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Philosophical origins of Seventeenth Century American Economic Thought

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Abstract. This paper examines the philosophical origins of seventeenth century American economic thinking, considering the contributions of both Puritan thought as derived from the abundant written legacy its followers left behind, and that of Quaker thought, which though less voluminous proved to be more influential in the long run development of American economics. Before addressing the dominant theme of this essay, the paper begins with a discussion of protohistory, a concept essential to understanding the contention that historiography has overvalued the significance of Puritanism at the expense of Quakerism.
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1. Introduction

At first glance, writing an essay on seventeenth-century American economic thought would seem to be an easy task since so little formal writing and publishing of any kind was produced in America during this time period. Therein lays a paradox. Early American colonists, whose numbers grew to approximately a quarter million by the century's end from less than a thousand at its beginning (Cassedy, 1969, 14-15; 62-63), were busy if not consumed with answering the basic economic questions of what, how, and for whom at the individual and societal levels. The practice of economics was extensive even if writing about economics was not. Some economic-thought historians ascribe the dearth of bona fide economics to the start-up cost of forming a new society: "Adventurers, colonizers, planters, agriculturalists, merchants, governors or soldiers as a rule are neither highly reflective nor philosophical in method" (Johnson, 1932, 11). The reality is that the absence of a well-developed body of knowledge for posterity, be it economics or whatever, is a major by-product of a protohistorical period. Anthropologists define protohistory as (1) a period between prehistory and history, a time when the existence of a preliterate culture is noted in the writings of other societies, or (2) a transitional period between the advent of literacy in a civilization and the writing of the first historians (Trigger, 1985, 116; Trigger & Swagerty, 1996, 326). For American aboriginals, the sixteenth century, basically the period from 1492 to 1600, satisfies the first definition. For colonial America, the seventeenth century or roughly 1607 to 1700, fits the second meaning as will be shown presently.

Indigenous Americans were preliterate and, understandably, did not create a written legacy. Colonial Americans came from literate countries, but the vast majority of these immigrants, especially the large number who came in the

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first substantial waves of migration in the mid-seventeenth century, could neither read nor write. These early colonists did not create a rich written legacy for future generations to mine, nor could they access the works of the few fellow colonists who did. Recognizing this is crucial to seeing the 1600s as the literary time-bridge between the prehistory of the sixteenth century and the first thoroughly historical era in America, the eighteenth century.

On the premise that "nothing can be understood apart from its context" (Crosby, 1972, xiii), this essay begins with a circular flow model of the production, transmission, and consumption of knowledge in early colonial America as a way of making the case for considering the seventeenth century as America's protohistorical period. This is necessary to justify the inferential methodology used in this paper as opposed to citation evidence, the standard approach when doing intellectual history scholarship, an option not viable since seventeenth century colonial Americans did not produce any tracts dealing specifically with economic thought. Once the notion of a protohistorical period is accepted or at least entertained, the essay examines, interprets, and evaluates the economics of New England Puritans, one group whose rich written heritage allows inference of their economic thinking, thinking that was complete, consistent, but in the end had limited impact on America economics in the seventeenth century or beyond. The essay concludes with an investigation of an alternative approach to economics, one associated with the seventeenth century Quakers of Philadelphia and developed in terms of the philosophical precepts of William Penn. While nowhere near as voluminous as that of the Puritans, Quaker writings and thus thought was more influential in shaping colonial economic behavior and ultimately the arc of American economic thought.

2. Knowledge, Ideas, Influence, and Protohistory

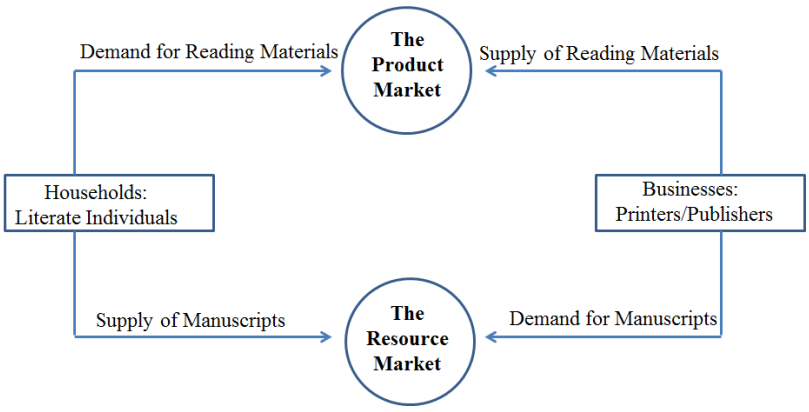
Capitalizing on Europe's fascination with the New World, books and pamphlets by English visitors or immigrants to American appeared almost as soon as England began a sustained effort at colonization. Examples included Captain John Smith's *A Description of New England* (1616) and *Good Newes from New England* (1624) by Edward Winslow, leader of the Mayflower pilgrims. Opportunities for place-bound Brits to see American aboriginals for themselves—Pocahontas and her husband, the colonist John Rolfe, and their son Thomas, visited London in 1616—only heightened New World curiosity (Foreman, 1943, 8). Awareness of America's indigenous people became so commonplace in England, the term "indian" found its way into Shakespeare's *The Tempest,* first performed in 1611 (Vaughan, 1965, 24). Hoping to exploit Europe's New World interest, colonists, particularly Puritans, crafted publications meant to induce others to migrate to America, and/or persuade policy makers to support colonization (Geller & Gomes, 1975, 16). Works such as John Winthrop's *A Modell of Christian Charity* (1630) probably had the desired effect; the question we need to explore is what impact did these writing have on the Puritan's colonial contemporaries living in America, and thus indirectly, the trajectory of American thought, particularly as it applies to economics?

To get a handle on this issue, consider Exhibit 1, a simple circular flow model of written knowledge/information in which the "product market" represents the consumption of information and the "resource market"

describes its production. In the product market literate persons demand or buy written information and the printing industry supplies or sells it. In the resource market, the roles are switched; literate individuals supply or sell manuscripts and printing firms demand or buy material to publish. We need to appreciate the scope and complexity of both the product and resource markets in this model to gauge the influence seventeenth century American writings had in the American colonies, and then contrast that with the status and weight such writings enjoy in modern intellectual history.

Consider the demand side in the product market, in short, the state of literacy in colonial America, understanding that the seventeenth century is a veritable "cul-de-sac of inadequate data" (Price, 1984, 19). Since the lack of data makes evaluating the incidence of literacy in seventeenth century colonial America in terms of the modern definition of literacy impossible (Soltow & Stevens, 1981, 4), modern researchers have used the evidence of testators' signatures or marks as a proxy measure, reasoning that "signatures on wills approximate the literacy not only of the sample but of the population" (Lockridge, 1974, 7). Other literacy scholars, recognizing that this approach has shortcomings "as it uses a biased sample and an ambiguous measure" (Lockridge, 1974, 4), have studied signatures and marks "attached to deeds of conveyance, depositions and jury inquests" as a way to assess the degree of general literacy (Bruce, 1910, 450-59). These scholars argue that signers of these documents were likely to be drawn from a wider swath of the population than property-owning will-makers (Soltow & Stevens, 1981, 56), and thus are more representative of literacy among the population as a whole. Although signature evidence is thought to overstate a population's literacy (Grubb, 1990, 455), the cumulative results of numerous signature-base measures of colonial literacy provide a clue as to the status of reading and writing in seventeenth century America (Soltow & Stevens, 1981; Bruce, 1910).

Exhibit 1: The circular flow of the printed knowledge/information industry in America during the protohistorical period.



In the first third of the century when immigration was minor and mainly ideologically driven, literacy was relatively high, about 75 percent for men, considerably less for women, and well above that for the general populations of England and Western Europe. From 1630 to 1680 when motivation for migration became more economic and less philosophical, the new colonists were more representative of the European populations from where they came, and literacy rates fell to about thirty percent for men and less for women

(Cressy, 1969, 98). By the end of the seventeenth century literacy for colonial men and women began to rise. This increase was due to a number of factors notably the rise of education, especially religious education (Morison 1936, 56-79. 83-87), increasing population density, and the broad ascent in the general level of prosperity (Perkins, 1980, 39). Increasing population in America's northeast created the economies of scale that permitted formation of public school systems, another boost to literacy (Soltow & Stevens, 1981, 30). In the southern colonies, the physical dispersion of the population because of the expanding planation economy put the emphasis on home schooling rather than formal education, contributing to regional differences in literacy rates, which were lower in the south than the north (Bruce, 1910, 293). By mid-century conservative estimates are that at least forty percent of male colonists and two-thirds of female colonists could *not* write their own names (Cressy, 1969, 217). Through the rising tide of prosperity elevated literacy across colonial America during the latter part of the seventeenth century (Grubb, 1990, 477), true literacy in America by century's end was confined primarily to scholars, clergy, and gentlemen of means (Steinberg, 1959, 165). Using signature evidence indicates that by 1700, the pool of literate persons in the American colonies was small, about 30 percent of the adult males in the north, less in the south, and still less when the total population of men and women of all races is considered (Lockridge, 1974, 14-15). The consumption of reading material was understandably negligible, a conclusion reinforced in probate records showing that book possession was rare even among the well-to-do. Personal libraries were tiny, usually in the single digits with a high probability that at least one of those volumes, if not all, was the Bible (Bruce, 1910,410-41; Morison 1936, 138).

The anemic demand side of the product market in Exhibit 1 seems downright robust compared to the supply side. The 1636 founding of Harvard College in Cambridge, Massachusetts led to the establishment of the first printing shop in colonial America in 1639 for the purpose of producing imprints for the school as well as the general public (Thomas, 1970[1810], 4). In the southern colonies, the first print house began around 1680 in Williamsburg, Virginia (Bruce, 1910, 390; 402): it began producing imprints in earnest in 1693 when the College of William and Mary, which operated as a "grammar school until well into the next century" opened (Dorfman, 1946, 27). During the early phase of the printing industry in America—1640-1669—about five imprints per year were produced (Soltow & Stevens, 1981, 41). By the end of the century printing houses had been established in a number of colonial urban centers including Boston, New York, and Philadelphia, but the overall level of output for the period 1639-1700 remained small, less than one thousand imprints (Weeks, 1996[1916], 2), consisting mostly of legal notices broadsheets and religious pamphlets, the majority of which appeared in the last decade of the century (Evans, 1941[1916]). The short supply of paper, which in the seventeenth century and through the first half of the eighteenth century was produced using fibers extracted from linen and cotton rages and not wood, also inhibited the development of a colonial printing industry (Weeks, 1996[1916], 60-72). Granted that during the protohistorical period most printing jobs originating in America were outsourced to Europe (Thomas, 1970[1810], 5), and most reading materials used in the colonies were imported (Cressy, 1987, 232-33), the conclusion is inescapable: the product market in

Exhibit 1 was diminutive and so was its economic and social influence within the colonies.

While reasonably operational in the major urban areas of England and Western Europe during the seventeenth century, the circular flow model of knowledge production and distribution in Exhibit 1 was basically nonexistent in colonial America because of an economic Catch-22. On the demand side of the model's product market, individuals were hesitant to acquire literacy skills due to the paucity of available reading material. On the supply side of the product market, printers were unwilling to exploit the economies of scale intrinsic in mechanical printing given the dearth of readers. Without viable demand and supply conditions in the product market, there was no derived demand to drive the resource market, creating an economic stalemate that persisted in colonial America until the eighteenth century. Compounding this situation was the absence of publishing intermediaries; "Publishers, in the modern sense of the word, did not exist in the English-speaking world until the eighteenth century" (Morison 1936, 124). This was especially evident in the newspaper industry. The first attempts to publish newspapers in England date to the late 1500s (Thomas, 1970[1810], 9), but sustained publishing success was not achieved until 1620 (Copeland, 1997, 14-15). By contrast, the first newspaper in the American colonies appeared in Boston in 1690. After one issue *Publick Occurrences Both Forreign and Domestick* ceased publication, suppressed for political and religious reasons (Copeland, 1997, 11-14). Not until 1704 and the appearance of the *Boston News-Letter*, a weekly broadsheet with a typical press run of 250 in a town with a population of about 10,000, did America witness the continuous operation of a successful newspaper (Mott, 1945, 12). The *News-Letter* survived until December, 1719, the same month Boston got its second newspaper and Philadelphia got its first (Copeland, 1997, 14). Newspapers in the southern colonies appeared later suggesting a north/south pattern of development, but the spatial reality of seventeenth century America followed an east/west progression, or more accurately, a coastal/interior settlement pattern, and not a north/south one. The South as a geographical expression did not emerge until well after independence (Bridenbaugh, 1970, vii-viii).

One group of American immigrants, however, was intent on communicating with others, present and future. American Puritans, particularly in New England, "were highly self-conscious about their achievements and began interpreting themselves for posterity as soon as they arrived in the New World" (Morgan 1964, 3). Published New England Puritans included John Winthrop, William Pynchon, John Cotton, and Anne Bradstreet, while numerous others produced hand-written journals and diaries. Most of this voluminous output met with indifference among British scholars (Cressy, 1987, vii), but has been mined to near exhaustion by twentieth century American scholars creating a variety of interpretations of New England Puritans ranging from the conceptual narratives of the incomparable Perry Miller, to the Whigish histories of his equally eminent protégé Edmund Morgan, and from the neglected proses of Samuel Eliot Morison, to the eclectic methodologies of the new social historians__"cliometricians, interdisciplinary social theorists, and critically minded social democrats"—whose views of historical scholarship are both complementary and sometimes contradictory (Henretta, 1979). Thanks to these modern efforts we probably know more about American Puritans then

they knew about themselves (Greene & Pole, 1984, 8); we certainly know more about New England Puritans than their contemporaries living in other American colonies. The accumulated body of Puritan work has yielded unimaginable insights into a distant culture but not without some consequences, largely unintentional.

First, inherent in the study of intellectual history is the analysis of written documents and those who create them, which in seventeenth-century America means accentuating the views of clerics and political officials, a distinct minority that had the time and talent to write, as opposed to the largely illiterate mass of immigrants who had neither (Trigger, 1985, 341). Second, "the rich and extensive writings…on New England culture…especially Puritanism" has given it "a disproportionate importance in the history of seventeenth America (Bailyn, 1955, 75), to the near exclusion of other shapers of American culture. Yet, however exaggerated the import of Puritan thinking may seem, it cannot be ignored. As recently as 1776, "Puritanism provided the moral and religious background of fully 75 percent" of European immigrants living in America (Ahlstrom, 1972, 124). Rather than downplaying the significance of the New England Puritans on the development of the American mind, their importance must be calibrated, contextualized, and put in perspective with other prominent contributors whose modest written legacy underestimates the magnitude of their impact, especially as it pertains to economic thought.

3. Puritan Economic Thought

In 1930 Max published *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, a work which helped popularized the view that Puritanism in general, and that practiced in New England in particular, was a religious precursor of the market economics Adam Smith 'preached' in *The Wealth of Nations* (Parks, 1996, 15-16). The reality was more complicated than that (Frey, 1998). To be sure, certain aspects of Puritanism parallel Smith's economic thinking such as the idea of harnessing self-interest to advance the social good, although Puritans clearly distinguished morally acceptable self-interest from sinful self-centeredness (Frey, 2009, 13). On the other hand, certain tenets of Puritanism—just price, the sin of usury and other Scholastic precepts—were antithetical to pure market economics (Appleby, 1978, 14). As no Puritan ever penned a tract explicitly focused on the sect's economics, Puritan economic thought has always been a matter of inference and interpretation, especially speculative processes given that the group's economics was embedded in its religion, itself a manifestation of Puritan philosophy. Contemporary scholars often have difficulty coming to terms with Puritan thought, "not because of its profundity but because of its simplicity" (Miller 1967, 161).

> Its [Puritan thought] fundamental ways of regarding things being utterly foreign to our manner of thinking, or seeing; to us it seems highly abstract and over-intellectualized, yet in its day the doctrine had for Puritans among its many virtues that of easy comprehensibility. It can indeed be stated very compactly. When God created the world, He formed a plan or scheme of it in His mind, of which the universe is the embodiment; in His mind the plan is single, but in the universe it is reflected through concrete objects and do seems diverse to the eye of human reason; these apparently diverse and temporal segments of the single and timeless divine order are the various arts; the principles of

> them are gathered from things by men through the use of their inherent capacities, their natural powers; once assembled, the principles are arranged into series of axiomatical propositions according to sequences determined by the laws of method (Miller, 1967, 161).

Like nested Russian dolls, the three interrelated aspects of Puritan thought—economics, religion, and philosophy—are conceptually distinct yet inexorably related, requiring an appreciation of both the philosophy and the religion if one hopes to understand Puritan economics.

The philosophical roots of Puritanism can be traced to William Perkins (1558-1602), a Cambridge University theologian and a moderate during the English Reformation (Wright, 1940, 171). Writing in Latin during a period of limited literacy, his influence was restricted largely to his peers, namely, intellectuals, academics, and other clerics. Still, the power of his proses to explain the "knotty problems that troubled the consciences of the time' (Wright, 1940, 196), made Perkins as important to England as John Calvin was to Western Europe. Many of his students used their careers to spread his message. Principal among these was William Ames (1576-1633), Perkins' protégé and the one especially instrumental in shaping seventeenth century Puritan religion as it evolved in England and was practiced in New England. Ames operationalized Perkins' philosophical precepts into a useful, every-day religion that served as a practical guide to ethics (Sprunger, 257) teaching "men what to believe and how to act" (Haller, 1957[1938], 25). His writing, many of which appeared in English before those of Perkins, had a profound impact on ordinary Puritans, particularly those who migrated or considering migrating to the New World. Indeed, Ames's *The Marrow of Theology* (1627), which initially appeared in Latin but was quickly translated into English, became the primary divinity text at Harvard College from its founding in 1636 and well into the eighteenth century (Maloy, 2008, 105). Less dogmatic than many of his peers, Ames gave Puritanism a degree of flexibility often lacking in purely philosophical approaches, as he reworked Scholastic doctrines to make them more applicable to contemporary life (Boughton, 1987, 203). In the process he inadvertently crafted a religion that was especially adaptable to the unanticipated realities of the New World (Davis, 2005). Ames's "theological treatises...were to reign supreme in New England for a century and a half" (Morgan, 1963, 74), but in England he was dismissed. Unable to coexist with the established English church, he began in 1610 a self-imposed exile in the Netherlands that lasted until his death (Sprunger, 1972, 27).

However important Perkins and Ames were to Puritanism in general, John Robinson (1575-1625) was the minister most instrumental in bringing the religion to New England. A "rigid Separatists who saw the English church as polluted throughout" (Sprunger, 1972, 19), Robinson studied at Cambridge during a time when both Perkins and Ames were there. After graduation and several ministries, he became pastor of a Separatist group in Scrooby, a small town in Northern England. Robinson was apparently a gifted preacher with substantial influence among his followers (McNeill, 1954, 335-6) during a period when Puritans placed a premium on the spoken word (Haller, 1957[1938], 19), due in part to the low rates of literacy (Lockridge, 1974, 15). Indeed, Puritans considered preaching "the principal means ordained by God for instructing people in the great truths revealed by the Scriptures" (Morgan, 1963, 7), which would explain why William Perkin's most enduring work was

not one of his philosophical tracts but rather *The Art of Prophesying* published posthumously in 1607 (Emerson, 1990, 17).

Using his powers of persuasion, Robinson convinced his flock to migrate to the religiously tolerant Netherlands, first to Amsterdam in 1607 then settling in Leiden in 1609, where Robinson became the leading Separatist outside of England (Sprunger, 1972, 37). Being mainly merchants, the Scrooby group initially encountered some serious problems adjusting to life in the commercial republic of the Netherlands, but within a decade became sufficiently comfortable in their new, liberal surroundings to achieve a level of prosperity comparable to that which they had left behind. For Robinson, convinced that Puritanism was not just the right way but the only way, the Puritan's new life had become too tolerant and too comfortable. Having "no intention of tolerating other sects" (Miller, 1933, 64), Robinson believed that Dutch hegemony would eventually absorb the Scrooby congregation, rendering the Separatist movement meaningless. As the author of *A Justification of Separation from the Church of England* (1610), Robinson had no truck for the institutional arrangement that gave political officials authority over church affairs, but as a Puritan, he was favorably disposed to the reverse situation—church officials running the government—and was especially partial to laws providing that only church members could vote or hold elected office (Morgan, 1965, xxix). To thwart the religious hospitality of the Dutch and simultaneously promote the idea of creating a Puritan theocracy, Robinson began to call upon his congregation to consider relocating to the New World, there to erect a "new state...in accordance with Puritan ideals" (Miller, 1933, 100). In the fall of 1620 a small portion of Robinson's followers, heeding their leader's appeal, went to London with the intent of voyaging to the New World to establish "the Puritan dream of a godly Utopia (Haller, 1957[1938], 189)." In London, the thirty-three Puritans joined a group of "strangers," essentially non-Puritans seeking to migrate to the New World for economic reasons. This bizarre combination of the righteous and the opportunistic boarded the *Mayflower* and, after one false start, the 102 passengers and a crew of 30 departed for their destination on September 16, 1620. Following nearly two months at sea, the ship anchored in what is now Provincetown Harbor of Cape Cod, making Robinson the "pastor of the Plymouth pilgrims" (Emerson, 1990, 51) and bringing Puritanism to what would become Massachusetts. What was this variant of Calvinism-- that Perkins conceived, Ames refined, and Robinson preached --all about, and what economic thinking was embedded in the philosophy of this religion?

Puritanism was a retro radical movement as it sought to recapture the Christianity of the past rather than take the faith in a new direction (Geller & Gomes, 1975, 13). Following the lead of William Perkins, Puritans looked upon the Bible "as the ultimate authority" in all matters concerning human life (Wright, 1940, 184). Committed to building a society based on biblical precepts as interpreted by St. Augustine and filtered through the writings of Thomas Aquinas and other Scholastic thinkers (Miller, 1967, 66), the Puritans worked toward updating medieval teachings for life in the seventeenth century (Boughton, 1987, 194-203). This was especially true of the Puritans who migrated to Massachusetts where they created the so-called New England Yankee, a mythical persona formed when their rugged religious idealism came to terms with 'Yankee' realism, "a product of native conditions, created by a practical economics" (Parrington, 1927, 3-4). This wisdom born of necessity is

evident in the Puritan's attitude toward the Scholastic notions of just price and usury.

Functioning markets in which the dynamic interactions of buyers and sellers set prices that influenced choice-making were operational in England and its colonies long before the publication of Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* (Appleby, 1978, 20-23). Commodity markets were well established throughout the seventeenth century, and factor markets, particularly for labor, while less evident, were clearly emerging at the time Puritans landed in Massachusetts (Jones, 1996, 118-120). Initially, Puritans followed Scholastic teaching about pricing as evident in the infamous Keayne trial (Valeri, 2010, 37-71), in which Robert Keayne, a Boston merchant, was assessed a hefty fine and given a severe tongue lashing for repeatedly taking advantage of shortages to 'overcharge' his customers (Morison, 1936, 8). Eventually, Puritans figured out how to be pious and profitable (Valeri, 2010, 90); ever the Yankee, they equated the 'just price' with "the common market price," a proto-market economics that was a practical concession to reality and well within the norms of conformity expected of everyone, Puritans and non-Puritans alike (Bercovitch, 1993, 72-79). Similarly, usury or interest-bearing, business-to-business loans were considered an acceptable and appropriate aspect of commercial life, although when lending to the poor, Puritans believed that one should neither demand nor expect a return beyond the principal (Frey, 1998). Plainly, with respect to just-price and usury, Puritans were "attuned to the commercial needs of the times" (Dorfman, 1946, 12). While Puritans paid lip service to Scholastic economics, they embraced wholeheartedly a basic tenet of Scholastic society, namely, mutual interdependency of individuals and the collective responsibility of all to promote the common good (Langholm, 1998, 101). Acceptance of this proposition was evident in the covenants or contracts Puritans believed to be the foundation of social order.[1]

Rightly or wrongly[2], Puritans believed that endemic to medieval society was the notion that every individual "was placed by God's command in a particular station in life (Morgan, 1965, xv)," a covenant or spiritual contract the Puritans dubbed 'the calling.' In Puritan microeconomics, there is a person for every job and a job for every person; the calling is the process that determines who does what, that is, the life activity by which each individual earns a living for one's self while simultaneously promoting social wellbeing. Finding one's special place required each individual to study God's word (the *Bible*) and examine one's "God given capacities and opportunities" to discern what that calling was (Morgan, 1965, xvi). Those who selected the correct calling were rewarded accordingly, while those who could not decipher the Almighty's message or chose to ignore it, would never know prosperity. Puritans expected everyone to work and work hard, but hard work alone was not sufficient to prevent poverty. Having no truck in a labor theory of value, Puritans subscribed, if only implicitly, to the principle of comparative advantage. For Puritans, poverty was the result of following a sub-optimal calling. By simply reassessing their life choices and discerning one's true calling, the poor could

[1] The impact of Scholasticism on the development of Western economic thought is a matter of debate. For a sampler of the variety of views on the subject see (Schumpeter, 82-107), (Friedman), (Blaug, 29-31), (Zuniga), and (Casey).

[2] For a comprehensive review of medieval thought and social norms, and philosophy see (McGrade, 2003).

alter their financial status for the better. Coupling a person's unique abilities with society's occupational needs promoted the common good as well as personal well-being, for when the good of the self is optimized so too is that of society as a whole (Frey, 1998, 1575). Believing that on Earth God's work was surely their own, Puritans were not averse to tweaking the system of callings as reality dictated; the staffing of the teaching profession was a clear example of this.

During the seventeenth century and throughout much of the eighteenth, brawn trumped brains as the human attribute most necessary for the survival of colonials. Thinking and reflection were no substitutes for a strong back and the willingness to work endless hours using primitive tools to create a pasture, till the rocky New England soil, or build a crude home and hearth. Yet not all those expected to shoulder there burdens, namely men, were physically endowed for the task. Some had genetically-based physicals disabilities while others were simply too slight for the demanding physical labor that early colonists had to endure in establishing a permanent presence in the New World. Nevertheless, even physically disabled Puritans had a calling, a commitment to serve self and the community through work. Applying a bit of human ingenuity, the Puritans matched God's design with theirs. This was surely the case when it came to staffing the growing educational system and its ever increasing need for teachers, a perfect 'calling' for men with physical limitations (Elsbree, 1939, 34). This became a common practice in New England as well as in other colonial areas such as New York and Philadelphia. Begun in the seventeenth century, the calling of frail men to the teaching profession continued well into the next century illustrated in the person of the spindly Ichabod Crane, the main character in Washington Irving's classic short story "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," set in the 1790s and first published in 1820. When the quantity supplied of men, disabled or not, was insufficient to match that being demanded, Puritans turned to women to fill the growing teacher shortage (Elsbree, 1939, 68). During this period of American history, the old saw "those that can do, those that can't teach" was an apt description of clever resource management and not merely a catty remark.

The calling was part of a larger, grand covenant that imposed a variety of mutually interdependent obligations on each person in a Puritan society, creating a microeconomics that was essentially the byproduct of prescribed social expectations. As revealed in scriptures, this social contract spelled out the proper behavior of all individuals to self and others, mimicking a religious commune; even the ostensibly individualistic choice of an occupation was in reality a social decision "in which one's vocation was service to the community, not purely service of the self" (Frey, 2009, 15). Embedded in this complex social matrix was a relational economic system based on a network of reciprocal duties that applied to everyone, including leaders and their followers.

> God approved of rulers, called them to office, and endowed them with the sanction of His authority; but He did so, as with other callings, indirectly: He called rulers to office through the consent of their people. It belonged to the people to establish government, define its purposes, place rulers in charge of it, and submit to those rulers as long as they fulfilled their offices properly. To achieve all these ends, the people must engage in a second, subsidiary covenant, not with God but with each other and their perspective rulers (Morgan, 1965, xxiii).

The Puritan system of economics, which was as much ecclesiastical as it was economic, required unflinching compliance with social norm and a willingness to work hard, with the accent on the later; disobedience was intolerable and indolence forbidden. In this saintly yet secular culture, cloistered monastics "were actually viewed as following an unproductive, even antisocial, calling" (Frey, 2009, 16).

The "distinctly theological" system of Puritan microeconomics was strictly medieval, but their macroeconomics was *au courant*. The seventeenth century was the golden age of Mercantilism, at least in colonial America (Johnson, 1932, 139-49). Building on the policy recommendations of Thomas Mun as reflected in his *England's treasure by forraign trade*, written in 1623 and widely circulated among British politicians but not formally published until 1664 (Appleby, 1978, 37), the English established trade patterns with colonial America that were mutually beneficial and eagerly accepted by all parties involved—"the colonial providers of raw materials and the metropolitan producers [England] of finished manufactures..." (McCusker, 1996, 362). The American colonies, including New England, found ready markets in England proper and its Caribbean colonies for their furs, fish, ship masts, tobacco, and other agriculture products, and were happy to buy, in turn, British-made capital goods and consumer durables (McCusker & Menard, 1985, 97; 118). In the eighteenth century Mercantilism economics would become a contributing factor to the American war of independence, but in the seventeenth century it was the basis of a welcome and thriving symbiotic relationship.

Given the state of Puritan economic thought, clearly not on a par with what the English economist William Petty was producing at approximately the same time, two questions arise about its impact: How well did the Puritan economic system actually perform, and what legacy did that system and its underlying philosophy have on the long-term development of American economic thought? For an answer to the first question, let's start with the Plymouth colony, the first explicit attempt to create an American settlement based on Puritan principles. As a theocratic beachhead, Plymouth was doomed before the Puritans disembarked from the Mayflower. The strangers (non-Puritans) on board, mostly farmers representing about two-thirds of the 100 or so passengers who survived the Atlantic crossing, were driven by dreams of the prosperity to be had in the blossoming agriculture belt of northern Virginia, the original destination of the Mayflower. Realizing that those dreams were not likely to be realized in the wilderness that was Massachusetts, technically part of the Virginia Colony (Tyler, 1907, 291), the strangers initially refused to disembark. After nearly two months on a tiny ship with a bunch of religious zealots, they demanded that a binding contract, a "covenant" protecting secular as well as religious rights be agreed to before landing; otherwise the strangers would remain on the ship for the return trip to England (Dorfman, 1946, 30-31). Painfully cognizant of their lack of agrarian skills, the Puritans quickly agreed to the strangers' demands and the Mayflower Compact was struck. Often portrayed as a cosmic documents that "laid the groundwork for democracy in America" (Yero, 2006, 18), the

Mayflower Compact was more likely the first manifestation in what is now the State of Massachusetts of O'Neill's dictum—all politics in local.[3]

Neither the Puritans nor their religion thrived in Plymouth. Within a year of their first landing, half of the colonists who came to Plymouth had perished. Initially under-resourced and later poorly resupplied, the Plymouth settlement nearly suffered the same fate as the "Lost Colony" at Roanoke or the abandoned Sagadahoc colony in Maine; yet, Plymouth survived, just barely. Ten years after being settled, Plymouth had a population of about 300 living in "primitive comfort within small frame houses built along two intersecting streets" (Bailyn, 1955, 4). The Mayflower compact created an open society at Plymouth, at least as open as prevailing seventeenth-century English mores would allow. This meant that the Puritans, who had little use for other Protestant sects, even separatists ones (Ver Steeg, 1964, 78-79), could not build their utopian theocracy at Plymouth. So, in 1629-1630 the Puritans initiated a bigger and better-financed effort to create a religious state in the New World. In less than two years 17 ships brought over 1,000 colonists, who established "what would become the city of Boston upon their arrival in Massachusetts Bay." (Carter, 2008, 44). However, what set this endeavor at colonization apart from its forerunner at Plymouth was not just its size nor its resources but its leader, John Winthrop, the champion of the Puritan ideal whose force of will was the single most important factor in the founding and success, however limited, of the Massachusetts Bay Colony (Morgan, 1964, vii, 174).

Winthrop (1588-1649) came to the New World as governor of the Massachusetts Colony, a position he was elected to on four separate occasions and held for 12 years. He and many of the early Puritans who travelled with him (Emerson, 1990, 35) came to America with one purpose in mind: to create a society consistent with biblical precepts that would be both "ciuill and ecclesiasticall." Boston was to become a "Citty upon a Hill," a paragon of piety, politics, and prosperity that would serve as a shining model of nation building for England, if not all of western Europe (Miller, 1953, 4-5). For Winthrop and those who accompanied him, the idea was "to make New England a beacon to the world, not a refuse from it" (Morgan, 1980, 173), and for the first dozen years in Massachusetts it appeared as though they would succeed. The period from 1630 to 1642 witnessed a 'great migration' from England to New England as some fifteen to twenty thousand people made the crossing with a fair share settling in Boston, the center of Puritan America (Morgan, 2007, 60). These immigrants brought with them, in ascending order of importance, their human capital, their aggregate demand, and their money supply. The ships that transported the migrants also carried many of the products colonists needed but could not produce, while on the return trip, took fish, lumber and other New England exports to consumers in the Caribbean, England, or both, thereby completing the mercantilist cycle of trade (Morgan, 2007, 60). The duration and magnitude of this spurt of economic growth was unprecedented in Colonial American history, but in 1642 these halcyon days came to a bubble-bursting end when the very engine of prosperity—immigration—stalled, and America experienced what was possibly its first recession.

[3] Thomas "Tip" O'Neill (1912-1994) was a Massachusetts representative in the U.S. Congress and served as Speaker of the House for ten years. The dictum is a piece of advice his father gave him when Tip was a young politician (O'Neill, 25-26).

The ostensible cause of this economic downturn was the English Civil War, a series of armed conflicts that began in 1642 and occurred on and off for nearly ten years. The war resulted in a number of prominent changes in English life including the creation of a social climate more hospitable to Puritans and other separatists groups; this, in turn, diminished the significance of the political and religious reasons for migrating while simultaneously elevating the import of economic factors. On that score, New England was an inferior destination compared to the agricultural-rich areas in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Maryland, Virginia, and other points along coastal America south of Boston (Galenson, 1996). At its peak, New England was the destination for just over thirty percent of those immigrating from England. After the English Civil War, that proportion dropped as even second- and third-generation New England Puritans began migrating south, causing net immigration to New England to turn negative in the 1680s and 1690s (Cressy, 1987, 68-69).

Other contributing causes to the decline of the Puritan ideal included but were not limited to: a growing perception among the elder founders of Puritan New England of "a great and visible decay of godliness" and the increased "manifestations of pride" (Miller, 1956, 7); conflicts with American aboriginals (Schultz & Tougias, 2000); a lack of intensity on the part of immigrants during the second half of the seventeenth century to push the Puritan agenda (Bailyn, 1986), 9); the impractically of the communal system of work and rewards (Parks, 1996, 19); the growing importance of the shipping-services industry and the corresponding decline of the resource-intensive export industry (Anderson, 1975, 8-23): the increasingly unpopular, class-identifying sumptuary codes (North, 1988, 41-58); the nearly perpetual internecine conflicts between John Winthrop and virtually everyone who disagreed with him (Morgan, 2007, 145-152); and the Salem witch trials, symbolic of the "death throes of a passing era." (Middleton, 2002, 181). Even though 'blue laws,' statutes prohibiting commerce on the Sabbath, and other vestiges of Puritan economics survived well into the twentieth century in parts of New England, the influence of Puritan economic thought, never appreciable, gave way to Yankee realism by the end of the seventeenth century, a convergence in economic thinking more in tune with the practices prevailing in most other areas of Colonial America (Johnson, 1932, 128-133).

4. Another Perspective

If modern scholars have exaggerated the importance of Puritan contributions to the scope of American economic thinking, than they have done so at the expense of other influences on the arc of economic thought in America, most notably Quakerism under the leadership of William Penn (1644-1718). Curiously, Penn deserves recognition for what

He did, and to some extent for what he didn't do. Because of an old friendship and debts the Crown owed his father, Penn received a royal charter in 1681 making him the proprietor of 45,000 square miles in the New World that included most of present-day Pennsylvania (named for Penn's father), northern Delaware, and western New Jersey.[4] In 1682 Penn came to America intent on achieving three important goals. One of his objectives was to acquire legal title to some of the lands in his proprietorship, specifically riverfront

[4] For a detailed description of the particulars involved in how Penn received his proprietorship, see (Geiter, Chapter 1; Bronner, Chapter 2).

properties along the rivers separating eastern Pennsylvania from Delaware and New Jersey; this meant purchasing the property from resident aboriginals (Forrest, 2001). The acquisition process took Penn nearly two years to complete, and by all accounts he treated indigenous Americans with dignity and respect, paying fair prices for their lands (Peare, 1957, 246-47, 250-51). A second major goal of his first visit to colonial America was to create a Quaker utopia in Pennsylvania that would "show a society founded and operated along the lines of Quaker ideals not only could work but was the answer to mankind's ills" (Endy, 1973, 349). John Winthrop and the Puritans came to the New World to create the scaffolding for a temporary society that would ultimately serve as a model for nation building in the Old World; Penn saw his Quaker enclave as a permanent refuge from Europe, with Pennsylvania being as different from Massachusetts as Quakerism was from Puritanism.

In a sense Puritanism and Quakerism were more alike than different in that both were bible-based Protestant sects. However, Puritans were partial to the Old Testament with its negative reinforcement, exclusivity of membership, and limited redemption; by contrast, Quakers favored the New Testament and its notions of positive reinforcement, inclusiveness, and the prospect of universal salvation. In Massachusetts, Puritan values translated into inhibiting norms that encouraged conformity and stifled initiative. This would not be the case in Penn's "holy experiment" where Quaker principles would insure democracy and justice, inclusion, and creativity. In 1684 Penn, the real estate entrepreneur, returned to England to recruit Quakers and non-Quakers from all of Europe to migrate to his religious utopia (Hull, 1970). Before his departure he wrote *Framework of Government*, a genuinely democratic blueprint for governing Pennsylvania in his absence, which takes us to the one important thing he didn't do.

John Winthrop was the champion of the Massachusetts colony; he was also a micromanager. They were called puritans for a reason and Winthrop was inclined to see himself as being among the purist of the pure. For almost twenty years he made the major strategic decisions in the Massachusetts colony, that is, the what and the why; he also made most of the tactical decisions—the how. As both chief executive and day-to-day manager, Winthrop institutionalized decision-making in Massachusetts, leaving little wiggle room for those who governed after him. Penn was the visionary of Pennsylvania and probably would have become a micromanager if he had the opportunity; he chose instead to return to Europe to people his utopia, trusting that the managers he left behind would follow the spirit if not the letter of his principles as described in *Framework*, a document that ultimately served as an inspiration for the United States Constitution (Peare, 1957, 294-95). Penn stayed in Europe fifteen years and during this time there arose in Pennsylvania the inevitable conflicts that occur when the mixture of "low politics and high ideals" clash (Kammen, 1980[1972], 146). Using their discretion, resident managers in Pennsylvania devised commonsense compromises "between Penn's radical vision and the tradition-bound expectations of the early settlers" (Dunn & Dunn, 1982, 2). The result transformed lofty values into workable ethics, and did so within the guidelines Penn prescribed in *Framework*. Naturally, there were gaps between practice and principles. As a group, Quakers were almost uniformly outspoken in their denunciations of slavery, yet the record clearly indicates even William Penn owned and traded slaves (Endy, 1973, 356). The acute labor shortage in

Colonial America led some to tolerate the supposedly intolerable (Jernegan, 1931, 30-35). Still, when Penn returned to his proprietorship in 1699 for a two-year stay, he found a prosperous, pluralistic society whose political system embraced his concept of democracy, whose economic practices were aligned with his business-oriented thinking, and whose social norms were in tune with his puritanical inclinations as reflected in his 1682 essay *No Cross, No Crown* (Morgan, 1983).

Penn's third objective in visiting his proprietorship in 1682 was to establish the city of Philadelphia, a planned community complete with a commercial hub that would serve as the economic engine driving the Pennsylvania colony (Forrest, 2001), an engine fueled by trade, both domestic and international (Dunn & Dunn, 1982, 18). When Penn returned to England in 1684, Philadelphia was more dream than reality; upon his return to America in 1699, presumably a permanent relocation, he found that the population of Pennsylvania had grown to 18,000, of whom about 3,000 lived in Philadelphia. Though he had intended to live out his years in the colony, Penn returned to England in 1701 to put his crumbling financial affairs in order; he never succeeded, and on July 30, 1718 he died penniless (Dunn, 1986). If he could have returned in seventy years he would have found Philadelphia a vibrant, thriving city with a population of 30,000 and a hub of science and letters comparable in many respects to the major centers in Europe.

> In 1787 Philadelphia was unquestionably the intellectual capital of the United States. It was not simply that Philadelphia was much larger in population than New York or Boston; it was the distinction of its citizens that made the city a magnet for foreign visitors and the obvious meeting place for men of thought, as Alexander Hamilton put it, continentally, men who could see beyond the boundaries of their town or parish or county or state. It was the city of Benjamin Franklin, the very symbol of the Enlightenment, of Benjamin Rush, America's best-known physician, of David Rittenhouse, America's leading astronomer, of Charles Willson Peale, painter and promoter, of William Bartram, the country's foremost botanist. It was home of the American Philosophical Society, the only significant learned society on the continent. It had a flourishing theater, where, despite lingering objections from Quaker moralists, ladies and gentlemen could laugh at a farce or weep at a tragedy. It had eight newspapers and two monthly magazines (the *Columbian Magazine* and the *American Museum*). It had Peale's Museum with a display of waxworks, paintings, and scientific curiosities, the eighteenth-century prototype of the Smithsonian. It had Gray's Tavern, with the most elaborate landscape gardens in the country, complete with waterfalls, grottoes, and Chinese pagodas. Philadelphia was the place to be, the place to go. (Morgan, 2009, 130-31).

Despite his extensive publications—more than "fifty books, pamphlets, and broadsides... which he published at his own expense" (Dunn, 1986, 41)—William Penn did not add in a material way to the development of economics as an intellectual pursuit. Nevertheless, the implementations of his visions for Pennsylvania and Philadelphia were instrumental in fashioning the America version of laissez faire, that paradoxical blend of public and private interests designed to foster business development and promote economic growth on the local, regional and even the national level. This public/private paradigm became the model of economics, at least as it evolved in the eighteenth century America (Johnson, 1932, 243-61), and that alone is sufficient to include

Penn among those who have contributed mightily to the American strain of economic thought.

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