction between using the Melmottes of the world for money and power in the public sphere and allowing them to have intimate contact with her higher social position in the private sphere.

By presenting Melmotte’s spurious financial dealings and his status as a foreign Jew as a contaminant that threatens notions of absolute value, *The Way We Live Now* also suggests a world ruled by Melmottes would be an end to all household gods. When Georgianna contrasts the Longestaffe “mode of living” to that of the Melmottes, for example, she does so by critiquing the objects displayed in the Melmottes’s home as objects without history or personality.

The house in Bruton Street had never been very bright, but the appendages of life there had been of a sort which was not known in the gorgeous mansion in Grosvenor Square. It had been full of books and little toys and those thousand trifling household gods which are accumulated in years, and which in their accumulation suit themselves to the taste of their owners. In Grosvenor Square there were no Lares;—no toys, no books, nothing but gold and grandeur, pomatum, powder and pride. (Trollope 245)
Once goods are sacralized, they serve as markers of individual character, morals, and taste, and in the case of Georgianna, social distinction. Georgianna’s household gods are not things but “appendages of life.” By infusing them with ‘life,’ objects no longer signify their equivalent position with other objects in the circuit of exchange but, instead, the social standing and history of a person or group. The problem with the goods in Melmotte’s home is the same problem Georgianna perceives in the people that visit their house; they are without history: “[s]he did not even know who they were, whence they came, or what was their nature” (Trollope 245). The goods in Bruton Street signify not newly acquired wealth but the histories and affections of the family within the home.89 Georgianna’s observations echo that of Dickens’s narrator in Hard Times, where the presence of accumulated wealth has not been transformed into household gods through feminine affections. “There was no mute sign of a woman in the room. No graceful little adornment, no fanciful little device, however, trivial, anywhere expressed her influence. Cheerless and comfortless, boastfully and doggedly rich, there the room stared at its present occupants, unsoftened and unrelieved by the least trace of womanly occupation. As Mr. Bounderby stood in the midst of his household gods, so those unrelenting divinities occupied their places around Mr. Bounderby…” (Dickens Times 97-98). Louisa’s utilitarian education, instead of investing her with the attributes of the typical angel in the house, leaves her in a perpetual state of emotional vacuity. Similarly, the Melmotte home appears drained of the feminine influence that would transform mere

89Mary Douglas claims that Trollope exemplifies the role of goods as a form of information sharing among members of society about the values, judgments, and tastes that form the loose rubric of ‘culture’ and engender class formations. In referencing status, goods denote our control over information and the natural ease with which we wear culture as a second skin. Endogamous, gentrified families such as the Longestaffes or Carburys naturally manipulate the patterns of culture to consolidate their group and exclude outsiders like Melmotte (76-89). Melmotte can buy new things, but he lacks the cultural information and class membership to own household gods.
commodities into “Lares.” Madame Melmotte fulfills none of the typical duties of wife and mother associated with the domestic angel. She remains a passive and largely silent figure throughout the novel, speaking only when spoken to after years of physical abuse by Melmotte. Moreover, Madame Melmotte’s ancestry remains unclear and, as if to underscore Melmotte’s association with counterfeit, she is Marie’s “pseudo-mother” and has no biological relationship to her (Trollope 658). Both the biological and affective bonds needed to secure value and shape household gods appear entirely absent.

Part III Value, Kinship, and the Regeneration of Household Gods

The loss of household gods in novels by Dickens, Trollope, and Eliot results in a parallel destruction of the patriarchal family, in which the woman’s position within the home as the anchor of absolute value and virtue is destabilized. In these novels, capitalism not only threatens the home with contamination but unsettles domestic arrangements. On the one hand, capitalism instantiates the theoretical split of public and private spheres and the prescriptive role given to women as signifiers of intrinsic value; yet, on the other hand, the entrenchment of intrinsic value in the home proves continuously threatened by capitalism’s logic of equivalence, which made it theoretically possible for men and women to enter into exchange relationships in the market.\footnote{Kathy Psomiades makes this point in her analysis of Maine, McElneran, and Trollope’s \textit{The Eustace Diamonds}. Specifically, she argues that heterosexual exchange emerges as a concept at a time when the exclusion of women from the market seems at odds with capitalism. Heterosexual exchange explains the connections between desire and capitalist exchange because it reveals how market relations come to overlay older forms of traffic in women grounded in kinship and alliance (93-94). See also Gayle Rubin’s essay “The Traffic in Women: Notes on the ‘Political Economy’ of Sex.”}

Opposing this logic of equivalence and its effects on gender roles, novels such as \textit{Dombey and Son} and \textit{The Way We Live Now} resist the fungibility of capital and resacralize the home by retrogressively positioning the family between two kinship
systems: the endogamous patriarchal kinship system associated with aristocratic alliance and capitalism’s (patriarchal) exogamous practices, in which parties stand in a reciprocal relation of heterosexual exchange. If, as Ruth Perry contends, the eighteenth century witnessed a transition from consanguineal bonds to conjugal bonds that substituted voluntary association for the blood bonds of kinship, this is a process that even mid-Victorian novels contest (2). In contesting this effect, Dickens’s Dombey and Son envisions a process of resacralization wherein household gods are recreated through contact with Florence’s sacred influence and the formation of a family that conceals Florence’s position as an heiress to Dombey and Son by overlaying an endogamous patriarchal arrangement over the exogamous marriage with Walter. Similarly, The Way We Live Now delimits the threat Melmotte poses to the domestic household and the woman of virtue, Hetta, by both conceding the demise of the endogamous patriarchal family represented by Roger Carbury and maintaining it through the exogamous marriage of Paul and Hetta. Again, Trollope muffles Hetta’s position as the heiress to the Carbury property and the violation to primogeniture by entailing it on her first-born son. In The Mill on the Floss, however, Eliot resists the awkward synthesis of two kinship systems found in Dickens and Trollope and instead presents both exogamous and endogamous marriage as impossible alternatives. Just as these novels totter between older models of value and capitalism, so too they vacillate between the kinship that ideologically appears inseparable from the problem of value. Such indecision arises from the specific intertwining of value and kinship within the ideology of separate spheres. Like Ricardo’s troubled analysis of the invariable standard, woman’s association with absolute value anchors a differential value system even as she escapes the movement of difference.
Dickens and Trollope straddle between kinship systems in order to evade the logic of capitalism, which shows women, like gold or land, to be just another value among values.

The connection between household gods, value, and the seemingly incoherent synthesis of endogamy and exogamy, becomes clearer by turning to anthropological discussions of totemism and exogamy in the nineteenth century. Anthropologists like John McLennan, James Frazer, and William Robertson Smith depict sexual and economic reproduction as coterminous with the relationship between kinship systems and the connection groups establish to things.\textsuperscript{91} Control over the totem signals a control over the group’s sexual and economic reproduction. McLennan’s investigation in \textit{Primitive Marriage} (1865) on the evolution of the patriarchal family as it passes through stages of primitive promiscuity, totemic exogamy and matrilineage, ends by grafting the endogamous patriarchal family over exogamous matrilineage. This he does, I argue, because he reads Victorian domestic ideology into the woman’s connection with the totem and sacred as integral to sexual and economic reproduction. As George Stocking and Anita Levy make clear, McLennan’s work reflects the historical concerns of a period in which questions of human sexuality, the passage of the 1857 Matrimonial Causes Act, and the agitation that finally led to 1870/1882 property act, destabilized Victorian conceptions of marriage, sexuality, and inheritance (Stocking \textit{Victorian} 197-208, Levy 48-74). McLennan’s narrative of the evolution of marriage practices from a state of primitive promiscuity to exogamous matrilineal descent, and finally the patriarchal...

\textsuperscript{91}Since McLennan’s theories of kinship were largely replicated by James Frazer and William Robertson Smith, I concentrate on McLennan’s \textit{Primitive Marriage} to lay the foundation of the argument. While Robertson Smith and Frazer do not contest the stages of kinship that McLennan outlines in \textit{Primitive Marriage}, there is a difference in their areas of emphasis. Robertson Smith, for example, concentrated on totemic sacrifice and the sacramental meal that strengthens the mutual obligations and duties between members of the totemic group. Frazer, on the other hand, was deeply influenced by a utilitarian and economic perspective on totemism and interpreted it through a Malthusian lens of control over agricultural resources.
conjugal family, emerges at the very point in history when such a model of the family seemed threatened and Victorian domestic ideology needed to be legitimated. In this context, I argue that the woman’s connection with the sacred and fertility in the totemic stage, becomes linked to the figure of the domestic angel and later inscribed within endogamous patriarchal relations, where her sexuality and access to property is controlled by men. McLennan’s emphasis on the relationship between sacred objects and kinship systems allows us to reinterpret household gods as totems, totems whose passage into the market signifies the instability of value and the forms of reproduction that women symbolize through their connection to the sacred and fertility.

Attention to anthropological discussions of totemism can help reframe our understanding of household gods within novels as functioning in a capacity other than mere commodity fetishism. Moreover, the imaginative thought experiments conducted by these novelists can help us to hypothesize a potential reason for why, until the turn of the century, anthropologists expressed an obsessive interest in the relationship between kinship and totems, despite evidence that contradicted their claims. The ground for

92 As William Pietz shows, Marx’s discussion of fetishism participated in a discourse on religious fetishism that began with Charles de Brosses’s *Du Culte des Dieux Fétiches* (1760). Marx’s disparaging comments on fetishism, however ironically stated, replicates the post-Enlightenment attitude of Victorian anthropologists who interpreted fetishism as a lower form of religiosity within the narrative of progress that only “primitive” people practiced (Pietz 128-138). The present argument resitutes the nineteenth-century discourse on fetishism and totemism as categories devised to understand how things could become the basis of religious reasoning not only within so-called non-European peoples but, implicitly, within the Victorian culture of things. Rather than focus on the critical comments anthropologists made about the faulty cosmological reasoning that led savages to attribute divine powers to things rather than an all-powerful god, I concentrate on how the arguments about the functions of fetishism and totemism, such as kinship and marriage practices, appears within Victorian notions of “household gods.”

93 Robert Jones’s *The Secret of the Totem* provides a careful exegesis of the development of these arguments among Victorian anthropologists. Jones credits the vast discourse that surrounded totemism as a fully integrated and holistic phenomena until the turn of the century as coextensive with theories of social evolution. Jones thus interprets the critique of the social evolutionary paradigm as responsible for the disappearance of arguments on totemism around the 1890s (4). While my argument does not contradict Jones’s claims, I do think that nineteenth-century novels offer another perspective on why Victorian anthropologists might have been drawn to such a topic and what cultural problems they may, however
both anthropological and fictional interest in kinship and the relationship groups establish with sacred objects, I argue, hinges on the problem of value. Like these novelists, anthropologists were concerned with the threat that capitalist forces presented to the middle-class organization of the family. Such a reorganization of the middle-class family would destabilize the locus of absolute value and undermine both economic and sexual reproduction, which both anthropologists and the novels depict as a linked process.\(^{94}\) Anthropologists obsessively pursued the relationship that “primitive” cultures established between things and kinship practices because they unconsciously perceived a parallel to phenomena within British society: possession over inalienable property and its transmission through the male line was not independent of the woman’s embodiment of intrinsic value and her ability to reproduce this pattern through her daughters. The novels under discussion depict the failure of both economic and sexual reproduction as coterminous with the family’s inability to maintain possession and control of their household gods. By contrast, the restoration of household gods and the endogamous patriarchal family relies on reconstructing a place in the home for the self-sacrificing domestic angel who initiates a process of both economic and sexual regeneration.

i. McLennan, Kinship, and Totems

unconsciously, have sought to address. As Jones himself states, totemism offered Victorians a way to “write about themselves” and “was a powerful object to think with” (304). But Victorian anthropologists not only used totemism to explore issue of empire and Christianity but, as I argue here, to examine the specific connections between value, kinship, property, and the sacred.

\(^{94}\)In *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, for example, Levi-Strauss interprets marriage as the reciprocal exchange of women and other goods in primitive society in order to establish alliances between families and tribes. Within this schema of reciprocal exchange, he argues, women are of “essential value” in the group compared with other goods that are exchanged. Women are not only “a sign of social value, but a natural stimulant” of the very reciprocal act of exchange that transforms nature into culture (43, 62-63). Levi-Strauss, like Victorian anthropologists and novelists, reveals the way in which women function both within and outside the system of exchange—the essential value that groups cannot lose control of because women represent the one possession that naturally stimulates exchange, reproduction, and social organization.
Mclennan’s backwards thinking logic, necessitated by his desire to affirm middle-class ideology, proves crucial in illuminating several contradictions in his argument on primitive marriage and kinship; his agenda helps explain both anthropological obsessions with totemism at the end of the nineteenth century and the role of household gods in novels. Coining the terms endogamy and exogamy, Mclennan claims that the shift from matriarchal to patriarchal kinship stabilizes paternity and coincides with the privatization of property along the male line. To explain this gradual evolution of the patriarchal conjugal family and modern British marriage laws, Mclennan draws on ethnographies of “savage” groups in which he finds evidence of female infanticide, incest taboos, imbalances of male-female ratios, and marriage ceremonies that rehearse bride capture. Reorganizing the latter evidence into a causal chain, Mclennan reads ceremonies of bride capture as relics, Tylorian survivals of a time when such practices actually took place. In order to explain the practice of bride capture, Mclennan contrasts two types of marriage practices and tribal organizations: endogamous and exogamous tribes. In endogamous tribes, the violent practice of bride capture could never occur because marriage proceeded peacefully among kindred and members were bound by common interests and possessions—there was no notion of private property. Mclennan postulates an alternative tribal formation to explain the genealogy of bride capture. He hypothesizes that the “system” of “marriage by capture” can be explained by recourse to the practice of female infanticide which created shortages of women among tribes and resulted in polyandry within the tribe (Mclennan Marriage 31). The Malthusian regard for the undersupply of women and oversupply of men in the tribe as a result of female infanticide led to the incest taboo and exogamy. In these exogamous tribes, marriage with members within the
tribe was prohibited and, given the perpetual state of violence, exogamous marriages could only take place through violent capture. Thus, the primitive state of marriage in which bride capture took place coincides with the presence of exogamy, the incest taboo, and the totem.

The practice of bride capture initiates a transition to kinship based on matrilineal descent, which created greater social cohesion. Since the sharing of women in the group would have made paternity uncertain, the bond between child and mother would be more obvious to recognize. The general state of promiscuity in which children and women belonged to the group and kinship was recognized through women was slowly overtaken by more regulated forms of polyandry. The sharing of a woman by brothers, Tibetan polyandry, represents a step towards the patriarchal family’s emergence and private property since, Mclennan assumes, it would naturally lead the brothers to exercise their “common rights of property” and appropriate the children as theirs, making them heirs not to the mother’s property but that of the father (Marriage 78). “Paternity having become certain, a system of kinship through males would arise with the growth of property, and a practice of sons succeeding, as heirs direct, to the estates of fathers; and as a system of kinship through males arose, that through females would—and chiefly under the influence of property—die away” (Mclennan Marriage 98). The transition from patri-local paternity to the Roman conjugal family, however, was a long process and each developmental step, Mclennan argues, was “affected by considerations derived from property” (Marriage 98). The simultaneous assertion of patrilineage and private property meant that women and children were the property of men. Property having become the
“test of kinship” (Mclennan *Marriage* 99), men rather than women would determine kinship.

Mclennan’s evolutionary theory of kinship incorporates aspects of the previous stages into the patriarchal conjugal family. Matrilineal exogamy, for example, plays a crucial role in the development of the patriarchal middle-class household on which Mclennan’s theory was based since the recognition of the affections that tie mother and child in the totemic stage, what William Robertson Smith calls the “refined feelings” that characterize the conjugal family, was central to middle-class ideology (*Arabia* 141, Levy 66-67). This combined with the patri-local household and inheritance rights enabled the emergence of the patriarchal conjugal family. Similarly, Mclennan’s patriarchal family reestablishes the homogeneity associated with primitive endogamous tribes. Patriarchal endogamy “arrests the progress of heterogeneity” and instability associated with matrilineal exogamy because the introduction of women from other stocks would simply be absorbed into the stock of the male (Mclennan *Marriage* 99). While matrilineal descent introduced multiple stocks and made marriage within the tribe possible without violation of the rule of exogamy or bride capture, patrilineal descent would reintroduce homogeneity and reinstate the practice of bride capture. This stage of patrilineal exogamy, however, becomes a step toward the decay of exogamy and the assertion of endogamous patrilineal kinship. Decent from a father would lead to the fiction of a common father for the tribe and thus denial of the actual multiplicity of stocks on the basis of agnatic kinship (Mclennan *Marriage* 100). The introduction of an eponymous patronym represents the process by which exogamy decayed and patrilineal descent
reasserted homogeneity and the endogamous nature of its group (Mclennan *Marriage* 102).

Mclennan’s evolutionary narrative reverses the sequence found in Maine’s *Ancient Law*—the patriarchal endogamous family is the endpoint of kinship systems rather than its beginning. Mclennan’s evolutionary narrative circles back to endogamy but with this critical difference: the circular process initiates a progressive process of individuation not present in primitive endogamous tribes. Unlike earlier ties, which emphasized the connection to a group rather than to individuals, the development of kinship systems relied on the concept of stocks and “a special system of blood-ties between certain member of the individuals in the group” (Mclennan *Marriage* 64). Anita Levy argues that Mclennan here uses the language of blood and kinship, associated with aristocratic marriage alliance, in order to dissociate blood ties from kinship ties. Rather than one’s status within a community united by blood, Mclennan individuates kinship as the specific blood-ties established between members of a family and their biological similarity (*Marriage* 64). Mclennan posits a parallel process of individuation wherein the emergence of blood bonds between members coincides with proprietary rights within the group—private property replaces communal ownership. “The history of property is the history of the development of proprietary rights inside groups, which were at first the only owners, and of all other personal rights—even including the right in offspring—it may be said that their history is that of the gradual assertion of the claims of individuals against the traditional rights of the group” (Mclennan *Marriage* 67). Mclennan’s

95 As discussed in the previous chapter, Maine contends that the patriarchal family was succeeded by the aggregation of families into gentes, the gentes into the tribe, and tribes into a nation or commonwealth. By contrast, Mclennan argues that the ignorance of primitive people of biological blood bonds shows that the earliest forms of social organization could not have been the biological, nuclear family.
narrative is both progress and return: endogamy asserts itself over exogamy but the new
type of patrilocal kinship established through biological similarity between individuals
regulates private property.\(^{96}\)

Despite the appearance of a teleological narrative that asserts the gradual
emergence of the patriarchal endogamous family out of matrilocal exogamy and
primitive endogamy, McLennan actually makes the temporal positions of endogamy and
exogamy ambiguous. Thus, for example, when listing the specific degrees of
endogamous and exogamous tribal arrangements, McLennan admits that this is not a clear,
linear progression.

Although these tribal systems may be arranged…to form a progression, of which
the extremes are pure exogamy on the one hand, and endogamy…on the other
hand, we have at present no right to say that these systems were developed in
anything like this tribal history. They may represent a progression from exogamy
to endogamy, or from endogamy to exogamy…The two types may be equally
archaic. Men must have originally been free of any prejudice against marriage
between relations…From this primitive indifference they may have advanced,
some to endogamy, some to exogamy. (McLennan \textit{Marriage} 60)

McLennan’s evolutionary narrative presents exogamy and endogamy as both synchronic
and diachronic. Various aspects from previous stages of evolution ‘survive’ into the
present and the greater internal differentiation enabled by exogamy exists alongside the
homogeneity of patriarchal endogamy, even as endogamy and exogamy are primitivized
in a linear evolutionary sequence.

The incoherent positioning of endogamy and exogamy within McLennan’s system
can be explained, however, by attending to a brief aside in his chapter on the decay of
exogamy and the emergence of patriarchal endogamy. McLennan claims that in addition

\(^{96}\)As Psomiades states, McLennan equates promiscuity with the absence of private property. The stage of
exogamous matrilineage allows McLennan to posit patriarchy and private property as parallel social
formations that characterize greater degrees of civilization (107).
to the other factors that contributed to the decay of exogamy, “the earliest violations of the rule of exogamy would have appeared to have been called for in the case of the female heiress,” since the exogamous marriage of a woman to a man outside her father’s family would have carried the property into another tribe or gentes (Mclennan Marriage 113). What appears to be an afterthought to Mclennan’s argument, however, actually presents a structuring principle and supplies the motive for his reassertion of endogamy at the end of his argument on the evolution of kinship practices: women’s right to property would destabilize the patriarchal conjugal family unless endogamy constrains its transmission along the male line. Reading middle-class anxieties into his analysis of early marriage practices, Mclennan presents an implicit link between the “heiress” whose property must be controlled through endogamy and the efforts by Victorian women to own their own property.

Applying Mclennan’s theory of kinship systems to early Semitic tribes, William Robertson Smith’s Kinship and Marriage in Early Arabia (1885) makes the threat of female ownership in matrilineal kinship systems more explicit by stating that in such kinship systems “a want of fixity in the marriage tie” results in “a state of things in which divorce is so frequent” (62). Robertson Smith further states that female ownership of property represents a relic of the matrilineal kinship (Arabia 95). Within the totemic stage, the totem and its name are identified with the woman who transmits the totem name to her children and determines kinship. The figure of the heiress thus represents a trace of the matriarchal figure of the totemic stage, which it is the express purpose of patriarchal endogamy to suppress. As a result, Mclennan finds himself enmeshed in what Robertson Smith aptly terms “the double system of kinship,” wherein the family feeling
arising out of patrilineal kinship contends with the group feeling of matrilineal exogamy (Arabia 161). Functioning within the patriarchal model of the middle-class conjugal family, McLennan strives to preserve the connection earlier established between women and the sacred totem or her group, but inscribes the connection within the patriarchal, endogamous family where both women and the totems they represent can be controlled by men and individuated property rights.

This leads us to the next question: what did totems represent that they needed to be inscribed in the way I am contending? In being identified with the sacred totem, women were also identified with the sexual and economic reproduction of the family that worship of the totem symbolized in the totemic stage. The circumscription of women’s property within patriarchal endogamy not only enables men to exercise control over women’s property but nature itself. The instability attributed to matriarchal kinship grounds anthropological claims over the potential instability that would result on sexual reproduction. As Robertson Smith states, “male kinship was a perfectly stable unity, and could go on multiplying from generation to generation without loss of homogeneity and local continuity so long as it had room to expand; whereas the groups of mother-kin which we have been looking at would be essentially unstable” (Arabia 233). Despite their claims that the totemic stage effects greater social cohesion, anthropologists repeatedly curtail the stability of such a system because such a stage empowers women in determining issues of kinship. Here, the identification of the totem with sexual (and potentially economic) reproduction becomes crucial in understanding the specific way in which middle-class domestic ideology influenced the curious obsession that Victorian
anthropologists expressed about the relationship between members of groups and their totems.

In his essay “The Worship of Plants and Animals,” published in *The Fortnightly Review* (1869), McLennan continues his exploration of totemism as a stage in the evolution of religious practices, a stage that allows him to delineate the transition from matriarchal to patriarchal kinship structures by tracking shifts in the transmission of property and a group’s totem names. The totem of each family usually refers to a plant or animal after which the family is named and which the family regards as sacred. Thus each tribe consists of several great families or gentes, united by the common totemic name and binding them in mutual obligations (McLennan “Worship” 409-410, Frazer *Totemism* 53). Each member of a family, McLennan claims, regards her totem as a “friend or protector and is thus much like the genius of the early Italian” (“Worship” 414). McLennan distinguishes fetishism’s tendency to ascribe life and human characteristics to natural and inanimate objects such as plants, animal, and rocks from totemism.

Fetichism thus resembles Totemism; which, indeed, is Fetichism plus certain peculiarities. These peculiarities are (1) the appropriation of a special Fetich to the tribe, (2) its hereditary transmission through mothers, and (3) its connection with the jus connubi. Our own beliefs is that the accompaniments of Fetichism have not been well deserved, and that it will yet be found that in many cases the Fetish is the Totem. (McLennan “Worship” 422-423)

The distinction between the totem and fetish is crucial since the totem is an organic substance identified with the group whereas the fetish is an artificial object. As Catherine Gallagher argues, McLennan’s organization of sexuality and Frazer’s analysis of agricultural rites of sacrifice incorporate Malthusian links between sexuality and the food supply. In Frazer, especially, control over fertility and sexual reproduction is identified with the economic reproduction of natural resources. In Frazer’s essay “Totemism,” he
argues that the origin of the totem has not as yet been determined but suggests that its root lies in issues of agricultural fertility: “it appears that the tendency of totemism to preserve certain species of plants and animals must have largely influenced the organic life of the countries where it prevailed” (Totemism 87). This is a thesis that remains underdeveloped in the essay but which The Golden Bough repeatedly explores. Whether considering the myth of Demeter and Persephone, the ritual death and resurrection of the priest at Nemi, or agricultural rites of English peasants, Frazer consistently sought to explicate how both primitives and modern subjects combined utilitarian logic and magical thinking in their efforts to control fertility, the food supply, and the process of birth, death, and regeneration through worship of the totem (Frazer Bough 1-3, 488-496, Jones 112-118).

Perceiving totemism to constitute both a religious and social system that regulates marriage laws, the distribution of property, and an ample food supply, anthropologists such as McLennan, Robertson Smith, and Frazer differentiate organic totems, which symbolize the very nature that tribes seek to control, from artificial objects that serve as fetishes. Thus, for example, in “Totemism,” Frazer reiterates a position taken on by

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97 In a letter to A.C. Haddon, for example, Frazer insists that the meaning of totemism is “a cooperative system of magic designed to provide the community with the necessaries of life, especially of food” (qtd. in Jones 162). Jones offers other examples from Frazer’s letters to Haddon in which Frazer interprets the intichima ceremony of the Australian aboriginal Arunta tribe as a totemic rite that seeks to increase the supply of the tribe’s totem for food, see 149-151.

98 Robertson Smith commends McLennan’s Primitive Marriage precisely for demonstrating that the totem constitutes an entire system that embraces the religious and social organization of groups (Arabia 223). In this sense, Victorian anthropologists approached the totem as a total system in the same way that Mauss would later interpret archaic gift economies as a ‘‘total’ social phenomena’’ (3). This totalizing approach to totems crumbled in later years, as the features of the totem stage, such as exogamy, matriarchy and worship of a totem, were no longer interpreted as necessarily connected (Jones 291-305). Worship of the totem just became a practice among practices rather than reflecting a systematic form of social organization. We can understand the drive to interpret social organization in this way as mirroring the organization of the middle-class family around the worship of the female and the household gods she represents, a symbol of absolute value that, if extricated from a system of relations, would cause the entire system to disaggregate as well.
many of his contemporaries with respect to the difference between the fetish and the
totem. “As distinguished from a fetich, a totem is never an isolated individual, but always
a class of objects, generally a species of animals or of plants, more rarely a class of
inanimate objects, very rarely a class of artificial objects” (Frazer Totemism 4).
Concerned as Frazer especially was with problems of scarcity and the food supply, he
deems the unnatural, artificial object to be an untenable catalyst for the reproduction of
nature, whether agricultural or sexual. Through their identification of women with the
totem and fertility, these anthropologists then equate control over economic and sexual
reproduction with controlling women and the totem. We can thus understand the earlier
incoherence found in McLennan’s temporal positioning of exogamy and endogamy as his
attempt to theorize a kinship system in which the woman’s identification with economic
and sexual reproduction through the totem becomes appropriated to a man and then
cannot be alienated in exogamous marriages. Endogamous patrilineal marriage keeps
control of women and what the totems they were once connected with symbolize:

- economic and sexual reproduction. McLennan’s theory thus preserves the connection
  established between women, sexual reproduction, and totems, but circumscribes them
  within the patriarchal conjugal family. In his efforts to render the middle-class Victorian
  family normative, women (and the totems they represent) cannot be alienated given their
  association with the sacred, sexuality, and fertility. McLennan uses the language of
totemism and kinship systems in order to legitimate the position of women within
domestic ideology, which attributes symbolic power to women through their connection
to the sacred and value in order to justify delimiting their economic and political power.
The power anthropologists like Mclennan attribute to women arises in part from Victorian notions of domesticity but also from their reading of Comte’s *System of Positive Philosophy* (Jones 32). The influence of Comte on Victorian anthropology provides an important bridge in my argument insofar as it demonstrates how commodities may be transformed into household gods. Comte makes clear how feminine influence, buttressed by the ideology of separate spheres, results in the sacralization of the domestic space and things into household gods—totems that secure value and insure economic and sexual reproduction. In outlining the stages that lead toward the “Religion of Humanity,” Comte argues that the progressive movement towards an altruistic society that characterizes the end-stage of his positive philosophy finds its early precursor in fetishism. Fetishism’s pantheism, its tendency to see all artificial and natural things as animated by human powers, cultivates “the sympathetic instincts” in human nature that enable individuals to subsume their egoistic impulses for altruistic motives (Comte 41). 99 While Comte argues that positivism extends and organizes the logic of fetishistic sympathy systematically by removing it from the confines of the family and transforming it into a sociology and ethics grounded in disinterest and reciprocity (78), the religion of humanity begins in the home and, specifically, with women. Due to their ‘natural’ disposition, women are more capable of sympathy and “the charm of self-sacrifice” (Comte 100). In their capacity for sympathy and self-sacrifice, they “are the personification of the Great Being” and each woman individually represents “the soul of her family” (Comte 55, 56). “Priestesses of Humanity,” Comte claims that women should renounce all work outside the home and all wealth (61). Women play an essential

99This aspect of Comte’s philosophy especially appealed to George Eliot, though Comte is not the only source for her interest in altruism and feelings of sympathy as a unifying force (Semmel 12-13). For a discussion of the importance of Comte and other positivists on Eliot’s thinking, see Semmel 7-15, 55-102.
role in the religion of humanity by practicing a form of worship in the home; and it is this practice of private, domestic worship that Comte argues constitutes “the adoration…of our personal patrons, our guardian angels or household gods…” (101). Here, the rhetoric of separate spheres and fetishism initiates a process that transforms the home and its constitutive objects into household gods. If women attained the right to possess property and enter into exchange relations in the market, as McLennan and others feared, not only would the construct of separate spheres be destabilized but, along with it, the sacralization of the domestic space that women specifically facilitated. In relation to the novels, the present analysis of McLennan shows that household gods potentially represent not fetishes but totems, and demonstrate the feared crisis in sexual and economic reproduction when the sanctity of the household was overtaken by capitalist forces. The loss of these totems either meant the downfall of the endogamous family, as in Eliot, or the resacralization of objects into household gods and the reconstitution of an endogamous patriarchal family with the self-sacrificing, domestic angel at its center, as in Trollope and Dickens. Similar to McLennan, the patriarchal endogamous family in the novels by Trollope and Dickens remains incoherent and synthesizes endogamous and exogamous marriage practices in order to shore up aspects of domestic ideology. In Dickens and Trollope, especially, the return to an endogamous patriarchal family coincides with the resacralization of the home and household gods, a process of transformation engendered by paragons of domestic virtue and self-sacrifice such as Florence and Hetta.

ii. Household Gods, Resacralization, and Kinship
The loss of household gods in *Dombey and Son*, as I discussed earlier, results from Dombey’s failed strategy to synthesize the sexual and economic and his concomitant failure to recognize Florence as the embodiment of intrinsic value. Dombey’s possessive individualism instead commodifies the home and allows the fluid values associated with the market and empire to enter its confines. The entry of the market into the home renders Dombey incapable of reproducing either economically or sexually: he faces bankruptcy, his marriages fail, and his heir, Paul, dies. The regeneration of a new family in Dickens’s novel hinges, as it does in Mclennan, on the woman’s connection to the sacred and sexual and economic reproduction—a process of regeneration that Florence effectively symbolizes through her sacralization of things into household gods. This act of sacralization in *Dombey and Son* begins by exploiting the very contagion that threatens the economy and domestic space: unstable values. While Dickens regards money and commodities as the taboo object that infiltrates Dombey’s home, he manipulates the ambiguity of tabooed objects to reform money and things as sacred, cleansing them both of their association with empire and unstable values through their connection with Florence. Dickens thus epitomizes the double process that tabooed objects, such as money, undergo. As Christopher Herbert claims, Frazer’s discussion of taboo directs Victorian readers to their obsessions with cleanliness and dirt. Such obsessions become crystallized in the contradictory attitude evangelicals expressed toward money as an object invested with divine powers and yet a filthy contaminant (Herbert “Lucre” 187-195). The contingency of the taboo mirrors value’s instability and yet simultaneously supplies the means by which the tabooed object of money can be resacralized, redirecting the very potent powers that Dombey had assigned to it. Thus, if
as Frazer suggests, the tabooed object becomes sacred either by relation to a god or by removing it from its functional usages, Dickens resacralizes money and the commodities within the domestic space by bringing them into relation with Florence and shifting them away from their functionality. As in McLennan, however, this transformation of value and reconstitution of the sacred results in a family that see-saws between kinship systems: Dickens can only secure value and the sacred by positioning Florence, the heiress of Dombey and Son, within an endogamous patriarchal family where she can be the source of its vitality without interrupting the distribution of private property along the male line.

In *Dombey and Son*, these processes of resacralization and the constitution of a new family primarily unfold within the space of Sol Gills’s shop the Wooden Midshipman. The Wooden Midshipman, unlike Dombey’s counting house, does not physically separate the dwelling place from the place of business but harmoniously integrates them, placing the parlor with its fireside behind the shop and the bedroom upstairs. In addition to the spatial proximity of work and home, Dickens also locates Sol’s shop in the vicinity of Dombey’s firm, the Royal Exchange, the Bank of England, and the East India Co., firmly situating Sol’s shop within the realms of watery trade and economic expansion. In the world of the Wooden Midshipman, the economy and family are reconciled and become productive once love and Florence embody intrinsic value. Cuttle, Sol, and Walter recognize Florence’s real value, equating her not with “base coin” but with her heart’s “undivided treasure” (Dickens *Dombey* 902). Florence’s haloed

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100 Disparaging Dickens’s romanticized portrayal of the Wooden Midshipman, Julian Moynahan argues that the back parlor of Sol Gills’s shop establishes a quasi-religious society in which Florence functions as an object of worship and all those who enter her purview have a good relationship with the “the quasi-sacramental element of water” (128).
position among the characters that congregate in the Wooden Midshipman enables her to facilitate the movement of money and commodities from their accursed position of instability and filth to the medium by which a new economy based on disinterest is sacralized. Thus, for example, when Florence finally runs away from home to Sol’s shop, Captain Cuttle raises an altar in Sol’s bedroom where Florence can rest, providing the very household gods that Dombey’s renovated home lacked.

It was very clean already; and the captain, being an orderly man, and accustomed to make things ship-shape, converted the bed into a couch, by covering it all over with a clean white drapery. By a similar contrivance, the Captain converted the little dressing-table into a species of altar, on which he set forth two silver spoons, a flower-pot, a telescope, his celebrated watch, a pocket-comb, and a song-book, as a small collection of rarities, that made a choice appearance. (Dickens *Dombey*

In this act of bricolage, objects that are anything but rarities aid in the construction of a sacred altar by being brought into relation to Florence and the moral values associated with her. In contrast to Marx’s commodity fetishism, where the deification of goods conceals the social relations of production, the transformation of Cuttle’s watch and other items into “a species of altar” evidences the contingency of an object’s value and the sacred itself. Dickens thus exploits the mutability of the sacred at the very moment that he reconstructs it as absolute value. Moreover, the shift from landed forms of wealth to the liquidities of capital and empire that destroyed Dombey’s home is here manipulated to denote not the contagion of money, commodity culture, and empire but “a species of altar.” Unlike the earlier scene in which Walter’s walk toward the docks allegorizes the movement toward less stable forms of value and property, Dickens’s sacralization of commodities reverses the traditional privileging of land over portable forms of property. In an economy less and less defined by the ownership of land, Dickens capitalizes on the
itinerancy of moveable possessions, presenting them as the subtle matter through which both he and his characters imaginatively restructure their relationship with others. Just as Wemmick rehabilitated the “portable property” associated with the ilk of his workplace by using it to construct his private castle, so Cuttle here ‘converts’ ordinary things into an altar for Florence.\(^{101}\) Just as Dickens preserves the figure of the domestic angel and her association with intrinsic value even as he reformulates the ideology of separate spheres, so Dickens critiques the fungibility of capital and commodity fetishism, even as he draws on such fetishism to saturate the economy with the value-laden, emotional relation on which he wants to ground both trade and family.

In addition to narrating the transformation of commodities into sacred objects, Dickens’s description of the wooden midshipman that stands outside Sol’s shop links them to sexual and economic reproduction.

The Wooden Midshipman at the Instrument Maker’s door, like the hard-hearted Midshipman he was, remained supremely indifferent to Walter’s going away…. He was so far the creature of circumstances, that a dry day covered him with dust, and a misty day blistered him; but otherwise he was a callous, obdurate, conceited midshipman….Such a midshipman he seemed to be, at least, in the then position of domestic affairs. Walter eyed him kindly many a time in passing in and out; and poor old Sol when Walter was not there, would come and lean against the door-post, resting his weary wig as near the shoe-buckles of the guardian genius of his trade and shop as he could. But no fierce idol with a mouth from ear to ear, and a murderous visage made of parrot’s feathers, was ever more indifferent to the appeals of its savage votaries, than was the wooden midshipman to these marks of attachment. (Dickens *Dombey* 330)

By presenting a contrast between the midshipman’s indifference and the emotional associations that characters ascribe to him, Dickens emphasizes the degree to which the

\(^{101}\) Both Cuttle and Wemmick reshape the status of objects in their midst as a way to transform the social world in which they find themselves. Hence, if characters bring taboo objects into relation with the sacred and remove them from their common, functional usages, they do so not to remove them from social context but to reorganize the social context and their position in relation to it. For a related argument see Brown *Things* 11. For Levi-Strauss’s discussion of Wemmick as an example of bricolage, see *The Savage Mind* 17, 150.
figure mediates social relations and self-understanding, narrating not his innate nature but how characters construe their relations with others. Dickens’s description of the wooden midshipman as a “guardian genius” proves especially important for our discussion of household gods. McLennan’s comparison of the totem to the Roman concept of a genius illustrates the way in which household gods can be read as a totem. Like the lares or household gods, the Roman concept of the “genius” refers to the spirit of the house. The genius expresses the spiritual double of persons and is associated with fertility and reproduction. While the divine double becomes the object of the religious cult, it is not a single person’s genius that families worship but the household genius of the paterfamilias depicted in the shrine of the Lares (Hornblower and Spawforth 630). As a type of lares and totemic object, the description of the midshipman as an object through which characters come to terms with “the then position of domestic affairs” takes on even greater significance since it relates the sacred object to issues of fertility. The animating power of affection transforms the wooden figure just as disinterested love produces a sacrificial labor that renders commodities the means to underwrite cherished social relations.

Dickens’s novel reveals the way in which various types of portable property, whether configured as money or things, can be reanimated to engender both sexual and economic reproduction. Reading the wooden midshipman as a lares, we can understand the physical space of Sol’s shop and the kinship of its members tied by affection rather than blood, as Dickens’s attempt to imagine a new and healthy family structure that effectively joins sexual and economic reproduction by demonstrating that, like the midshipman, money and ordinary possessions can be reconstituted into a sacred object.
through people’s affective responses. Thus, for example, when Florence gifts her magic “money purse” to Walter before he sails to Barbados, she rinses the money of its negative connotations by predicking it on a gift-economy and asking Walter to “take it with my love” (Dickens *Dombey* 339). By connecting Florence with this transformative and constituting power, Dickens makes the gold Florin coin that her name Florence obliquely references a medium of sacred influence rather than contamination. As in the altar Cuttle builds, money takes on a sacred character once it comes into association with Florence. In this manner, Florence becomes a portable possession, whose sacred status in the novel sacralizes whatever comes into contact with her even as she herself physically circulates.  

If the novel effectively joins the “money world” with the separate “water world” through empire and catalyzes capitalist expansion by transforming foreign goods into metropolitan wealth, such a merger can only be endorsed by the novelist after money has been reconstituted as something sacred (Perera 64). When Florence and Walter leave for China after their wedding, Walter refers to Florence as his “sacred charge” (Dickens *Dombey* 884). Dickens’s use of “charge” underscores Florence’s dual position as an object of Walter’s care and her capacity to revitalize things by merely entering her

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102 On a slightly different note, Jonathan Arac states that Dickens connects Florence to dead spirits such as her mother and Paul right after Paul’s death, which transforms Dombey’s house into a gothic home animated by spirits. Florence’s solitary presence initiates a process of estrangement in which Dombey’s home becomes uncanny (Arac 103-104). While Dickens clearly draws on gothic and fairytale elements to describe the house’s state just prior to its renovations, he invests Florence with an animating power to transmute the ghostly. Through such powers, Florence “gave to every lifeless thing a touch of human interest and wonder” (Dickens *Dombey* 267). While Dombey deanimates the house with his emotional frigidity, Florence animates it.

103 Several critics have discussed the motif of water in the novel. Julian Moynahan claims that Florence transforms the sea of death into a sea of love and establishes the contrast in the novel between ‘wetness’ and ‘firmness.’ In order to be saved, every character has to establish an intimate relation with water (125-126). Nina Auerbach interprets the opposition of the “money world” and “water world” in the novel as part of its general binary logic in which the separation of masculine and feminine spheres results in a set of contraries: Dombey’s masculine world of money, railroads, and trade opposes Florence’s association with water, love, and natural cycles (107-129).
sphere of influence. In her capacity as sacred charge, Florence both feminizes the ship and insures its prosperity: “Upon the deck, image to the roughest man on board of something that is graceful, beautiful and harmless—something that is good and pleasant to have there, and should make the voyage prosperous—is Florence” (Dickens *Dombey* 907). Florence’s presence on the boat effects both economic and sexual reproduction since she gives birth to another Paul at sea and Walter’s journey to China proves financially lucrative.\(^\text{104}\) Remarking on this transformation, Mr. Toots states “[t]hus…from his daughter, after all, another Dombey and Son will ascend” (Dickens *Dombey* 974).

Unlike the first Dombey and Son, the new business and family that Dickens imaginatively reconstructs is stabilized by the value and love that Florence symbolizes, an economy ruled by the logic of the gift, self-sacrifice, and duty. Florence’s nurse Susan Nipper summarizes the ethic of this new economy when she pledges her loyalty to Florence and refuses wages, stating that she “wouldn’t sell her love and duty…even if the Savings Bank and me were total strangers or the Banks were broken to pieces” (Dickens *Dombey* 882). Similarly, Dombey receives an anonymous “annual sum” from Carker’s brother and sister as a “debt and act of reparation” for the bankruptcy Carker caused. Once the economy becomes allied to the values of duty, affection, and mutuality, business improves as well. The Wooden Midshipman, which never sold anything and continues in this state, begins to turn a profit and is thus rewarded for its non-participation in exchange (Jaffe *Vanishing* 101). Moreover, this new family transgresses the boundaries of race, class, and blood ties by including such characters as Captain

\(^{104}\)This is yet another example of how, in contrast to Dombey, Florence’s marriage integrates work and domesticity where Dombey failed (Flint 42).
Cuttle, Mr. Toots, the “mulattor” and “slave” Susan Nipper, all of whom are brought into connection with each other through their love for Florence. In contrast to the contagious sea and Dombey’s possessive individualism, Florence embodies the “good spirit” that shows people the destruction emanating from within their homes and that they are “creatures of one common origin, owing one duty to the Father of one family…!” (Dickens *Dombey* 738-739). Dickens’s alternative economic model in which value and relationships of mutual obligation sacralize a new economy and family thus appears to have transformed the sea of contagion and fluid values to the intrinsic value of love, integrating individuals of various classes and races within a utopian community.

In Dickens’s alternative family and economy, the sea no longer speaks of death or pollution but “of Florence and their ceaseless murmuring to her of the love, eternal and illimitable, extending still, beyond the sea, beyond the sky, to the invisible country far away” (Dickens *Dombey* 976). To inaugurate this new family, anchored in the intrinsic value of Florence and love, Sol brings out the last bottle of Madeira that he had reserved for Walter’s return and marriage to Florence, the very bottle of Madeira that traveled for years in ships around the globe as sailors sang Rule Britannia. In a quasi-totemic rite, Dombey, Sol, and Captain Cuttle drink from the last bottle of Madeira, toasting together the new family they have formed. Cleansed of its exploitative origins in imperial trade through its association with Florence, the bottle of Madeira sacralizes both the new family based on mutual obligations and “lost ships, freighted with gold” (Dickens *Dombey* 974). But if, as the novel’s closing chapter claims, there are many other buried bottles of wine like the Madeira that will later be brought into the light, the novel gestures toward the repeated sacralization process that the goods of imperial trade will have to
undergo to stave off the threat of fluid values and its contagion. In this sense, Dickens’s novel proves unsuccessful in the resolution of the problem it explores since the new economy that converts imperial trade into sacred gold must conceal its origins, not letting its readers know where Florence’s money purse comes from or how Sol Gill’s shop turns a profit.

The novel’s ending not only suggests that securing value requires a family constructed around Florence and repeated acts of sacralization but, replicating the pattern identified in Mclennan, a partial return to a patriarchal, endogamous family that ascribes sacred powers to women in order to divest them of money and property. The extended and non-biological family that Florence constructs around her conceals Dickens’s deeper conservatism. Though Dombey may have been mistaken in his appraisal of Florence’s value as “debased coin,” the novel undercuts her position as the heiress to Dombey and Son. As in Mclennan, securing women’s association with the sacred, value, and their role within domestic ideology appears irreconcilable with women’s ownership and transmission of property. While the novel feigns a matriarchal lineage founded through Florence, heiress to Dombey and Son, Dickens actually recreates the endogamous patriarchal family that Dombey had destroyed with Florence at its center, who then resacralizes household gods and reproduces the family. Dickens accomplishes this by having Florence enter into a biologically exogamous marriage with Walter that he then figuratively transforms into a set of endogamous relations. After Paul’s death, Florence tells Walter: “you’ll be a brother to me Walter, now that he is gone and I have none on earth” (Dickens Dombey 337). The narrative further emphasizes Walter’s role as a

105Suvendrini Perera claims that Dickens draws on the mythology of the sea from adventure tales like that by Captain Marryat, with whom Dickens was familiar, in order to cover up the imperial source of the gold-freighted ships (74).
surrogate Paul by placing him on a boat that Dickens calls the “Son and Heir.”

When Walter returns after his shipwreck, he and Florence have become adults and his position as Paul’s substitute leads to sexual tensions that cause Florence to “weep at this estrangement of her brother” (Dickens Dombey 802). Even after their marriage, however, Walter and Florence’s relationship continues to resemble a filial bond between brother and sister (Waters 54-55).

While earlier the logic of substitution revealed Paul’s status as a changeling, an object that Dombey hoarded and thus drained of life, Dickens now draws on the trope of substitution to reconstruct an endogamous family even while Florence enters into an exogamous marriage with Walter. Through the fiction of the surrogate brother, Dickens presents their marriage as both endogamous and exogamous at once. Florence and Dombey and Son thus become reincorporated into the patriarchal line of Dombey, giving birth not only to another Dombey and Son but another Florence and Paul. The potentially incestuous feelings that Florence earlier represented to Dombey as the “clue to something secret in his breast” are distanced through her marriage to Walter (Dickens Dombey 84). Dombey no longer displaces his attraction to Florence, his “blooming daughter,” onto rivals such as Edith but channels it into his granddaughter Florence and “hoards her in his heart” (Dickens Dombey 975). Dombey hoards the very thing that he had earlier failed to

__Commenting on the numerous surrogate familial relationships in the novel, Catherine Waters argues that such substitution points to the failures and fissures in the Dombey family (56). Hilary Schor, by contrast, connects it to a pattern of “replication, replacement, and destruction” in a story that ends with “a world of repetitive parenting” (50, 69). Diane Sadoff views Florence, like other Dickensian daughters, as a figure that repairs temporal discontinuities and eradicates origins through repetition. This pattern of redemption through repetition appears in both Florence’s repetition of herself in the children she produces and in her connection to currency. In being “base coin,” Florence ironically gives birth to copies of herself despite suggestions of her valuelessness or illegitimacy (Sadoff 51-64). I am more interested in how Dickens utilizes such metaphorical substitution and repetition to construct the novel’s tropology and imagine a new Dombey family that combines economic and biological reproduction. Ironically, Dickens’s ending draws on the very logic of substitution and equivalence inherent to capitalist exchange in order to restructure a family guided by non-capitalist motives. For a discussion of how the commodity and money form relies on homology and the play of substitutions, see Goux 2-4, 9-12.__
see was the basis of economic and sexual generation: woman. In her association with the sacred and the totem, Dombey now hoards the right thing that will ensure the reproduction of his firm and family. Like the young Walter who preserved Florence’s “image in his mind as something precious, unattainable, unchangeable,” Dombey learns that the reproduction of capital and value are inseparable from the hoarding of women (Dickens *Dombey* 288). Women like Florence, rather than Paul, represent capital to be hoarded. Florence regenerates the family and its household gods but rather than disinheriting the male line, will transmit it to the new Paul. As Dombey tells his grandson, the older Paul “was weak, and you are very strong” (Dickens *Dombey* 975). Walter as the surrogate Paul will hand it down to the newer and healthier Paul to whom Florence has given birth. Florence’s ability to transform commodities and capital like the bottle of Madeira into household gods, her position as something sacred and untouched by the forces of capital, and yet her function as capital to be hoarded, display the contradictions and uneasy alliances totems and their attendant taboos seek to regulate.

Dickens’s symbolic resolution to the problem of value and restitution of household gods through the self-sacrificing woman who secures value, and yet is constrained within a system of patrilineal endogamy, surfaces in Trollope as well. As discussed earlier, Trollope attributes the absence of Lares in Melmotte’s home to a set of interrelated issues: the culture of speculation and fluctuating values, uncertain kinship, and the absence of a self-sacrificing maternal figure in the home who could transform newly acquired wealth into markers of domestic affections and histories. The “lack of fixity” that Robertson Smith claims characterizes matrilineal kinship thus emerges within the context of Melmotte’s family, a family bereft of household gods. Trollope contrasts
the family that emerges around Melmotte to the one he constructs around Hetta, Paul, and Roger at the novel’s close. Yet, unlike Dickens, Trollope does not explicitly stage a resacralization process through the members of this new familial arrangement. Rather, Trollope’s synthesis of endogamous and exogamous relations, his repositioning of a self-sacrificing and virtuous woman in Carbury Hall, suggests the possible means by which England can facilitate a transition into a new economy without losing its household gods. Though Hetta embodies many of the traits of the domestic woman, her marriage to Paul indicates a transition into a new economy and familial arrangement. In addition to marrying out of love and individual choice rather than familial duty, Hetta marries a man who struggles to participate in the speculative economy throughout the novel. As a liminal figure, Paul’s position between economies and conceptions of gentlemanly behavior makes the marriage between Paul and Hetta all the more significant. Through their voluntary union and marriage based on love, the novel gestures toward the kind of marriage that guarantees economic and sexual reproduction in a changing economy. Trollope secures value through Hetta’s clichéd role as the self-sacrificing, virtuous maiden and, quite literally, by embedding the exogamous marriage and home within the older values of landed gentry and endogamous patrilineal inheritance that Roger Carbury symbolizes. Through this fractured collage of old and new economic and domestic arrangements, Hetta and Roger preserve the inalienability of land and a domestic space watched over by household gods.

Like Comte, Trollope praises “a woman’s natural desire to sacrifice” (391). Yet, the novel persistently demonstrates a culture in which sacrifice no longer has a place.

107 Ilana Blumberg, by contrast, argues that Trollope dissents from the prevailing valorization of self-sacrifice found in other nineteenth-century writers. Instead, she claims that Trollope subjects the ideal of sacrifice to critique by comparing it with forms of theft.
either in women’s roles at home or in the workplace. *The Way We Live Now* presents the absence of self-sacrifice, the reduction of marriage to an economic transaction, and women’s right to divorce and own property, as causally related phenomena that result in both economic and domestic instability. The Beargarden Club and London stock-exchange, for example, proceed without the sacrifices of labor, prudence, or saving. Felix Carbury’s idea of “weary work” is to chase heiresses like Marie Melmotte while, similarly, Lady Carbury’s notion of “sacrifice” is to help Felix marry an heiress (Trollope 41, 88). Lady Carbury claims to know that “it was a woman’s duty to sacrifice herself for society,” but only does so if she receives “some return for her sacrifices” (Trollope 134, 179).

The culture of speculation not only results in adulterated notions of sacrifice but also transforms marriage into a market in which individuals speculate on the financial benefits of particular partners. Like Edith in *Dombey and Son*, Melmotte places his daughter Marie on the “matrimonial market” where she is forced into “trafficking with the Nidderdales and Grassloughs” so her father can acquire property through the alliance (Trollope 92). Marie and Georgianna, like men at the stock exchange, play the matrimonial market—the crucial difference being that they view themselves as stock subject to speculation. Georgianna engages herself to Breghert and later marries Batherstone though she regards neither as an ideal match, because she realizes that, earlier, she had “fixed her price too high” (Trollope 463). Whereas her brother Dolly stands to inherit the Pickering property, Georgianna must find a husband for financial security even if it means setting aside her anti-Semitic and classist sentiments. Marie cynically diagnoses a climate in which marriage passes for an economic transaction when
she doubts the motive of Fisker’s marriage proposal, stating that “[i]t’s only money. Nobody cares for anything else. Fisker’s all well; but he only wants the money” (Trollope 709). While Trollope empathizes with Marie’s description of marriage, her inheritance aligns her with a set of values that he holds as suspect. Marie’s inheritance allows her to resist, unlike Georgianna, the strictures of the marriage market and to choose a mate that will not compromise her desire to be financially independent. Marie’s acceptance of Fisker’s proposal of marriage and move to America hinges on the reassurance that in America, unlike England, she will retain control over her finances.

“And then,” said he, pleading his cause not without skill, “the laws regulating woman’s property there are just the reverse of those which the greediness of man has established here. The wife there can claim her share of her husband’s property, but hers is exclusively her own. America is certainly the country for women,—and especially California.” (Trollope 750-751)

Trollope relegates both speculative activity and women’s ownership of property to foreign spaces such as America, cautioning his readers that the instabilities that pervade the culture of investment represents but a species of problems that will undermine the home and marriage. The connections between divorce, women’s ownership of property, and America is further substantiated by Trollope’s characterization of Mrs. Hurtle. Mrs. Hurtle divorced her husband in San Francisco and since then “she’s had the handling of her own money, and has put it so that he can’t get hold of a dollar” (Trollope 703). As a “wild cat” rumored to have dueled with her husband, Trollope portrays Mrs. Hurtle as a dangerous harbinger of what would ensue should women in England be allowed to control their money and property (503). To underscore this point, Trollope opposes Mrs. Hurtle to the representative figure of virtuous English women in the novel, Hetta. Hetta also serves as Trollope’s mouthpiece against divorce and the economic independence
Mrs. Hurtle represents. “Had she been divorced then?” asked Hetta,—“because I believe they get themselves divorced just when they like” (Trollope 582). Hetta expresses the fear of men in England—if women can divorce at will and own property, then they would divest men of financial security. Trollope resolves the problem of the heiress that McLennan poses by exporting the problem to America. If America is, as Fisker states, “the country for women,” then England will remain the country for men. Trollope implicitly narrates a causal chain in which the unstable values associated with the sandy foundations of credit and investment culture enable women to act as players in the new economy, a role that undoes the patriarchal domestic arrangement that accompanies his notion of a stable economy.

In contrast to the Melmottes and Americans, Trollope constructs an alternative, though unorthodox, family around Hetta, Paul, and Roger that incorporates the values of self-sacrifice, virtue, and the stability of a land-based economy. He thereby rescues value and the English family from “American ways” through the uncompromising positions taken by Roger and Hetta. Such absolutism not only appears in the context of Roger’s refusal to have contact with the Melmottes or engage in shady business practices, but also in his views of love.

What did love mean if not that? What could be the devotion which men so often affect to feel if it did not tend to self-sacrifice on behalf of the beloved one? A man would incur any danger for a woman, would subject himself to any toil,—would even die for her! But if this were done simply with the object of winning her, where was that real love of which sacrifice of self on behalf of another is the truest proof? (Trollope 762)

Roger’s ultimate willingness in the novel to sacrifice his wishes to be Hetta’s lover, brings into relief the subtle tie that Trollope forms between feelings and other markers of absolute value in the novel such as land. Because the culture of credit and speculation
endangers the traditional estimation of land as an inalienable possession, Trollope makes feelings of love something that cannot change or suffer repeated circulation. Whatever the fate of his love for Hetta, Roger’s feelings will remain, like him, “altogether unchanged” (Trollope 710). Similarly, when Hetta discovers that Paul had been previously engaged to Mrs. Hurtle, she maintains her virtue by severing the relationship with Paul even though her feelings for him are not subject to change. “But Hetta Carbury, if once her heart had passed from her own dominion into the possession of another, would never change her love” (Trollope 359). Hetta’s unchanging feelings, once alienated and given to another, cannot be repeatedly circulated or used to serve financial interests. Though Hetta bears greater similarity to Roger than to Paul, insofar as Paul vacillates in his romantic and financial affairs throughout the novel, Hetta refuses to shift her attachment from Paul to Roger, either due to financial interests of her family or Paul’s suspected infidelity. Hetta would be willing to “sacrifice much for her mother…[b]ut she did not know how she could give herself into the arms of a man she did not love” (Trollope 401). In a world where everything, even marriage, is liable to be speculated upon and trafficked, Hetta refuses to allow her love to become subject to the wheel of circulation.

Yet, if Roger and Hetta share such absolutist tendencies, then the question remains why Trollope does not construct a family and economy around their marriage rather than that between Hetta and Paul. Despite the novel’s apparent valorization of the intrinsic value of land and the moral values that Roger represents, the novel also makes
clear that Roger’s value system is out of fashion.\textsuperscript{108} The stable system of value that Carbury hall represents seems atavistic and isolated. Roger Carbury is “alone in the world” precisely because he is, as Paul Montague states, “a gentleman all around and every inch” (Trollope 47, 198). Such praise renders Roger an invariable standard of conduct and values but not a standard that can or should be replicated in an economy that in no way resembles the feudal relations that Roger maintains with characters like Ruby Ruggles and John Crumb. Despite voicing the novel’s critique of the “degeneracy of the age,” Roger himself is aware that he “set[s] no example to the nation at large” (Trollope 423). Like the property he owns, Roger indicates the attitudes of a much older generation. His moral position is too stringent, so much so that Hetta finds him unattractive: “[h]e is so much above me, that, though I do love him, I cannot think of his in that way” (Trollope 301). While the novel offers a nostalgic and romanticized portrayal of Roger’s attachment to the land and his tenants, Trollope also makes clear that there will be no more Rogers.

Roger is, quite literally, a dying breed who will not be able to reproduce himself either sexually or economically. Yet, rather than submit to wholesale destruction of Roger’s family lineage, as in Eliot’s novel, Trollope rescues both the property relations of a feudal economic system rooted in land and its transmission through the endogamous marriage that symbolically occurs at the novel’s close. Roger decides not to marry at all and instead assumes the role of father to Hetta, giving her in marriage to Paul. Roger then violates the law of primogeniture, which is “sacred” to him (Trollope 711), by entailing his property on Hetta’s first-born son. Trollope papers over the alienation of

\textsuperscript{108}Both Kincaid and Herbert, for example, note that Roger’s almost exaggerated moral punctiliousness shows that Trollope does not endorse him fully as the novel’s moral center (Kincaid 172, Herbert Comic 176).
Roger’s inheritance by placing the sanctity of property alongside that of love. While in an older economic and social system it would have been expected of Hetta to marry her cousin Roger and continue the family line, the marriage of alliance is replaced by the absolute value given to romantic love. “Among the holy things which did exist to gild this every-day unholy world, love was the holiest. It should be soiled by no falsehood, should know nothing of compromises, should admit no excuses, should make itself subject to no external circumstances” (Trollope 507). The language of love and property, both symbolizing the holy, the inalienable, and intrinsically valuable, compete with each other in the novel only to then be reconciled through Roger’s compromise. Roger settles the property on Hetta, essentially making her an heiress, but conceals this fact by entailing it on a male heir. This compromise makes the marriage-plot ending appear, as in Dickens, as both exogamous and endogamous. On the one hand, Hetta’s marriage to Paul is exogamous; on the other hand, Roger’s decision to settle his property on Hetta supplies a fiction that the system of endogamous inheritance has not been interrupted. Furthermore, by giving Hetta in marriage to Paul and entailing his estate on Hetta’s son, Roger joins the holiness of love with the holiness of the land.

The disposition of a family property, even though it be one as small as mine, is, to my thinking, a matter which a man should not make in accordance with his own caprices—or even with his own affections. He owes a duty to those who live on his land, and he owes a duty to his country. And, though it may seem fantastic to say so, I think he owes a duty to those who have been before him, and who have manifestly wished that the property should be continued in the hands of their descendents. These things are to me very holy. (Trollope 766)

In his function as “steward” of the Carbury property, Roger’s main responsibility is in guaranteeing the reproduction of the family and its perpetuation into the future (Trollope 766). Through the marriage between Paul and Hetta, Roger ushers in a compromise: the
marriage maintains the transmission of land along the male line and also places Hetta in Carbury Hall where her virtue will guarantee the perpetuation of the Carbury name and the sanctity of the home. While Roger facilitates the symbolic return to endogamous, patrilineal inheritance, Hetta’s position in Carbury Hall opens up the possibility that she would become the steward of household gods. Trollope hints at this possibility early in the novel through Roger’s express determination to make Carbury Hall, like Ruskin’s domestic haven, a place watched over by household gods. “He held the place in trust for the use of others. But if there were one among all others to whom the house should be a house of refuge from care, not an abode of trouble…that of him and of his house, and of all things there, she was the mistress,…that one was his cousin Hetta” (Trollope 119). Trollope intertwines the intrinsic value of love and land, exogamous marriage with endogamous patrilineal inheritance so that Roger can maintain his feudal relation to the Carbury property and its tenants while Paul and Hetta’s love secures the domestic space as a “refuge from care.” Unlike the Melmotte home, Hetta’s virtue and willingness to self-sacrifice all else but her love for Paul, expresses the possibility that their love-marriage will be economically and sexually productive, an unchanging love that will sacralize the home and its household gods.

The sacralization strategies adopted by Dickens and Trollope pose particular problems for *The Mill on the Floss* given Eliot’s feminist aspirations and resistance to the very model of feminine self-sacrifice that Dickens and Trollope make the medium of sacred influence. If the restoration of household gods relies on both the presence of a self-sacrificing female in the home and the peculiar “double system of kinship” that integrates endogamous patrilineal inheritance with an exogamous marriage, Eliot’s novel
pronounces the loss of household gods to be irremediable. Lacking the domestic resolution found in Dickens and Trollope, the Tullivers’s things are not reanimated by feminine influence but rather suffer a process of deanimation that parallels the disintegration of both matrilineal and patrilineal inheritance. The failure of the Tulliver family to either reanimate their things or recreate the family after the bankruptcy arises from the dislocation of both the men and women from the family roles they previously inhabited. When Tulliver has a stroke, for example, he awakens after hearing the family open the tin box, a family heirloom that contains his financial documents. Yet Eliot’s depiction of this reanimation only serves to remind both Tulliver and the reader that the patriarchal lineage that the object represents cannot be reproduced.

Mr. Glegg had lifted out the parchments and had fortunately drawn back a little, when the iron holder gave way, and the heavy lid fell with a loud bang that resounded over the house. Perhaps there was something in that sound more than the mere fact of the strong vibration that produced the instantaneous effect on the frame of the prostrate man, and for the time completely shook off the obstruction of paralysis. The chest had belonged to his father and his father’s father, and it had always been rather a solemn business to visit it. All long-known objects, even a mere window-fastening or a particular door latch, have sounds which are a sort of recognised voice to us—a voice that will thrill and awaken when it has been used to touch deep-lying fibres. In the same moment when all the eyes in the room were turned upon him, he started up and looked at the chest, the parchments in Mr. Glegg’s hand, and Tom holding the tin box, with a glance of perfect consciousness and recognition. (Eliot 193-194)

Like Mrs. Tulliver’s things, the tin box carries multiple associations and embodies vital aspects of Edward Tulliver, which is why after he hears its familiar sound he awakens from his paralysis. Eliot again demonstrates the way in which individual objects embody the vitality of a person or families and how contact with such beloved possessions reanimate individuals as well. In Spencer’s analysis of idol and fetish worship, for

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One could interpret Stephen Guest and Lucy Deane’s marriage at the end of the novel as a marriage plot that represents the transition into a capitalist economy, but it remains unclear whether this union will reinstate household gods.
example, objects that represent persons, such as effigies or miniatures, seem to embody the spirit of that individual. Possession and worship of such objects allows individuals to feel that they are connected to that person because “the vivid representation so strongly arouses the thought of a living personality” and “the vitality of the person imitated” (Spencer “Idol” 162, 163). The tin box’s sound animates Tulliver with the vital connection to his forefathers. Eliot describes this reanimation process as an act of recollection that rescues individual values and national culture consigned to loss. Nevertheless, “the complete restoration” of his senses and his “revival” is short-lived and Tulliver relapses into a state of incoherence. Whereas Tulliver experiences a brief reanimation through the memory of the past only to fall back into a deanimated stupor, Mrs. Tulliver becomes irrevocably deanimated by the loss of her things. “Poor Mrs Tulliver, it seemed, would never recover her old self—her placid household activity: how could she? The objects among which her mind had moved complacently were all gone….It was piteous to see the comely blond stout woman getting thinner and more worn under bodily, as well as mental, restlessness which made her often wander about the empty house after her work was done…” (Eliot 241-242). Alienated from their possessions, the Tullivers become ghostly and their material losses disinherit their children from their property and the roles that would allow them to reproduce the family economically and sexually.

The failure to adapt to economic changes results in a parallel failure to institute a new family in which middle-class domestic ideology secures value in the home through feminine self-sacrifice. Maggie’s attempts at self-sacrifice backfire and appear ill-fitted to her changing circumstances. As the incident of the jam puff illustrates, Maggie’s
“power of sacrifice” is limited (Eliot 33). Moreover, even when she does embrace renunciation, she actually internalizes her desires rather than surrendering the self to outer forces such that, as John Kucich observes, she “enlarges selfhood in isolation from the inconclusive, fragmentary world of others” (Repression 118). The narrator confirms Maggie’s deepening of the self through renunciation when she remarks that “[f]rom what you know of her, you will not be surprised that she threw some exaggeration and willfulness, some pride and impetuosity, even into her self-renunciation” (Eliot 255-256). This model of excess even in sacrifice surfaces in Maggie’s reading choices. She decides to read Thomas a Kempis’s *Imitation of Christ* and its impassioned advocacy for renunciation over another book that Bob also gifts her, Robert Dodsley’s *The Economy of Human Life*. *The Economy of Human Life* outlines the economic principles of sacrifice, abstinence, prudence, and saving that the Gleggs promulgate (Blake 227). Thus, Maggie rejects the particular type of sacrifice and prudence that underlies capitalist logic and the model of female self-sacrifice that it promotes in favor of Thomas à Kempis’s disciplined excesses.

Maggie’s assertion of self through renunciation stands in contrast to Lucy’s disinterested passivity, which more closely resembles the ideal of the domestic angel. Lucy is filled with so much disinterested benevolence that, the narrator quips, “even her small egoisms were impregnated with it” (Eliot 324). A doll-like benevolent girl who delights in “feeding dependent creatures” (Eliot 325), Lucy survives in the novel and finally marries Stephen because her desires, unlike Maggie’s, have been successfully domesticated. Her desires have been so overly domesticated that she remains ignorant of, if not incapable of recognizing, the sexual attraction between Maggie and Stephen.
“Maggie could look at Stephen—which, for some reason or other, she always avoided when they were alone; and he could even ask her to play his accompaniment for him, since Lucy’s fingers were so busy with that bazaar-work” (Eliot 354-355). The feminine labor that Maggie as a child had labeled “foolish work” distracts Lucy away from the erotic exchange the musical performance secretly conveys. When Stephen jokingly wonders prior to meeting Maggie whether she, like her mother, will “be represented by her brandy-cherries and cream-cakes” (Eliot 321), he inadvertently points to the very self-sacrificing feminine labor that Maggie refuses to do. Even when she does do stitch-work, it’s for pay and not the kind of work that expresses her selfhood. Her inability to domesticate her desires also leaves her without a mate. Maggie’s attraction to Stephen is sexual while her attachment to Philip expresses a desire to be self-sacrificing and create a “sacred place, a sanctuary” within herself away from her selfish desires through her “womanly devotedness” to Philip (Eliot 360-361). Of course, her passionate nature prevails and she fails to create such a sanctuary within herself. In her failure, the novel suggests that Maggie also cannot successfully integrate herself into the paradigm of marriage made available to her.110 Thus, while she can row home in longing for the very sanctuary of home in which “sacred relics” once lay, she herself cannot be an agent that

110There’s a wealth of feminist criticism that has analyzed Eliot’s portrayal of Maggie and her relationship to desire. I give here but a few examples. Judith Lowder Newton faults Eliot for curtailing her critique on the social system that oppresses Maggie’s self-development and desires by praising the powers of sacrifice and dependent love; Eliot embeds Maggie’s final act of resistance through the flood, in which she sacrifices both herself and destroys the patriarchal community of St. Ogg. (150-157). Elaine Showalter analyzes how Maggie’s desires are neither channeled into productive work nor achieve sexual fulfillment but rather take the perverted form of renunciation (127-130). Elizabeth Ermath sees Eliot as dramatizing how Maggie is engaged in a “long suicide” in which she suppresses her desires and internalizes social norms that cripple her and leave her feeling inferior and deformed. By contrast, Nina Auerbach interprets Maggie as a powerful demonic figure whose untrained hunger gives her witch-like tendencies and surfaces in the gothic descriptions of her appearance, relationship to nature, and reading choices (230-252). Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar also emphasize Maggie’s resemblance to witches. Maggie channels her satanic desire to harm either through inflicting pain on other things, like dolls or rabbits, or through the self-inflicted martyrdom that Eliot promotes in the novel’s ending (492-493).
transforms the home or commodities into something sacred since she has rejected the domestic ideology that underwrites such transformation.111

Whereas Maggie fails to perform the domestic role assigned to women, Tom quickly adapts to the demands of capitalist enterprise through manly self-reliance and abstinence. Nevertheless, Tom is unable to combine economic success with marriage and family. As he tells his uncle Deane, aside from work “[t]here’s nothing else I care about much” (Eliot 350). While Tom’s resignation to a life of work without family shocks his uncle, Eliot shows that Tom’s strategy to combine the propulsive movement of capitalism with the retrogressive recuperation of the Tulliver past are irreconcilable. Tom may be successful but all his efforts are bent upon regaining the mill and the lost connection to the past. Mrs. Glegg observes that Tom had given up the values of clanship in favor of personal pride. His sense of injured pride fuels his efforts to fulfill his father’s wishes and regain the mill, but the price for this restoration is reproductive sterility. Joshua Esty convincingly argues that the absence of a marriage plot for Maggie and Tom further indicates their position within a historical breach; the Tullivers must not only transition from being yeoman farmers to capitalists but, at the same time, must shift from the extended family kinship system that the clanship of the Dodsons represent to a nuclear family. Esty further suggests that the narrator’s ethnographic description of St. Ogg as an endogamous village threatened by modernization shows the impossibility of the cousin marriage between Tom and Lucy Deane, which would reproduce the endogamous structure of the family and continue its sexual and economic reproduction. Neither this

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111Daniel Cottom argues that Maggie’s “doubleness,” her vacillation between private desire and self-sacrificing duty, imitates the double process of the sacred and accursed (196). In the context of my argument, Maggie’s inability to commit to self-sacrificing duty and the gendered role therein implied jeopardizes her ability to manipulate the double process of tabooed objects, an ability that would infuse objects with a sacred rather than accursed character.
endogamous marriage nor the exogamous marriage of Stephen and Maggie, the novel suggests, can occur. Instead, the extended family disaggregates and the Tullivers are left isolated from the kinship system they relied upon, forced into the model of a middle-class nuclear family without having the appropriate tools to succeed within its divisions. Instead of an ending in which endogamous patrilineal inheritance stands alongside an exogamous marriage, Maggie and Tom’s attachment to the mill and the past leads to an incestuous and ultimately destructive type of endogamous union in which they drown in an embrace. The household gods around which family roles, economics, and sexuality were organized are dispersed, and Tom and Maggie succumb to self-destructive incestuous relations that the household gods, as totems, might have regulated.

As the ending of Eliot’s novel suggests, any resistance to, or reorganization of, the patriarchal domestic arrangement accompanies economic upheaval, and vice versa. The domestic and economic plots found in the novels by Eliot, Dickens, and Trollope weave the problem of value, kinship structure, and the sacred into a set of inextricable ties. While the novels rely on the ideology of separate spheres as a schema through which commodities may alter their status as they enter the zone of the home, becoming associated with the sacred space of the domestic and the self-sacrificing, non-economic labor of women rather than the profane space of the market, the plotting of the novels relies on the very inseparability of the economic and domestic that the end position of the sacred denies. The transformation of commodities into household gods also links value to a kinship structure in which women’s association with fertility and the sacred, as depicted in Victorian anthropological analyses of the totemic stage, is subsumed within patriarchal endogamy. The novels by Dickens and Trollope, in particular, retain the

112 My argument here is indebted to Joshua Esty. See pages 111-112.
connection between women, fertility, and totems, but minimize the disruption such female empowerment would cause on the inheritance and distribution of private property by circumscribing women within a system of patriarchal kinship. In this manner, the transformation of commodities into totems, or household gods, reflects the very quasi-system of social and economic organization that anthropologists attempted to plot within the context of non-European peoples.

The novelistic synthesis of value, kinship, and the sacred totem, which controls economic and sexual reproduction, elucidates the unvoiced preoccupation of Victorian anthropological writings on kinship and the totem: not only were these anthropologists projecting Victorian debates on female ownership of property, but they also feared any fracas within the patriarchal family would undermine the very synthesis of the economic and religious that theoretically had been located in the model of the domestic woman and her disinterested labor. Theories of value hinge on theories of kinship. Commenting on the research by Victorian anthropologists on the totem, Franz Boas claimed that the totem, contrary to all Victorian assertions, represented not a universal stage or a set of necessary and systematic connections between incest taboos, exogamy, and matrilineal descent, but a set of contingent elements forged into an artificial system by Victorian anthropologists (Jones 302). By openly linking the contingency of value, the sacred, and kinship, the novels examined in this chapter clarify why Victorian anthropologists ascribed such systematicity to totemism despite the contingency of its elements. Household gods function as totems that stabilize the contingency of value through a process of sacralization and, in so doing, stabilize kinship by synthesizing elements of matrilineal exogamy and patrilineal endogamy. While anthropologists struggled to
comprehend the connections between totems, the sacred, property, sexuality, kinship, and economic reproduction in non-European societies, fictional dramatizations allow us to posit the possibility that Britons sacralized commodities, rather than organic life forms, in order to organize the very problematic set of relations that anthropologists examined in communities at the periphery.
CHAPTER 5

SACRED GAMES: ENERGY, SACRIFICE, AND RITUAL IN KIPLING

My discussion of sacrifice thus far has primarily concentrated on the experience of communality and reciprocity. Notions of sacrifice in John Ruskin’s political economy or Charles Dickens’s *Dombey and Son* appear linked, almost exclusively, to the social solidarity and kinship mutual sacrifice engenders, at times glossing over the costs of sacrifice for those at the imperial periphery or trammeled by class hierarchies. In the work of Rudyard Kipling, however, the contradictions between a capitalist ethos of self-interest and models of self-sacrificing mutuality cannot evade the reality of colonial exploitation. Unlike *Dombey and Son*, where a utopian vision of a multiracial family clouds the reader’s memory of “lost ships, freighted with gold,” Kipling’s fiction openly and repeatedly professes its militaristic jingoism while it promotes ideals of mutual self-sacrifice as an expression of manly devotion to empire’s goals. In this context, Kipling’s fiction demonstrates the negative underside to the rhetoric of self-sacrifice and equilibrium insofar as these ideals further economic self-interest through the accumulation of wealth in the colonies.

In Kipling’s fiction, models in which acts of self-sacrifice and self-interest result in a coordinated and harmonic network represent the type of hegemonic and efficient system necessary to suppress colonial rebellion. At the turn of the century and, especially during the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) and its aftermath, Kipling feared that British
arrogance and apathy had weakened its political and economic hold over its colonies. Such apprehension forms the central thrust of his famous poem “The Recessional” (1897) which, rather than being a paean to Queen Victoria on the celebration of her Jubilee, admonishes the public not to “forget” their responsibilities and take its delicate hold over its colonies for granted because they are “drunk with sight of power” (Kipling Verse 327). In this context, it is unsurprising that Kipling’s middle fiction in the years subsequent to the Jubilee, such as The Day’s Work (1898), Kim (1901), and Traffics and Discoveries (1904), addresses the incursions into British imperial dominance by the French and Germans in Africa, as well as Russian aggression at the Afghan-Indian border, by consistently exploring the tactics of coordination and efficient control necessary for the machinery of empire to maintain possession over its colonies.

In developing such models of efficient economic systems and imperial administration, Kipling’s middle fiction draws on the writings of Victorian sociologists and anthropologists such as Herbert Spencer, James Frazer, Andrew Lang, and E.B. Tylor—men whose writings he not only read but also with whom he socialized. Drawing on Spencer’s theories of energy in First Principles (1862) and Frazer’s discussions of magic in The Golden Bough, I argue that Kipling figures energy as the

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113Kipling’s close friendship with Andrew Lang and Rider Haggard is well-documented, and all three writers expressed a pronounced interest in writings related to anthropology and non-European cultural practices. Lang not only wrote on myth, ritual, and folklore, but he also co-wrote The World’s Desire (1890) with Rider Haggard. In such works as She (1887) and Nada the Lily (1892), Rider Haggard incorporated his readings on anthropology, colonial adventure tales, and African missionary writings into romantic adventure stories. In addition to his friendships with Lang and Haggard, Kipling expressed an avid interest in The Golden Bough by James Frazer, whom he later befriended, and had also read Tylor’s Primitive Culture (Lycett, 184; Stocking 149; Seymour-Smith 244). Kipling, however, expressed negative views of Herbert Spencer’s work, particularly Spencer’s tendency to privilege science and reason above all other forms of thinking—an attitude that is mocked in Kim through Kipling’s condescending portrait of Huree Mookerjee (228). But as Seymour-Smith argues, while Kipling disparaged Spencer’s breed of Comtian rationalism, his writing often resembled Spencer’s social Darwinism (105,108,116,244-245). As I will show, social Darwinism is not the only overlap; Spencer’s quasi-religious attitude toward “force” surfaces in Kipling’s treatment of energy as well.
magical prime mover and source of value that empire must regulate or its magical powers will overwhelm and destabilize the imperial order. In lieu of this threat, Kipling presents mechanical analogies of coordinated action where either individuals or parts of a machine act in concert with one another on the basis of reciprocal self-sacrifice and duty, effecting a balance of forces that equilibrates self-sacrifice and self-interest. Action, specifically work on behalf of empire, not only serves to praise the ‘white man’s burden,’ but also participates in a ritualized framework of systematicity that wards the disorder and chaos associated with the imperial subject and its culture. In his aggrandized portraits of British engineers, soldiers, and civil servants, Kipling consistently presents labor for empire as an act of disinterested self-sacrifice. These disinterested and largely invisible acts sustain the machinery of empire and achieve a balance of forces. Furthermore, this balance of forces stabilizes value, here configured as energy, within the coordinated network of actors that form the machinery of empire. Whereas Dickens, Eliot, and Trollope secure the labile nature of value by transforming things into sacred household gods, Kipling manages energy’s fluid and sacred powers by regularizing it within empire’s social order and law. In this manner, the magical forces of energy that animate individuals, groups, and machines as they participate in coordinated acts of self-sacrificing labor, transform the machines and social groups into magical, omnipotent agencies. Kipling thus appropriates the sacred and magical forces associated with eastern religion, landscape, and culture that threaten imperial autonomy by figuring

114 My discussion of empire’s magical omnipotence in this chapter relies, primarily, on Lewis Wurgaft’s The Imperial Imagination, though I am less interested in the psychoanalytic underpinnings of such analysis. See Wurgaft 54-78. John Kucich’s more recent Imperial Masochism also presents arguments on imperial omnipotence and relies on psychoanalytic paradigms to demonstrate how the masochist transforms narcissistic suffering into feelings of omnipotence. See Kucich 1-30.
empire’s administrative technology as the magical medium of efficient colonial control, a medium that sanctifies and legitimates colonial rule.

By presenting value as the magical force of energy that animates technological advances such as the steam engine and electric telegraph, Kipling conceives of empire as a dynamic rather than static system of coordinated acts: the mechanical analogies he deploys progress through time and space such that the parts of a machine not only coordinate with one another but alter each other through their actions. Kipling thus presents, though unintentionally, a corollary to economic theories of value and exchange, wherein agents seek to balance units of energy conceived as labor or pleasure through coordinated acts of exchange. Late nineteenth-century economists such as Alfred Marshall and Francis Edgeworth, under the influence of Herbert Spencer, struggled with two competing notions of the economic system: 1) the economy as a field animated by forces of energy that balance each other as in the science of static mechanics and 2) the economy as a dynamic system in which forces compete with one another and affect each other over time such that the economy, conceived as an organic structure, alters.

Kipling’s fiction allows us to see the political and ethical consequences of these theoretical bifurcations in political economy. Whereas Kipling’s model of coordinated action and equilibrium conceals the exploitation and costs of empire, political economy presents a theoretical vision of equilibrium and communitarian ethos when the very principle of competition that drives the economy fuels hierarchies and disequilibrium. For both Kipling and political economists like Edgeworth and Marshall, the sacred energies that propel the system toward equilibrium also potentially undermine it.
Kipling’s depiction of imperial administration and economy as a static and dynamic system relies on two distinct but related models: the centralized forms of administrative action, denoted by the efficiency of his mechanical analogies, and a decentralized model of imperial action that infiltrates the unmapped regions of the Indian interior. In his first model, Kipling offers mechanical analogies such as trains, bridges, steam engines, and ships as metonyms of empire (Sullivan 119). These self-contained systems miniaturize the expansive field of political and economic action as a tightly coordinated, ritualized network of exchanges but cannot encapsulate an action’s branching effects. Kipling’s second, decentralized model compensates for the inadequacies of centralized administration and the holistic representation of empire found in his mechanical analogies. The decentralized model of administration, by contrast, responds in a spontaneous manner to exigent circumstances and epitomizes the open-ended, invisible agencies of imperial aggression that make up the Great Game. In this context, Kipling reveals a further parallel that economists struggled with: the static analogy of the economy at equilibrium only offers a freeze frame, never making entirely visible the countless acts whose effects unfold over time. As shown in chapter two, while price matrices serve as the visible index of exchange as acts of reciprocal self-sacrifice at equilibrium, they stand as statistical evidence of only one moment in time.

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115 Timothy Alborn demonstrates the importance of mechanical analogies for nineteenth-century political economy by arguing that the steam-engine, in particular, served as the most common representation of centralized administration. The metaphorical language of the economy as a machine that required cooperation stood in tension with the metaphor of the economy as a system that automatically self-adjusts through laissez-faire individualism, suggesting that the ‘natural’ functioning of the economy required mechanical supplements such as centralized administration (176-178). Alborn’s analysis parallels the tensions seen in Edgeworth and Marshall, as well as the compensatory role that decentralized administration plays in Kipling.
Instead of trying to encompass all acts and their effects, Kipling’s second model of imperial and economic administration, most fully developed in *Kim*, uses Kim’s involvement in the decentralized information gathering techniques of the Great Game to dramatize the inability of a single mind to conceive of the vast system in which her actions participate. In the Great Game of imperial expansion, Kim embodies the magical energies of the electric telegraph and literally functions as the medium of empire’s information system. In being identified with such magical energies, Kim manipulates energy’s sacred and unstable powers through his self-conscious mimicry of magical thinking and thus translates it into a tool of imperial conquest that preserves and sacralizes imperial order. Kim’s involvement in the Great Game and its secret spy rings plays a part in the machinery of empire but, unlike the mechanistic models of coordinated action, one cannot represent the totality of acts that make up the game of imperial expansion. Furthermore, *Kim* presents any attempt by the individual to comprehend her participation in the ritualized system of empire as an interruption of such participation and its magical efficacy. Thus the Great Game of imperial expansion, conceived as a ritual system, is a game that one has to play without questioning how it connects to the larger machinery of empire; one must be in the game to perform the game. The non-representational aspects of the game also affect its ability to establish a stable equilibrium. *Kim*’s internal economies demonstrate that neither the model of mutual self-sacrifice among agents of empire, nor the supposedly symbiotic relationship of self-sacrifice and self-interest between imperial and colonial subjects, results in a balance. Rather, the oscillating forces of self-interest and self-sacrifice, whether in the context of
the economy or imperial expansion, perpetuate disequilibrium and require strategic repetition of the game.

In the first section of this chapter I discuss the supernatural connotations given to the scientific concept of force in the work of Spencer and its influence on the political economy of Edgeworth and Marshall. I demonstrate how Edgeworth and Marshall struggle to reconcile representations of economic equilibrium with the fluctuations caused by energy, which destabilizes their idealized conceptions of value and exchange. The sacred yet unstable qualities ascribed to energy provide a framework for discussing Kipling’s manipulation of its powers and the two models he presents of imperial administration and economics in order to strengthen and sanctify colonial rule. In the second section, I examine the role of steam’s energy in relation to mechanical analogies and centralized forms of administrative action, focusing particularly on *The Day’s Work*. In the third section, I turn to Kipling’s decentralized model of imperial action, exemplified in *Kim*, and the magical characteristics attached to Kim and electricity.

I Economic Systems and the Regulation of Sacred Forces

As discussed earlier, in Ruskin’s political economy, “life” and its “holiness” form the basis of value and wealth. Ruskin’s biological approach to the problem of value presents the labor theory of value as the sacrifice of so much “life.” By making “life” sacred and the basis of value, Ruskin’s articulation of the labor theory of value and exchange as a rite of reciprocal sacrifice in which individuals exchange life for life in an interdependent and highly coordinated system confirms the sanctity of the social body. Among late-nineteenth-century political economists like Jevons and Edgeworth, Ruskin’s definition of value in terms of “life” surfaces in their utilitarian approach to value as
energy—energy becomes the supernatural prime mover that manifests its invisible powers in all things. In *The Principles of Science*, for example, Jevons states that “[l]ife seems to be nothing but a special form of energy which is manifested in heat and electricity and mechanical force” (735).\(^{116}\) Such energy, in Jevons’s political economy, assumes the form of utility and economic exchange, as a model of protoenergetics, balances utilities.

This notion of “energy” takes on a supernatural quality in the work of Spencer, Edgeworth, and Kipling. As Bown, Burdett, and Thurschwell argue, Victorian notions of the supernatural stress its invisibility and protean nature, a tendency that led Victorian spiritualists to attribute supernatural qualities to invisible forms of energy such as electricity (8-9). In being compared to supernatural and sacred entities, however, energy also evidences the instability and ambiguity that marks the sacred. As discussed in relation to household gods, the tabooed object’s sacred and contagious powers can either sanctify or be the source of destabilizing effects, making the dynamic of the sacred and accursed contingent and malleable. In the context of late-nineteenth-century political economy, equilibrium results from the balance of energies in exchange; yet, energy also initiates the disequilibrium that characterizes systems that evolve over time, destabilizing the coordinated networks of exchange in which sacrifice equals its remuneration. Energy, like the malleability of the sacred, thus conserves and disturbs equilibrium.

This paradoxical role of energy surfaces in Edgeworth’s and Marshall’s theorizations of the economic system in which the static model of an economy that balances forces at equilibrium competes with a dynamic model of the economy that links energy to progressive evolution and the disequilibrating forces of competition. The

\(^{116}\) Jevons’s discussion of force was also influenced by Spencer’s *First Principles*. See Jevons *Science* 448.
social idealism that underlies the static model of equilibrium seems irreconcilable with the spirit of competition that renders the economy dynamic and imbalanced. With respect to Kipling’s fiction, the paradox of energy as the sacred force that both creates and disturbs the economy’s equilibrium appears as the aura of magical omnipotence that surrounds empire’s efficient, coordinated systems of imperial administration.

Kipling, I argue, represents such systems of economic and imperial administration through mechanical and technological metaphors such as steam-ships, steam-cars, and the electric telegraph, literalizing the energy that renders empire magically omnipotent into such forces as steam and electricity. While energy’s protean quality can be used to sanctify empire, it also threatens the imperial order. Just as Edgeworth and Marshall struggle to synthesize static and dynamic models of the economy, so Kipling’s representations of efficient imperial administration continuously contend with the disruption caused by the magical forces of energy. As Lewis Wurgaft points out, the British empire’s representations of magical omnipotence were inspired by the “primitive” supernatural powers that empire simultaneously dismissed as irrational (54-55). The mechanical and biological analogies for the economy and social order such as steam engines and complex biological organisms, found in the works of Spencer, Edgeworth, and Marshall, thus become the imaginative materials with which Kipling constructs magical systems of imperial control and economic dominance. These magical systems are fueled by, yet constrain, the unruly and sacred energies of the colonies, converting these energies into the substance of imperial omnipotence. The influence of Spencer on the thought of Edgeworth, Marshall, and Kipling, I contend, demonstrates the way in which these political economists and Kipling replicate Spencer’s notion of energy (force)
to address problems of stability with respect to social and economic equilibrium and, for
Kipling, imperial hegemony. The uncomfortable juxtaposition between Kipling’s
imperialist attitude and his fictional models of equilibrium and coordinated acts of self-sacrifice reveals a fundamental dissonance in economic theories: the principle of
competition that drives the capitalist economy and theoretically leads to the ideal of
economic equilibrium also sows the conditions of disequilibrium and inequality.

In the political economy of Edgeworth and Marshall, the magical powers
attributed to energy and its tendency to engender both equilibrium and disequilibrium
derive in part from the influence of Spencer. In addition to his contributions to theories
of evolution, Victorian anthropology, and sociology, the writings of Herbert Spencer also
influenced economists such as Edgeworth and Marshall, particularly his analysis of
energy and social evolution in First Principles (Mirowski Heat 266). Spencer’s
discussion of the balance of forces in organic, mechanical, and social bodies, however,
was not the sole source of such preoccupations among economists. Nineteenth-century
economists had already drawn on Newtonian mechanics and subsequent developments in
physics from Laplace to Lagrange, as evidenced in Jevons’s comparison of exchange to a
lever or pendulum coming to rest. According to Philip Mirowski, late-nineteenth-century
neoclassical economists like Jevons and Edgeworth essentially applied the metaphor of
energy conservation, taken from physics, to economic exchange and, given their
background in engineering, were attracted to mechanical analogies (Heat 196, 264).117
Spencer’s discussion of energy and the balance of forces occupies a special place in
relation to nineteenth-century political economy, however, because he synthesizes the

117Theodore Porter claims that engineering and economics overlap at the end of the nineteenth-century,
especially in the appeal to analogies such as the steam-engine and electricity (141).
static and mechanical model of forces coming to rest with a dynamic model of society as an organism that evolves and progresses over time through the competitive interplay of forces. Spencer’s influence on Marshall and Edgeworth can be traced to the articulation of this central problematic: how can the social utopia implicated in economic theories of exchange as the static equilibrium of forces be combined with a dynamic, biological model of the social system as progressing and evolving according to the imbalance of competing forces? In this context, the magical status given to “force” in Spencer leads toward both equilibrium and disequilibrium, a tension that will appear in Edgeworth’s and Marshall’s economic theories, as well as Kipling’s representations of the imperial economy and administration.

In *First Principles*, Spencer attributes a supernatural and magical quality to energy (force) insofar as it functions as the universal prime mover. When discussing the categories of space, time, matter, and motion, Spencer claims that “these are either built up of, or abstracted from, experiences of force” (*Principles* 143). The “primordial experience of force” stands as a correlate for the absolute force that persists and which, like a noumenal *Ding an sich*, we only know through its “conditioned effect” (Spencer *Principles* 145). As if to underscore its supernatural nature, Spencer remarks that in the concept of force “religion and science coalesce” (*Principles* 167). Spencer’s description of force parallels the Melanesian concept of *mana*, which the nineteenth-century missionary and anthropologist, Robert Codrington, defines as a supernatural and ubiquitous force that manifests itself physically in the material world or in expressions of human power (118-119, 191). The correspondence Spencer draws between scientific and
religious conceptions of force articulates a position that Durkheim’s analysis of mana would later reiterate (Elementary 151-152).

More significantly, Spencer links the magical nature of absolute force and its persistence to both the equilibrium and disequilibrium of forces. The “correlation of forces” requires that no amount of force be lost without being converted to something else, thus making any condition of unstable equilibrium stable again. When a certain amount of water becomes steam, for example, the quantity of force remains equivalent because no amount of force can be lost (Spencer Principles 175, 182). In contrast to the static “correlation of forces” that conserves and balances energy in the example of water and steam, Spencer’s analysis of the “persistence of force” that drives the dynamic process of evolution and the formation of complex organisms and societies destabilizes the internal organization of organisms and creates disequilibrium within its structure.

Whether in relation to an organic compound, the vital system of the body, or social formations, the persistence of force triggers the dynamic “double process” of integration and disintegration such that either integration or disintegration, rather than being at equilibrium, is in excess of the other (Spencer Principles 245). If they do balance each other, evolutionary growth has reached a stasis and the progress of the organism, whether physical or sociological, comes to a standstill. The “double process” of integration thus mimics the double process of the sacred taboo: the magical force that engenders complex systems also continuously destabilizes it from within.

The process of integration represents the hallmark of evolutionary progress, resulting as it does in greater and greater complexity in organisms, machines, and social formations. Progressive integration and evolution leads to “an ever-increasing co-
ordination of parts” that comprise a “co-operative assemblage” (Spencer Principles 284), whether this assemblage be the parts of a machine, organism, or society. Echoing the claims of political economists like Adam Smith, Spencer compares this model of “mutual dependence” to the division of labor and the increasingly complex social organizations that arise as communities progress from tribes to the increasing heterogeneity of functions and dependence that marks modern capitalist society (Principles 283, 299-300). This highly differentiated system of functions, Spencer claims, proceeds with greater and greater precision in its actions like a military organization in which the group performs as an integrated whole on the basis of a clear chain of command and rigid roles. Yet, while the persistence of force results in complex integration and highly differentiated heterogeneous structures, it also destabilizes any momentary equilibrium (Spencer Principles 369). For Spencer, this arises from the process of evolution itself which, in order to progress, cannot remain at a stasis. An implicit power dynamic informs his analysis of the persistence of force—neither in the business firm, the military, nor nervous system, will there be complete functional equality among its various parts.

In addition to the division of labor, Spencer also discusses machines, such as steam engines, as an analogue for the processes of integration and differentiation that characterize complex systems at equilibrium. This analogy in particular will become significant for Kipling and Edgeworth, both of whom utilize machines as representations of the social and economic order. In modern machinery, Spencer argues,

we see that in each of our machines several of the primitive machines are united into one…[t]he fire-box and boiler of a locomotive are combined with the machinery which the steam works. A still more extensive integration is exhibited in every factory. Here we find a large number of complicated machines, all connected by driving shafts with the same steam engine—all united into one cast apparatus. (Principles 281)
Machines and factories, like the division of labor, appear as microcosms of the complex coordination and integration of functions that characterize modern social organizations and economies. The steam engine, for example, exemplifies the process of a “dependent moving equilibrium,” which balances forces but never comes to a position of permanent rest:

The steam engine (and especially that kind which feeds its own furnace and boiler) supplies an example. Here the force from moment to moment dissipated in overcoming the resistance of the machinery driven, is from moment to moment replaced from the fuel; and the balance of the two is maintained by a raising or lowering of the expenditure according to the variation of the supply: each increase or decrease in the quantity of steam, resulting in a rise or fall of the engine’s movement, such as brings it to a balance with the increased or decreased resistance. This, which we may fitly call the dependent moving equilibrium, should be specially noted; since it is one that we shall commonly meet with throughout various phases of evolution. (Spencer Principles 421-422)

The interchange in the steam engine between the “supply” of fuel and its expenditure provides Spencer with a suggestive parallel to economic processes. Hence, he claims that the mechanical forces that act and react upon one another in the dependent moving equilibrium established by a steam engine also characterize the adjustment of economic forces such as the price of commodities to the forces of labor expended during production, the supply of labor and goods in the market to its demand, and the food supply to the growth or diminution of population (Spencer Principles 440-441). The dependent moving equilibrium within an industrialized capitalist society with high degrees of division of labor and the technological advances of rail and telegraph moves toward the limit of what Mill called the “stationary state” and its perfect balance of forces—a state that we progress toward but never absolutely attain (Spencer Principles 441-442).
Spencer’s use of the steam engine as both a model for complex integration and the dependent moving equilibrium of forces in advanced capitalist societies supplies the key analogy for Edgeworth’s discussion of economic exchange as a social utopia in which individuals maximize the pleasure and happiness of society as a whole just as a machine’s highly integrated parts maximize energy. As in Spencer’s discussion of force, Edgeworth’s *Mathematical Psychics* (1881) attributes a mystical quality to energy. Pleasure guides the Platonic chariot, disciplining the twin horses of self-interest and self-sacrifice, as it propels society towards its ideal state of social and economic equilibrium. Pleasure is “a fluent form, a Fairy Queen guiding a most complicated chariot” and economics, as the science of pleasure as it maximizes itself, studies “the attraction between charioteer forces, the collisions and compacts between chariots” (Edgeworth 12). Edgeworth regards the dynamic laws of physics as both a corollary for the market’s maximization of pleasure and utilitarian ethics, wherein each individual’s efforts to maximize pleasure maximizes the greatest happiness of all. In realizing the ‘greatest happiness of the greatest number,’ the economy achieves a sympathy of interests and the pleasures of others weigh equal to one’s own—a state that Edgeworth compares to Spencer’s discussion of evolutionary integration (9).

Spencer’s depiction of the steam engine as a model of integration and dependent moving equilibrium becomes in Edgeworth a form of social equilibrium as well. By presenting the forces of pleasure in the market as forms of energy that achieve a maximum, Edgeworth posits a utopian social vision in which social mechanics and celestial mechanics stand on equal footing.

‘Mécanique sociale’ may one day take her place along with ‘Mécanique celeste,’ throned each upon the double-sided height of one maximum principle, the
supreme pinnacle of moral as of physical science. As the movements of each particle, constrained or loose, in a material cosmos are continuously subordinated to one Maximum sum-total of accumulated energy, so the movements of each soul, may continuously be realising the maximum energy of pleasure, the Divine love of the universe. ‘Mécanique sociale’...is less attractive to the vulgar worshipper in that she is discernible by the eye of faith alone....But Mathematics has long walked by the evidence of things not seen in the world of atoms....The invisible energy of electricity is grasped by the marvelous methods of Lagrange; the invisible energy of pleasure may admit of a similar handling. (Edgeworth 10)

In contrast to the labor theory of value, utilitarian notions of value examine the non-substantial, invisible quality of energy. The allure of the invisible in political economy, of course, predates Edgeworth given the prominent role Adam Smith gives to both the “invisible hand” that harmonizes self-interested acts and the invisible acts that participate in producing the day laborer’s coat. While Edgeworth appears attracted to the invisibility of energy, he also insists energy remains subject to scientific measurement. Following Jevons, he argues that economics can also be an exact science like physics because it measures energy, i.e. utility, through the visible effect of price. While physics measures units of energy and takes “maximizing energy” as its object of study, economics measures “atoms of pleasure” as individuals seek to maximize energy and fulfill the greatest happiness principle (Edgeworth 12). This maximization process involves the cooperation of others to achieve the maximum pleasure for all and translates celestial utopia into economic reality.

In addition to comparing agents to particles in the cosmos, Edgeworth also employs a confused array of mechanical analogies and compares the maximization of pleasure by agents in society to the parts of a machine contributing to the maximized energy of the whole. In a cosmos composed of “all manner of wheels, pistons, parts, connections...if any given impulses be imparted to any definite points in the mechanism
at rest, it is mathematically deducible that each part of the great whole will move off with a velocity such that the energy of the whole may be the greatest possible” (Edgeworth 8). Similar to Spencer’s model of the steam engine, each part of the machine subordinates its energy to establish the maximum energy of the “complex whole” (Edgeworth 9). Just as the charge of electromagnetic force makes steam-locomotives move along rails by impelling “the movements of the steam-engine so as to satisfy her own yearning towards maximum,” so pleasure obeys the law of force and “sways the subject energies so as to satisfy her own yearning towards a maximum” (Edgeworth 11, 12). Whereas engineering conceives of the steam-locomotive as a mechanical machine propelled by units of energy, economics conceives of the individual as “a pleasure machine” (Edgeworth 12).

Edgeworth thus theorizes a metaphorical utopia in which human ‘pleasure machines’ operate like steam engines, atmospheric particles, or chariots, subordinating the desires of the part in order to maximize the energy of the whole. In this context, equilibrium occurs when the total energy (pleasure) of those parties involved in exchange achieves a relative maximum (19). Or, following Edgeworth’s metaphor, for equilibrium to occur, “charioteer-pleasures should drive their teams together” and “the joint-team should never be urged in a direction contrary to the preference of either individual” (20). The economic theories that Edgeworth develops, however, contradict the hodge-podge of idealistic analogies because they fail to incorporate, as in Spencer’s models, the forces of competition and hierarchies that delineate the internal functions of any complex system.

Rather than a model of mutuality and coordination, *Mathematical Psychics* demonstrates that all exchange contracts are indeterminate and subject to renegotiation. Contrary to Jevons’s assertions that there was one ratio at which exchange could occur,
Edgeworth illustrates that there exists an indeterminate number of ratios to which persons in a barter exchange might agree and, moreover, in exchange situations that include more than two people, persons can choose to contract with some but not others. What Edgeworth terms the contract curve represents the range of contracts that might be finally agreed to and all that can be determined is that the contract will lie on this curve but not specify which point. This region of final settlements consists of those exchange contracts that no party objects to either on grounds that it adversely affects their interests or that a better trading option is available to them (Edgeworth 31-32). Edgeworth conjectures that the region of final settlements shrinks as the number of agents on the market near infinity, realizing the conditions of “perfect competition” and equilibrium (32).

This state of perfect competition, however, never occurs in reality. The market does not automatically self-adjust to achieve an equilibrium in which all parties maximize happiness, nor do parties in exchange necessarily obtain an equivalence between sacrifice and remuneration (Edgeworth 27-28). As a result, Edgeworth concludes that in the absence of such a final settlement in contracts and equilibrium conditions, a settlement has to be decided upon through arbitration on utilitarian grounds otherwise economics indeed would be a dismal science in which individual and social happiness were subject to the imperfections of competition such as monopolies (36, 39). In this context, the earlier analogies from physics and mechanics fail him since, unlike particles of energy, individuals are not infinitely divisible and fluid, nor do the forces they exert on one another automatically self-adjust (Edgeworth 39). Conceived as a field of energy, Edgeworth’s theorizations of the market brush up against the very dynamism that underlies Spencer theory of force and integration—the persistence of force leaves the
Marshall responds to the limitations that the analogy of mechanical physics poses to economics by arguing, in effect, that theories of static equilibrium offered a starting point for economic theorization but, at its higher stages of theorization must draw on biology rather than physics. In his essay “Mechanical and Biological Analogies in Economics” (1898), Marshall famously claims that the “Mecca of the economist is economic biology” and promotes a combined approach to economics that synthesizes the mechanical and biological perspectives (Memorials 318).

And therefore in the later stages of economics, when we are approaching nearly to the conditions of life, biological analogies are to be preferred to mechanical….the mechanical analogy is apt to be the more definite and vivid: the analogy, for instance, of a satellite which is moving around a planet, which is itself moving around another planet, is helpful for special purposes….But as the science reaches its highest work such occasions become rarer and rarer, and the tone becomes more and more that of a biological science. (Memorials Marshall 317-318)

Marshall echoes similar sentiments throughout the Principles and draws on his readings of both Darwin and Spencer to explore the relevance of biological analogies for advanced economic processes, incorporating an element of realism into economic theorizations. Spencer’s writings, in particular, were integral to Marshall’s thinking on biological models of the economic system. As Camille Limoges and Claude Ménard succinctly state, “[i]n economics, differentiation means division of labor, and integration means coordination” (342). Marshall’s evolutionary conception of industrial organization exemplifies the process of differentiation and integration and organizes society with increasing degrees of self-sacrifice and mutual dependence. As mentioned in earlier chapters, like many British economists, Marshall conceived of labor and capital as the
corollary of sacrifice and abstinence and viewed the progressive development of
civilization through the division of labor as deepening the bonds of interdependence and
self-sacrifice (Marshall *Principles* 140, 232-233, 243). For Marshall, as for Spencer,
iintegration and coordination go hand in hand: only a society highly differentiated by
division of labor is also highly coordinated.

In accordance with Marshall’s usage of biological analogies, the economy not
only proves subject to the processes of integration and differentiation as industrialization
leads to more complex forms of organization and precise functions, but the economy also
experiences the oscillating forces of life and death in which one organism arises only to
be later overtaken by another. Spencer makes clear in his analysis of the division of labor
and the rise of industries the potential for monopoly (*Principles* 366).118 The problem for
Marshall, as for Edgeworth, is that the model of static equilibrium remains at odds with
the dynamic aspects of competition that destabilize the internal equilibrium of any
system. Marshall reveals this cycle of growth and decay, and its potential for monopoly,
in his famous example of the tree in the forest.

But here we may read a lesson from the young trees of the forest as they struggle
upwards through the benumbing shade of their older rivals. Many succumb on the
way, and a few only survive; those few become stronger every year, they get a
larger share of light and air with every increase of their height, and at last in their
turn they tower above their neighbours, and seem as though they would grow on
for ever ... but they do not. One tree will last longer in full vigour and attain a
greater size than another; but sooner or later age tells on them all. Though the
taller ones have a better access to light and air than their rivals, they gradually
lose vitality; and one after another they give their place to others. (Marshall
*Principles* 315-316)

118 Camille Limoges and Claude Ménard also discuss the problem monopoly poses to Marshall’s arguments
but attribute such tensions to the influence of Darwin rather than Spencer, with whom Marshall is
traditionally associated. Margaret Schabas, by contrast, privileges the influence of Spencer’s evolutionary
argument. Spencer, she claims, provided Marshall with biological metaphors of evolution while Comte
furnished him with the language of statics and dynamics (Schabas “Greyhound” 325). Marshall’s
*Principles* contains references to both Spencer and Darwin, demonstrating his familiarity with both, though
the thought of Spencer seems to predominate. See Marshall *Principles* 50, 136, 240, 252, 136, 726, 770.
Marshall’s metaphoric use of the tree in the forest, while suggesting that even the monopoly firm will eventually face its demise, undermines his theorizations of a “normal,” equilibrium price in the market (Hart 1141-1142). Instead, the market potentially consists of monopoly prices determined by competition between large firms. Given this degree of instability, Marshall invents his abstraction of the “representative firm” to bypass the very irregularities his biological approach introduces. The representative firm stands for the “average firm,” whose life span and success have been “fair” and which has “normal” access to the means of production and resources (Marshall Principles 317). Limoges and Ménard criticize this abstraction as essentially a step away from the dynamic and biological model that Marshall purported to explore since Marshall retreats to a stable type and a static model of the economy. Marshall, they claim, devises the vague concept of the representative firm because he was unable to synthesize the metaphor of the economy as an evolving, biological system with the prevailing metaphor of the market as a mechanistic system that balances forces (Limoges and Ménard 355).

Marshall repeatedly privileges biological analogies to articulate the economy’s complex, realistic processes only to then capitulate to static models of the economy for the sake of theoretical simplicity. Thus, for example, he recognizes that the cycle of life and decay more accurately represents the oscillations of the market than mechanical analogies, but when he analyzes the equilibrium of supply and demand prices, Marshall claims economics must begin with the simpler model of mechanical equilibrium in which the balance of supply and demand prices is expressed as the opposition of two forces, namely sacrifice and resistance to sacrifice, in the manner of a stone hanging from a string and coming back to rest (Marshall Principles 323-324). Within the latter static
model of equilibrium, equilibrium proves stable when supply and demand prices return to their earlier position of rest, like a pendulum, despite the forces that displace them. Marshall pursues such analysis while insisting that in real life this is not the case since any change alters the equilibrium amount and its price, and the correspondence between sacrifices and pleasures could never really be exact due to the effects of time (*Principles* 347). Even though Marshall recognizes the limits of such an approach, he was unable to devise a way to incorporate biological analyses effectively into his theorizations.

Ensnared by conflicting theoretical paradigms, Marshall repeatedly compromises by introducing the representative firm. As Neil Hart argues, Marshall’s organic approach “was a framework that came to be challenged…when confronted with the burden of accommodating ‘equilibrium’ configurations that somehow accord with a process of continuous change. Marshall had invented the Representative Firm concept as a medium through which such a correspondence could hopefully be accomplished” (1149). The representative firm, as a tree in the forest, conforms to the biological model of development at the metaphorical level only; it may be in a forest, but unlike other trees that are subject to constant change, the representative firm embodies constant averages.

Marshall’s failure to synthesize two competing models of economic processes, the mechanical and the biological, informs his understanding of the middle path that economic administration should follow so that it encourages competition and improves the welfare and distribution of wealth throughout the community. In his essay “The Social Possibilities of Economic Chivalry,” Marshall critiques contemporary accounts of laissez-faire as misconstruing Smithian political economy. Non-interference in an individual’s ability to achieve self-betterment does not mean government should not
involve itself in economic matters whatsoever. Rather than a systematic welfare state run by the government, however, Marshall calls on the spirit of “chivalry” that already exists in economic life, where individuals combine self-interest and self-sacrifice in business.

As a model of the administrative methods that would promote such chivalry, Marshall tellingly turns to imperial administration.

The chivalry which has made many administrators in India, Egypt, and elsewhere, devote themselves to the interests of the people under their rule is an instance of the way in which British unconventional, elastic methods of administration give scope for free, fine enterprise in the service of the State; and it atones for many shortcomings in forethought and organization. Again, because the dead hand of bureaucracy has stretched but a little way into her affairs, this country is able to call together voluntary committees of men trained in strenuous private enterprise, who freely give good guidance in some large matters, such as London transport systems and army administration; and this, again, is a form of chivalry in work which has great potentialities for good, and which it is the business of economists and others to study and to praise. (Marshall *Memorials* 343-344)

Socialism modeled on imperial administration and its paternalistic form of Burkean chivalry would, claims Marshall, retain “individuality and elasticity” and avoid the “mechanical symmetry” associated with Marx’s socialism (Marshall *Memorials* 346).

Marshall praises imperial administrative structure for the very synthesis of the mechanical and elastic that he, in his economic theories, struggled to formulate. Imperial administration combines the efficiency and highly differentiated set of functions that Spencer attributed to the military and division of labor, yet it retains the elasticity that Marshall associated with biological systems.

In this regard, Kipling’s metonymic representations of imperial administration and economic systems epitomize the elasticity and dynamic element that Marshall noticed in biological processes and saw evidenced in imperial administration. But Kipling’s mechanical analogies, such as steam-ships and steam-cars, also embody the
structures of coordination, interdependence, and mutual self-sacrifice that characterize complex, integrated bodies at equilibrium in Spencer and Edgeworth. In his depiction of the energy that fuels such machines, Kipling conceives of energy as a supernatural force that engenders both equilibrium and disequilibrium. Because the supernatural aspect of energy overlaps with “primitive” forms of magical thinking and the unknown forces of colonial culture, the complex structures of imperial order continuously find themselves implicated in, and overwhelmed by, the supernatural energies they discipline. Thus, the supernatural attributes of energy serve equally as the instrument of imperial omnipotence and catalyze its internal degeneration.

In response to this conflict, Kipling presents two models of imperial administration and economic organization that control the destabilizing effects of energy’s magical powers—models that overlap with the split seen in Edgeworth and Marshall wherein mechanical systems that maximized and balanced energies were contrasted to dynamic and elastic models of the economy that resemble the disequilibrium of biological systems. The first model presents mechanical analogies such as bridges, steam-cars, and steam-ships as representations of complex, coordinated structures in which ritualized acts of reciprocal self-sacrifice sanctify the system and delimit the destabilizing effects of energy’s magical forces. Just as contemporary politicians like Disraeli and Chamberlain campaigned for a federation of colonies modeled after the economic system of the German Zollverein (McBratney 5), Kipling’s technological models depict global imperial administration as a highly coordinated and efficient system of actions. These systems, like Spencer’s examples of complex organizations such as the military or division of labor, feature high degrees of integration.
and differentiation with a clear chain of command without sacrificing dynamic elasticity. In Kipling’s second model of imperial administration, most notably represented by the Great Game in *Kim*, he retains the features of coordination, elasticity, mechanicity, and a clear chain of command within an interdependent system of reciprocal sacrifice, but the second model appears more decentralized and its structure cannot be visualized as a discrete and self-contained structure like a car or ship. Instead, Kipling dramatizes the experience of participating in such a structure rather than viewing it from without, forcing the reader to experience the inability to “see” the system in which Kim participates, however coordinated its machinery may be.

**Part II Magic, Mechanical Rituals, and Empire’s Long Day of Work**

Kipling disciplines the ambiguity and instability of energy’s magical powers by emphasizing the performance of actions that reproduce the rule of law and social order. In particular, Kipling underscores the importance of reciprocal acts of self-sacrificing labor and secret societies such as the Masonic brotherhood as the means by which agents of empire participate in networks of ritualized action that generate social stability. Critics of Kipling’s fiction have long commented on Kipling’s admiration for middle-class civil servants, the “Sons of Martha” who thanklessly martyr themselves on behalf of empire in their acts of self-sacrificing labor (Islam 109-111, McBratney xvi, McClure 18). For Kipling, as Shamsul Islam argues, “man is what he does,” and self-sacrificing acts of labor transform renunciation into the positive fruit of action and its products (90). As the eponymous heroine of the story “William the Conqueror” from *The Day’s Work* proclaims to a disappointed suitor, “I like men who do things” (172). William Martyn’s attraction to Scott, on the other hand, stems from Scott’s ability to renounce himself in
selfless acts of excruciating labor on behalf of the imperial mission in India. Scott’s acts of self-sacrifice, as well as his focus on action, amplify his erotic appeal. Kipling’s mythologized portraits of such masochistic heroes, who martyr themselves through their life of action for the sake of imperial dominance, explain his attraction to machines and men who build things such as engineers.

The importance Kipling gives to labor goes hand in hand with his conception of the law, which emphasizes suffering through work, discipline, obedience, and the value of action in maintaining social order (Islam 25). Kipling’s law, first developed in the *Jungle Books*, concerns less the issue of right and wrong than the opposition of order and disorder (Randall 115). The law emerges within social groups and represents a set of agreements that oversees and controls its individual members such that each subsumes her individual desires in favor of the group (Dobrée 69-70). In his seminal essay on Kipling, Noel Annan argues that Kipling resembles sociologists like Durkheim and Pareto insofar as he is concerned with how society coheres and, like Durkheim, he ends by fetishizing society itself (99-100, 122). According to Annan, Kipling views society as a “nexus of groups” in which group patterns of behavior, rather than individual will, determine actions and social order (100). In this context, he argues that Kipling’s law functions much like anthropological notions of culture: individuals move in a network of relations in which various codes of behavior such as religion, laws, customs, and social mores function as forces of control that prevent disorder (Annan 102, 104).

Following Annan, I argue that adherence to the law through coordinated acts of reciprocal, self-sacrificing labor functions to sacralize the very social order and law that

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119 Yet, as Carrington points out, this ethic of social integration in which the wolf submits to the pack allows for, and even enjoins, the ruthless aggression of individual actors within accepted bounds (260).
members of groups such as the cadre of Kipling’s Anglo-Indian civil servants or spy rings translate the magical energies that threaten imperial law and order into the substance of empire’s magical omnipotence. Yet, just as energy’s propulsive quality destabilized both economic and social equilibrium in Spencer and Edgeworth, so the very magical energies that Kipling’s law uses to sacralize the social order also imperils it. In this context, the absolute value given to law and its singularity confronts the multiplicity, mutability, and lawlessness of the sacred. Kipling’s fiction thus examines the tactics of both social groups and mechanical systems as they seek to maintain the equilibrium between self-sacrifice and self-interest, order and disorder, even as these tactics draw on the sacred to render imperial authority absolute.

The mechanical analogies of steam-ships, railroads, bridges, and steam-cars in Kipling’s fictions thus stand as the end-product of ritualized networks of self-sacrificing actions and symbolize, like the “complex whole” of the Tylorian culture concept, Kipling’s ideal of order and lawfulness. In the collection The Day’s Work, for example, Kipling repeatedly presents the self-sacrificing labor of the British civil servant, and the fraternity such men establish on the basis of reciprocal self-sacrifice, as the type of orderly action that will perpetuate imperial power. Kipling’s portrait of the martyred civil servant, according to Lewis Wurgaft, models itself after John Lawrence, a civil servant and later viceroy, who epitomized the charismatic authority and ascetic self-denial that contributed to the self-conscious mythmaking of British imperialists by aggrandizing their sense of imperial omnipotence and magic (Wurgaft 83, 95). John Kucich advances a related claim, suggesting that masochistic fantasy transforms pain into
magical omnipotence and provides the foundational myth that sanctifies the imperial martyr’s suffering as a form of ecstatic rebirth (*Masochism* 5, 26). Representations of British rulers as self-martyring demi-gods, Wurgaft suggests, demonstrates that “British fascination with magic…existed in contrapuntal relation to the supposedly demystified doctrine of administrative order” (58). The British experience of magical omnipotence was thus inspired by and existed in an uneasy tension with the “primitive” magical thinking they attributed to the colonized subject (Wurgaft 54-55). Not only did figures of imperial authority like Lawrence embody magical omnipotence, but imperial feats of engineering and technology also bore the aura of empire’s magical omnipotence.

Yet if Britain incorporates magical thinking into constructions of imperial authority, then magical thinking poses the possibility of dissolving empire’s infrastructure with its contagious powers. Such dissolution underlies magical thinking since it often entails an absence of boundaries between self, world, and others—eliminating the hierarchy of distinctions that empire seeks to enforce. As Kipling’s friend and folklorist Andrew Lang comments, echoing the accepted views of anthropologists like Tylor and Frazer on primitive animism, “the savage…draws no hard and fast line between himself and the things in the world” (49). The lack of distinction between self and other not only structures magical thinking but, as Frazer argues, is the source of magic’s contagious powers. The absence of boundaries between self, nature, and things supports the logic of what Frazer terms sympathetic or contagious magic in

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120 Expanding on her previous argument on the simultaneous emergence of the modern individual and the woman during the eighteenth and nineteenth century, Nancy Armstrong argues in *How Novels Think* that the novel played an instrumental role in constructing the bounded subjectivity of the modern individual. The romantic adventure tales of Rider Haggard and others, in this regard, imagined the possibility of energies that transgress the boundaries between individuals such that the distinguishing feature that separated western individualism from the “savage” ceases to exist. For Armstrong’s presentation of this argument in relation to Rider Haggard’s *She* and Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, see 105-135.
which “like produces like” and “an effect resembles its cause” (Bough 12). If magical thinking relies on the absence of boundaries and influences by way of contagion, then using magical omnipotence to constrain disorder and assert imperial authority entails risks.

Kipling’s fiction bears the traces of the permeable boundary between imperial omnipotence and “primitive” magical thinking, a boundary precariously maintained by the technological edifices he erects as symbols of imperial order and magical omnipotence. In “The Bridge-Builders,” the short story which opens The Day’s Work, Kipling dramatizes the magical powers attributed to the Ganges’s natural energy, demonstrating the degree to which empire’s magical omnipotence derives from the very magical thinking that attributes supernatural powers to the Ganges. “The Bridge-Builders” portrays the efforts of the civil engineer Findlayson to build the Kashi Bridge across the Ganges, a bridge that symbolizes the fragile structures separating imperial order from the disorder the Ganges can cause. A preeminent example of the “Sons of Martha,” Findlayson has worked for the Public Works Department on the bridge for three years “with responsibility almost too heavy for one pair of shoulders” (Kipling Work 3).

Kipling opposes the unruliness of the Ganges to the relentless work ethic of Findlayson and his assistant Hitchcock who have borne “the burden of the work” (Work 6). The disciplined efforts of Hitchcock and Findlayson to erect the Kashi Bridge contend with the Ganges and the unruliness of the Indian village itself. In governing the community, Findlayson and Hitchcock had to contend with the chaos of death, famine, drought, administrative interference, sanitation, financial difficulties, and warring castes, but “[b]ehind everything rose the black frame of the Kashi Bridge—plate by plate, girder
by girder, span by span” (Kipling Work 7). Despite the bridge’s symbolic permanence, which would “endure when all memory of the builder…had perished,” it continuously faces the possibility of being destroyed by the shifting force of the Ganges and its unstable beds of sand (Kipling Work 5). The bridge stands upon piers that sink “eighty feet below the shifting sand of the Ganges’ bed” and truckloads of materials are hauled “to hold the river in place” (Kipling Work 4). Just as the “fluid form” and magical power of energy in Edgeworth manifests its force and value in coordinated networks of exchange like a well-functioning steam-engine only to then face the disequilibrium such energy causes, so the magical omnipotence of the Kashi Bridge derives its powers from the very fluid and sacred energies that animate the Ganges but threaten to destroy it with colonial disorder.

In the tension between the bridge and the Ganges, Kipling dramatizes the contagious power of the magical. Ambivalently situated over the Ganges, both the bridge and the machines working on the bridge begin to resemble the animals and invisible powers of the colonial landscape: “an over-head crane travelled to and fro along its spile-pile, jerking sections of iron into place, snorting and backing and grunting as an elephant grunts in the timber-yard. Riveters by the hundreds swarmed about the lattice side-work and the iron roof of the railway-line, hung from invisible staging under the bellies of the girders” (Kipling Work 4). The machines grunt like elephants and the very railway that symbolizes imperial prowess and economic expansion hangs from “invisible staging.” Despite the fact that the bridge itself seeks to displace the force of the river and withstand the energy the river possesses, Kipling draws a parallel between the “invisible staging” that upholds the bridge and the invisible energies that animate the river. Findlayson’s
bridge, the narrative suggests, remains buttressed by the very powers of the invisible he associates with the Ganges and the Indian subcontinent.

In exploring these shared origins of the magical, however, Kipling distances the British characters from the illogical fear of the supernatural by using the character of Peroo, the lower-caste Indian who faithfully assists Findlayson and Hitchcock in building the bridge, to voice their fear of the Ganges’s power. Peroo warns Findlayson of the Ganges’s ire by saying that “[w]e have bitted and bridled her. She is not like the sea, that can beat against a soft beach. She is mother Gunga in irons” (Kipling *Work* 11). It is Peroo who, when the Ganges floods, attributes animistic powers to the river and exclaims “She moves!...Mother Gunga is awake!” (Kipling *Work* 16). Peroo further ventriloquizes Findalyson’s apprehensions by stating that “[t]he bridge challenges Mother Gunga…But when she talks I know whose voice will be the loudest” (Kipling *Work* 16). Through the character of Peroo, Kipling outlines the parallels between the magical energy of the Ganges and the magical energy exerted by imperial administration and technology—a resemblance that could potentially unravel imperial authority, law, and social order.

Hence, while Findlayson and Hitchcock dismiss Peroo’s fear that the Ganges will rebel by flooding the bridge and mock Peroo for praying to the low-press cylinder in the engine room of a steam-ship, Findlayson admits that Peroo’s worship of technology is “[n]ot a half bad thing to pray to” (Kipling *Work* 12). Kipling subtly indicates the similarity between Peroo’s worship of inanimate things and the power Findlayson ascribes to technology as the instrument of imperial domination and omnipotence. Kipling would later openly assert such continuity in thought in a 1925 letter to Rider Haggard in which he concedes with Tylor that animism survives in altered form in modern society. “It stands
to reason old man that the world’s very limited modicum of thinking was done millions of years ago, and that what we mistake for thought nowadays is the reaction of our own damned machinery on our own alleged minds. Get an odd volume ofTyler’s [sic] Primitive Culture and see how far this squares with fact” (Kipling Rider 139). According to this logic, there exists little difference between the thinking of a Peroo and a Findlayson, between the magical omnipotence of the Ganges, the Kashi Bridge, and steam engine—a proposition that Kipling both accepts and resists.

Further dramatizing the tension between imperial and colonial forms of magical thinking, Kipling portrays the magical powers of technological energy in competition with those of the Ganges. At the very moment that Findlayson dismisses Peroo’s superstitions, a telegram arrives, informing Hitchcock and Findlayson that the Ganges has flooded due to heavy rains and will overflow their bridge within fifteen hours—two months before they had expected her to flood from rains. The speed and energy of the Ganges overturns their calculations and stands in opposition to the electrical energy of the telegrams that informs them of her movements. As Findlayson states, “I’ve only known Indian rivers for five and twenty years, and I don’t pretend to understand. Here comes another tar” (Kipling Work 13). The telegrams cannot keep up with the pace with which the Ganges travels, which floods six hours before they expected her to arrive.

As Pamela Thurschwell argues, Victorians often compared the telegraph to forms of magical thinking such as telepathy because both collapsed time and distances (7). The Ganges’s energy threatens to collapse distances faster than either the telegraph or

121Roger Luckhurst makes a similar argument, claiming that the British compared African incidents of clairvoyance to the electric telegraph. He further argues that psychical tales operated like rumor and thus resembled the unorthodox information systems of the colonies, where information seemed to magically circulate with supernatural speed through rumor—an effect most notably felt by the British during the 1857 Mutiny (200-205).
Findlayson’s workers can respond. “Mother Gunga had come bank-high in haste, and a wall of chocolate-coloured water was her messenger” (Kipling *Work* 18). The competition Kipling stages between two types of energy and message systems, the natural “messenger” of the Ganges versus the electric telegraph’s messages implicitly returns to the scene of political disorder caused by the 1857 Mutiny. In the wake of the Mutiny, British officials claimed that information about their military weakness circulated among rebels with a speed that was “almost electric,” demonstrating the administration’s vulnerability to the amorphous and magical powers of rumor (Bayly 315, 320-322). It was the electric telegraph and its rapid relay of news that actually aided British efforts to stymie the Mutiny by mobilizing an international system of communication (Bayly 336). In “The Bridge-Builders,” the unknown and magical powers attributed to electricity compete with the unknown and magical powers of the Ganges. As the immensity of the flood becomes clear, Findlayson calculates and recalculates the formulae with which he had designed the bridge only to admit with exasperation that “[h]is side of the sum was beyond question; but what man knew Mother Gunga’s arithmetic?” (Kipling *Work* 20). Yet, just as he had utilized Peroo to voice fears of the Ganges’s powers, Kipling again has Peroo neutralize the fear of the Ganges and the magical as a site of colonial resistance by stating that though he knew the Ganges would “speak,” the telegraph gave them adequate warning (Kipling *Work* 15).

Findlayson responds to the disorderly upheaval that commences with the news of the flood by calling all the workers to attention in a coordinated effort of labor that will, presumably, forestall the destructive effects of the river. This coordinated effort appears
not only in their actual acts but also in the call and response pattern by which they respond to the signal that a flood approaches.

Long before the last rumble ceased every night-gong in the village had taken up the warning. To these were added the hoarse screaming of conches in the little temples; the throbbing of drums and tom-toms; and, from the European quarters, where the riveters lived, Mc’Cartney’s bugle, a weapon of offence on Sundays and festivals, brayed desperately, calling to ‘Stables.’ Engine after engine toiling home along the spurs at the end of her day’s work whistled in answer till the whistles were answered from the far bank. Then the big gong thundered thrice for a sign that it was flood and not fire; conch, drum, and whistle echoed the call, and the village quivered to the sound of bare feet running upon soft earth. The order in all cases was to stand by the day’s work and wait instructions. The gangs poured by in the dusk; men stopping to knot a loin-cloth or fasten a sandal; gang-foremen shouting to their subordinates as they ran or paused by the tool-issue sheds for bars and mattocks; locomotives creeping down their tracks wheel-deep in the crowd; till the brown torrent disappeared into the dusk of the river-bed, raced over the pile-work, swarmed along the lattices, clustered by the cranes, and stood still, each man in his place. (Kipling Work 14)

As in each of the stories in the collection, scenes of mutual self-sacrifice and interdependence in which both men and machines perform synchronic acts of labor on behalf of empire become hallmarks of ‘the day’s work’ that forms the foundation of the British empire. The call and echo of the whistle, conch, drum, and engine mimic the joint action of all the workers who perform their function within the machinery of empire that delegates to each man “his place.” In opposition to the frenzied torrent of the Ganges, Kipling describes the organized and efficient call to attention in which the hierarchy of responsibilities appear clearly delineated and the men “stood still” awaiting instruction.

Despite the advance warning of the telegram and the model of coordinated labor, in “The Bridge-Builders,” Kipling reveals that efficient, imperial administration and its technological advances are sanctioned by and embody the very supernatural powers they purport to suppress. After Peroo gives Findlayson opium to blunt his hunger and fever, Findlayson gets dragged in his drugged state by a boat on the river and nearly drowns. In
his opium induced stupor, Findlayson confronts the invisible powers of the river and
descends, as Zohreh Sullivan argues, into the magical dream-world associated with night
and Hinduism’s polytheistic disorder that imperial daytime and its strict regime of labor
and law opposes (120). Findlayson’s attempt to discipline the unruly powers of the
Ganges mirrors an internal struggle in which he tries to master the unruliness of the soul
by disciplining the body’s desires and the unconscious. In his dream-state, Findlayson
experiences a momentary separation of soul and body. “His body—he was really sorry
for its gross helplessness—lay in the stern, the water rushing about its knees….To his
intense disgust he found his soul back in his body again, and that body spluttering and
choking in deep water. The pain of the reunion was atrocious, but it was necessary, also,
to fight for the body” (Kipling *Work* 24). The return of soul to body coincides with the
return of Findlayson to land and to the life of imperial action associated with the body.

While the return to land signals the temporary triumph of action and the body
over the vagaries of the soul, the narrative descends further into the magical by briefly
depicting a vision in which Peroo and Findlayson listen and watch various animals,
identified with gods from the Hindu pantheon, hold council about the Ganges’s desire to
destroy the bridge as an act of political resistance to the British imperial presence. In the
interchange that unfolds, the river Ganges begs the gods for justice against the bridge
builders who, she claims, have “chained my flood” (Kipling *Work* 27). As the debate
between the gods progresses, Kali sides with the Ganges and wants revenge, but
Hanuman, Ganesha, and Shiva want the work to continue. When Krishna arrives on the
scene, he tells the gods it is too late; if they wanted to punish the bridge-builders, they
should have done so when they first arrived. The bridge must stand and the Ganges will
have to submit to the bridge-builders since, if she destroys it, they will simply begin working again. As a result of past passivity, Krishna claims they will soon be replaced by new gods—technology itself. “[The Indian people] do not think of the Heavenly Ones altogether. They think of the fire-carriage and the other things that the bridge-builders have done, and when your priests thrust forward hands asking alms, they give unwillingly a little” (Kipling *Work* 37). Hanuman protests Krishna’s indictment by stating that they have hybridized western monotheism. They took Mary and “made her twelve-armed” and, similarly, Hanuman claims he “made a man worship the fire-carriage as it stood still breathing smoke, and he knew not that he worshipped me” (Kipling *Work* 38). But Krishna asserts instead that “[t]he fire-carriages shout the names of new Gods that are not the old under new names” (Kipling *Work* 39). Krishna’s comments echo the earlier scene in which Findlayson and Hitchcock discuss Peroo’s fetishized worship of the engine. What first reads like an endorsement of imperial presence by the colonized subject actually reveals the degree to which the magical omnipotence ascribed to imperial administration and its machinery derives from “primitive” magical thinking.

Through the dream sequence, Kipling highlights the fact that the “energy” that animates the gods of the Hindu pantheon and sacred rivers such as the Ganges also animates empire. When the council finally ends and Indra is asked to determine whether Krishna’s prediction is correct, Indra speaks in a riddle and says “When Brahm ceases to dream the Heavens and the Hells and Earth disappear. Be content. Brahm dreams still. The dreams come and go, and the nature of the dreams changes, but still Brahm dreams….The Gods change, beloved—all save One!” (Kipling *Work* 39-40). Zohreh Sullivan argues that the dream narrative of the Hindu gods contradicts the narrative of
daytime work and imperial rationalism that Findlayson must gingerly walk between (126). Rather than daytime imperialism canceling out the irrational dream-world once Findlayson wakes from his stupor, however, Kipling actually demonstrates the extent to which the godlike machines that Findlayson worships as emblems of imperial power share the magical elements of Hindu religious beliefs and have become enlivened by the prime mover Brahm, the creator god in Hinduism who sets the universe in motion. Thus, on the one hand, the decision of the gods to let the bridge stand typifies Kipling’s ideological position that the forces of empire are inevitable and pointless to resist; yet, it also suggests that the magical omnipotence of empire—its visible edifices and machines—are invisibly animated by animistic religious beliefs. The multiplicity of the many-armed goddesses of the Hindu pantheon, like the shifting sands of the Ganges, threaten British symbols of monotheism, stability, and singularity while being the very means by which British imperialism asserts the omnipotent powers of its machines and rigid social order.

In the larger context of *The Day’s Work*, “The Bridge-Builders” frames a core problematic that Kipling addresses in the rest of the collection. If empire draws on magical thinking to establish its omnipotence, then its structures continuously face the possibility of being overwhelmed by magic’s contagious powers. Hence, subsequent stories in the collection address two possibilities that Findlayson tests in the collection’s opening story: 1) agents of empire and imperial technologies succumb to the contagious powers of magic; 2) agents of empire and imperial technologies participate in a ritualized system of actions in which all parts of the administrative and mechanistic system perform
reciprocal acts of self-sacrificing labor and thus successfully constrain the magical
powers of energy within a coordinated system.

Kipling explores the first possibility in “The Devil and the Deep Sea,” in which
magic’s contagion envelops both the crew and steam-ship, causing it to descend into a
state of lawlessness and self-destruction. In this short story, like the later poem “The
Secret of the Machines” (1911), Kipling expresses his well-acknowledged fascination
with machines and technology, but also registers reservations regarding technology
precisely because of the magical powers attributed to them. In “The Secret of the
Machines,” for example, various types of modern machines such as the telegraph and
steam-ship boast of their ability to surpass human limitations and yet warn the reader of
their supernatural powers: “If you make a slip in handling us you die!…Our touch can
alter all created things./We are everything on earth except The Gods!” (Kipling Verse
734). Though machines seem to possess a contagious power that nears the gods, the
poem undercuts their fetishized powers by suggesting that the error lies in our tendency
to ascribe supernatural powers to entities that are actually the product of human labor and
imagination. Hence, the poem ends by stating that “for all our power and weight and
size,/We are nothing more than children of your brain!” (Kipling Verse 734). While
Kipling views the magical powers attributed to technology as merely a product of the
mind and a Tylorian survival, he also fears the magical and unknown powers of steam
engines, railroads, and the telegraph as potential sources of lawlessness and disorder.

In “The Devil and the Deep Sea,” a mercantile steam-ship and crew eventually go
mad when left to fend for themselves in peace time. Outside the scaffolding of imperial
administration and economic exchange, the magical powers that animate the ship lead to
lawlessness. The protean nature of the supernatural, like the fluid and magical powers of energy, posed no problem when the ship participated in imperial trade. Once called the Aglaia, Julia M’Gregor, Shah-in-Shah, Martin Hunt and, most recently, the Haliotis, “the boat of many names came and went, busy, alert, and inconspicuous always …Her name she changed as occasion called; her well-paid crew never; and a large percentage of the profits of her voyages was spent with an open hand on her engine-room” (Kipling Work 137). Like other secret agents of empire in Kipling’s fiction such as Kim and Strickland, the boat of many names effectively served empire by embracing multiple identities and selflessly devoting itself to the work of imperial trade, never financially profiting from its ventures.

Yet, the boat’s mercurial identity proves to be a liability when peace time brings an end to her trading. As Kipling would later make clear through the militaristic poem “Big Steamers” (1914-1918), steam-ships like the Haliotis daily contribute to the imperial trade and expansion that Britons take for granted. Such steam-ships, he admonishes the British consumer, “fetch you your bread and your butter,/Your beef, pork, and mutton, eggs, apples, and cheese” from cities like Hong Kong and Bombay. If Britons want to continue enjoying such privileges they should send “big warships to watch [their] big waters” (Kipling Verse 732). Similarly, a passive British populace and government form the backdrop of the Haliotis’s demise since it occurs when “peace brooded over Europe, Asia, America, Australasia, and Polynesia…and business was very bad for the ‘Martin Hunt’” (Kipling Work 138). Deprived of the economic opportunities that war-time and imperial expansion affords her, the Martin Hunt resurfaces elsewhere as the Haliotis and the crew enters a life of piracy, illegally poaching oysters for pearls to sell on the black
market (Kipling *Work* 138). Left to roam outside the structures of imperial administration and trade, the fluid identity and supernatural energy that had allied the Haliotis to empire now becomes linked to disorder.

If mechanical structures like steam-engines serve as metonymies for imperial administration and economics, Kipling demonstrates that the fluid and magical nature of energy must be carefully controlled or imperial omnipotence will quickly translate into self-annihilation. The Haliotis thus exemplifies Kipling’s worst case scenario: rather than being a model of coordinated, reciprocal action, the Haliotis’s engine becomes a maniacal beast. Such magical powers spread like a destructive contagion as both boat and crew descend predictably into madness, testifying to the overwhelming influence of the “primitive.” The madness that infects the crew originates in the damage caused to the engine after a foreign man-of-war shells the fleeing ship with its cargo of poached pearls.

The forward engine had no more work to do. Its released piston-rod, therefore, drove up fiercely, with nothing to check it, and started most of the nuts of the cylinder-cover. It came down again, the full weight of the steam behind it, and the foot of the disconnected connecting-rod, useless as the leg of a man with a sprained ankle, flung out to the right and struck the starboard…...The cross-head jammed sideways in the guides, and in addition to putting further pressure on the already broken starboard supporting-column, cracked the port, or left-hand, supporting-column in two or three places. There being nothing more that could be made to move, the engines brought up, all standing, with a hiccup that seemed to lift the ‘Haliotis’ a foot out of the water; and the engine-room staff, opening every steam outlet that they could find in the confusion, arrived on deck somewhat scalded, but calm. There was a sound below of things happening—a rushing, clicking, purring, grunting, rattling noise that did not last for more than a minute. It was the machinery adjusting itself, on the spur of the moment, to a hundred altered conditions….You cannot stop engines working at twelve knots an hour in three seconds without disorganising them. The ‘Haliotis’ slid forward in a cloud of steam, shrieking like a wounded horse. (Kipling *Work* 140-141)

Kipling allegorizes the politics of disorder and the Haliotis’s alienation from the structures of imperial administration and economy through the destruction of the engine.
Like the Haliotis itself, the damaged and dislocated parts of the engine are left either destroyed and with “no more work to do” or, because “disconnected” from the framework of the engine, perform their functions in a frenzied manner “with nothing to check it.” Anthropomorphizing the ship’s engine, Kipling describes it as a body whose severed limbs have become useless and cease to function as a highly integrated and coordinated organism. And as with the body’s reflexes, the injured engine tries to adjust its actions as it spontaneously responds “to a hundred altered conditions,” but to no avail.

The damage to the ship’s engine actually adds to its fetishized powers and leaves it in a state of dangerous excess. Commenting on the ship’s instability as it is towed to port, the narrator states that “[t]he forward cylinder was depending on that unknown force men call the pertinacity of materials, which now and then balances that other heart-breaking power, the perversity of inanimate things” (Kipling Work 142). Rather than epitomizing Spencer’s example of a dependent moving equilibrium, the energy and “unknown force” that animates the steam engine of the Haliotis has become a destructive and unbalanced demonic spirit. When the engineer, Wardrop, enters the engine room to repair the damaged Haliotis, Kipling describes him as an artist who “composed a work terrible and forbidding. His background was the dark-grained sides of the engine-room; his material the metals of power and strength” (Kipling Work 144). Kipling elsewhere interprets the powers of machines, especially steam-engines, as akin to daemons whose supernatural energies the engineer must translate into unified and regularized action. In “Steam Tactics,” for example, the character Hinchcliffe is the “engineer o’ the Djinn,” a steam-ship (Kipling Traffics 159). In Muslim demonology, the djinn literally means made from fire and represents an invisible order of spirits that have the power to appear
in human and animal forms and exert supernatural influence on men (Smith *Religion*
573). The break down of the ship’s engine unleashes the demonic and fetishized spirit
that had once been regularized within the steam engine as the supply and expenditure of
steam. Once disorder is given free reign, no amount of reconstructive work by Wardrop
and the crew returns the ship’s engine to its prior state of order.

Mr. Wardrop wiped away a tear as he listened to the new song. ‘She’s
gibberin’—she’s just gibberin’…Yon’s the voice of a maniac.’ And if engines
have any soul, as their masters believe, he was quite right. There were outcries
and clamours, sobs and bursts of chattering laughter, silences where the trained
ear yearned for the clear note, and torturing reduplications where there should
have been one deep voice. Down the screw-shaft ran murmurs and warnings,
while a heart-diseased flutter without told that the propeller needed re-keying.
(Kipling *Work* 163)

Completely out of tune and no longer able to perform acts as a unified voice, the magical
forces that animate the ship’s “soul” become a crazed cacophony of conflicting voices
that eventually infects the crew, who now appear “naked and savage” and “[look] over
the rail, desolate, unkempt, unshorn, shamelessly clothed” (Kipling *Work* 164, 165). The
“new song” of the Haliotis signals, like the many-armed gods of the Hindu pantheon, a
proliferating multiplicity and lawlessness that eventually wrecks the ship.

In contrast to the daemon that causes the Heliotis to self-destruct in “The Devil
and the Deep Sea,” Kipling explores the second possible way in which empire manages
energy’s magical powers in the story “The Ship that Found Herself.” In this short story,
all parts of the ship’s engine and infrastructure participate in a ritualized system of
reciprocal acts in which self-sacrificing labor disciplines the magical powers of energy
within a coordinated system that stands as an analogue for efficient yet elastic
administration and economic exchange at equilibrium. While parallels to the fluidity of
value and exchange as a network of reciprocal sacrifice metaphorically surface in
Kipling’s other stories, in “The Ship That Found Herself,” Kipling explicitly establishes a correspondence between the ship’s model of cooperation and the role that steam plays in its performance with that of economic systems, correspondences that resemble the mechanical and biological analogies for the economy in Spencer, Edgeworth, and Marshall. “The Ship that Found Herself” articulates a model of action in concert wherein steam, as energy, acts as a prime mover and magical force, impelling all parts of the ship to find itself united as one voice through acts of mutual self-sacrifice and interdependence. In this manner, the coordinated acts of the Dimbula exemplify Kipling’s conception of ritual as a type of action that reproduces the social order and law through self-sacrifice and the bonds of fraternal kinship.

The poem that opens the story, “Song of the Engines,” announces the principles of self-sacrifice, mutuality, and brotherhood. “We now, held in captivity,/Spring to our labour nor grieve!/See now, how it is a blesseder,/Brothers, to give than receive!/Keep trust, wherefore ye were made,/Paying the duty ye owe;/For a clean thrust and the sheer of the blade/Shall carry us where we should go” (Kipling Work 72). This model of action united on the basis of duty and mutual labor results in a steam-ship that, like Edgeworth’s description of steam engines at equilibrium, achieves a balance through the interdependent function that each part performs as it maximizes the energy of the whole. The steam engine and ship that Kipling describes, however, retains elasticity and incorporates biological elements. As a result, the Dimbula is not constrained by the static model of equilibrium that delimited the theorizations of Edgeworth and Marshall but offers a model of action as a dynamic, internally calibrated system epitomized in Spencer’s description of a dependent moving equilibrium. The equilibrium that the
Dimbula realizes, in contrast to the disequilibrium of the Haliotis, conforms to Kipling’s notion of law and his emphasis on action. Hence, the captain of the Dimbula corrects Miss Frazier, the daughter of the firm that owns the Dimbula, for thinking that merely the ceremony of christening makes a ship when becoming a ship, like Kipling’s notion of what makes a man, concerns the ability to act.

In the nature o’ things, Miss Frazier, if ye follow me, she’s just irons and rivets and plates put into the form of a ship. She has to find herself yet….But it’s this way wi’ ships, Miss Frazier. She’s all here, but the parrts of her have not learned to work together yet. They’ve had no chance….But there’s more than engines to a ship. Every inch of her, ye’ll understand, has to be livened up and made to work wi’ its neighbour—sweetenin’ her, we call it, technically….For a ship, ye’ll obsairve, Miss Frazier, is in no sense a reegid body closed at both ends. She’s a highly complex structure o’ various an’ conflictin’ strains, wi’ tissues that must give an’ tak’ accordin’ to her personal modulus of elasteecity. (Kipling Work 73-74)

Prior to engaging on her first cross-Atlantic voyage, the Dimbula has not yet acted as a unified entity and borne the struggle of rough waters. In order to be truly animated or “livened up” with the powers associated with a ship, each part has to coordinate its function with that of others. This coordination does not simply require a balance of forces; rather, each part must accommodate and adjust to the impact of force experienced by other parts of the ship and the sea as well. In this sense, the ship possesses the dynamic element of change that Marshall sought to incorporate into his model of the economy as a biological system in which forces do not simply balance each other in a static system but also change and are changed by the forces with which they come into contact. The ship tempers mechanical systematicity with, as the engineer of the Dimbula surmises, “spontaneecity” (Kipling Work 74). The Dimbula is not a “reegid body,” but like the tissues of a body, possesses a degree of elasticity that allows it to adapt to the
conflicting forces within its structure so that it can, in the end, achieve concord and blend mechanical systematicity with biological spontaneity.

The mutual coordination of the Dimbula’s mechanical parts, however, represents more than a metonymy for imperial administration; it also serves as a metonymy for the balance of forces and reciprocal sacrifice in the economic system. Thus far, I have primarily outlined the parallel analogies that economics and Kipling employ as models of equilibrium in exchange and unified acts of self-sacrifice on behalf of empire. But in the case of “The Ship That Found Herself,” Kipling literalizes the parallels that I have sketched by deliberately drawing on the labor theory of value to explain the precise way in which the parts of the ship achieve interdependence and unity.

The ‘Dimbula’ was very strongly built, and every piece of her had a letter or a number, or both, to describe it; and every piece had been hammered, or forged, or rolled, or punched by man, and had lived in the roar and rattle of the ship-yard for months. Therefore, every piece had its own separate voice in exact proportion to the amount of trouble spent upon it. Cast-iron, as a rule, says very little; but mild steel plates and wrought-iron, and ribs and beams that have been much bent and welded and riveted, talk continuously. Their conversation, of course, is not half as wise as our human talk, because they are all, though they do not know it, bound down one to the other in a black darkness, where they cannot tell what is happening near them, nor what will overtake them next. (Kipling Work 75)

Each part of the Dimbula bears traces of its individuality insofar as it stands as an artifact of past labors. The individual voice of each mechanical part expresses the labor quantities expended on it in production. As in the previous discussion of exchange at equilibrium in chapter two, wherein exchange represented the reciprocal of the labor sacrificed and pleasure gained and each discrete act of exchange came to be harmonized within an interdependent network of exchanges without conscious coordination, so the discrete parts of the ship coordinate their voices in a “conversation” though no part knows “what is happening near them.” Instead of being guided by Smith’s invisible
hand, Kipling figures the prime mover in his parable of the economy, like Edgeworth, as energy itself—steam. Thus, while labor expended determines the relative value of each part of the ship, coordination is effected through steam, the ultimate ground of value.

Once the boat moves into the Atlantic, the voice of the steam plays a leadership role as the waves begin to challenge various parts of the ship to withstand its pressures. As in Spencer’s analysis of the military and the division of labor as examples of evolutionary integration and differentiation, here the steam acts like the leader of a regiment, directing each disgruntled part of the ship to stay its course because one part abandoning its post is “contagious in a boat” (Kipling Work 85). By following a transparent chain of command, the Dimbula models the economic system and the style of efficient imperial administration that Bentham instituted in India wherein imperial law conformed to the language of command and authority could clearly be traced to the district officer (Stokes 72-74, 148, 164). The Dimbula thus encounters its first experience of ‘the day’s work’ and, by anthropomorphizing the ship, Kipling dramatizes the tension and dissent that inflames when each part of the boat must subsume its egoism in order to finally become one voice. Thus, for example, the deck beams ask the iron plates to be still while the starboard stringers complain that the beams are riveted to their structure. The plates grumble that they do not know “whether the other plates are doing their duty” whereas the web frame laments that it does all the work “entirely unsupported” and bears sole responsibility for the cargo whose estimated worth is £150,000 (Kipling Work 80). The funnels, stays, and decks all tell each other to “pull together” and fight the waves. Then the frames say they must expand because “[e]xpansion is the law of life” while the engines call for rigidity and the rivets complain
in “chorus” that “no two of us will ever pull alike” (Kipling Work 84). In this comical scenario, Kipling demonstrates how the ship must be both rigid and elastic at once in order to effectively unite in its action and find its voice as one ship. All the while, the steam urges all the parts to “hold on” and “share [the strain]” (Kipling Work 80, 85).

In its function as a benevolent but strict leader of a regiment, the steam encourages all parts of the ship to cooperate with one another until they are able to balance rigidity with elasticity. As the cylinders relate to the steam: “If you’d been hammered as we’ve been this night, you wouldn’t be stiff—iff—iff, either. Theoretic—reitti—reitti—cally, of course, rigidity is the thing. Purrr—purr—practically, there has to be a little give and take” (Kipling Work 89). While Kipling by no means here consciously responds to the methodological problems that faced Marshall and Edgeworth, the Dimbula succinctly summarizes the problematic that these economists faced. Theoretically, static equilibrium articulates an ideal state of the economy, but pragmatically speaking, forces not only balance each other but affect each other and evolve, requiring elasticity in its highly integrated system. Having achieved such integration and a dependent moving equilibrium, when the Dimbula comes to port it addresses the steam in a “new voice” and “[t]he Steam knew what had happened at once; for when a ship finds herself all the talking of the separate pieces ceases and melts into one voice, which is the soul of the ship” (Kipling Work 92-93). While the ship has found her voice and soul and learned to calibrate all the forces that animate it to form a unified whole, the steam itself remains separate and addresses the Dimbula as a separate entity. Like the god Brahma in “The Bridge Builders,” the creative and absolute energy that enlivens all entities remains separate from them.
The coordinated acts of the Dimbula present a parallel to notions of ritual. In chapter two, I compared ritual to coordination problems in which agents draw on common knowledge to respond to situations that require interdependent decision-making but face-to-face contact is absent. Ritual, from this point of view, becomes a way for individuals and groups to share common knowledge through the publicity and formality of ritual performances. Ritual participates in a type of information system in which collective social practices convey to actors the very common knowledge upon which they act. In Roy Rappaport’s analysis of ritual, ritual’s structural pattern of actions creates an information system in which individuals and groups convey their status within the system and inform themselves about the system by “doing” rather than “saying” (50-52). In the example of the Dimbula, the ship “found herself” through functional participation in the mechanized system of the ship though each part performed its duty without full knowledge about the actions of other parts. Yet, in the end, this disinterested performance of prescribed functions within an orderly system resulted in the experience of unity and an orderly system. According to Rappaport, “ritual indicates a public and binding acceptance of the order it encodes” and, as ritual continues and its actions become highly coordinated, individuals move “as a unified whole” such that the collective experience of temporality alters—what Durkheim terms effervescence and Victor Turner *communitas* (224). Kipling’s example of the Dimbula demonstrates the process by which individual parts overcome their sense of separateness and become “one voice” through coordinated acts of self-sacrifice, becoming fully absorbed in doing their duty rather than reflecting on their duties. The claim that ritual facilitates the experience of unity among individual participants articulates a central thread in theories of ritual.
from William Robertson Smith and thereafter. As Catherine Bell argues, ritual theory from E.B. Tylor to Durkheim to current practice theory, consistently opposes thought/belief to action, only to then present ritual as an integrative activity in which thought and action coalesce (Theory 13-29). For Kipling, the unity that results from collective action encodes and reaffirms the acceptance of the social order, the law. Through the unified performance of duties, whether these duties are performed by agents of empire such as Findlayson or mechanical systems that represent the economy and empire such as the Dimbula, collective acts sanctify the very order their ritual performances encode: empire.

If ritual functions in Kipling, as it did in my analysis of Ruskin, as a performatve system that indexes values and beliefs through participation in the collective and reciprocal act of self-sacrifice, Kipling’s ritual system performs the imperial order through acts of dutiful sacrifice in order to sanctify the imperial order. Kipling explores the connection between collective action on behalf of empire and ritual’s capacity to sanctify the group through his interest in secret societies and their formal rites. Kipling’s interest in ritual, especially in connection to freemasonry, is well-documented and represents his overall interest in action as the mode by which individuals communicate who they are and their values. Charles Carrington argues that freemasonry’s “cult of common action,” “masculine self-sufficiency,” and “hierarchy of secret grades” provides Kipling with a model in which to explore his social ideals (543). Kipling’s fascination with freemasonry conjoins his abiding preoccupation with collective action, self-sacrificing labor, and fraternal unity. His attachment to notions of “brotherhood,” a key aspect of freemasonry, surfaces in his treatment of both men and machines in The Day’s
Work. Not only are Findlayson and Hitchcock working together as brothers on behalf of empire, but in the story “.007,” Kipling describes a new train that is first shunned by other trains only later to become “a full and accepted Brother of the Amalgamated Brotherhood of Locomotives” after aiding a fellow derailed train “on an errand of mercy to the afflicted” (*Work* 229). Like Findlayson, Wardrop, and machines such as the Dimbula and .007, freemasons are craftsmen devoted to the act of labor. Kipling views acts of self-sacrificing labor, like Masonic ritual, as creating order out of disorder and thus a source of consolation. Freemasonry provides a model for common action and, more importantly, links such common action and notions of blood brotherhood with the goals of empire.

Freemasonry’s connection to empire not only appears in Kipling’s fiction but also in the organization’s history. The lodges that the freemasons first established in India were deeply connected to the East India Company, whose employees composed its membership base (Roberts 103). Kipling’s penultimate collection of short stories *Debits and Credits* (1926) contains several linked stories centered on the unofficial instructional lodge “Faith and Works 5837 C.E.”122 In the story, “In the Interests of the Brethren,” Kipling opposes the formal procedures of ritual and imperial order to colonial disorder and lawlessness. In “In the Interests of the Brethren,” for example, Kipling describes the encounter between an unnamed narrator and the head of the lodge, Faith and Works 5837 C.E., Lewis Holroyd Burges, who owns a tobacco shop. Burges approaches his old-fashioned tobacco shop the way he does freemasonry. When he hands a pipe to the narrator, for example, he tells the narrator that “[i]t deserves better treatment than it’s

122The title *Debits and Credits* does not pursue an overt economic theme. Kemp claims that the title refers to Kipling reviewing his career and the sum of his life (68) while Lisa Lewis contends that it alludes to the idea of profits and losses and the stress laid on theories of balance in freemasonry (191).
had. There’s a procedure, a ritual, in all things” (Kipling Debits 48). Burges attends to the craft in both senses—to the rituals of the freemasons and to the procedures of his craft as a tobacco shop owner. “I’m a shopkeeper by instinct….I like the ritual of handling things” (Kipling Debits 49). Kipling’s conception of ritual embraces the procedures of the workplace and the quasi-religious practices of groups such as the masons.

Burges’s adherence to the procedural aspects of ritual highlights, according to Catherine Bell, features that repeatedly arise in anthropological efforts to define the slippery category of ritual: formality, fixity, and repetition (Theory 91). Thus, for example, the gathering of lodge members at the instructional dinner represents a formal occasion that follows a fixed agenda and will be repeated again in subsequent weeks. Adherence to ceremony, whether it be dressing up for dinner or handling a pipe, provides solace. When Burges invites the narrator to join him in the evening, he arrives formally dressed and states that

...we owe that much to the craft...All ritual is fortifying. Ritual’s a natural necessity for mankind. The more things are upset, the more they fly to it. I abhor slovenly ritual anywhere. By the way, would you mind assisting at the examinations, if there are any Visiting Brothers to-night? You’ll find some of ’em very rusty—but it’s the Spirit, not the Letter, that giveth life. (Kipling Debits 50-51)

The latter half of Burges’s comment reveals a contradiction that troubles the narrator throughout the story: Burges’s lodge alleviates the pain and disaffection of many shell-shocked war veterans roaming London, but the lodge itself has not been authorized by the Grand Lodge, and its performance of Masonic ritual unfolds in an improvisational manner.

After watching the brothers of the lodge blunder through a lodge ceremony, the narrator remarks “[w]hen the amateurs, rather red and hot, had finished, they demanded
an exhibition-working of their bungled ceremony by Regular Brethren of the Lodge.

Then I realized for the first time what word-and-gesture-perfect Ritual can be brought to mean” (Kipling Debits 56). Despite Burges’s claim to being a strict “Ritualist,” the ritual performances in the lodge and the conversations he holds among its members about how some performances “had given rise to some diversity of Ritual,” demonstrate that ritual’s formality remains unfixed and malleable in the hands of its practitioners though it provides a place of refuge and healing for the war veterans that come there. Yet, it is precisely this malleability and diversity that offends the narrator because it is against “regulation” (Kipling Debits 66). Such disorder would not be troubling if the narrator did not present a parallel between the informality of the lodge’s rituals and the disorder of empire. When the members of the lodge perform their greetings, for example, the narrator claims that they speak

without order, in every tone between a grunt and a squeak. I heard “Hauraki,” “Inyanga-Umbezi,” “Aloha,” “Southern Lights” (from somewhere Punta Arenas way), “Lodge of Rough Ashlars” (and that Newfoundland Naval Brother looked it), two or three Stars of something or other, half-a-dozen cardinal virtues, variously arranged, hailing from Klondyke to Kalgoorlie, one Military Lodge on one of the fronts, thrown in with a severe Scots burr by my friend of the head-bandages, and the rest as mixed as the Empire itself. (Kipling Debits 59)

Like the Haliotis, the members of the lodge fail to speak in a regularized and unified voice but “grunt” and “squeak” in a disorderly manner. The mish-mash membership of the lodge and its confused handling of Masonic rituals reproduce the disorder of empire rather than being a remedy to it.

123 Coates’s discussion of stories from Limits and Renewals (1932) reveals a similar use of Masonic ritual as a source of healing for war veterans. Like the story “Madonna in the Trenches” in Debits and Credits, stories in Kipling’s last collection draw a close relationship between sympathetic magic, Masonic ritual, and the reenactment of original trauma through psychoanalysis. See Coates 91.
Furthermore, Burges’s desire to accomplish change “by Masonry through Masonry for all the world” may articulate the ambitions that Kipling himself saw in the connection between empire and the brotherhood of freemasonry (Debits 66), but he fears that imperial ambition can becomes self-destructive once it strays from law and regulation. Kipling had echoed similar sentiments in “The Man Who Would Be King” (1888). In this story, two rowdy ex-soldiers of the British Indian Army, Daniel Dravot and Peachey Carnehan briefly colonize a portion of Afghanistan. Dravot founds a lodge in Afghanistan despite Peachey Carnehan’s warning that it was against “all the law” to set up a lodge without sanction from the Grand Lodge (Kipling King 265). Dravot and Carnehan have to “fudge the Ritual” since they do not know fully what they are doing. Carnehan worries that they will be caught in their transgression and fears imminent disaster since “[t]hat comes of meddling with the Craft without warrant!” (Kipling King 266). Both their violation of the “law” and their improvisation of ritual prove symptomatic of the imperial arrogance that eventually leads to their death. Like the ship Haliotis in “The Devil and the Deep Sea,” which was overtaken by the magical, daemonic powers because of its descent into lawlessness, Carnehan’s and Dravot’s misuse of Masonic ritual contribute to colonial disorder rather than erecting structures that discipline it.

Unlike contemporary theorizations of ritual like Victor Turner’s discussion of communitas, Kipling does not oppose structures of social order and hierarchy to the creative anti-structure of ritual. Turner argues that ritual occupies a space of liminality in which an experience of communality unfolds and ritual mediates the dialectic of structure and anti-structure (94-97). For Kipling, however, the law of social order, ritual, and the
experience of communality are synonymous. The model of a military regiment governed by strict hierarchies and in which each individual stands connected to others by the precise function each performs represents the type of united action and esprit de corps based on mutuality, interdependence, and self-sacrifice that Kipling associates with law and ritual. The self-sacrificing martyrs of the British empire, embodied by the civil servant, promotes the same experience of diminished selfhood and immersion in group feeling that Kipling values in ritual. Yet, such martyrdom can easily become a form of egoism since the narrative of empire praises the extremity of such self-sacrificing labor as the source of empire’s magical omnipotence. In “The Bridge-Builders,” for example, Findlayson symbolizes the self-sacrifice of the civil servant, but he also arrogantly stands over the Kashi Bridge and “with a sigh of contentment saw that his work was good” (Kipling Work 5). The strict adherence to law, regulation, and self-sacrificing labor, associated with the formality and order of ritual, sanctifies imperial action and yet sews the seeds of arrogance and excess that Kipling’s divinization of action supposedly delimits. Ritual and orderly self-sacrificing action control the feared powers of the sacred and magical even as they invest themselves with the omnipotent excess of the sacred and magical.

Part III Electric Kim and the Ludic Rituals of Empire

Kipling’s interest in action does not rest with depictions of efficient systematicity, as epitomized by the steam-ship Dimbula, military hierarchies, or the procedural aspects of Masonic ritual. Both imperial administration and the economy, as Marshall remarks, require a degree of elasticity and spontaneity in order to evolve and progress through time in a realistic fashion. In Kipling’s first model of imperial administration and economic
systems, he emphasized efficient coordination and univocal movement as an analogue for the collective action that sanctifies the imperial order and offsets the potential disequilibrium of energy’s magical powers. Yet even the Dimbula relied, as discussed earlier, on a degree of elasticity and spontaneity in establishing its model of ritualized collective action and militaristic chain of command. In Kipling’s second model of imperial administration, he emphasizes flexibility in collective action and ritual by highlighting the ludic and improvisational aspects of ritual, specifically the Great Game of imperial conquest.

In the context of imperial administration in particular, Kipling attends to the necessity of ad hoc adjustment in order to exert control over rural areas of the colonized territory. Thus, while the narrator of “In the Interests of the Brethren,” chastises the lodge for acting against regulation, Kipling also stood critical of highly centralized forms of imperial administration. Scott, in “William the Conqueror,” epitomizes the values of independence, work, duty, and heroic self-sacrifice of what came to be known as the Punjab style of government (Wurgaft 37). Lewis Wurgaft argues that post-Mutiny imperial administration often marks the dividing line between the “improvisational administrative style” and heroic men of action on the Punjabi frontier and the administrative red tape that hampered the decisiveness of such men in the 1880s and 1890s. Scott willingly goes into the most rural areas of India where there are no telegraphs or material comforts to aid in famine relief efforts, selflessly drawing on his own funds to pay for expenses rather than relying on the slowness of government bureaucracy because, as his supervisor Sir Jim states, “[t]he man who wishes to make his work a success must draw on his own bank-account of money” (Kipling Work 196).
Scott proves his resourcefulness when he attends to the starving babies that are left at the relief centers by rounding up stray goats and feeding them goat’s milk. Kipling’s men of action repeatedly compensate for governmental interference and incompetence by responding decisively to the situation at hand, which often requires an improvised resolution.

Such improvisation proves necessary because the machinery of empire, like all machines, will at times falter. In the short story “Steam Tactics” from *Traffics and Discoveries* (1904), Kipling presents an allegory for the “improvisational style” of cooperative effort in which a steam-car, rather than magically adjusting its parts so as to act in unison, repeatedly breaks down and requires human ingenuity and repair. “Steam Tactics” offers a short, picaresque narrative of adventure in which an anonymous narrator travels through Sussex with his friends on a steam-car that repeatedly needs mechanical repair, water, or gas. The disjunctive and episodic style of the picaresque, utilized a few years earlier in the composition of *Kim*, provides the stylistic corollary and ‘tactic’ that Kipling deploys in the story to demonstrate how empire may respond to breakdowns in the system and regions where the centralized system of administration cannot penetrate.

The story begins with an interruption: a cart on the road stands in the way of the narrator’s motorized steam-car. At this juncture, the narrator meets two navy friends on leave, Pyecroft and Hinchcliffe, and offers them a lift to Instead Wick in Sussex. Hinchcliffe, an engineer on steam-ships, takes an immediate interest in the mechanics of the steam-car, which begins to give problems as soon as they drive. The fire blows out, the breaks work improperly, and Hinchcliffe complains that the slow car, like the crazed steam-ship Haliotis, behaves like “a terror…a whistlin’ lunatic” (Kipling *Traffics* 162).
The story progresses with a series of interruptions and digressions in which scenes of breakdown alternate with those of repair. The car stalls because it needs more water to produce steam and the men go to a Masonic lodge where, true to Kipling’s ideals of Masonic cooperation, they refill the car’s water-tank. As soon as they refill water, they run out of petrol and the propeller blades beneath the engine fall out and the group has to halt to search for the missing parts (Kipling Traffics 163-164). Further interruptions occur. A police officer halts them with a telegram charging them with drunk and disorderly conduct and, in a playful manner, the men take him hostage on their travels until they reach their final destination.

“Steam Tactics” presents a miniature picaresque narrative of imperial adventure but combines the picaresque’s episodic structure with a mechanistic analogy to demonstrate the way in which the steam-car, as an allegory for imperial administration and adventure, can work in an ad hoc fashion while retaining the elements of ritual and collective coordination. Kipling accomplishes this by combining features of religious ritual with the playfulness of games. Whereas the Masonic tales in Debits and Credits, such as “In the Interests of the Brethren” and “The Madonna in the Trenches” had explored the healing powers of ritual, Traffics and Discoveries explores the healing powers of mirth and the ritualistic aspect of games (Lycett 384). The narrator underscores the ludic aspects of their journey in the car by comparing their journey and search for the propeller blades with an actual race he ran against other cars in which he left a trail of ball bearings (Kipling Traffics 165). In Levi-Strauss’s discussion of the connection between games and ritual, for example, Strauss claims that

[all games are defined by a set of rules which in practice allow the playing of any number of matches. Ritual, which is also ‘played’, is on the other hand, like a
favoured instance of a game, remembered from among the possible ones because it is the only one which results in a particular type of equilibrium between the two sides. The transposition is readily seen in the case of the Gahuku-Gama of New Guinea, who have learnt to play football but who will play, several days running, as many matches as necessary for both sides to reach the same score...This is treating a game as a ritual. (Mind 30)

Levi-Strauss’s discussion of the connections between games and ritual elucidates the sudden religious turn that Kipling’s story takes and demonstrates how the ludic aspects of the adventure tale coalesce with Kipling’s notions of ritual and the magical equilibrium of the motorized steam-car’s forces. As an allegory of imperial conquest, the story shows how even the Great Game of empire and its improvisational techniques can result in the balance of self-interest and self-sacrifice, individual duty and collective performance, which the Dimbula’s more efficient and centralized system of coordination symbolized.

Kipling openly asserts the religious themes of “Steam Tactics” when the narrator, accompanied by the police officer, Pyecroft, and Hinchcliffe, meets his friend Kysh on his steam-car and continues the journey into Sussex on Kysh’s car since his water-tank leaks. On being introduced to Kysh, Pyecroft says “Well, I’m glad it ain’t Saul we’ve run up against—nor Nimshi, for that matter. This is makin’ me feel religious” (Kipling Traffics 174). The figure Kysh appears in the Hebrew Bible as the father of Saul, the first king of the Israelites. Kysh’s religious status is confirmed by the supernatural powers of his steam-car, the Octopod, which does not need to stop frequently for water or petrol like that belonging to the narrator. The narrator underscores the magical status of both Kysh and the Octopod in his description of their drive through the Sussex countryside.124

I had seen Kysh drive before, and I thought I knew the Octopod, but that afternoon he and she were exalted beyond my knowledge. He improvised on the

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124In his autobiographical work Something of Myself (1937), Kipling claims that he modeled the Octopod on his steam-car called the “Locomobile,” which he states, “reduced us to the limits of fatigue and hysteria, all up and down Sussex” (192). For discussions of Kipling’s interest in steam and motorized cars, see Mason 142-143; 186-187 and Lycett 344, 359, 402.
keys—the snapping levers and quivering accelerators—marvellous variations, so that our progress was sometimes a fugue and sometimes a barn-dance, varied on open greens by the weaving of fairy rings…. And she—oh! that I could do her justice!—she turned her broad black bows to the westering light, and lifted us high upon hills that we might see and rejoice with her. She whooped into veiled hollows of elm and Sussex oak; she devoured infinite perspectives of park palings; she surged through forgotten hamlets, whose single streets gave back, reduplicated, the clatter of her exhaust, and, tireless, she repeated the motions. Over naked uplands she droned like a homing bee, her shadow lengthening in the sun that she chased to his lair. She nosed up unparochial byways and accommodation-roads of the least accommodation, and put old scarred turf or new-raised molehills under her most marvellous springs with never a jar. (Kipling Traffic 175-176)

The Octopod enacts the elastic, dance-like spontaneity and motion of mechanical apparatuses in their ideal state. Like the steam-ship Dimbula, Kysh “improvised” and his steam-car combines spontaneity with rigidity in order to effect a dependent moving equilibrium in which the contrapuntal voice of mechanical parts, despite their discrete structures, achieve an interdependent harmony resembling a “fugue.” The magical powers of the Octopod, like a fearsome kraken, overwhelm its passengers as they travel “half stupefied with open air, drugged with the relentless boom of the Octopod, and extinct with famine” (Kipling Traffic 177).

Kipling ascribes quasi-religious aspects to the adventurous drive and the equilibrium achieved by the energy of the steam-car both through Kysh’s name and the events that unfold in the final stages of the narrative. Driving through the Sussex countryside, they suddenly enter a tropical zoo and the car itself, as Hermione Lee states, resembles an “exotic animal” (21). The magical powers of the Octopod seem to have impacted their sense of the real. Pyecroft asks the narrator if “’unger produce ’alluciations” because he sees “a sacred ibis” and fears his hallucinations might be “catching” to which the narrator replies, “Yes. I’m seeing beaver” (Kipling Traffic 178).
Unlike the Haliotis, the Octopod and its occupants are not crazed by the contagious effect of the magical since Kysh explains to them that their “vision” was actually a local landowner’s exotic zoo. At the end of their adventurous game, the men turn into an inn and “after a great meal [they] poured libations and made burnt offerings in honour of Kysh” (Kipling Traffics 179). After sharing a sacramental meal and making sacrificial offerings to Kysh, Pyecroft reminds the narrator that whenever they meet they seem to have a “hectic day” (Kipling Traffics 179). What seemed like just a drive through Sussex turns out to be a metaphor for ‘the day’s work’ of empire and its improvisational style—the daily acts of imperial sacrifice and work that the men then sanctify through a sacramental meal. As in the writings of William Robertson Smith and Ruskin, the sacrificial ritual that closes “Steam Tactics” functions as an act of communion that reaffirms the fraternal and cooperative efforts of men who “improvised” on the motor-car and, through their collective acts, solidified their reciprocal duties and obligations to one another.

“Steam Tactics” combines discontinuity and improvisation to produce a machine that functions just as efficiently as the more regimented depiction of coordination in “The Ship That Found Herself” and still embodies the magical powers that Kipling associates with machines animated by energy such as steam. Yet, as an allegory of imperial administration’s improvisational style, the steam-car remains a contained representation of empire and is thus easily visualized by the mind. Just as Jevons turned to the price-index in order to imaginatively represent the interconnected network that results from countless invisible acts of exchange, so steam-cars and steam-ships become a short hand for an empire whose scope actually escapes such manageable parameters. In this context,
the coherent and harmonized network of the steam-ship, steam-car, or price-matrix becomes apparent either to an outside viewer or requires an act of self-distancing on the part of participating agents. In *Kim*, Kipling provides us with a view of improvisational imperial administration that remains coordinated to the larger machinery of empire yet rarely allows us to glimpse the ritualized Great Game in which Kim participates because we, as readers, watch Kim’s performance from within the game. Rather than an efficient machine powered by the magical energy of steam, Kim’s performance within the Great Game epitomizes the invisible and global reach of electricity and, more specifically, the electric telegraph. By metaphorically comparing Kim to the electric telegraph, Kipling shows how Kim’s performance within the Great Game, like ritual, functions as an information system in which Kim becomes the instrument and magical medium of imperial control. Unlike other representations of imperial control, however, Kim’s mobility and dispersal into the interstices of India’s deterritorialized regions make him just as invisible as the magical energies he embodies.\(^{125}\) Through Kim, we experience the magic and electric energy that animates the Great Game and disseminates information within a system of coordinated networks, but we cannot glimpse the totalized structure of the game because, as in rituals, the experience of unity that participation in the Great Game affords requires absorption in the game.

Kipling had already appealed to the electric telegraph’s seemingly magical powers and speed in “The Bridge-Builders,” wherein the magical energy of the telegraph competes with the Ganges and warns Findlayson of the coming flood. In the short story

\(^{125}\)In a similar vein, Randall argues that Kim’s liminal status as an adolescent and hybrid identity enables the British to infiltrate the unknown space of India’s rural landscape and acquire knowledge that furthers British power. Kim thus supplements centralized administration and the ‘law’ through disciplinary techniques such as surveillance (116, 128, 136, 141).
“Wireless” from *Traffics and Discoveries* and his poem “The Deep Sea Cables” (1898), Kipling presents electricity as a magical force that transmits its effects by contagion and, quite literally, coheres individuals in a global network that resembles a séance. In “Wireless,” the daemonic energies that had inspired the artistry of engineers, here leads one of its characters to become the creative medium for Keats’s “Ode to a Nightingale” and “The Eve of St. Agnes.” The anonymous narrator of the story waits in a chemist’s shop with the chemist’s assistant, a consumptive named Shaynor, and the electrician, Mr. Cashell, who has set up a Marconi electric telegraph to receive wireless messages from his friend named Poole. Though the narrator comes to watch the experiment with the Marconi wireless telegraph, he instead observes the consumptive Shaynor transcribe lines by Keats, whose work he has never read, while staring at an advertisement of a woman named “Fanny Brand” in a drug induced reverie.

The story parallels Shaynor’s position as a magical medium for Keats’s poetry with the transmission of the magical and unknown powers of electricity through the electric telegraph. When the narrator asks Cashell to explain the nature of electricity, Cashell classifies it as one of the great unknowns.

> ‘Ah, if you knew *that* you’d know something nobody knows. It’s just *It*—what we call Electricity, but the magic—the manifestations—the Hertzian waves—are all revealed by *this*. The coherer, we call it.’ He picked up a glass tube not much thicker than a thermometer, in which, almost touching, were two tiny silver plugs, and between them an infinitesimal pinch of metallic dust. ‘That’s all,’ he said, proudly, as though himself responsible for the wonder. ‘That is the thing that will reveal to us the Powers—whatever the Powers may be—at work—through space—a long distance away.’ (Kipling *Traffics* 185)

Electricity assumes the position, as once did steam, of the magical prime mover—the noumenon whose nature can only be known through its “manifestations” and which the coherer alone reveals. Explaining the way the coherer works, Cashell states that Hertzian
waves cause the particles of dust to cohere from the magnetic field it creates. In this magnetic field, a wire becomes charged with electricity simply by being parallel to another wire in a magnetic field “[o]n its own account” (Kipling Traffics 189). Like sympathetic magic, wires become charged within a magnetic field without any actual contact. In Frazer’s analysis of homeopathic and contagious magic, for example, he claims that both

assume that things act on each other at a distance through a secret sympathy, the impulse being transmitted from one to the other by means of what we may conceive as a kind of invisible ether, not unlike that which is postulated by modern science for a precisely similar purpose, namely to explain how things can physically affect each other through a space which appears to be empty. (Bough 14)

At the same time that Cashell provides his explanation and demonstration, Shaynor begins to transcribe lines from Keats as if evidencing the very principle of sympathetic influence that Cashell used to describe wires in a magnetic field. The parallel presented between electricity, magic, and Shaynor’s mediumship, demonstrates Kipling’s conception of electricity as the force of something unknown and potentially contagious. When, for example, the narrator observes Shaynor’s act of automatic writing, he explains the occurrence by claiming that the “Hertzian wave of tuberculosis” combined with Fanny Brand, his profession as a chemist, and the subconscious produced the poetry of Keats (Kipling Traffics 194). Like tuberculosis, the sympathetic magic of electricity transmits its powers from wire to wire simply through propinquity and hence imitates the logic of contagion.

While Kipling views the magical powers of electricity, like other technological advances, as an instrument of imperial dominance, he also sees it as a potential threat. In the poem “The Deep Sea Cables,” for example, Kipling expresses fear and awe of the
electric telegraph’s powers to create unity\(^{126}\): “For a Power troubles the Still that has neither voice nor feet.//They have wakened the timeless Things; they have killed their father Time;/Joining hands in the gloom, a league from the last of the sun./Hush! Men talk to-day o’er the waste of the ultimate slime,/And a new Word runs between: whispering, “Let us be one!” (Kipling *Verse* 173-174). The unity experienced around the world due to telegraphic communication annihilates distance and time, allowing people to communicate at vast distances quickly.\(^{127}\) For Kipling, however, the telegraph’s magical, sacred powers can also be threatening because, like all forms of magical contagion, they annihilate distinction. The exclamation “let us be one” does not express enthusiasm for utopian unity and equality but apprehension that magical forces, when not directed by imperial omnipotence, can level hierarchies. The experience of unity among members of empire like Findlayson and Hitchcock is one thing, but global unity would dismantle the hierarchy between colonizer and colonized.

In *Kim*, the principle of contiguity by which magic and electricity communicate their powers becomes a tool of empire to control the dissemination of information through decentralized procedures of administration. Whereas in the short stories from *The Day’s Work* Kipling associates energy such as steam and electricity with the mechanical systems that stand as metonymies of empire’s magical omnipotence, in *Kim*, Kipling tackles the problem of decentralized forms of control by making Kim the magical medium of electricity that penetrates the interior of India’s unknown territorialities. Kim, like the electric telegraph, functions both as medium and messenger, co-opting the

\(^{126}\)According to Marvin, electricity was feared as a magical power that could either be a tool for destruction or a utopia (146-148).

\(^{127}\)Nickles claims that this annihilation of time and space increased metropolitan control over the imperial periphery and made nations more interdependent, diminishing the prominent role once held by government middlemen like the diplomat (32-34).
formlessness of India that undermines the imperial order with its invisibility. As magical medium, he embodies the invisibility and formlessness of electricity and transmits information from the periphery to the imperial center. Yet, in order to avoid the complete erasure of hierarchies, Kim self-consciously mimics the magical thinking associated with Indian culture to assert difference and distinguish the magic of imperial omnipotence from the “primitive.”

Kim’s magical status appears at the outset of the novel through his connection with the secret society of the Masonic brotherhood. The amulet he wears around his neck contains his “estate” and consists of his baptismal certificate, his father’s military certificate, and Masonic papers. The Masonic papers “belonged to a great piece of magic—such magic as men practiced over yonder behind the Museum…—the Magic House, as we name the Masonic Lodge” (Kipling Kim 50). Kim’s identity papers, his “charm,” represent his totemic membership to the magical and secret brotherhood of both the freemasons and, eventually, the brotherhood of secret service agents who work on behalf of the Great Game. In the poem “The Totem” (1932), for example, Kipling conceives totemic membership in freemasonry as synonymous with participation in the Great Game. “I was loosed to go my ways/With a Totem on my breast/Governing my nights and days—/Ancient and unbribeable,/By the virtue of its Name—/Which, however oft I fell,/Lashed me back into The Game” (Kipling Verse 780). When Father Victor and Bennett catch Kim and discover his true identity by taking the amulet filled with his identity papers, Kim shouts “O give it me. It is my charm” (Kipling Kim 132). Kim’s attitude toward his identity papers and his pursuit of the Red Bull insignia from his father’s military regiment as a type of “fetish,” intrigues Colonel Creighton, the head of
the Secret Service and avid ethnographer who mentors Kim in the Great Game (Kipling Kim 161). While Kim initially seems to reproduce the fetishistic thinking associated with Indians, his racial identity and membership to the totemic groups of freemasonry and the secret service later enables him to self-consciously mimic fetishistic thinking as a tactic within the Great Game.¹²⁸

Kim’s unorthodox upbringing allows him to occupy a liminal space in which his deft manipulation and performance of colonial identities furthers the aims of empire. Interpreting Kim as a liminal figure of adolescence and multivalent, colonial hybridity, Don Randall argues that Kipling figures Kim as a mediator, who “serves to integrate and co-ordinate under a continuous imperium the various, dispersed sites where power intervenes” (17). In penetrating these “dispersed sites,” Kim both draws on and mocks notions of magic that characterize Indian religious attitudes. Thus, for example, when the lama and Kim encounter a farmer and his wife while on their quest for the lama’s river, Kim dismisses his prophecy of finding a red bull in a field.

‘But thou hast a Search of thine own?’ The lama—very pleased that he remembered so well—sat bolt upright. ‘Ay,’ said Kim, humouring him. The boy was entirely happy to be out chewing pan and seeing new people in the great good-tempered world. ‘It was a Bull—a Red Bull that shall come and help thee—and carry thee—whither? I have forgotten. A Red Bull on a green field, was it not?’ ‘Nay, it will carry me nowhere,’ said Kim. ‘It is but a tale I told thee.’ (Kipling Kim 82)

Kim conceals his instinctive attraction to adventure and desire to explore the “great good-tempered world” through the rhetoric of magic and prophecy, which he uses as a cover to penetrate the interior of Indian communities otherwise closed to the British. The narrator

¹²⁸Parama Roy argues that mimicry and the exchange of identities in Kim become pivotal to the Great Game insofar as the exchange of clothing parallels the exchange of information. These exchanges function as the “rituals of nationness” and must be repeatedly performed to generate citizenship and nationness (88-89).
underscores Kim’s manipulation of the magical when the farmer’s priest, trying to interpret Kim’s prophecy, asks when Kim was born and Kim replies that it was the year of the earthquake in Kashmir. “The earthquake had been felt in India, and for long stood a leading date in the Punjab. ‘Ai!’ said a woman excitedly. This seemed to make Kim’s supernatural origin more certain” (Kipling Kim 87). Kipling uses the narrator’s commentary to distinguish between Kim’s own sense that he is supernatural and Indian ascriptions of supernatural powers to Kim. In this manner, Kipling demonstrates how mimicry can be a means to manipulate the principles of sympathetic magic without succumbing to complete immersion.129 In Frazer’s analysis of homeopathic and contagious magic, he claims that homeopathic magic employs the logic of “like produces like” by using charms that rely on the “Law of Similarity” whereas contagious magic uses charms that rely on the “Law of Contact or Contagion” (Bough 12-13). While contagious magic obviously transmits its magical powers through contact, homeopathic magic works by way of imitation and mimicry—obviating evil omens by performing acts that mimic them (Frazer Bough 42). Just as in “Wireless” Kipling explored the magical means by which wires transmitted their powers to one another across vast distances, in Kim he utilizes the logic of homeopathic magic, specifically Kim’s mimicry of colonial identities, as a way to exert colonial control through a type of sorcery.

Kipling establishes the importance of mimicry and Kim’s fluid relationship to identity as a means to engage in information gathering early on in the novel. Kim refuses to wear European clothes because he “found it easier to slip into Hindu or Mohammedan garb when engaged on certain businesses. One of the young men of fashion…had once

129See, for example, McClure’s discussion of the risks Kipling himself faced regarding his immersion in indigenous culture and the attendant loss of Englishness (48).
given him a complete suit of Hindu kit, the costume of a low-caste street boy, and Kim stored it in a secret place… When there was business or frolic afoot, Kim would use his properties, returning at dawn to the veranda….’’ (Kipling *Kim* 51). The malleable and mobile nature of Kim’s identity as a costume that he can slip in and out of distinguishes him from both Indian and ignorant British characters in the novel. Hence, he scorns the drummer-boy at St. Xavier who calls all Indians “niggers” and yet, by the same token, feels superior to the Hindu boy that serves Lurgan Sahib because he does not possess his powers of mimicry.

After dinner, Lurgan Sahib’s fancy turned more to what might be called dressing-up, in which game he took a most informing interest….Kim was appareled variously as a young Mohammedan of good family, an oilman, and once—which was a joyous evening—as the son of an Oudh landholder in the fullest of full dress….The Hindu child played this game clumsily. That little mind, keen as an icicle where tally of jewels was concerned, could not temper itself to enter another’s soul; but a demon in Kim woke up and sang with joy as he put on the changing dresses, and changed speech and gesture therewith. (Kipling *Kim* 207)

Kim’s split identity as an Anglo-Indian enables him to master the speech, manners, and custom of Indians and “enter another’s soul.” Though a “demon” awakens as Kim inhabits various identities, they never fully take possession of him because he conceives of identity as a “game” to be played at will. Kim proves his resistance to magic when Lurgan Sahib attempts to make him hallucinate that a broken vase slowly reassembled itself. Kim begins to hallucinate while thinking in Hindi but overcomes the spell and “leaped out from darkness” once he switches to English and recites the multiplication-table, trumping the dark powers of native magic with the light of western reason (Kipling *Kim* 202). Kim’s Anglo-Indian heritage equips him with a split identity so that even
when he imitates Indians he can always return to the fact of his whiteness and avoid being overtaken by magical thinking.\textsuperscript{130}

In his manipulation of magic and identity, Kim functions as the ideal spy for Creighton and the Secret Service since he understands Creighton’s basic rule that for boys being trained for government service, “there is no sin so great as ignorance” of native customs (Kipling \textit{Kim} 167). Creighton’s role in the novel as the head of the Secret Service, a division of the Ethnological Survey, as well as his avid interest in ethnography, presents intelligence gathering on behalf of empire and ethnography as interdependent activities.\textsuperscript{131} Hence, unlike native Indians who regard the train ticket as “a magic piece of paper” and wonder why conductors “punch great pieces out of the charm” (Kipling \textit{Kim} 246), the narrative continuously highlights Kim’s manipulation of magic and charms as modes of exerting power. Knowledge of the foreign culture, as Creighton intimated to Kim, translates into magical power in the hands of the colonizer. When the French and Russian spies abandon their research, letters, maps, and survey instruments in a bag, their native guides mistake the items as “brass idols” and fear its nature. Kim exploits their fear and, “with the craft of his mother-country,” convinces them to leave the items with him because he knows how to “draw out its magic” (Kipling \textit{Kim} 296-297). Kipling presents these stereotypical examples of native ignorance and superstition in order to

\textsuperscript{130}Zohreh Sullivan’s discussion of \textit{Kim} focuses on Kim’s split identity as an Anglo-Indian and the reproduction of Kim’s divided self through the series of political oppositions in the novel, e.g. the lama’s search vs. the Great Game, India vs. Britain etc. Kim’s self-division is necessary to produce the fantasy colonial agent who is both of the Indian people yet differentiated from them as a Sahib (148, 176-177). As McBratney claims, Kim’s racial identity as a white man remains absolute and overrides whatever identities he might adopt (14). Ali Behdad also discusses the issue of self-divided identities in Kipling. Behdad claims that Kipling’s British colonial figures are characterized by self-exoticism in that they are culturally alienated from both Indians and the British at home (77-78).

\textsuperscript{131}Interestingly, Peter Hopkirk claims that the connection between the Secret Service and the Ethnological society was entirely Kipling’s invention (126). For a fuller discussion of ethnography in relation to the Foucauldian dynamic of power/knowledge, see Randall 137-159.
demonstrate how easily Kim assumes insider status to achieve the self-interested ends of empire only to then switch to “a Sahib’s point of view” as he inspects the contents of the loot taken from the European spies (Kipling *Kim* 302).

In using his knowledge of native culture, Kim behaves like a sorcerer who, as in Frazer’s analysis of magicians, establishes public authority by performing public acts of magic on behalf of the community. The sorcerer, Frazer writes,

is often convinced that he really possesses those wonderful powers which the credulity of his fellows ascribes to him. But the more sagacious he is, the more likely he is to see through the fallacies which impose on duller wits. Thus the ablest members of the profession must tend to be more or less conscious deceivers; and it is just these men who in virtue of their superior ability will generally come to the top to win for themselves positions of the highest dignity and commanding authority. (*Bough* 52-53).

The community for which Kim exercises his magic and role as a “conscious deceiver” is, of course, the British Empire. Kim displays his powers of sorcery on the train to Delhi when he encounters E23, a Mahratta spy working for Creighton, who asks Kim if he has “a charm to change [his] shape” so that he can escape his pursuers (Kipling *Kim* 249). Within minutes, Kim transforms him into a Saddhu and, as Frazer remarks of the sorcerer, Creighton rewards Kim with greater authority by sending him on his first major mission for the Great Game.

Kim’s manipulation of his native knowledge parallels that of the narrator who functions as an ethnographer and repeatedly brings the reader’s attention to his acts of translation (Randall 150). Not only does the narrator constantly incorporate Hindi words into his description and dialogues, but he selectively provides bracketed translation of words in English within quoted speech. Occasionally, this translation occurs after the reader has already encountered the foreign word earlier in the novel. When Kim attends
St. Xavier, for example, the drummer-boy says “what was you bukkin’ to that nigger about” (Kipling *Kim* 150), but later when Kim addresses Huree Mookerjee he says “How can I do anything if you bukh [babble] all round the shop? (Kipling *Kim* 269).” The narrator forces the reader to encounter something foreign only then to assert control and prove mastery over the culture that disorients the English reader by asserting his prior knowledge. Just as Kim spends thirteen years on the streets of Lahore studying “human nature” and “[copying] the very inflection” of the proverbs he heard (Kipling *Kim* 97), the narrator establishes himself as an expert ethnographer and student of Indian culture (Kucich *Masochism* 170-171). While the level of cultural knowledge established between narrator and reader remain asymmetrical, the reader learns through the narrator’s expert performance that the unknown can be mastered through the processes of translation and astute cultural observation.

Though Kim, like the narrator, distances himself from the Indian community whose customs, beliefs, and rituals he performs, he takes active membership in the rituals and exchanges of the secret societies that perform the Great Game. Kim’s membership in secret societies such as the Masonic Brotherhood and the Sat Bhai adds to his magical status and introduces him to a separate set of rituals and exchanges than that of mainstream Indian or British society. Kim joins the Sat Bhai (Seven Brothers) through Huree Mookerjee, a fellow spy, who introduces him to the secret Hindu sect when he first joins the Great Game. As a secret Hindu society, Kim’s entrance into the Sat Bhai as a “Son of the Charm” gives him membership to two secret societies, allowing him to synthesize British and Indian identities in a manner that does not contradict imperial power (Kipling *Kim* 230). The Sat Bhai and the Masonic brotherhood overlap in Kim’s
participation in the Great Game, each emphasizing brotherhood and the performance of ritualistic exchange, secret codes, and amulets that, as John McBratney succinctly states, stage communitas in “a casteless enclave cordoned off from the main business of empire” (118). The main form of ritualized exchange for the members of the Sat Bhai is information. As the various transactions between Kim and Mahbub Ali show, in the Great Game, information is coin of the realm.

‘Dost thou give news for love, or dost thou sell it?’ Kim asked. ‘I sell and—I buy.’ Mahbub took a four-anna piece out of his belt and held it up. ‘Eight!’ said Kim, mechanically following the huckster instinct of the East. Mahbub laughed, and put away the coin. ‘It is too easy to deal in that market, Friend of all the World. Tell me for love. Our lives lie in each other’s hand.’ (Kipling Kim 182)

An exchange that begins as the sale of information for the sake of financial gain shifts to one in which two ‘sons of the charm’ share information for the Great Game in which they only have each other and must rely on an ethic of reciprocal sacrifice in order to survive. Mahbub Ali openly affirms such an ethic when Kim later becomes a compatriot in the Great Game by telling Kim “I am thy sacrifice” (Kipling Kim 226). Like Scott and Findlayson, these ‘sons of the charm’ martyr themselves on behalf of empire and, in so doing, add to its omnipotence.

Despite the gesture toward brotherly self-sacrifice, the game of espionage also feeds on competitive and self-interested instincts. Mahbub Ali’s relationship with Kim arises precisely because he “knew the boy’s value as a gossip” and can relay news heard in the bazaars (Kipling Kim 66). Kim’s nickname “Friend of all the World” draws attention to his intermediary role as a conduit for information and the way in which his position of liminality proffers a means of imperial control insofar as he can penetrate sites of potential resistance. In C.A. Bayly’s historical analysis of the information orders
utilized by the British imperial administration in India during the eighteenth- and
nineteenth-century, Bayly claims that there were two systems of information: state
surveillance and autonomous networks of communication (2). While these two systems
overlapped to some degree, Bayly argues that the overlap was not complete, especially
into the nineteenth-century when decentralized forms of information gathering by native
informants such as postrunners and astrologers were replaced by centralized systems like
the army and district office, creating a “zone of ignorance” between the district office and
rural areas that facilitated the spread of the 1857 Mutiny (143, 165). As discussed earlier
in the context of “The Bridge-Builders,” the British countered the ‘electric’ speed with
which rumor of the Mutiny traveled among Indian rebels with their relatively new system
of the electric telegraph. The electric telegraph thus sealed the gaps between formal
and informal orders of information gathering, between centralized administration and the
decentralized networks of informants that roamed the bazaars and the countryside.

Kim’s relationship to rumor in the novel, rather than being the instrument of
indigenous rebellion, actually furthers the tactics of the Great Game. After delivering an
encoded message to Colonel Creighton that he received from Mahbub Ali on a possible
Afghan-Russian conspiracy, Kim watches and listens in secret as Creighton orders an
army of 8,000 to assemble near the Indian and Afghan border. While on the road with
the lama, Kim proudly tells other Indians that they meet, like the priest and the soldier’s
son, that there will be a war of 8,000 men at the border and they dismiss his claim as

132 After the Mutiny, the British government gave money to the Red Sea and Indian Telegraph Co. to
establish a connection between the East India Company’s possessions and Britain. This effort failed and
the Indian government entered into a similar venture with the Gutta Percha Co. (Kieve 110-111). While
only a few telegraph cables were present at the time of the Mutiny, many more were built in the colonies
during the 1880 and 1890s (Kieve 115-116).
“bazar-talk” and “bazar-rumour” (Kipling *Kim* 95, 107). Kim relates the same news to the colonel of his father’s old regiment, the Mavericks. When the colonel realizes that Kim’s prediction of the war has come true, he dismisses it as a “bazar rumour” though he cannot account for how he came to know of a decision that only occurred within forty-eight hours (Kipling *Kim* 146). By making rumor the instrument of the Great Game rather than mutinous rebellion, Kipling shows the importance of bridging the two orders of information outlined by Bayly.

Kim’s relationship to rumor demonstrates the importance of decentralized forms of administration by governmental servants like Scott in “William the Conqueror” and Creighton’s Secret Service for the effective exertion of imperial power. Creighton highlights the decentralized nature of the Secret Service by claiming that, while short of funds, “[o]ne advantage of the Secret Service is that it has no worrying audit….the funds are administered by a few men who do not call for vouchers or present itemised accounts” (Kipling *Kim* 223). Working within a decentralized network, Kim utilizes his liminality to successfully penetrate and disappear into the less territorialized regions of “grey, formless India” (Kipling *Kim* 143). Yet, even in his formlessness, Kim remains a part of the imperial machinery. In this context, Kipling does not completely reproduce Bayly’s historical account of British information systems, but instead presents Kim’s decentralized efforts as still connected to and coordinated by the machine of empire.133

McBratney argues that Kipling links Kim to the Great Game through mechanical

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133While Kipling’s fictional account contradicts Bayly’s depiction of empire’s information order, there is other historical precedence for Kipling’s description of decentralized procedures as part of the centralized administrative machinery of empire. Stokes claims that the portraits of charismatic men like John Lawrence and John Nicholson exaggerate the improvisational aspects of the Punjab style when they were actually subject to a rigid system of administrative overview—a fact substantiated by the numerous detailed reports the government produced (245-248).
metaphors of the “wheel,” which not only symbolizes the Lama’s “wheel of life” but also the “wheel” of fortune and empire (123). Kipling makes the association between the Great Game and machinery more obvious through Kim’s function for the Secret Service as a surveyor or “chain-man”—a role that aligns him with the chains of empire and its wheel rather than the lama’s struggle to be released from the wheel of life’s illusory materiality and its “Chain of things” (Kipling Kim 259; McBratney 124). Kim’s connection to the machinery of empire becomes clear at the end of the novel when Kim reflects on his journey through the Himalayas with the lama.

He squatted by the white wall, the mind rummaging among the incidents of the long dooli journey, the lama’s weaknesses, and, now that the stimulus of talk was removed, his own self-pity, of which, like the sick, he had great store. The unnerved brain edged away from all the outside, as a raw horse, once rowelled, sidles from the spur. It was enough, amply enough, that the spoil of the kilta was away—off his hands—out of his possession. He tried to think of the lama—to wonder why he had tumbled into a brook—but the bigness of the world, seen between the forecourt gates, swept linked thought aside. Then he looked upon the trees and the broad fields, with the thatched huts hidden among crops—looked with strange eyes unable to take up the size and proportion and use of things—stared for a still half-hour. All that while he felt, though he could not put it into words, that his soul was out of gear with its surroundings—a cog-wheel unconnected with any machinery, just like the idle cog-wheel of a cheap Beheea sugar-crusher laid by in a corner. The breezes fanned over him, the parrots shrieked at him, the noises of the populated house behind—squabbles, orders, and reproofs—hit on dead ears. ‘I am Kim. I am Kim. And what is Kim?’ His soul repeated it again and again. He did not want to cry—had never felt less like crying in his life—but of a sudden easy, stupid tears trickled down his nose, and with an almost audible click he felt the wheels of his being lock up anew on the world without. Things that rode meaningless on the eyeball an instant before slid into proper proportion. Roads were meant to be walked upon, houses to be lived in, cattle to be driven, fields to be tilled, and men and women to be talked to. They were all real and true—solidly planted upon the feet—perfectly comprehensible—clay of his clay, neither more nor less. (Kipling Kim 331)

Kipling exposes Kim’s connection to the machinery of empire through the images of a “gear” and “cog-wheel,” but he also demonstrates the perils of such self-awareness. Kim only feels disconnected from the machine of empire, like “a cog-wheel unconnected with
any machinery,” when he assumes a self-reflective posture with respect to his role in the Great Game and disturbs the fluid workings of the machine that made his mission into the Himalayas a success. Kim’s attempt to take in the “bigness of the world” and his self-reflective stance toward his past actions creates an experience of disconnection and disrupts “linked thought.” This sense of disconnection departs as soon as he becomes absorbed in the given world and the life of action it presents before him. Reentering the world of action and its commitment to the present tense, Kim and the machine of which he’s a part resolve their contrarian voices and speak in one voice again.

In order to experience the unity that arises from the ritualized exchange of information within a secret society, the machine of the Great Game must remain invisible. Like the coordinated network of parts on the Dimbula steam-ship, wherein each part of the ship performed its duty while remaining “bound down one to the other in a black darkness,” so agents of the Great Game can never be fully self-conscious of the game because they are inside the game, what Bourdieu terms *illusio*. Investment in and commitment to the rules of the game, he argues, gives members of a field a “feel for the game,” a feel that cannot be maintained when one assumes the analytical stance of a spectator and questions the beliefs that underlie participation in the game (Bourdieu *Practice* 166-167). Thus, Mahbub Ali explains the complex series of effects that Kim’s minor espionage activity participates in by stating that “[t]he Game is so large that one sees but a little at a time” (Kipling *Kim* 216). Kim’s desire to witness the game’s visibility appears early in the novel. After delivering the encoded message to Colonel Creighton and receiving a small payment, Kim listens as Colonel Creighton orders the armies of 8,000 men to assemble at the Afghan border because what he really “desired
was the visible effect of action” (Kipling *Kim* 84). At this early stage in the narrative, Kim has yet to enter the game and so assumes the position of a detached observer—a role unavailable to him as the narrative progresses and he becomes involved more deeply in the Great Game.

Kipling’s interest in action as the mode of self-assertion and imperial power requires that Kim express his membership and position of power within the field of colonial conquest through absorption in the ritual performance of the game. Only through such absorption does the game realize its effects and can Kim assert his identity as a white man. After Kim transforms E23 into a Saddhu on the train, for example, the lama scolds Kim for having “loosed an Act upon the world, and as a stone thrown into a pool so spread the consequences thou canst not tell how far” (Kipling *Kim* 258). When the lama advises him to abstain from action, Kim replies, “[a]t the Gates of Learning we were taught that to abstain from action was unbefitting a Sahib. And I am a Sahib” (Kipling *Kim* 261). Kim’s racial identity and participation in the Great Game now make him synonymous with unreflective action. In this manner, ritual absorption in the Great Game becomes the site of the very magical thinking that Victorian anthropologists applied to “savages.” As Tylor remarks in *Primitive Culture*, “the savage or barbarian has never learnt to make that rigid distinction between subjective and objective, between imagination and reality” (*Religion* 29). While Kim refuses to adopt the reflective, objective stance in which he examines the effects of his actions, the narrator-ethnographer adopts a distanced perspective and describes the very ripples Kim’s actions on the train cause.

…there was then being handed in at Simla a code-wire reporting the arrival of E23 at Delhi, and, more important, the whereabouts of a letter he had been
commissioned to—abstract. Incidentally, an over-zealous policeman had arrested, on charge of murder done in a far southern State, a horribly indignant Ajmir cotton-broker, who was explaining himself to a Mr Strickland on Delhi platform, while E23 was paddling through by-ways into the locked heart of Delhi city. In two hours several telegrams had reached the angry minister of a southern State reporting that all trace of a somewhat bruised Mahratta had been lost; and by the time the leisurely train halted at Saharunpore the last ripple of the stone Kim had helped to heave was lapping against the steps of a mosque in far-away Roum—where it disturbed a pious man at prayers. (Kipling *Kim* 258)

The narrator’s detached perspective and description offers the “visible effect of action” that Kim earlier craved but which he can no longer witness now that he has become one of the game’s actors. Agents of the game like Mahbub Ali and Kim may only see the game’s machinery of effects “a little at a time,” but the omniscient narrator provides a telescopic view of the product of such actions, allowing readers to glimpse a portion of the coordinated network in which characters participate.

The narrator’s description of the ripple of effects establishes a consonance between Kim’s actions and the effect of electricity. The passage conveys the experience of simultaneity associated with the electric telegraph. Even the prose style in places imitates the curtness of telegrams by eliminating articles (“on Delhi platform”). The parallel presented in the passage between the unfolding effects of Kim’s actions and the transmission of information via telegrams indicates a deeper connection that the novel subtly establishes between Kim’s magical status, electricity, and the circulation of information that bridges the gap between the formal and informal systems of information. Having heaved the stone, Kim functions as the source from which the concentric circle of effects irradiate—the electrical prime mover that gets the action of the Great Game going. The magical qualities given to electricity in “Wireless” here assume the form of Kim’s agency. Kim’s liminality and the electric telegraph resemble one another insofar as both
mediate the interstices between the systems of information, interstices that offer sites of resistance.

Kim becomes more clearly identified with the electric telegraph as the novel progresses, and this identification occurs in those very episodes in which Kim self-consciously questions his identity and represents a stage in his assimilation into the Great Game. When Kim first attends St. Xavier to receive the education of a ‘sahib’ and learns the survey techniques needed to work for Creighton and the Ethnological Survey, Kim’s questions about his identity hinge on his mobility.

‘Hai mai! I go from one place to another as it might be a kick-ball. It is my Kismet. No man can escape his Kismet. But I am to pray to Bibi Miriam and I am a Sahib’—he looked at his boots ruefully. ‘No; I am Kim. This is the great world, and I am only Kim. Who is Kim?’ He considered his own identity, a thing he had never done before, till his head swam. He was one insignificant person in all this roaring whirl of India, going southward to he knew not what fate. (Kipling Kim 166)

The progressive development of Kim’s sense of his identity rests on his ability to integrate his perpetual desire for mobility with competing notions of ethnicity, a task his ascension in the Great Game accomplishes by exploiting his desire for adventure, continuous movement, liminality, and hybridity. Once he becomes inducted into the secret societies of the Great Game, such self-division disappears and he fully embodies the actions of empire rather than questioning his role in it.

Kipling depicts the disappearance of such self-division the more Kim becomes the magical medium through which empire transmits information, that is, the more the novel identifies Kim with electricity and the telegraph. On completing his education at St. Xavier, Kim confronts a feeling of alienation and disconnection that he expresses in terms of his capacity to transmit information. “‘Now I am I alone—all alone,’ he
thought. ‘In all India is no one so alone as I! If I die to-day, who shall bring the news—and to whom? If I live and God is good, there will be a price upon my head, for I am a Son of the Charm—I, Kim….Who is Kim—Kim—Kim?’ (Kipling Kim 233). The narrative identifies Kim with the circulation of news via telegraph through Kim’s fear that without him no news would circulate and also through the telegraph-style punctuation of his name. Kipling had employed a similar stylistic effect in “Steam Tactics” to denote a telegraphed message when the narrator “telegraphs a question” to Pyecroft who then answers with “Not—in—the—least” (Kipling Traffics 157).

Similarly, the electrician of “Wireless” describes the electrical power of the wireless telegraph as trying to “kick—kick—kick into space” (Kipling Traffics 191). Kim’s growing association with the wireless telegraph, a development Kipling signals stylistically, transforms Kim into the medium by which empire transmits information: electricity. Like the magical nature of electricity and its ambiguous origin, Kim’s transmutability makes him an ideal agent of the Great Game.

Kim’s assertion of identity as a Sahib through participation in the Great Game only invigorates the confluence Kipling establishes between Kim’s magical status, his devotion to unreflective action, and the electric telegraph. After being given the task of pursuing French and Russian spies into the Himalayas, Kim exults over his first real assignment in the Great Game. “Now I shall go far and far into the North playing the Great Game. Truly, it runs like a shuttle throughout all Hind……a great and a wonderful world—and I am Kim—Kim—Kim—alone—one person—in the middle of it all” (Kipling Kim 273). In this pronouncement of his identity, Kim reveals the significance of his nickname “Friend of all the World.” Like the deep sea cables that join the world as
one, Kim becomes the center of the world through which all others are connected. Kim’s identification with the electrical telegraph that mediates communication and connects the world through its simultaneous transmission of information occurs at a crucial juncture in the novel since he and the lama are about to trek into a rugged region that has not been territorialized by British information systems: the Himalayas (Bayly 100). Hence, when the lama and Kim climb over the endlessly steep peaks, the narrator describes their entrance into “a world within a world” (Kipling *Kim* 283). Yet, through his metaphorical identification with the telegraph and his participation in decentralized systems of information gathering, Kim effectively penetrates those regions barred to the imperial center and gathers the information Creighton needs. Kim’s self-divided subjectivity, the perforation of his identity as he becomes the electric and magical medium by which empire transmits information, becomes sutured at the close of the novel. In the very scene where Kim feels that he is “out of gear” and disconnected from the wheel of empire, Kipling signals Kim’s return to the machinery of the game with the “audible click” heard as Kim refocuses on the physical world and the life of action and, more importantly, through his self-assertion “I am Kim. I am Kim” (Kipling *Kim* 331). Just as Findlayson earlier asserts the magical omnipotence of empire as he oversees the Kashi Bridge and, like the creator god in the Hebrew Bible, “saw that his work was good” (Kipling *Work* 5), Kim’s full entry into the Great Game ends with an eternal ‘I am’ that establishes his role as the magical prime mover of imperial machinery, consistently drawing on colonial forms of the magical only to assert his independence and power over it.
In the short stories from *The Day’s Work* and * Traffics and Discoveries*, the magical energies that empower the machines, which represent the coordinated networks of imperial administration and economics, achieve a dependent moving equilibrium that balances self-sacrifice and cooperation with the self-interested egoism of the individual parts. Yet such an equilibrium, as in Marshall’s analysis of the tree in the forest and monopoly, remains subject to the disequilibrating forces of competition—what Spencer would term the persistence of force. Hence, Kipling’s efficient systems of imperial administration contend with the destabilizing forces of competition that are the basis of imperial expansion. The tendency of any system toward disequilibrium surfaces in the relationship between the lama and Kim, which never balances self-sacrifice and self-interest since the excess of one or the other drives the expansion and continual performance of the Great Game. The framework provided by Spencer and political economists such as Edgeworth and Marshall allows us to address the vexed issue that preoccupies critical treatments of *Kim*: its indeterminate ending and the unresolved tension between the lama’s search for the river and Kim’s commitment to the game. This unresolved tension hinges on the relationship between self-interest and renunciation throughout the novel, between the lama’s commitment to renunciation and inaction and Kim’s commitment to the self-interested aims of empire and action.

While Kipling effectively constrains the potential instability of the Dimbula’s equilibrium in “The Ship That Found Herself,” *Kim*’s lack of closure suggests that the propulsive movement of the Great Game will shift between the poles of equilibrium and disequilibrium. Kipling depicts this instability through the complicated relationship between Kim and the lama, which see-saws between acts of self-sacrifice and self-
interest without maintaining a balance. At the beginning of the novel, Kim regards the lama as “his trove” and he “[takes] possession” of him as a tool for the Great Game (Kipling *Kim* 60). The novel underscores the lama as an imperial possession on his entrance into the Lahore Museum in which, as Zohreh Sullivan notes, the curator of the museum asserts imperial authority over the lama by exchanging spectacles with him so that the lama sees the world thereafter through the eyes of empire (154). The lama’s disempowered position stands in contrast to the Curator’s statement to the lama that they “be craftsmen together” (Kipling *Kim* 59). While the curator echoes the language of brotherhood and Masonic fraternity and Kim repeatedly claims to be the lama’s loyal disciple, aiding him on his search for the river, the lama primarily functions as a cover for Kim as he travels across India in his work for the Great Game. In exchange for his efforts as the lama’s disciple, the lama ironically pays for Kim’s education at St. Xavier, an education aimed at producing more agents for imperial expansion.

The relationship between the lama and Kim appears at turns parasitic and symbiotic. Despite using the lama for the purposes of the Great Game, Kim also performs acts of self-sacrifice on behalf of the lama during their trek through the Himalayas. During this trek Kim bears the “burden incommunicable” of the Great Game and “the burden of an old man” to whom he proves his loyalty by being the lama’s “sacrifice” (Kipling *Kim* 325, 319, 309). At the end of their long trek from the Himalayas, the lama marvels at Kim’s self-sacrificing devotion to him in his illness until Kim breaks down crying and confesses to the lama his true motives. “‘Thou leanest on me in the body, Holy One, but I lean on thee for some other things. Dost know it?’ ‘I have guessed maybe,’ and the lama’s eyes twinkled. ‘We must change that!’” (Kipling
Kim 261). Though oblique, the lama hints that he knows of Kim’s role in the Great Game and that he has used the lama for self-interested purposes.

The lama does “change” the dynamic of self-interest and self-sacrifice in the closing scene of the novel. After finding the river of salvation, the lama renounces Nirvana and returns to save his disciple. Like Findlayson’s struggle with the body and soul when he drowned, the lama drowns in the river only to return from Nirvana and save Kim, choosing the realm of the body and action—the wheel of life. On the surface, this appears to signal the lama’s submission to the aims of empire. Yet, as Zohreh Sullivan points out, the lama’s act also translates into an ultimate act of self-sacrifice since he returns to save Kim (177). The lama tells Kim their deliverance is now certain because he has found the river and saved both of them. The elliptical lines that close the novel read “He crossed his hands on his lap and smiled, as a man may who has won salvation for himself and his beloved” (Kipling Kim 338). The lama tilts the balance of self-sacrifice, leaving both Kim and empire in a state of uncertainty and disequilibrium since Kim neither answers the lama nor reciprocates his act of self-sacrifice.

Kim’s commitment to the wheel of life and the lama’s renunciation of it, rather than being irreconcilable, symbolizes the interdependence of self-interest and self-sacrifice within capitalist ideology. In this context, the economy’s equilibrium remains a theoretical construct because a capitalist economy that progresses and expands over time tends toward disequilibrium rather than equilibrium. The lama’s act of sacrifice will not be the last: each act of self-sacrifice and self-interest will spur another. The indeterminateness of the ending demonstrates the perpetual repetition of the Great Game

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Commenting on this passage, Matin states that Kipling presents the relationship between the lama and Kim as a microcosm of the reciprocity between colonizer and colonized, but it is clear throughout the novel that Kim takes far more than he sacrifices (336).
and capitalist expansion in which forces oscillate between the excesses of self-interest
and self-sacrifice as the economy evolves. The Great Game and the economy, as ritual
systems, thus encounter the feature of repetition that Levi-Strauss ascribed to ritualistic
games: players must continuously repeat the game until they achieve equilibrium. If the
ending of *Kim* serves as any indication, however, this process is endless.

The ending of *Kim* returns us to the double narrative of capitalism that I earlier
discussed in relation to Mauss’s *The Gift*. The principle of equivalence and reciprocity
that underlies disinterested gift-exchange transitions into the agonistic rivalries of
potlatch, binding individuals to repeated acts of exchange in which they alternate
between equilibrium and disequilibrium. Kipling’s fiction illuminates the degree to
which the sacred and models of interdependent, self-sacrificing labor can be
simultaneously used as expressions of power and rituals of communality. Characters like
Kim and Findlayson try to suppress colonial resistance by regulating and exerting
possession over *mana*, investing the technologies of empire with the unstable energies of
the sacred that, in turn, sacralize empire’s social order. Yet if Kipling’s models of
coordinated, self-sacrificing labor stand as metonymies for efficient colonial
administration and the equilibrium of the economy, such models show that the social and
economic equilibrium that results relies on the exclusion and exploitation of others. The
rituals of the Great Game and economic exchange must continuously repeat themselves
because the rule of the game is disequilibrium rather than equilibrium—political and
economic domination emerges not despite but through the rhetoric of mutuality. In this
context, Kipling’s politics discloses a fundamental conflict that continuously interrupts
nineteenth-century political economic theories of equilibrium. While the ideal and
theoretic state of equilibrium carries rhetorical force because it represents a social ideal of mutuality, such representations of social and economic equilibrium contradict economic activity on the ground because of the competitive forces that drive the economy. In contrast to the efficient coordination of Kipling’s and Edgeworth’s steam-engines, the real dynamics of the economy and empire operate, like the ending of *Kim*, under conditions of uncertainty and shifting inequalities.
CHAPTER 6
CODA

This dissertation began with the work of John Ruskin and key political economic and anthropological texts from the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century. In triangulating Ruskin, anthropology, and political economy, the first two chapters outlined the relationship between economic problems such as value and exchange and the religious categories of the sacred and sacrificial ritual, examining the synthesis of such concepts in light of nineteenth-century apprehensions about social cohesion. In the last two chapters, I resituated these theoretical problems in relation to Victorian literature by analyzing the significance of the term “household gods” in Eliot, Trollope, and Dickens, as well as the relevance of ritual, magic, and technology in Kipling’s imperialist fiction. The specific consonances I examined over the course of four chapters between nineteenth-century political economy, anthropology, and literature, however, find their most explicit articulation in the sociological writings of Durkheim. Durkheim’s The Division of Labor in Society and The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life self-consciously express the fundamental problem of social cohesion in an increasingly individualistic society by exploring the very categories that appear intertwined in the nineteenth century: value, exchange, sacrifice, the sacred, ritual, and communality.

Durkheim’s transference of economic categories onto the beliefs and rituals that govern religious life, as the preceding chapters make clear, was not anomalous but presaged by British writers during the nineteenth century. In The Division of Labor in
Society and The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life, Durkheim poses the problem of how individuals in a community form an interdependent whole such that they not only maintain its social equilibrium but also become aware of themselves as participating in the social collective. Durkheim contrasts the “organic solidarity” of the division of labor, and the greater degrees of interdependence it precipitates, to the “mechanical solidarity” that characterizes the primitive horde. Mechanical solidarity relies on the principle of resemblance, promoting homogeneity between the individual and aggregate. In its most perfect form, there is no difference between collective feeling and the individual: the individual and society “[beat] as one” and achieve a “consensus” of parts so that all parts of society must move together in order to move at all (Durkheim Division 105-106).

Durkheim, like Adam Smith, distinguishes this state of collective feeling from the heightened state of interdependence that defines modern life. Though the collective feeling found in primitive clans may have waned, the division of labor results in an organic solidarity that more closely binds individuals to each other in a set of mutual obligations and reciprocal duties precisely because the self-preservation of the individual is inextricably knit to the self-preservation of the group, requiring each to make “mutual sacrifices” (Durkheim Division 173). In the linked functions of the division of labor, unlike the horde, each retains her individuality while still acting in concert with the whole.

The parallel positions taken by Durkheim and economists do not end with the division of labor but extend to notions of equilibrium. In accordance with the economists that preceded him, Durkheim states that the division of labor does spontaneously lead to a social and economic equilibrium as they suggested—what, following Comte, he describes
as the “spontaneous consensus of parts” (*Division* 297). The spontaneous consensus results in an “equilibrium of wants” in which the economy achieves a balance between the “effort expended” in production and demand, making price identical to the “social value” of the object produced (*Division* 317). The contractual society that emerges alongside the division of labor increasingly insists, Durkheim argues, on “exact reciprocity” and judges deviations from such equivalent values in exchange on the basis of labor expended to be unfair and the result of external inequalities (*Division* 320). “If, on the contrary, the values exchanged do not produce an equilibrium when balanced against one another, they could only do so if some external force were thrown into the scales” (*Division* 318). Hence, while Durkheim is famous for characterizing the anomie that leads to the experience of alienation and increased suicide in modern society, he sees these as abnormalities and not intrinsic to modern social formations such as the division of labor. Here, as in Ruskin’s description of the “holy state,” equilibrium and the interdependent functioning of parts are possible if and only if society regulates the division of labor through economic justice and, specifically, by eliminating the unequal distribution of wealth through inheritance. Otherwise, the economy experiences disturbances due to class conflict and will continuously be forced to reestablish its equilibrium through “trial and error,” or what Smith called the “higgling and bargaining of the market” and Walras “groping” (*Division* 304, *Wealth* 27, Walras 170). By contrast, Durkheim saw the equilibrium and social solidarity that the division of labor gives rise to in its “normal state” as based on a definite set of “predetermined functions” that are regularized and stable, a state ensured through the elimination of inherited wealth (*Division* 301-2).
Abnormalities also arise in the economy’s equilibrium due to the sheer size of the market. In the modern market, “the producer cannot keep the whole market within his purview, not even mentally,” and this gap leads to anomic states of the economy such as bankruptcies and panics (Durkheim *Division* 305). Due to the relative invisibility of the modern market, traders make errors and exact reciprocity in exchange no longer holds. Yet, even if a totalizing, visible representation of the modern market were feasible, it would not suffice for the experience of social solidarity. For solidarity to occur, persons must not only think that they are part of a whole, they should also feel themselves in contact with one another. Contact among individuals who occupy contiguous functions within the division of labor, for example, makes the experience of solidarity continuous so that they are not only connected by the functions they perform but “the whole may become conscious of itself” as a unity (Durkheim *Division* 298).

In *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, Durkheim transfers the themes of interdependence, value, sacrifice, equilibrium, and the visible representations that mediate the experience of collectivity from the economic context to the religious, specifically focusing his analysis on totemism. While representations alone were not enough in overcoming the anomic potentialities of the division of labor, religious life consists primarily of such collective representations. Totems are held sacred in totemic societies, Durkheim argues, because they make visible and provide an objective representation of the feeling of collectivity they stand for and reinforce. Hence, just as the modern economic system proves too vast an organization to conceive mentally, so Durkheim argues that the clan is also too intricate a system and requires the totem, “the visible body of the god,” in order to effectively represent the feeling of collectivity that
the group seeks to commemorate and sanctify (*Elementary* 166). Such visible and collective representations become the medium through which religious life facilitates an experience of intimate relations and unity. The totem provides the emblem around which individuals rally and refers back to the actions and complex system of signification that enables communicatory symbols like the totem itself to emerge. It is in this sense that, according to Durkheim, social life is made possible by “a vast body of symbolism” (*Elementary* 176).

Durkheim’s claim that the totem, as a collective representation, functions as a canvas for projecting idealizations of the social, revisits the problem of economic value and equilibrium in exchange within the context of religious life. This parallel becomes especially obvious in his treatment of the sacred and sacrificial ritual. Elaborating on William Robertson Smith’s analysis of the ambiguity of the sacred and the mutual implication of the sacred and accursed in the taboo, Durkheim describes the contingency of the sacred as a “kind of fluidity” whose mutability refers back to the affective states of society rather than the intrinsic quality of the things that are deemed sacred or profane in any given context (*Elementary* 237). As a representation of the collective affective states that oscillate between the poles of “euphoria and dysphoria,” the sacred also shifts between the sacred and profane (Durkheim *Elementary* 308). Due to the instability of the sacred and its inherent tendency toward imbalances, totemic societies try to balance the sacred through the economizing ritual of gift-sacrifice. Dissenting from William Robertson Smith, who saw the sacrificial rite solely as an act of communion and not an economizing rite that balanced sacrifices and interests, Durkheim argues that sacrificial rites are both acts of communion and economic insofar as they seek to reestablish the
balance that the sacred continuously destabilizes. This communal and economic rite, in aiming to balance the sacred and mediate an experience of collectivity, also guarantees the “perpetual regeneration” of the gods and what they symbolize: society (Durkheim *Elementary 257*). Yet, the sacred can never be balanced and constantly requires rites to redirect its fluid forces. The “balance” of the sacred’s fluidity, and the idealization of society it represents through the totem, reintroduces Durkheim’s earlier discussion of economic equilibrium and the destabilizing effects of anomie. The social solidarity and just ideal that economic equilibrium represents in *The Division of Labor in Society* here appears as the sacralization of society and its perpetual regeneration through the circular economy of gift-sacrifice.

Durkheim’s claim that totemic societies graft an ideal, sacred world onto the real, profane world through the significations they give to their totems actually identifies a pattern nascent in his sociology and the British thinkers I have discussed in the preceding chapters, who graft the ideals of religious life onto the profane realm of the economic. Among the British thinkers and writers I examine, we see a repeated attempt to think through the problem of relative values, economic justice, and social cohesion through idealized representations of economic equilibrium. In such ideal representations of the economy, the logic of gift-sacrifice stabilizes value and coordinates exchange in an interdependent system on the basis of reciprocal self-sacrifice. In this manner, agents repeatedly engage in acts that sacralize the economic system and ensure its perpetual regeneration. In elucidating the idealizations and religious categories that capitalism harbors alongside its rhetoric of self-interest, my argumentative aim in this dissertation has not been to demonstrate that capitalism operates just like a religion or to sugarcoat
the inequalities that result from capitalist practices by appealing to its concealed idealism. Instead, attention to such underlying themes allows us to critique capitalism from within, holding it accountable for the very ethical ideals that have governed its theorizations from its inception rather than dismissing such idealizations as ideological mystifications.
Works Cited


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