

Ontological Love in the Global Market

Michelle Bakker

A Thesis

in

The Department

of

Religion

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Arts (Religion) at  
Concordia University  
Montréal, Quebec, Canada

August 2006

© Michelle Bakker, 2006



Library and  
Archives Canada

Bibliothèque et  
Archives Canada

Published Heritage  
Branch

Direction du  
Patrimoine de l'édition

395 Wellington Street  
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4  
Canada

395, rue Wellington  
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4  
Canada

*Your file    Votre référence*

*ISBN: 978-0-494-20674-4*

*Our file    Notre référence*

*ISBN: 978-0-494-20674-4*

#### NOTICE:

The author has granted a non-exclusive license allowing Library and Archives Canada to reproduce, publish, archive, preserve, conserve, communicate to the public by telecommunication or on the Internet, loan, distribute and sell theses worldwide, for commercial or non-commercial purposes, in microform, paper, electronic and/or any other formats.

The author retains copyright ownership and moral rights in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

#### AVIS:

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque et Archives Canada de reproduire, publier, archiver, sauvegarder, conserver, transmettre au public par télécommunication ou par l'Internet, prêter, distribuer et vendre des thèses partout dans le monde, à des fins commerciales ou autres, sur support microforme, papier, électronique et/ou autres formats.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur et des droits moraux qui protègent cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

---

In compliance with the Canadian Privacy Act some supporting forms may have been removed from this thesis.

Conformément à la loi canadienne sur la protection de la vie privée, quelques formulaires secondaires ont été enlevés de cette thèse.

While these forms may be included in the document page count, their removal does not represent any loss of content from the thesis.

Bien que ces formulaires aient inclus dans la pagination, il n'y aura aucun contenu manquant.

  
**Canada**

## ABSTRACT

### Ontological Love in the Global Market

Michelle Bakker

The ethical thought of Christian theologians Paul Tillich and Reinhold Niebuhr is rooted in the ontological perspective on the human being in society. Niebuhr's pragmatic political approach complements Tillich's broad existential analytic.

Both thinkers view human history and conflict – within the self and in society – as historical manifestations of the ahistorical structure of reality. Part of this ahistorical reality is human estrangement from the source of its being, leaving it both utterly free and radically destined. The ethic is based on recognition of this human condition and the response of faith to the realization that one is finite. This response is to always strive to self-transcend, both as individual and as collective, to create a society governed by rules connected with human existence in all of its irrationalities and contingencies, rather than rules based on disconnected ideals.

I raise the point that the global market, especially as dominated by the wealthy West, is based on an economic ideal that is divorced from the reality that it creates and governs. I focus specifically on the problems of so-called trade liberalization, export processing zones and sweatshop labor, to discuss how a free market represents individualist morals with no transcendent basis. For Tillich and Niebuhr, such a moral denies one the capacity to recognize the humanity of others – both near and distant – and the interdependence of human beings regardless of time or place. As a result both foreign sweatshop workers and those who consume the products they make are objectified and thus dehumanized.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Official thanks to Dirk and Jenny Bakker, aka Mom and Dad, for their unfailing support – moral, financial, emotional – over the past 3 ½ years and, of course, the 26 years preceding that. Thanks for raising me to want, among many things, to challenge myself, to ask questions, and to feel comfortable with trial and error (i.e. “science!”).

## CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1 - Interdependence: Paul Tillich's Ontological Ethic.....	5
A. Self and World: Individualization and Participation.....	12
B. Power and Justice.....	16
C. Social Relationships and the Threat of Self-Destruction.....	24
D. Faith .....	33
Chapter 2 - Reinhold Niebuhr's "Impossible Ethic" .....	39
A. The Impossible Ethic.....	44
B. Self-Interest and the Law of Love.....	50
C. Justice.....	58
Chapter 3 - Wal-Mart, the Global Market, and "Cheap Labor".....	63
A. Why Wal-Mart? Wal-Mart as a Template Business.....	65
B. Chains of Production, Trade Agreements and Export Processing Zones.....	71
C. Wal-Mart and China.....	82
D. "Cheap Labor".....	88
Chapter 4 - Conclusion.....	91
A. Free Trade: A New Napoleon.....	93
B. Consumer Sovereignty? Voting With Dollars.....	98
C. Responsibility, Freedom, Justice.....	110
Bibliography .....	117

## **Introduction**

This thesis examines the ontological and pragmatic ethical thought of Protestant Christian theologians, Paul Tillich and Reinhold Niebuhr, and its relevance for ethical dilemmas resulting from the current global socio-economic order. Both thinkers reflect upon the capacities and incapacities of the individual within society, and the complexities of responsibility and justice. Though Tillich's ontological approach differs somewhat, in its ahistorical perspective, from Niebuhr's firm grounding in history, their work is complementary; Tillich's suggesting a "why" and Niebuhr's a "how." Moreover, their work overlaps in many respects. Most notable for this thesis is their shared understanding of the structures of reality.

To demonstrate the relevance of their thought, I focus on the issue of sweatshops and labor abuse in the practice of outsourcing, bringing in the issue of consumer responsibility for the plight of distant others. The question of responsibility is tied to the role of economically powerful global organizations in the relationship between consumer and producer. For this purpose I use the example of Wal-Mart, as it is a corporate entity affecting thousands of businesses and millions of people, and is admired and emulated by other organizations.

In the face of clearly immoral and exploitative practices such as sweatshop labor, which are committed for the ultimate material gain of wealthy nations, it is a simple response to accuse of complicity those citizens who claim high moral standards, when they

participate in the system that perpetuates such injustices. However, such a reaction, and accusations of hypocrisy, are too facile and are unforgiving of circumstances by which one finds oneself committing actions which contrast one's own moral self-understanding and desires for ethical living. Though it may be that the particular social circumstances one experiences today are unprecedented in human history, the moments in which one finds oneself contradicting one's own will are not unique to these unprecedented times. Rather, according to Tillich and Niebuhr, the state of the world today is one historical example of the difficulties and tensions that are inseparable from human existence. Part of this human condition is to have free will and the responsibility and capacity for choice and yet to be at the mercy of innumerable contingencies, the results of the free choices and inherent limitations of every other human being on the planet.

Niebuhr and Tillich overlap in their descriptions of the tragic nature of the human condition, both authors emphasizing the conflict between what one wants to do and what, as human, one is capable of doing. While Tillich's description is ontological, explaining the nature of human existence and the encounter of the finite and infinite within that existence, Niebuhr's focus is political, describing the conflict of the individual's will, or self-interest, with collective will. He compares the moral difficulties of the group and the individual. This focus is somewhat like Tillich's on the ontological polarities of individualization and participation, and is a strong parallel to Tillich's description of the ontological tension between (individual) freedom and (universal) destiny.

Self-interest and collective interest constitute a whole which exists both within the self, as egoism and *eros*, and outside of but incorporating the self, as the ethical and the political. This whole structure, whether looked at as within or outside of the self, contains

the dual potential for either fulfillment or destruction of the self and, concomitantly, the fulfillment or destruction of others. Within this paradigm, which Tillich and Niebuhr share, fulfillment or actualization of a being's potential depends on the recognition of one's being by other beings – it is a mutual recognition of interdependence. Destruction of being, on the other hand, results from non-recognition of an other's being.

In tying together Tillich and Niebuhr with consumer ethics one must remember that their – as well as one's own – thought is the product of a specific historical context. This theme, of context specificity, is an important part of any ethical analysis. Throughout this thesis I use the terms “thick” and “thin” to refer to experiences or perspectives that are, respectively, highly contextual or near-universal. I take these distinctions from Michael Walzer's book, *Thick and Thin: Moral Argument at Home and Abroad*,<sup>1</sup> which I found very helpful in unraveling and keeping straight some denser parts of the problems I was working on. While his explanation of the terms is within a discussion of thick and thin – maximalist and minimalist – morality, I found the concepts helpful to me in four ways: identifying some differences in moral perspective and focus, recalling my own subjectivity with regard to my subject matter, considering how Tillich and Niebuhr's thought is and is not relevant, and gaining empathy for the problem of the discrepancy between ideal and real with regard to the implementation of theory and policy.

These latter two I will briefly explain here, as I do not include them in the body of the thesis. The potential relevance of Tillich and Niebuhr is affected by their contexts, and thus the “thickness,” or subjectivity and context-specificity, of their work. Neither Tillich nor Niebuhr experienced a world that is, or is like, the world that exists today.

More particularly, the economies that informed their perspectives were worlds apart from the global market. Nonetheless, I think that their ideas can be read as relevant to the current circumstances that I discuss. In Walzer's terms, this involves a "thin" reading of their works and the application of that reading, as a constructed thin morality, to the current reality that I here describe in detail. This application of Tillich and Niebuhr to multiple layers of a complex problem can be seen as, in a sense, a now "thickened" reading.

As for the difficulties of practicable theory, the thick and thin distinction brought home to me that it is not only those theories which seem to blatantly ignore actual life that face the challenge of incorporating it into their vision. All prescriptive efforts aimed at collective reform will encounter individuals whose circumstances limit the practicality of suggested solutions for problems.

In this way, Walzer's work is very relevant to the ontological and political problems of justice looked at by Tillich and Niebuhr. Both are aware that one may see very clearly what the problem is, and what *sort* of action it is necessary for individuals and collectives to move toward for the creation of justice. Likewise, both see that it is a much different challenge to work with the realistic capabilities of and opportunities for individuals as moral agents and groups as bodies of inevitably conflicting moral agents.

The following statement by Niebuhr sums up this difficulty for both him and Tillich:

"...the same man who touches the fringes of the infinite in his moral life remains imbedded in finiteness, ...he increases the evil in his life if he tries to overcome it without regard to his limitations. Therefore it is as important to know what is impossible as what is possible in the moral demands under which all human beings stand."<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press) 1994.

<sup>2</sup> An Interpretation of Christian Ethics. (New York: Meridian Books) 1958 [1935].

## **Chapter 1**

### **Interdependence: Paul Tillich's Ontological Ethic**

The defining characteristic of Paul Tillich's theology is his view of all aspects of being, and specifically human life, as inseparably interdependent. This applies to infinite essence, essential finitude and existential estrangement as well as to all of the ontological structures that stem from these three things. Within the basic ontological relations of interdependency are relations of conflict and polarity. In this chapter I outline Tillich's ontological understanding of reality, as a step toward the use of his understanding in an examination of some dilemmas for ethical consumption in today's global market.

The ontological viewpoint is essential to consumer ethics because it contains a means by which the interdependence between disparate individuals can be explained, and a reason for why this relationship matters. In addition, it is realistic, neither releasing the consumer from responsibility for his/her choices, nor blaming the individual for systemic wrongs. While it recognizes the constraints on free choice that everyone experiences it is likewise realistic about the fact that one chooses one's actions from moment to moment. A third reason it is a suitable way to think about consumer ethics is its potential to release the individual from relations defined by the market, into a new way of relating. This sort of relation is characterized by the presence of three principles, love, power and justice, working in balance, which is the enactment of ontological love, whereas in market-based relations these principles exist in imbalance and are thus destructive.

Love, power and justice are the principles by which beings live in relation with and to each other. The potentials for these relations are many, and can exist from the highest form of justice and mutuality possible in estranged existence, to unstoppably destructive unjust domination. Tillich discusses the ontological nature of the human, society, and the human in society as manifestations of the ahistorical structure of reality. He explores the ramifications of humanity's capacity for self-transcendence, a blessing and a curse concomitant with its position as juncture between the finite and the infinite, the temporal and the divine. Human ontological anxiety, the fear of self-loss brought on by the realization – through an inkling of infinity – that one is finite and will die, leads to two paths: the desire to make oneself infinite, and the desire to unite with the infinite. The first of these is self-destructive egoism, and the latter *eros*, the drive for actualization of self and others. It is *eros*, that, for Tillich, is also the underlying drive for all of estranged existence, the source of the tension in the ahistorical ontological structures of reality which, if resolved, would be the end of being.

The basis of Tillich's ethical standpoint is the human self in relation to its self, to its world and to the ultimate, and how all of these things are separate and yet inseparable and interdependent. This is summarized in his statement, "...being is one ...the qualities and elements of being constitute a texture of connected and conflicting forces... . It is one in the manifoldness of its texture."<sup>3</sup>

Underlying all relations is the relation of *eros*. This relation is spoken of as a "drive" and, while found in every ontological structure, it originates in the human relation

---

<sup>3</sup> Tillich, Paul. Love, Power, and Justice: Ontological Analyses and Ethical Applications. (New York: Oxford University Press) 1960 [1954], 19-20.

to the ultimate. Therefore I will begin by outlining this relation and the place that Tillich gives it in the human condition.

The basis of *eros* is humanity's fundamental, existential and active "[e]strange[ment] from the ultimate power of being."<sup>4</sup> For Tillich existence is estrangement, that is "separation from the divine ground,"<sup>5</sup> the ultimate source of existence. *Eros* is the desire for reunion with the divine ground of origination, "the desire to unite with a power of being which is both most separated and most understandable and which radiates possibilities and realities of the good and the true in the manifestation of incomparable individuality."<sup>6</sup>

Union, as a goal of being, is the ultimate actualization of life through re/union with "that of which it is in want, ...with that which is separated from it, though it belongs to it." This drive for reunion "...is true not only of [humans] but of all living beings." Though this is so, only the human being experiences *eros* toward the "ultimate," or, the ultimate source of existence. That in the human which strives for reunion is the "infinite essence."<sup>7</sup>

The infinite essence is the source of human self-consciousness. It is that which sparks the sense of an ultimate – the sense that one is finite, as opposed to the infinite that is possible; but not possible for oneself. In this way the infinite essence is also the source of existential anxiety. Relatedly, one's distance from the infinite makes one aware of possibilities for self-transcendence, and *eros* drives one to fulfill such possibilities. Finally, the infinite essence is what differentiates humans from all other beings; humans

---

<sup>4</sup> Tillich, Paul. *Systematic Theology (Vol. II)*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press) 1957. p.66.

<sup>5</sup> Slater, Peter. "Tillich on the Fall and the Temptation of Goodness" in *The Journal of Religion* Vol.65, No.2 (April 1985) 196-207. p.203.

<sup>6</sup> *Love, Power, Justice*, p.32.

are aware of their world as a separate entity within which they live and without which they could not live.

“Essential finitude,” in turn, is precisely that: essentially, or fundamentally, humans are finite creatures whose lives will end. This is a defining, determining, and necessary characteristic of human life as such. Because of this, humanity “...is under the domination of death and is driven by the anxiety of having to die.”<sup>8</sup>

Neither fully finite nor fully infinite, the human condition is one of ambiguity and estrangement, and “[m]an’s estrangement from his essential being is the universal character of existence.”<sup>9</sup> This condition of estrangement is that from which all defining qualities of existence arise and the understanding that this estrangement is the underlying character of all reality is definitive for Tillich’s ethical thought.

One such defining quality, mentioned above, is the drive to self-transcendence, the dialectical result of the realization of one’s finitude, and the intrinsic longing for the infinite, or, *eros*. For Tillich, the drive to self-transcend is the most defining quality of human existence.

This drive for self-transcendence exists at every level of relationship: within the self,<sup>10</sup> between the self and the world, and between the self and the ultimate. The “power of being” is the impulse of self-transcendence toward the ideal: the absolute and infinite, and the power of being is also increased by actualization of this impulse. Only, because

---

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p.29.

<sup>8</sup> *Systematic Theology, Vol. II*, p.66; “Finitude is the possibility of losing ones ontological structure and, with it, one’s self. [...] To be finite is to be threatened.” (Tillich, Paul. *Systematic Theology. Vol. I*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press) 1951.)

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p.64. For Tillich, what man is estranged from is the infinite, “source of all being” – but I think that the finite, for most beings, ought to have as much a claim to the title, “source,” or at least that humans are also very much estranged from the finite ground of their being, due to the infinite essence that makes us able to be *unaware* of it.

the infinite can never be gained by the finite – as mutually defining, both would be lost – one can never transcend one's finite self fully. Non-being will never be overcome entirely by being and efforts to make this happen are efforts at destruction. If the finite were to attain the infinite and become absolute, then both would cease to exist; likewise finitude if overcome by the infinite. Since as an ontological pair, being and non-being define each other, a resolution of ontological tension is impossible. This tension is the dynamic tension under and in which all reality exists. In the ahistorical "whole reality," this tension is between the finite and the infinite, the historical and the ahistorical. In the historical reality that humans exist in, the tension exists within the human being, again, the juncture of the finite and the infinite. Tillich describes these dynamic tensions of the structure of reality in terms of "ontological polarities."

The ambiguity of human existence is structurally present in the ontological polarities: "In every polarity each pole is limited as well as sustained by the other one. A complete balance between them presupposes a balanced whole. But [due to human essential finitude] such a whole is not given. ...under the impact of finitude, polarity becomes tension. Tension refers to the tendency of elements within a unity to draw away from one another, to attempt to move in opposite directions."<sup>11</sup>

These ontological tensions are the basis for the dynamics of human relations. This thesis will discuss the relations to oneself and to one's world, or other beings.

In his *Systematic Theology*,<sup>12</sup> Tillich describes three ontological polarities that are formed on the template of the basic ontological structure, that is, self and world. These

---

<sup>10</sup> "[t]he inability to reach a form in which the dynamics of man's nature are preliminarily or lastingly satisfied is an expression of man's estrangement from himself..."(*Systematic Theology, Vol. II*, p.65)

<sup>11</sup> *Systematic Theology. Vol. I*, p.198.

<sup>12</sup> *Vol. II*.

polarities are individualization and participation, dynamics and form, and freedom and destiny. All of these polarities are interdependent pairs relying on each other to exist, which is why they are described as polarities and not as contrasting or conflicting. As polarities, they must seek balance in order to exist; although one always tries to overcome the other, the mutuality of these efforts results in an unsteady balance. As with finitude and infinity, were one to succeed in conquering its polar opposite, it would mean the loss of both. The estrangement from self and world,<sup>13</sup> and simultaneous interdependence occurs on all levels of being<sup>14</sup> and is key to the tragic nature of human existence as viewed by Tillich (and Niebuhr).

Regarding the polarity of individualization and participation, Tillich states, “[t]he separation of individualization from participation is a mark of estrangement generally.”<sup>15</sup> This polarity is the most clearly evident when first discussing self-world relations and I will discuss it in these terms as well as in terms of the threat of loss of self through isolation as the extreme of individualization, and absorption into the collective as the conquering of individualization by participation. In order for the human being to exist ‘in’ the world, and yet maintain his/her unique awareness of this position, a balance between individualization and participation must be struck. As in every ontological structure the ends of the polarity are interdependent. While “[I]f individualizes in all its

---

<sup>13</sup> Due to both estrangement from and connection with the ultimate.

<sup>14</sup> Interdependency and estrangement are estranged from and interdependent on each other.

Estrangement needs interdependency because if things were not interdependent they would perhaps be independent, in which case there would be no yearning, and then no estrangement. Or, things would be together, perhaps, and not estranged. Interdependency implies that the elements of the polarity need one another but, as characterizes *Eros*, they cannot *have* one another; because if one successfully attained the other [thus no longer being dependent on the other, since it – and what was needed from it – had been incorporated by the “conqueror”] then the other would cease to exist and in fact the “conqueror” would also cease to exist, in the sense that it would become something else in essence, its essence having been dependent on the polar relationship. And thus interdependency works – must work – on the ground of fundamental estrangement.

forms; at the same time, mutual participation of being in 'being' maintains the unity of being. [...] The more individualized a being is, the more it is able to participate.”<sup>16</sup>

The polarity of dynamics and form is the “...continuous breaking of vitality by form and of form by vitality.” Again, “...if the one side disappears, the other does also. Dynamics, vitality, and the drive to form-breaking end in chaos and emptiness. They lose themselves in their separation from form. And form, structure, and law end in rigidity and emptiness. They lose themselves in their separation from dynamics.”<sup>17</sup>

The third polarity, freedom and destiny, is key to making any choice. It is tied strongly to individualization and participation, and clarifies the complexities of power dynamics among individuals and collectives. Tillich's term “universal destiny” is the counterpart to individual freedom. Destiny is the product of the actions of every being in the world, acting on their own volition, i.e. individual freedom, that is also a contingency on the free actions of every being. As in the other polarities there is a tension between freedom and destiny at the same time that they are an interdependent ontological polarity.<sup>18</sup> This understanding of polarities underlies Tillich's perception and explanations of the forms and dynamics of human relationships; and all three polarities described express different aspects of the human condition as understood and expressed by Tillich and Niebuhr.

---

<sup>15</sup> *Systematic Theology, Vol. II*, p.66

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p.65

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p.64

<sup>18</sup> Rather than viewing destiny as an ultimate goal or an inevitable end, it is more accurate to understand it as the continuous arrival of moments of existence that are the summation of one's world. Simultaneously there is a continual departure from these moments that are the continual actualization of the individual's power of being.

## **A. Self and World: Individualization and Participation**

The relation of humans to the world occur in two basic categories: as a self, one is influenced by one's world, and is as well an influence on it. This mutual relationship occurs both within the centered self – the world internalized as one's “other self” – and in the world where the individual's being participates in the collective being of other individuals. This too is a mutually influential organization of relationships. But at the same time, since all humans are finite and thus cannot strive for unity with each other in the way that finitude can yearn for the ultimate, they are relationships of conflicting powers.

This conflict of powers also occurs within the self, as the self must not be overpowered by the world. While on one hand, being is one “texture” within which forces connect and conflict, implying a basic cohesion of self and world; on the other hand the self and the world are entities that are essentially “separate, [and] not only distinct.”<sup>19</sup> In other words, though the self exists through mutual participation with the world, what makes this participation necessary is the individualization enabled by the mutual recognition between beings. Individualization and participation are two aspects of the essential finitude of the human. Within what Tillich designates the basic ontological structure, the polarity of self and world, these aspects constitute the polar tension and dynamic.

Without a self, a centre from which to exist and act, it is impossible for the human to be a self in the world and this would then prevent participation, as the polar counterpart to individualization.

---

<sup>19</sup> Scharlemann, Robert P. “Tillich's method of correlation: two proposed revisions” in *Journal of Religion*, Volume 46, No. 1 (January 1966) 92-103. p.100.

The human is both separate from and “in” its world. It is part of the world and, as such, inescapably formed, at least in part, by the world. Tillich states:

Every self has an environment in which it lives and the ego-self has a world in which it lives. All beings have an environment which is *their* environment. [...] Its environment consists in those things with which it has an active interrelation. Different beings within the same limited space have different environments. Each being *has* an environment, although it belongs *to* its environment.<sup>20</sup>

Tillich’s emphasis here is on the idea that the specific instance of the self, as the individual, is dependent on the specifics of his/her environment but that the specifics of his or her environment, not only the way that the individual experiences them but *what they are*, are dependent on the individual. This is called “active interrelation,” and interdependence. One is not determined by one’s static environment and then cut loose to be what one then is, from then on. One’s own existence, power of self, and the existence of one’s world are continuously in exchange of influence and, by playing such a role, the world is not only the external environment but also a force internal to the self.<sup>21</sup>

Thus the self, and its choices, are shaped by one’s world as one simultaneously creates and internalizes it. But one must remember that the world consists of other individuals doing the same thing. Thus one is also internalizing the worlds of other individuals. For this reason the world, though part of oneself, remains utterly separate.

The concept of self-relatedness is a thorny one, as Tillich himself acknowledges when discussing the concept of self love: “If love is the drive towards the reunion of the separated,” he says,

it is hard to speak meaningfully of self-love. For within the unity of self-consciousness there is no real separation, comparable to the separation of a

---

<sup>20</sup> *Systematic Theology. Vol. I*, p.170

<sup>21</sup> Here I am refraining from saying that therefore we can say that the self is the world and the world the self; though I think it basically has been said and will be later, too.

self-centred being from all other beings. Certainly the completely self-centred being, man, is self-centred only because his self is split into a self which is subject and a self which is object. But there is neither separation in this structure, nor the desire for reunion. Self-love is a metaphor, and it should not be treated as a concept.<sup>22</sup>

Tillich refers to the self-world (or subject-object) relationship as the basic ontological structure. Besides constituting one pole of this structure, the self's relation to itself also exemplifies that basic structure. The self-self, or self-"self as other," relationship is a whole unto itself, as well as a part of a whole. As a whole, it consists of constituent elements in ontological tension that comprise the personal center, the "self." At the same time, as a whole, it is self-aware of its singularity in and its inseparability from the world. The union that constitutes the self (or, any union) is not a static identity, but a dynamic balancing of the conflicting and disruptive elements of the self that, if allowed to become entirely imbalanced, would destroy the self. Union, too, is a form of imbalance in that it eliminates the dynamic of balance altogether.<sup>23</sup> This unstable equilibrium, for Tillich, occurs between the self and the world, the self and the self, and the constituent elements of the self.

"Selfhood" is the self as singular whole unit; "individualization" is the singular self in relation to the world as separate entity. Though "[s]elfhood and individualization are different conceptually,"<sup>24</sup> in actual function they are inseparable. "[T]he concept 'self' implies separation from and contrast to everything which is not self..."<sup>25</sup> and yet self depends on the world for its existence, both subjective and objective. As the basic

---

<sup>22</sup> *Love, Power, Justice*, p.33-34

<sup>23</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre describes the individual similarly, as "...a perpetually unstable equilibrium between identity as absolute cohesion without a trace of diversity and unity as a synthesis of multiplicity." *Being and Nothingness: an essay on phenomenological ontology*. (New York: Philosophical Library) 1956. p.124.

<sup>24</sup> *Systematic Theology. Vol. I*, p.175

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p.244

ontological structure the self-world relationship implies the separateness of the structure of the self from the structure of the world; “[t]he self being aware of itself and the self looking at its world (including itself) are equally significant for the description of the ontological structure.”<sup>26</sup>

The self’s relation to itself is that of the actual self to the potential self and thus is one of continual transformation and self-transcendence; the potential self is that power of being which is continuously overcoming the power of non-being and the power of the potential being is synonymous with (the power of) love. The self’s relation to itself is also that unity-but-not-identity, the *eros* of this relation emerging from the tension within the self as both ultimately-oriented spirit and finite being, estranged from and resistant to the ultimate. Though there is no “real separation” as of being from being or being from environment, there is a dynamic that exists within the potential-bearing centre that is the self and in that sense the self, or the “elements” of the self, can be described as *divided*. It is impossible for the self to be united, because of finitude, but it is necessary for it to be centred if it is to exist and to overcome non-being.

“Self-loss,” writes Tillich, “...is the loss of one’s determining center; it is the disintegration of the centered self by disruptive drives which cannot be brought into unity. So long as they are centred, these drives constitute the person as a whole. If they move against one another, they split the person.”<sup>27</sup>

There is a continual tension between the self’s individualization, the maintenance of the separation that defines ‘self’, and participation in the world to ensure recognition of the self, either of which, if taken too far, lead to loss of self. As Tillich states it,

---

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p.192

<sup>27</sup> *Systematic Theology, Vol. II*, p.61

Self-relatedness produces the threat of a loneliness in which world and communion are lost. On the other hand, being in the world and participating in it produces the threat of a complete collectivization, a loss of subjectivity whereby the self loses its self-relatedness and is transformed into a mere part of an embracing whole. Man as finite... oscillates anxiously between individualization and participation....<sup>28</sup>

This aspect of the relationship between the individual and the collective, the threat, or potential, or self-loss is parallel to that which one experiences when, confronted with the infinite, one realizes that one is finite. The threat of self-loss is also called ontological anxiety, as well as the threat of self-destruction. Yet, it also contains the potential for self-actualization.

## **B. Power and Justice**

It is crucial for Tillich that existence be understood as estrangement, as separation.

Without existential estrangement there would be no *eros*, and without *eros* there would be no ontological structure animated by the drive for reunion, or self-transcendence. The structures of being rely on this existential state of separation for power, which is the overcoming of non-being by being, i.e. existence:

The power of being is its possibility to affirm itself against the non-being within it and against it. The power of a being is the greater the more non-being is taken into its self-affirmation. The power of being is not dead identity but the dynamic process in which it separates from itself and returns to itself. The more conquered separation there is the more power there is. The process in which the separated is reunited is love. The more reuniting love there is, the more conquered non-being there is, the more power of being there is.<sup>29</sup>

Existence thus is not only estrangement but also power. The overcoming of non-being by being, that is the continuation of existence, occurs whenever reunion overpowers

---

<sup>28</sup> *Systematic Theology. Vol. I*, p.199

<sup>29</sup> *Love, Power, Justice*, p.48-49

separation: "The basic formula of power and the basic formula of love are identical:

Separation and Reunion or Being taking Non-Being into itself."<sup>30</sup>

For the individual, growth as the overcoming of non-being by being occurs in the context of encounters with the power of being of other persons. What is overcome is not the being of the other person, as that would be the overcoming of being by being – a self-destructive (or, being-destructive) act, rather than an act toward growth. Rather, it is the threat of non-being that is overcome, and that threat is found in the potential that the other being will destroy one's own being.

This potential derives from the egoistic impulse within the self. In a just relation this would be balanced with the love impulse for a self-transcendent urge toward fulfillment of all. But in estranged reality the corrupted natural tendency is to want to dominate. This is self-destructive.

For this reason, Tillich states, "The completely centred, self-related and self-aware being, man, has the greatest power of being. He has a world, not only an environment, and with it infinite potentialities of self-realization."<sup>31</sup> This power includes self-awareness which, as explained earlier, is awareness of the truth and degree of one's interdependence with one's world. This awareness enables one to relate to one's self more lucidly and justly, and therefore to have power over one's own being, rather than surrendering one's power. "Power over oneself," says Tillich, "is the power of the self over the forces which constitute it and each of which tries to determine it."<sup>32</sup> One of the forces over which the self must maintain itself is the world.

---

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p.49

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p.44; my emph.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p.52

Tillich's conception of justice is quite specific, and is ontologically tied to his conceptions of love and power. Being itself, he says, "...implies love as well as power and justice"<sup>33</sup> and justice is "the form in which the power of being actualizes itself."<sup>34</sup> The form in which the drive for the increase of power by self-transcendence occurs is justice; justice is the actualization of life – its movement from potential non-being to real being, the continual overcoming of non-being by being. The power of being "actualizes itself in the encounter of power and power" and justice is immanent in this process (as is love, and justice in love, etc.).

Tillich introduces three different types of justice: intrinsic, "tributive," and "creative" or "transforming." It is the latter which is central to his conclusions and which I most rely on in this thesis, but it builds on an understanding of the first two, and so I will briefly outline them.

Intrinsic justice is "a claim raised silently or vocally by a being on the basis of its power of being. It... express[es] the form in which a thing or a person is actualized. [And the claim] may be adequate to [the being's] intrinsic claim or it may not be."<sup>35</sup> If the claim expressed is not adequate to the being's intrinsic claim, if it claims more or less power of being than is intrinsically due, then though it is an expression of an encounter of power with power, it is not a just encounter. For example, if one person ends the life of another s/he is claiming more power in the encounter than s/he is intrinsically due. As well, if one person surrenders his/her power to another person without maintaining his/her own power of being, it is an unjust encounter – this particular sort of exchange will be further discussed shortly.

---

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p.109

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p.56

The response to an unjust encounter takes the form of what Tillich terms “tributive” justice, so called because “it decides about the tribute a thing or a person ought to receive according to his special powers of being.”<sup>36</sup> It is also called “proportional” justice, and includes attributive, distributive and retributive justice. This form of justice is that found in law and law-enforcement, treaties between nations, and other calculated social transactions. This form, however, is also insufficient, since it does not recognize justice as dynamic, the necessary counterpart to justice as form.

This insufficiency in tributive justice gives rise to the third form, which Tillich names “transforming” or “creative.” This justice is that given by and applicable to God, and the criterion of creative justice is “[f]ulfillment within the unity of universal fulfillment.”<sup>37</sup> It is justice driven by *eros* and it is that perfect form of justice wherein the power of being is actualized. As such, it cannot exist in the realm of essential finitude. fulfillment within the unity of universal fulfillment, absolute fulfillment of all powers of being and the elimination of tensions, cannot happen in human existence because it would mean the end of human existence. Tillich says that the religious symbol of creative justice is the kingdom of God<sup>38</sup> -- it is a source of hope and a goal toward which one may strive, but the nature of humans as finite means that absolute fulfillment of the self’s power cannot be arrived at without also arriving at self-destruction.

That the form of justice in which essential finitude and existential estrangement are actualized is tributive justice, under the criterion of creative justice, is demonstrated by Tillich’s discussion of compulsion (the term he uses for coercion – probably because

---

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p.63

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p.64

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p.65

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p.65

coercion comes from both outside and inside, and thus “compulsion” serves as a combination of coercion and compulsiveness<sup>39</sup>) and of what genuine love is in the person to person, or power to power, encounter.

As established, Tillich’s “love,” *eros*, is the drive for reunion of the separated, and as such, “presupposes that there is something to be reunited, something relatively independent that stands upon itself.”<sup>40</sup> This is differentiated from the oft-admired [says Tillich], “love of complete self-surrender” about which Tillich asks, “What kind of self-surrender is it and what is it that surrenders?” He continues:

If a self whose power of being is weakened or vanishing surrenders, his surrender is worth nothing. He is a self which has not received from himself the justice to which he is entitled, according to his intrinsic claim for justice. [This] surrender... is not genuine love because it extinguishes and does not unite what is estranged. ...[it] is the desire to annihilate one’s responsible and creative self for the sake of the participation in another self which by the assumed act of love is made responsible for himself and oneself [*i.e. by surrendering, one dominates the other*]. [This] self-surrender does not give justice to the other one, because he who surrenders did not give justice to himself. It is justice to oneself to affirm one’s own power of being and to accept the claim for justice which is implied in this power. Without this justice there is no reuniting love because there is nothing to unite.<sup>41</sup>

If “[e]very organism, natural as well as social, is a power of being and a bearer of an intrinsic claim to justice because it is based on some form of reuniting love,”<sup>42</sup> then an organism that surrenders or dominates, rather than strives to reunite, surrenders and destroys its own power of being.

Surrender and domination are different from compulsion or force, which are present in every encounter between powers of being. A being is always affected in some

---

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p.67.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p.69

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p.69; As well, without person-to-person justice, there is no human-ultimate *eros*, because there exists no being that is able to strive for union with the ultimate.

way through encounter; encounter itself compels the interaction of powers of being, prompted by the desire for reunion, or *eros*. “It is not compulsion [itself] which is unjust,” says Tillich, “but a compulsion which destroys the object of compulsion instead of working toward its fulfillment... [one] which disregards the intrinsic claim of a being to be acknowledged as what it is within the context of all beings.”<sup>43</sup> In other words, an unjust compulsion is an encounter between beings wherein the drive for reunion is stifled, be that by surrender or by domination, and a balance of powers or polarities in the encounter is therefore not reached. This is non-recognition of the other’s being, and is the destruction of both the self and the other.

Unlike the view that altruism is nothing more than veiled self-interest, in Tillich’s scenario self-interest and collective-interest are locked into one whole, from which neither can be extracted and given priority without doing injustice to both. One’s own being – one’s self, relation to self, relation to world, and relation to God – is an interdependent existence that relies on its place in the world, its particular form and dynamic of being, for meaning and power. And this place is necessarily shaped by both individual freedom and universal destiny. One is not on one’s own, alone in one’s experience of life, no matter how much one would like to be or feels that one is.

The combined necessity of recognizing the intrinsic claim to justice held by all beings and paying tribute to that claim by interacting with all beings in ways that lead toward their fulfillment demonstrates that essential finitude and existential estrangement are actualized through tributive justice under the criterion of creative justice. The actualization of life, of the power of being, through finding balance between polar

---

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p.98

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p.67 and see *ibid.*, p.46.

elements in all encounters is an actualization of the condition of essential finitude and the limitation of creative justice by necessary tributive justice is a condition of existential estrangement.

Active recognition of the drive for self-actualization has to be part of a full recognition of the interdependence of being and beings, because actualization is necessary to a meaningful life. Similarly, the drive for actualization has to be tempered by recognition of interdependence and, again, recognition must come both from one's self and from one's world. Care is the active recognition of the drive for self-actualization and it is both altruistic and self-interested. It is altruism motivated by self-interest: one cares for one's self by caring for others. And it is self-interest with altruistic motives: one who does not care for oneself is not able to care for others. Both actualization and the recognition of the drive toward it in self and in others are necessary for meaningfulness. Tillich addresses this interlocked relation of Care throughout his ontological analysis of love and power, but most explicitly draws attention to it when discussing justice.

In a just encounter one must overcome the non-being that threatens one's self by acknowledging the being of others. When an individual with a strong power of being encounters an individual with weak or lessened power of being, the weaker power of being must meet the stronger one with its own being. In this way non-being is overcome and justice is done to both. If the weaker power of being meets the stronger with its non-being, then the stronger being is compelled to overcome the weaker, to dominate, or to also surrender his/her power of being to the other's non-being. This would remove the justice from the encounter.

Also involved in the encounters of beings are the conditions and limitations of being imposed by essential finitude and existential estrangement. If a stronger being *conquers* a weaker being then both succumb to non-being, because their destinies and freedoms are entwined:

Participation [or “communion”] is essential for the individual... The person as the fully developed individual self is impossible without other fully developed selves. If he did not meet the resistance of other selves, every self would try to make himself absolute. But the resistance of the other selves is unconditional. One individual can conquer the entire world of objects, but he cannot conquer another person without destroying him as a person. The individual discovers himself through this resistance. If he does not want to destroy the other person, he must enter into communion with him. In the resistance of the other person the person is born. Therefore, there is no person without an encounter with other persons. Persons can grow only in the communion of personal encounter.<sup>44</sup>

Entering into communion with other beings requires the cultivation of one’s own power of being, which requires the overcoming of non-being by being, which, in turn, requires the opening of the self to the possibility of non-being and, in facing that threat, making one’s self vulnerable to it. This is the courage to be, and the state of estrangement, in preventing understanding of the potential for *both* being and non-being in the condition of essential finitude, prevents beings from discovering and cultivating this courage which relies on realization of the ambiguity of life, its non-absolute character.

The drive toward conquering other beings, making the self absolute, not recognizing the resistance of other beings but choosing instead to conquer and destroy them, thereby destroying the self, is a drive characteristic of the state of estrangement. It is the “transformation of essential finitude into existential evil... [or] structures of self-

---

<sup>44</sup> *Systematic Theology. Vol. I*, p.176-77

destruction...”.<sup>45</sup> Self-/world-destructive self-surrender likewise demonstrates the state of estrangement from the source of being, essential finitude in a state of disruption.

But in part this is an unavoidable situation since, says Tillich, it is humanity’s universal destiny to be estranged from what it essentially is, i.e. finite. This universal destiny of estrangement is the source of the tragic guilt for existential evil that was mentioned earlier. He continues: “Each expression of the estranged state contradicts man’s essential being, his potency [power, potential] for goodness. It contradicts the created structure of himself and his world and their interdependence. And self-contradiction drives toward self-destruction. The elements of essential being which move against each other tend to annihilate each other and the whole to which they belong.”<sup>46</sup>

### **C. Social Relationships and the Threat of Self-Destruction**

A way of life or a culture can be based on the primacy of the individual, as opposed to the community. The consumer culture of neoliberal economic theory is an excellent example of this. According to Tillich (and Niebuhr) existence acted out in only self-interest results in the destruction of the self. For a fully actualized, empowered life, one must recognize the right/demand to empowerment of other beings. There must be mutual love, mutual self-surrender. Without this the result is objectification and destruction – domination – of the other, which is the existential objectification and destruction of oneself. By participating in the global economic structures that deny power to millions of human beings around the world – the particular example here is that of humans

---

<sup>45</sup> *Systematic Theology, Vol. II*, p.68

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p.59-60

transformed into technical machinery called “cheap labor” – one participates in an individualism that is ultimately destructive of one’s self.

The use of human beings as “cheap labor,” non-recognition of their essential power as beings, is a quintessential historical instance of the egoistic impulse to increase one’s own power by dominating others. It is the individual drive removed from the ontologically necessary polarity of individualism and participation, made absolute. In Niebuhr’s terms this is “sin” and in Tillich’s, “self-destruction” or “the self-destructive drive.”

“Only man,” says Tillich,

has a completely centred self and a structured universe to which he belongs and at which he is able to look at the same time. ... He can and does transcend it with every word he speaks. He is free to make his world into an object which he beholds, and he is free to make himself into an object upon which he looks. In this situation of finite freedom he can lose himself and his world, and the loss of one necessarily includes the loss of the other. This is the basic ‘structure of destruction’, and it includes all others.<sup>47</sup>

Existential estrangement is the counterpart of fundamental interdependency.

The threat of destruction is inseparable from the dynamic existence of the self and the world. This paradox is part of the human condition. We are bound by the paradox and yet we *contain* the paradox because of the kind of being that the human is, finite. The drive for re/union that vitalizes ontological dynamics is at the same time a destructive drive. Attained union would result in the loss of both finitude and infinity, as well as the source of the self’s power, through the overcoming of this threat.

Thus there is a dual source of the “...anxiety implied in the always threatening loss of substance, that is, of identity with one’s self and the power of maintaining

---

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p.60

oneself.”<sup>48</sup> Anxiety comes from the fear of death and non-being. The possibility of non-being exists and is understood because “[m]an is a creature. His being is contingent; by itself it has no necessity, and therefore man realizes that he is the prey of non-being. The same contingency which has thrown man into existence may push him out of it. [...] The anxiety in which he is aware of this situation is anxiety about the lack of necessity of his being.”<sup>49</sup> Though the interdependence of self and world makes each one necessary for the existence of the other, outside of this relationship neither is necessary. Moreover, efforts to overcome the estrangement can result in self-destruction, which implicates anxiety in the power of maintaining oneself.

The threat of non-being is the threat of meaninglessness and is “a social as well as an individual reality.”<sup>50</sup> This threat is also the source of the will-to-power, or the drive to increase one’s power of being and resist the power of the other – yet another way that the structural tension of human existence is expressed.

Personal meaninglessness cannot be avoided unless one’s interdependence with one’s world is acknowledged by oneself and by the world. Without this acknowledgement one cannot transcend one’s self to fulfill one’s potential, and nor can any other. Existential estrangement becomes self-destruction – separation from the ground of one’s being, from the group and from one’s own self moves beyond separation to a state of hopelessness. The “threatened break” occurs; being is overcome by non-being.<sup>51</sup> Meaning, the movement toward actualization or fulfillment, depends on the recognition of the interdependence of beings as destined, free, and essentially finite

---

<sup>48</sup> *Systematic Theology. Vol. I*, p.198; and substance = also, resistance against non-being (*Love, Power and Justice*, p.197)

<sup>49</sup> *Systematic Theology. Vol. I*, p.196

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p.201

individuals in a shared world. This recognition is the impetus for social ethics and justice and a lack of recognition leads to injustice and apathy and acquiescence in the face of injustice.

For Tillich, the human being is the juncture where ahistorical structures become concrete and historical. This is because of the human's special nature as "the point of contact between the finite and the infinite,"<sup>52</sup> both 'in' and aware of the world. Society is the site, result and perpetuation of the ambiguities and tensions that exist not only within being, but that emerge when powers of being meet. Society is the nexus of actualization of the potentialities of being. It is here that paradox encounters paradox, finite freedom meets finite freedom and self finds self. Moreover, society is not just the product and site of the cohesion of persons, but also exists as an entity itself, i.e. in relation to, both separate from and part of, individuals and the ultimate; exerting its own power of being, having its own potentiality. And, as with all beings, the power of society is interdependent with the existence of the beings that comprise it and the larger "existence as a whole" that it is part of.

Society is not made up of ontological polarities except insofar as they exist within individuals; individuals themselves, as the components of society, do not exist in polarity but in conflict with each other. Every encounter is of power with a power, not power with non-power, or being with non-being. The self's encounter with non-being occurs *within* the self's center. Notes Tillich, there is

a fundamental difference between a person and a social group.<sup>53</sup> In contrast to the ... 'person,' the social group has no natural, deciding

---

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p.202

<sup>52</sup> Tillich, Paul. Dynamics of Faith. (New York: Harper) 1956. p.61.

<sup>53</sup> Be that global society as a whole, if such a thing exists, or nation, or one of the countless divisions of such larger social groups.

center. A social group is a power structure, and in every power structure certain individuals determine the actions of all individual who are parts of the group. There is, therefore, always a potential or real conflict within the group, even if the outcome is the united action of the group as a whole. As such, a social group is not estranged and as such, a social group is not reconciled.<sup>54</sup>

Though the estrangement-interdependence polarity is *manifested* in social relations, i.e., the polarity is the source of the “potential or real conflict”, these relations themselves are not polar. The polar dynamic between self and world is specifically that between the self’s existence as individual and the self’s existence as participating – i.e. individualization and participation, or individual freedom and universal destiny. The relationship between the (simultaneously individual and participating) self and the world of other like selves is one of conflict wherein powers of being that seek naturally to dominate must find balance in mutual recognition.

The way that the estrangement-interdependence polarity plays out in all social relationships is not *as* relationships, but as the historical entities which conduct these inevitable ontological relations of conflict and resolution. The distinction between the ahistorical polarity of social relationships and the manifestation of social relationships in historical realities is crucial. While historically manifested social relationships can be analyzed and problems therein pinpointed, the underlying structure of reality is that of estrangement and interdependence and therefore, universally, the dynamics of the ontological structural polarities will manifest in history in the same way repeatedly. Says Tillich, “There are structures of destruction in all periods, and they provide many

---

<sup>54</sup> *Systematic Theology, Vol. II*, p.58-9.

analogies with the particular structures of our period. Man's estrangement from his essential being is the universal character of existence."<sup>55</sup>

Recognition of this condition and living in awareness of it is ontological care, as opposed to non-recognition and acquiescence to structures of destruction. Recognition is a combination of abstract ontological care and concrete actions embodying care. The prior results from the latter, and vice versa. "Action" is not just tangible physical movement but also thought, attitude, and general perspective – it is anything that a being does. For Tillich, care stems from anxiety<sup>56</sup> – the threat of non-being that must be countered by the self's power of being which, as has been asserted, is inextricable from its world.

Therefore one must be responsible for one's own well-being as a way of caring for others – not necessarily immediate physical care, but having a sense, an understanding, of others as each being an individual actor. Not seeing the rest of humanity as a "masses" but as persons, as many unique faces, and thinking and feeling toward others in a care-full way. Likewise, one must be responsible for others as a way of caring for one's self. This raises the question of what it means to truly be responsible for one's self.

Responsibility for self here refers to maintaining one's power of being, which, while ontological, manifests concretely. Thus it can take the form of ensuring that one has a roof over one's head, enough to eat, an education, rewarding relationships, etc. Because all humans are finite, and thus are not polar opposites that can unite, they exist in conflict with each other, and in competition. This means that responsibility for self also

---

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p.74.

involves the maintenance of power in competition with other selves who want to maintain their power. This may take a variety of forms of defense of self or others, or of restraining oneself, perhaps in defense of an other.

However, it is not human nature to want simply to maintain one's self. Because of human existential anxiety, fear of non-being in one's finitude before the infinite, we want not only to maintain ourselves but to expand ourselves. We want more power than we need. In order to get more power, conflict has to become domination. One must take the power from an other by giving one's own self precedence over the self of the other, that is, by ceasing to recognize their being as necessary to one's own.

The tendency toward annihilation / self-destruction and non-recognition of essential finitude and the interdependence of self and world is a tendency toward annihilation and non-recognition of the human being as such; toward dehumanization. The drive to conquering other beings with one's own power of being, be that by domination or by submission, is tantamount to viewing and treating them as objects, as "things."

Non-recognition of another's power of being can also be described as non-recognition of a person's subjectivity, this summarized in the term "objectification," the making of a "being" into a "thing." Objectification of a being destroys the being by removing his or her capacity for freedom and destiny. A thing, says Tillich, is "a completely determined object" that by definition lacks freedom; the "*freedom of a thing* is a contradiction in terms."<sup>57</sup>

---

<sup>56</sup> O'Meara, Thomas. "Tillich and Heidegger: A Structural Relationship," *Harvard Theological Review*, 61 (1968), 249-261. p.254.

<sup>57</sup> *Systematic Theology. Vol. I*, p.183, italics original.

Tillich suggests various reasons for the self-objectification/ -destruction of a being through objectifying others, all of which are based on anxiety from the threat of personal non-existence that comes with the understanding of oneself as an essentially finite being that is dependent on relation with other beings and one's external world for existence.

This fear of non-being is also the fear of personal meaninglessness and of determinism (or, of being determined).<sup>58</sup> It is not hard to see that a fear of meaninglessness, from seeing one's life as utterly contingent, would likely cause one to reject the implications of universal destiny that arise when one admits or recognizes one's essential interdependence with other beings. The denial of this would naturally manifest in the assertion of one's freedom as absolute and not conditioned by the existence of other selves – thereby denying other selves the possession of this same sort of freedom.

However, just as the person "...is threatened with the loss of freedom by the necessities implied in his destiny ...he is equally threatened with the loss of his destiny by the contingencies implied in his freedom."<sup>59</sup> Even when using one's capacity for freedom to make one's own freedom absolute, this freedom is irrevocably interdependent with the universal destiny of humankind: "...freedom is imbedded [*sic*] in the universal destiny of estrangement in such a way that in every free act the destiny of estrangement is involved and, vice versa, that the destiny of estrangement is actualized by all free acts."<sup>60</sup>

One has the choice to respond negatively or positively to this situation. The positive reaction to the realization of the bonds of freedom and destiny, according to Tillich, is faith. And the negative reaction is the attempt to save either one's freedom *or*

---

<sup>58</sup> "...indeterminism as well as determinism is a theory of man's essential nature in terms which are descriptions of man's estranged nature." (*Systematic Theology, Vol. II*, p.63) + they "...reduce man to a cognitive subject (*ens cognitans*) who perceives, analyzes, and controls reality." (ST2.66).

<sup>59</sup> *Systematic Theology. Vol. I*, p.200

one's destiny, through arbitrariness. Saving one's freedom through arbitrariness is the denial of destiny by making oneself the center of the universe, within which all objects and beings are contingent upon oneself. The cost of saving one's freedom in this way, however, is the eradication of meaning, pattern, or purpose in one's world: "...absolute freedom in a finite being becomes arbitrariness and falls under biological and psychological necessities [i.e. contingencies]. The loss of a meaningful destiny [overcome by the absolutizing of freedom] involves the loss of freedom also."<sup>61</sup>

Saving one's destiny through arbitrariness, on the other hand, is the surrender of freedom to absolute determinism – removing the center from oneself and putting oneself in the hands (so to speak) of the actions of every other person but oneself. In other words, making an object of oneself. This, too, results in the loss of meaning and purpose in life. The absolutizing of freedom or of destiny are both acts of objectification of the self and therefore others. When one tries to save one's freedom by arbitrariness, one risks losing both freedom and destiny, and vice versa.<sup>62</sup> Both of these scenarios end in the changing of the human from subjective being in and observing his/her world, to "thing," objectified, "...a mere object among objects... part of a physically calculable whole... [and] a thoroughly calculable object him [/her]self."<sup>63</sup>

To the degree to which freedom is distorted into arbitrariness, destiny is distorted into mechanical necessity. If man's freedom is not directed by destiny [i.e. by his understanding of the interdependency of

---

<sup>60</sup> *Systematic Theology, Vol. II*, p.56

<sup>61</sup> *Systematic Theology, Vol. I*, p.201; + "...when man makes himself the center of the universe, freedom loses its definiteness. Indefinitely and arbitrarily, freedom turns to objects, persons, and things which are completely contingent upon the choosing subject and which therefore can be replaced by others of equal contingency and ultimate unrelatedness. ... If no essential relation between a free agent and his objects exists, no choice is objectively preferable to any other; no commitment to a cause or a person is meaningful; no dominant purpose can be est'd. ... [This is] a basic trend in the state of universal estrangement." (*Systematic Theology, Vol. II*, p.63)

<sup>62</sup> *Systematic Theology, Vol. I*, p.200

<sup>63</sup> *Systematic Theology, Vol. II*, p.66

humans] or if it is arbitrary... [w]hat seems to be free proves to be conditioned by internal compulsions [i.e. disruptive drives, not “power”] and external causes.<sup>64</sup>

Lacking freedom and so destiny, an objectified being also lacks power of being and the capacity to provide resistance and definition that other selves require to become fully developed and actualized and to grow [in power of being]. In other words, by not doing justice to another, one removes the capacity of the other to do justice to others, including oneself. And when one does not receive justice from an other, one is objectified. The objectification of others is the result of the drive to self-destruction, the structure of destruction that contradicts the interdependence of the self and the world, preventing the fulfillment of human potential for goodness and actualization; what Tillich also calls the structure of evil.

#### **D. Faith**

Faith is the positive reaction to the human condition of essential finitude as manifested in freedom and destiny. It exists when a person responds to the threat of non-being by overcoming it with his/her self's power of being. Response by dominion or surrender to the threat of non-being carried in the challenge of one's own power by any other power of being is an act by the person against faith – the use of one's capacity for freedom to negate one's own freedom, one's self – an act of self-destruction. By contrast, faith is the positive, fulfilling and powerful reaction to the understanding of the bind of personal freedom and universal destiny.

Faith is self-transcendent, involving the increase of one's power of being which transcends the power of one's previous self. As self-transcendent it also transcends

---

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p.63

freedom and destiny as the elements which comprise the life of the self: "Faith... is an act of the total personality. It happens in the center of the personal life and includes all its elements. [...] They all are united in the act of faith. But faith is not the sum total of their impacts. It transcends every special impact as well as the totality of them and it has itself a decisive impact on each of them."<sup>65</sup>

Tillich describes the transcendence of faith as "ecstatic," acting outside of the drives of the personality but not destroying or excluding them. Rather, "[i]n the ecstasy of faith there is an awareness of truth and of ethical value; there are also past loves and hates, conflicts and reunions, individual and collective influences."<sup>66</sup> One stands "outside of oneself" but does not cease to be oneself, with all of the elements that comprise one's self, or "personal center." This ecstasy of faith, as awareness, is having and acknowledging the power of one's self to have choices, to be responsible and to cultivate understanding and recognition of one's own life as a whole with regard to the greater whole that is one's destiny. Likewise, if the personality is not centered then "...faith does not occur, and compulsions take its place. For faith is a matter of freedom. Freedom is nothing more than the possibility of centered personal acts. [...] In this respect freedom and faith are identical."<sup>67</sup>

Here Tillich's abstract ontology enters the everyday existence of the individual, the ahistorical (again) manifesting historically. He raises "...the question of how faith as a personal, centered act is related to the rational structure of man's personality which is manifest in his meaningful language, in his ability to know the true and to do the good, in his sense of beauty and justice. All this," he says, "...makes him a rational being." But

---

<sup>65</sup> *Dynamics of Faith*, p.5

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p.6

the human's essential nature is not "...identical with the rational character of his mind. Man is able to decide for or against reason, he is able to create beyond reason or to destroy below reason." And the power by which one is able to transcend the rational being that comprises and is comprised by one's world, one's self, is the power of one's self. Faith is this power, this ability and *act* (as opposed to potential) of self-transcendence; it is "...the embracing and centered act of the personality."<sup>68</sup>

"Faith" as choice or decision, the fulfillment of potentiality – a continuous act wherein freedom and destiny, dynamic and form reside in tension and flux -- can be considered another term for "being." Tillich discusses faith as freedom in terms of

...deliberation, decision, and responsibility. [...] Deliberation points to an act of weighing (*librare*) arguments and motives. [...] The self-centered person does the weighing and reacts as a whole, through his personal center, to the struggle of the motives. This reaction is called "decision." The word "decision," like the word "incision," involves the image of cutting. A decision cuts off possibilities, and these were real possibilities; otherwise no cutting would have been necessary. The person who does the "cutting" or the "excluding" must be beyond what he cuts off or excludes. His personal center has possibilities, but it is not identical with any of them.<sup>69</sup>

Every act, those considered moral as well as any considered immoral or amoral, is one of faith. Whether or not one is very conscious of one's essential finitude and all of the elements involved therein, one is responsible as an actor – one is always the "doer" of one's actions, thoughts, attitudes, etc.:

The word "responsibility" points to the obligation of the person who has freedom to respond if he is questioned about his decisions. ... He alone must respond, for his acts are determined neither by something outside of him nor by any part of him but by the centered totality of his being. Each

---

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p.5

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p.6

<sup>69</sup> *Systematic Theology. Vol. I*, p.184

of us is responsible for what has happened through the center of his self, the seat and organ of his freedom.<sup>70</sup>

But it is true that one's experience of freedom as "deliberation, decision, and responsibility" can be compromised in many ways -- for example, by lack of (access to) information on which to base a decision, causing one to have to answer for a decision made without understanding of what was being decided; a decision made under duress, action forced in any way – militarily, economically, etc.; or a decision made based on false or misleading information.<sup>71</sup> In other words, contingencies of all sorts, biological necessities, unknown or hidden influences can compromise the integrity of one's decision-making process, one's choices; because of universal destiny we are each responsible for the creation of all of the aspects of such situations and contingencies.

Interestingly, Tillich does not distinguish between contingent circumstances and ideal ones when he says:

Our destiny is that out of which our decisions arise; ...it is the concreteness of our being which makes all our decision *our* decisions. When I make a decision, it is the concrete totality of everything that constitutes my being which decides, not an epistemological subject. This refers to body structure, psychic strivings, spiritual character. It includes the communities to which I belong, the past unremembered and remembered, the environment which has shaped me, the world which has made an impact on me. It refers to all my former decisions. Destiny is not a strange power which determines what shall happen to me. It is myself as given, formed by nature, history, and myself.<sup>72</sup>

This description of the being that is responsible for decisions made clearly *includes* every type of contingency imaginable. Because Tillich sees the external world of the human as constructing and constructed by the human's centered self, though distinct, the world is

---

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p.184

<sup>71</sup> It is also true that one can choose not to access information that might compromise the (surface) integrity of decisions that one has already made and not yet carried out.

<sup>72</sup> *Systematic Theology. Vol. I*, p.184-5

not a force that is separate from the self. Therefore the person does not escape responsibility by reason of contingencies. In fact it is one's destiny to be affected by contingencies and one is as responsible for their existence as for the results of conscious and informed decisions.

Contingencies are otherwise known as universal destiny and they are a manifestation of humankind's essential estrangement and the impossibility of reunion with the ultimate. Destiny is two things – it is individual responsibility for one's own acts and for the acts of all humans; and it is the responsibility of humankind for its own acts, the acts of each individual: "...freedom is imbedded [*sic*] in the universal destiny of estrangement in such a way that in every free act the destiny of estrangement is involved and, vice versa, that the destiny of estrangement is actualized by all free acts. ...act is dependent on one's whole being, including free acts of the past and the destiny which is one's special, as well as mankind's universal destiny."<sup>73</sup>

The destiny of estrangement is that which prevents humans from reunion with themselves, with the world, and with the ultimate. It both creates and is the necessary counterpart to the finite freedom that is the defining characteristic of being, of life itself, without which characteristic there would be no human being. The destiny of estrangement prevents the attainment, through the power and volition of freedom, of infinity and perfection – and non-being: "Life is not unambiguously good. Then it would not be life but only the possibility of life. And life is not unambiguously evil. Then non-being would have conquered being. But life is ambiguous in all its expressions."<sup>74</sup>

Likewise, the human being is not absolutely responsible, or determined by, the actions of

---

<sup>73</sup> *Systematic Theology, Vol. II*, p.56; my underline.

<sup>74</sup> *Love, Power, Justice*, p.115

his/her world; nor is one infinitely free or undetermined – existence is both choice and contingency.

This is humanity's "tragic guilt" and a person can respond to this with faith or with anxiety and self-destruction. Within this situation creative justice can only exist as an ideal against which the reality of tributive justice can be measured.

This state, of faith, is that wherein imperfect justice can most closely approximate perfect justice, or for Reinhold Niebuhr, the law of love. Thus the understanding of the ontological perspective is a strong starting point for an examination of Niebuhr's thought on ethics and justice. In the next chapter many close parallels between Tillich and Niebuhr will be seen.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Reinhold Niebuhr's "Impossible Ethic"**

My aim in this chapter is to clarify Niebuhr's concept of the Christian gospel ethic as "impossible," and explain the sort of justice that he views as possible and desirable. One goal of this task is to demonstrate the complementarity of Tillich and Niebuhr's thought on ethics. I will then be able to discuss in my conclusion the usefulness of their concepts as ethical motivation and as an interpretation of some injustices and ethical dilemmas in the contemporary situation of global chains of production, sweatshop labor, and consumer conscience.

I will begin my explanation with the idea of ahistorical reality manifested in social encounters. From there I will move to where Niebuhr differentiates himself from Tillich and criticizes Christian inaction and acquiescence to injustice, arguing for the moral necessity of Christian action against injustice. I will briefly explain Niebuhr's view of the inevitability of conflict and, finally, I will discuss Niebuhr's definitions of justice and injustice, and note how they compare to and align with Tillich's ideas of the same.

Tillich and Niebuhr's most basic similarity is their conception of the human condition of existence and of the human being as the juncture between the finite and the infinite. Relatedly, they share the fundamental understanding that there is an ahistorical, abstract reality that structures every temporal encounter. This abstract reality is the

united totality of the infinite, the finite, and their dialectical relation of estrangement.

The dialectical relation is the source of Tillich's ontological polarities, some of which are present in Niebuhr's discourse, for example the estrangement of finite humanity from its infinite essence. For both theorists this dialectic can result in either self-transcendence or in sin. The recognition of one's finitude in the presence of infinity will cause one, out of anxiety, to either strive for unity with the ultimate or to (try to) displace the ultimate with one's self. In what can be viewed as a summary of the moral ontology of both thinkers, Niebuhr states:

Thus when life is seen in its total dimension, the sense of God and the sense of sin are involved in the same act of self-consciousness; for to be self-conscious is to see the self as a finite object separated from essential reality; but also related to it, or there could be no knowledge of separation. If this religious feeling is translated into moral terms it becomes the tension between the principle of love and the impulse of egoism, between the obligation to affirm the ultimate unity of life and the urge to establish the ego against all competing forms of life.<sup>75</sup>

For Niebuhr, this tension emerges most painfully in the situation of the ethically conscious individual who must participate in the political world on his/her own and, more poignantly, as part of a larger group.

Historical conflict is viewed as the manifestation of human estrangement from the infinite, the condition that prevents us from implementing perfect justice, behaviour that we know is the most moral, whereas instead we behave selfishly, engendering conflict. In *Moral Man and Immoral Society*<sup>76</sup> Niebuhr lists numerous examples of what he calls "one of the tragedies of the human spirit: its inability to conform its collective life to its individual ideals. As individuals," he continues, "men believe that they ought to love and

---

<sup>75</sup> *Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, p.67; see also *Love, Power, Justice*, re. Love, e.g. p 112: the reunion of the separated.

<sup>76</sup> (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons) 1932.

serve each other and establish justice between each other. As racial, economic and national groups they take for themselves, whatever their power can command.”<sup>77</sup> While his description of the individual is perhaps optimistic, Niebuhr’s examples of historical manifestations of the ahistorical structure of the individual ethic versus the group politic do comprise an interesting list of forerunners to contemporary states of affairs, including global financial groups and agreements.

He first describes as “the tendency of power to destroy its very *raison d’être*” the transition of land ownership from nomadic agrarian and hunting practices to the exploitative feudal class structure, that occurred in Egypt, Peru, China, Japan, Rome and Greece (and probably elsewhere).<sup>78</sup> He then turns to wars that were “veiled and exalted” as the “symbolic expression and vicarious satisfaction” of the frustration and desires of the populace, when in reality the wars were fought on behalf of the ambitions of dominant groups. He gives as an example Napoleon’s “lust for power” presented as “the tool of French patriotism and as the instrument of revolutionary fervor.”<sup>79</sup> This analysis applies equally well to the actions of wealthy nations and global financial groups with regard to the claim that they promote well-being and stability in less-developed countries. The stability sought on behalf of the developing nations is not that which will lead to independence, but that which will make exploitation of their resources easier.

He also describes the rhetoric of sacred duty and moral responsibility employed by powerful groups to justify their unjust actions. He gives as examples the World War I nationalistic works of French and German intellectuals, America’s unprovoked “retaliations” during the Spanish-American War over Cuba, and the policies toward the

---

<sup>77</sup> *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, p. 9.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p.9-10.

Philippines ensuing from that war, by which that country was taken by America according to “the fiction that the fortunes of war had made [the United States] the unwilling recipients and custodians of the Philippine Islands.”<sup>80</sup> Similarly sacred duties were undertaken on behalf of Providence at the Treaty of Versailles, the division of Morocco by France and Spain, the passing of the Japanese Exclusion Act, and the colonisation of India (and, of course, North America) by the British and the French.<sup>81</sup> Certainly the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, or the current situation in Palestine have been justified by similar rationales as well.

Adam Smith and other early free market proponents argued for their economic vision on similarly transcendent grounds. The “invisible hand” of Providence, present in God-given human nature, they said, could manifest its will most freely by allowing human self-interest to assert itself without the constraints of human government. While for some the overtly sacred rationale still exists, for many of the groups addressed in this thesis the previously transcendent “invisible hand” has become simply the market itself.

Niebuhr speaks of a “full dimension” of reality, which is the totality of reality: the transcendent, the immanent, the finite and the infinite – all of the ontological structures and relations described by Tillich. This total reality results in the ambiguities and tensions of existence as we specifically know it, and as it may be abstractly described. Total reality’s natural unity is corrupted and this corruption results in existential tension,

---

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p.17-18.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p.97-100.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p.107-111.

conflict and self-destruction or moral evil.<sup>82</sup> Thus corruption, or estrangement, is not limited to the historical, but is constitutive of existence as a whole. One must distinguish between the concepts “ahistorical” and “transcendent.” Though the transcendent is not itself corrupt, corruption is part of the ahistorical relation of the transcendent and the immanent. Both thinkers agree that without the immanent, or without evil, one could not know the transcendent or the good. Though they are not united, being in fact estranged and opposed, these polarities depend on one another to exist and together create a whole. This is the ahistorical reality that leads to the conflict that is constitutive of existence.

Since, according to Niebuhr, the source of human conflict is ahistorical, the solution to these conflicts must also be rooted in ahistorical abstract reality; and just as ahistorical tensions manifest in temporal conflicts, so the ahistorically-rooted solution must manifest in historical relations. Niebuhr asserts that the only justice rooted “in the ultimate and transcendent unity of reality and not in tentative and superficial harmonies of existence which human ingenuity may contrive”<sup>83</sup> is that embodied by the gospel ethic of perfect love. This ethic, the “law of love,” is that wherein (as with Tillich’s showing of justice toward the other) one neither dominates the other nor surrenders one’s power of being to the other (forcing them to dominate), but loves the other as one loves oneself and God – i.e. makes the other one’s self, with no self-interested motives.

The achievement of justice thus depends on the existence and recognition of values which reach beyond moral inventions based on human experience; “A universe of value in which there is no dimension of depth is rent asunder along its thin surfaces by

---

<sup>82</sup> The ontological idea that being springs from non-being is an interpretation of the symbolism of the biblical myth of creation that I believe is shared by Tillich and Niebuhr. The similarities of Niebuhr’s and Tillich’s thoughts on power seem to reflect this common foundation.

<sup>83</sup> *Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, p. 113.

the forces of nature and history if it is not held together in a larger universe, the heights of which transcend the conflicts of the moment,”<sup>84</sup> which conflicts are only momentary, not lasting. They are historical instances of the ahistorical reality of conflict and tension in estranged existence.

### **A. The Impossible Ethic**

The structure of the total reality is characterized by dynamic tensions between finitude and the infinite that, though ontologically basic and thus eternal, manifest in temporal history, specifically in encounters between humans who as finite creatures aware of the infinite exist as a juncture between the ultimate and the penultimate. The tension that is most central for both Tillich and Niebuhr is that which exists as a result of humanity’s self-consciousness of its separation, as finite, from the eternal.

The self-consciousness results in what was described above, the efforts, driven by human inherent egoism, to overcome one’s finiteness by making oneself absolute, or infinite.<sup>85</sup> This is what Niebuhr terms “sin” and what Tillich has called the will to domination – the tendency of the unrestrained will-to-power.

The other form that this tension takes is what Tillich calls “*eros*” – the drive to reunite with the ultimate. Niebuhr describes this as “perfect love,” which encompasses the desire, drive, and fulfillment of this longing, *eros*. Like *eros*, perfect love is unattainable in the finite world, making it an impossible ideal, one that humans can imagine but not realize.<sup>86</sup>

---

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p.207-208.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p.82.

<sup>86</sup> For Niebuhr, the sense of evil is proof that the ideal of a perfect love “is something more than the product of a morbidly sensitive religious fantasy.” *Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, p.62. Since total reality

Because perfect love is an emanation of the infinite, that which cannot be destroyed, “[a]nything less than perfect love in human life is destructive of life”,<sup>87</sup> that is, anything less than perfect love must by logical definition contain an element of finitude, which means that it must one day cease to be. Because humans are finite they contain, by nature, that which is destructive of life and so they are incapable of perfect love, even though they may strive to achieve it. The polar opposite of perfect love, the drive to union with the ultimate, is the drive to overcoming and becoming the ultimate, i.e., unchecked egoism. Thus, for Niebuhr, egoism is inherently destructive of life, while selfless love is inherently creative or fulfilling of life.

The demand of the love ethic can now be seen as the demand for that of which humans, as finite beings, are constitutionally incapable. It demands “the sublimation of egoism... [and] complete disinterestedness...”<sup>88</sup>. The ethic is fulfilled by meeting the needs of the other “...without a careful computation of relative needs. ...without carefully weighing and comparing his needs with those of the self.”<sup>89</sup> The perfect love that leads to true justice is a mutual relation of selflessness between one self or being and all other selves. In Tillich’s ontological language it is the just equilibrium of the powers of beings in encounter, neither dominant nor surrendering. Nonetheless it is mutual competition and conflict, characterized by egocentricities and injustice.

The impossible ethic is a result of the tension that exists between the ideal uniting love – agape – and the actual human situation. It exists because of the pull of the ideal on

---

includes the finite and the infinite, good and evil, the ideal and the actual; and since humans embody the characteristics of the universe, one can know one is finite and one can recognize evil because one has the capacity for self-transcendence. This allows one to envisage the “others” of finitude and evil: infinity and perfection. Tillich and Niebuhr both employ this logic.

<sup>87</sup> *Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, p.62.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p.37.

<sup>89</sup> *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, p. 57.

human self-consciousness of “the contingent and arbitrary realities of its physical existence,”<sup>90</sup> what Niebuhr calls true morality, the sense of responsibility to the will of God, the desire for unity with God, and the “conscious impulse of unity between life and life”, that is, person-to-person justice.<sup>91</sup>

The dimension of depth in the consciousness of religion creates the tension between what is and what ought to be. [...] Every truly moral act seeks to establish what ought to be, because the agent feels obligated to the ideal, though historically unrealized, as being the order of life in its more essential reality.<sup>92</sup>

Despite the impossibility of actualizing perfect love – in fact, because of the impossibility – Niebuhr argues that this is the most relevant form of morality and thus the real significance of Hebrew-Christian religion: “the tension between the ideal and the real which it creates can be maintained at any point in history, no matter what the moral and social achievement, because its ultimate ideal always transcends every historical fact and reality.”<sup>93</sup>

Other paradoxes also emerge in efforts to explain the logic and meaning of the impossible gospel ethic. This underscores its relevance, speaking to the ambiguities and irrationalities of human life as much as to the rational aspects. While the most prominent is perhaps its ironic position as an utterly inaccessible standard, more of an oxymoron is its status as a “possible impossibility” or vice versa. Niebuhr’s work demonstrates the paradoxical nature of the ethic in numerous ways.

For one, the law of love requires faith in the ahistorical total structure of reality, which negates our own experiences of fractured actuality, because in the historical world

---

<sup>90</sup> *Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, p.66.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p.44.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p.17-18.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p.28.

the unity does not and cannot exist. In other words, one must believe that the unity, agape, is possible, yet simultaneously accept that it is impossible.<sup>94</sup>

Another paradox experienced is the simultaneous capacity and incapacity for self-transcendence. Though one can recognize one's sin and even, by orienting oneself by the law of love, transcend one's egoistic tendencies, at the same time one cannot escape one's finitude. This facet of estranged existence demonstrates itself in instances when though one may will oneself to do good one commits evil despite this and, because one is a free-willed creature, this evil that was committed against one's will was a freely-committed act of one's will. These paradoxes relate to Tillich's ontological view of being as polarities in equilibrium. The latter example parallels the ontological structure, and the previous examples can be explained by it. Though the finite self may seek to transcend itself, it can never gain the infinite because it would then cease to be a finite self and rather than transcend it would destroy itself.

Third, and similar to Tillich's point regarding the interdependency of estrangement and *eros*, or the drive to self-transcendence, is what Niebuhr calls the "paradox of the love commandment":

To command love is a paradox; for love cannot be commanded or demanded. To love God with all our hearts and all our minds means that every cleavage in human existence is overcome. But the fact that such an attitude is commanded proves that the cleavage is not overcome, the command comes from one side of reality to the other, from essence to existence.<sup>95</sup>

The law of love is to overcome the law of love.

Because the maintenance of the tension between the ideal and the actual is so central to the relevance of the love ethic, Niebuhr cautions strongly against seeing

---

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., p.36, 53, 134.

historical gains as more than they are. He notes numerous times the tendency to see temporary contextual gains in ethics as models of eternal truths, and the harmful “moral imperialism” that this can inflict. His statement, “The ethic of Jesus... [must] be confused neither with the ascetic ethic of world-denying religions nor with the prudential morality of naturalism, designed to guide good people to success and happiness in this world,”<sup>96</sup> demonstrates the importance that the ethic be relevant. It also shows its complete separation from even the most benign self-interest. It must also be distinguished from the ethics of rationalism, which relies on the eventual achievement of reasonable levels of justice by intelligent agreement and cooperation.<sup>97</sup>

Niebuhr provides numerous reasons for maintaining the distinction. First, all standards besides the impossible ethic rely on some measure of coercion. Second, such human-made ethical systems inevitably neglect some essential aspect of human nature or existence. For instance, Niebuhr points out that rationalism neglects the irrational parts of human being, “every natural emotion of sympathy and pity, of consanguinity and human solidarity,” and for that reason alone is in part irrelevant.<sup>98</sup>

The third reason for maintaining the distinction is stated by Langdon Gilkey:

the primal insecurity of the contingent creature who is anxiously aware of its contingency, and the subsequent insecurity of the creature who has denied that anxiety, sought to overcome it, and deceived itself about both... the self desperately hides its real situation from itself...<sup>99</sup>

---

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p.188.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p.43.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p.187.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., p.188-189.

<sup>99</sup> Gilkey, Langdon. On Niebuhr: A Theological Study. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press) 2001. p. 140.

Ethics established by human contextual standards lead to anxiety and dishonesty, fuelled by the egoism one seeks to quell but cannot, which in turn lead to an idolatrous and fearful insistence on the eternal validity of what are finite values.

The final important aspect of Niebuhr's impossible ethic is its characteristic of imprudence. It is by its imprudence that the gospel ethic most strongly differentiates itself from naturalistic and rationalistic ethics which take egoism into account and incorporate it, thereby believing it neutralized or redirected.

The absolutism and perfectionism of Jesus' love ethic sets itself uncompromisingly not only against the natural self-regarding impulses, but against the necessary prudent defenses of the self, required because of the egoism of others. It does not establish a connection with the horizontal points of a political or social ethic or with the diagonals which a prudential individual ethic draws between the moral ideal and the facts of a given situation. It has only a vertical dimension between the loving will of God and the will of man.<sup>100</sup>

In other words, "The justification for these demands is put in purely religious and not in socio-moral terms. We are to forgive because God forgives; we are to love our enemies because God is impartial in his love."<sup>101</sup> Because all are human, all are equally estranged from and connected with the infinite. All have a power of being that exists and every person requires equal amounts of justice to thrive and survive, making each person equally vulnerable. The love ethic is not justified by personal gain, nor argued for logically or on behalf of those suffering. It is not enlightened self-interest, which helps to explain its impossibility. It is to be executed because God commands it, without thought of reward, even though one is rewarded by its execution, by justice. It is not merely deeds, it is orientation of one's entire being.

---

<sup>100</sup> *Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, p.45.

## **B. Self-Interest and the Law of Love**

The impossibility of human fulfillment of the gospel ethic ideal has led to various misinterpretations and self-interested interpretations of the love ethic's transcendent view of human history. Niebuhr discusses various doctrines and tendencies of orthodox and liberal Christianity: apocalypticism, social conservatism, piety, perfectionism, moralism or "moralistic utopianism", naturalism, sacramentalism, and rationalism, as ways in which the love ethic has been corrupted into acquiescence to unjust authorities. The ease and multiplicity of ways with which the law of love is and has been employed for injustice rather than justice is important to note for Niebuhr's discussion of relative and "basic" justice as opposed to the search for "perfect justice" among humans. Ignoring imperfect possibilities while aspiring to the perfect love of the impossible love ethic is, he argues, hypocritical and engenders worse or equally bad injustices than if one were not transcendently inclined at all.

The apocalyptic view of history is a good example of what Niebuhr means when he says, "One of the vices of a really profound religion is that its insights into the ultimate problems of the human spirit frequently betray it into indifference toward the immediate problems of justice and equity in human relations."<sup>102</sup> Though in a sense the gospel ethic is eschatological in that it cannot be fulfilled in human history, it does not, as St. Paul did in consideration of the imminence of the Kingdom of God, counsel indifference or contempt toward temporal relationships because the world will soon end.<sup>103</sup>

---

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p.50.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p.88.

<sup>103</sup> See *Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, p.58 for discussion.

The divine ordinance of government has also been emphasized in orthodox thought. Natural determinism and piety, regarding God as in minute control of nature and history, accept and support historical occurrences as divinely sanctioned. In the early church this yielded the concept of “divine right,” and the support by Christians of even wicked rulers as “meant by God to be a punishment for evil people”.<sup>104</sup> Such a fatalistic attitude, writes Niebuhr, was counselled by orthodox Christian leaders, both Catholic and Protestant, from Augustine to John Calvin, and clearly this counsel would manifest socially as acquiescence to injustice.<sup>105</sup>

Though this attitude of piety toward government has become less common, Niebuhr notes that Christian pessimism, which also supports government as of God, continues within modern orthodoxy. Understanding creation and humanity as sinful before all other characteristics, this pessimism supports the divine ordinance of government as a means provided by God to prevent the world from falling into anarchy. Because the human is sinful and incapable of good, s/he must submit him/herself to a social order that will prevent the destructive eruption of natural human tendencies. “This logic,” says Niebuhr, “...neatly dismisses the Christian ideal from any immediate relevance to political issues.”

The submission counselled by pietism and pessimism was later reinforced, by Luther (during the Peasants’ Revolt), with Christian perfectionism. Citing the commands to “turn the other cheek” and to forgive “not seven times, but seventy-seven times,”<sup>106</sup>

---

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., p.143; *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, p. 76-77. See also *Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, p.37.

<sup>105</sup> *Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, p.142-144. Niebuhr also notes on page 144, briefly, that Calvin’s eventual criticism of rulers for placing themselves in God’s stead – which is a usurpation of divine law – led to a later use of naturalism to support Christian participation in political rebellion.

<sup>106</sup> Matthew 5:38 and 18:21-22.

perfectionist dogma entrenched even further the acquiescence to the violence experienced by the people under unjust rule and gave divine sanction to the complacency of Christian leaders. Though Niebuhr allows that “some of the political ineptness of Christian orthodoxy must be explained in terms of honest confusions derived from Christian pessimism and Christian piety,” he views the introduction of perfectionism from above as the use of Christianity as a “witting... tool of class interests.”<sup>107</sup>

In turn, Niebuhr summarizes the modern liberal Christian approach to injustice and conflict as “a gay and easy confidence. Men had been ignorantly selfish. They would now be taught the law of love.” Niebuhr calls this conflation of the law of love with rationalism, variously: “sentimental illusions,” “naïve optimism,” “moralistic utopianism,” and “futile moralism.”<sup>108</sup> Though liberal moralism perhaps seems to promote complacency less than doctrines of divine sanction, Niebuhr argues that it is not more useful for gaining justice. He points to this “religio-moral version of *laissez-faire* economics,”<sup>109</sup> as unrealistic about human relations.

Politics, that is, social coercion as opposed to individual freedom, presents a perennial problem for liberal Christianity which believes in the attainment of justice for all yet opposes the use of coercion both for and against justice. Though it recognizes that relative justice can only be attained through the use of social coercion, it copes with this by condemning conflict and hoping that one day humanity will realize “that love and cooperation are superior to conflict and coercion, and that therefore they must be and will

---

<sup>107</sup> *Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, p.146. By “from above” I mean “by dominant interests,” as opposed to “from below,” which would infer a grassroots forces supporting perfectionism. This idea comes from Richard Falk in “The Making of Global Citizenship” in Jeremy Brecher, John Childs, and Jill Cutler (eds.), *Global Visions: Beyond the New World Order*. (Boston: South End Press) 1993, p. 39-49.

<sup>108</sup> *Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, p.153-155, 163.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p.155.

be established.”<sup>110</sup> This, Niebuhr argues, is preaching a hope for something which has never happened in all of history. Though this sounds similar to the hope of the impossible ethic, it differs in that the liberal hope is not for a transcendent possibility but for a temporal impossibility.

Attempts by rational moralism to create change are carried out through the ethical conduct of individuals. While individual moral conduct is obviously not an unjust act, says Niebuhr, “it is necessary to insist that the moral achievement of individual good will is not a substitute for the mechanisms of social control. It may perfect and purify, but it cannot create basic justice.”<sup>111</sup>

The orthodox and liberal doctrines, as Niebuhr describes them, share common ground. They all lead to social apathy and thus tacit agreement, they are all idealistic and not realistic, and they all rely on ethics which do not derive solely from the law of love but are constructed around partial or flawed interpretations, and misappropriations, of the gospel teachings. As discussed earlier, human-devised ethical systems invariably, even if not obviously, spring from the urge to dominate, and therefore are inevitably unjust. Niebuhr’s discussion of the complacency of the early church demonstrates this well.

The doctrines differ in that liberal rationalism borrows from naturalism the belief in the intrinsic goodness of humans. It is thus readily “betrayed into dependence upon corruptions of its own ethos and culture.”<sup>112</sup> By contrast, the orthodox orientation toward the transcendent is not worldly enough. Nonetheless, though from different directions, both arrive at irrelevance.

---

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., p.159.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., p.163.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., p.27.

This critique by Niebuhr is also a practical rendering of Tillich's "structures of self-destruction."<sup>113</sup> The acquiescence and surrender to injustices compelled by these misinterpretations are compelled by non-recognition of the estranged human condition and thus of the limitations of human possibility. When one ignores or is ignorant of this reality, it becomes possible for finite beings and their inventions to (falsely) claim status as absolute being. The ontological result of this claim, since finite beings are in conflict, is the absolute domination of other beings.

In contrast to these responses to the impossible possibility of the perfect law, is the alternative response of faith, which responds to existential anxiety with the recognition of the interdependence of all beings and their actions. This response's relation to the infinite is one of yearning for unity, rather than yearning for becoming. However, faith too risks injustice if its focus is only on the transcendent.

Faith, according to Niebuhr, is and must be morally responsible. It must be able to speak "both *to* power and *about* power."<sup>114</sup> And in order to be morally responsible, faith must remain morally relevant. The only way to maintain such relevance is by always having an ideal for history that has not been met, i.e., by maintaining a moral tension between the actual and the ideal. Such a tension means, additionally, that neither the transcendent nor the immanent can become absolute in the pursuit of morality or justice.

The power of the gospel ethic is its relevance to all history, in part by incorporating no (overt) contextual references and not being a philosophical response to

---

<sup>113</sup> *Systematic Theology, Vol.II.*, p.68

<sup>114</sup> Patterson, Eric. "Niebuhr and His Contemporaries: Introduction to Christian Realism" in Eric Patterson, ed. *The Christian Realists: Reassessing the Contributions of Niebuhr and his Contemporaries*. (Lanham: University Press of America, Inc.) 2003, p. 17. Source referred to as "Patterson.1" in notes from this point.

any specific situation as, for example, Marxism was. So too Niebuhr, in arguing for the pursuit of basic justice by means of the law of love, supplies no more specific guidelines on political issues than “that its adherents follow a middle path between the twin pitfalls of utopianism and resignation, sentimentality and cynicism.”<sup>115</sup>

Niebuhr’s interpretation of the gospel ethic, however, is not a middle path where the polarity of the transcendent and the historical are muted for an ethic which is neither challenging nor effective. This was the case for the doctrines he just described, where either both polarities were muted, or one was absolutized over the other, creating a self-destructive doctrine oriented either entirely toward the transcendent or not at all. To Niebuhr, the impossible possibility is “a dynamic relationship between the ideal of love and the principles of justice,”<sup>116</sup> in some sense parallel to the dynamic (and conflicting) relationship between ethics and politics, freedom and destiny, the individual and society. Though perfect love and perfect justice will not arrive in human history, they nonetheless play a role in the creation of imperfect love and justice. Says Niebuhr, “...a religion which holds love to be the final law of life stultifies itself if it does not support equal justice as a political and economic approximation of the ideal of love.”<sup>117</sup>

A religion, or group, or individual, oriented in life by the perfect law may find it difficult to settle on a definition of justice that is imperfect. There will always be some aspect of finite justice, even if that aspect remains hidden, that does not meet the moral desires at work. This is constitutive of the relationship between the ethical and the political. Denying justice to another, albeit imperfect justice, is equivalent to withholding recognition from the other; one’s moral desires become one’s ego, made absolute:

---

<sup>115</sup> Richard Fox, quoted in Patterson.1, p. 17.

<sup>116</sup> *Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, p.131.

“...every higher principle of order to which the soul might attach itself, in the effort to rescue meaning from chaos, is discovered, upon analysis, to have new possibilities of evil in it...”<sup>118</sup>

Niebuhr’s view of the relation between the individual and society, involves the dynamic freedom and destiny outlined in Chapter One, though less stringently delineated in his work than in Tillich’s. Niebuhr terms the conflict, or tension, between the individual and society a conflict between ethics and politics, “a constant and seemingly irreconcilable conflict between the needs of society and the imperative of a sensitive conscience.”<sup>119</sup> As noted in Tillich’s ontological approach, one is never truly alone in one’s own world, or in control of one’s own path and destiny. One’s existence is shaped constantly by the experiences, potentials and fulfilled destinies of every other individual, that is, by society.

The needs of society are the space required for the existence of other individuals, resulting in contingencies on one’s own experiences. The needs are also the natural and social necessities of remaining alive and relatively free within one’s environment and society. In order to keep the things that keep one alive, one must enter into some social agreement that will inevitably, eventually, conflict with someone else’s conscience or wants, thereby affecting the moral existence of every individual. Yet, although “[t]he society in which each man lives is at once the basis for, and the nemesis of, that fullness of life which each man seeks,”<sup>120</sup> humans are free to choose, decide, and act. No

---

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., p.120.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., p.68.

<sup>119</sup> *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, p. 257.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., p.1; of course there is the option of asceticism and begging, but in that case what you beg for has to come from someone else’s participation in the above social order. Not to mention that this doesn’t remove a person from the social order, it simply puts them elsewhere. Niebuhr also views asceticism as foreign to prophetic religions.

occurrence or action, “no cultural or spiritual enterprise... can be explained purely in terms of the special social circumstances which condition and corrupt it.”<sup>121</sup> Individuals “will always have the opportunity of loyalty to the highest canons of personal morality,” therefore the individual remains morally responsible for his/her actions.<sup>122</sup>

Thus for Niebuhr, like Tillich, one is free yet constrained (or vice versa). Because of the human capacity for self-transcendence, for stepping outside of oneself and viewing the larger picture, humans have a claim to freedom outside of contingencies. We are not utterly determined despite the inescapable “fate of becoming, and being used as, an instrument of relative and partial social interests.”<sup>123</sup> This paradox of the human condition is a recurrent theme for both Niebuhr and Tillich.

As well, however, because society consists of many individuals, each individual is also responsible for the acts of groups they are part of. This is, as also found in Tillich, the universal destiny of tragic guilt and the inescapable contingency on individual freedom, as well as the mechanism of society’s intrinsic egoism. It cannot help but infringe on individual freedom and be thus dominant and self-destructive. Though an individual may aspire to the highest ethical conduct, a collective is incapable of such aspirations. Thus, for Niebuhr, exists the perpetual conflict between person and group – and this also underscores the claim that only the gospel ethic is truly moral. Any ethical system devised in history will be unavoidably self-interested, because it is born of conflict, and thus will end in evil and self-destruction.

---

<sup>121</sup> *Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, p.130.

<sup>122</sup> *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, p. 273 and 275.

<sup>123</sup> *Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, p.130.

### C. Justice

According to Niebuhr, the law of love incorporates a realistic understanding of human egoism, irrationality, and political society with transcendent ideals that provide an always challenging standard by which we can critique ourselves and improve. But Niebuhr also recognizes that what is possible in the moral life of an individual is much more difficult to achieve for the moral life of a group, and that this impinges on the individual's ability to lead a consistently ethical life. Moreover, the solution is not for the individual to withdraw from society. Due to one's own position as a contingent factor in the lives of others, one has a moral responsibility toward the various groups that one is member of even if one were to withdraw. A moral orientation toward the ultimate demands the giving of justice to our "others," but because we are estranged from perfect justice, this balance of mutuality is not possible – we rather lean more toward domination or surrender, that is, injustice.

Both justice and injustice, according to Niebuhr's conception of the human condition, are rooted in humanity's self-consciousness and resultant capacity for self-transcendence. In all such consciousness, with which humans are both "gifted and cursed,"

there is a note of protest against this finiteness. It may express itself in religion by the desire to be absolved in infinitude. On the secular level it expresses itself in man's effort to universalize himself and give his life a significance beyond himself. The root of all imperialism is therefore in all self consciousness...

but so, then, must be the root of selfless choices, or (equal) justice.<sup>124</sup>

Here, as with Tillich, one must distinguish the various possible types of justice.

Within Niebuhr's discussion are natural law, basic justice (also called imperfect, equal, or

relative), and perfect justice, or “perfect love.” These three conceptions basically parallel Tillich’s three types: intrinsic, tributive, and creative.

Natural law is the absolute right to freedom and equality embedded in everything by virtue of its existence, or, by virtue of its being created by God. This law differs from the law of love in that it can be and has been discovered and argued for by reason.

Though it is an intrinsic and created characteristic, the natural law itself cannot support the pursuit of justice because, like all moral laws discovered or invented by humans, it is easy prey for the interests of individuals and classes.<sup>125</sup>

The justice of natural law is “the harmony of self with other, and of the self with itself,”<sup>126</sup> that same justice envisioned by rational moralism. Ideally, humans should gravitate toward such an existence, since it is the most truly beneficial for all, but in actuality the natural state of unity is corrupted and so humans also gravitate, irrationally, to self-destructive egoism: “Laws are not automatically obeyed, whether the laws of the state or the higher law of reason.”<sup>127</sup>

Perfect justice, or the perfect law, is the law of love, as described earlier. Much like Tillich’s creative justice, the perfect law can exist only in a state of uncorrupted unity between the parts of the total reality. So, though it is a possibility in transcendent reality, it is an impossible goal for temporal existence. Nonetheless it provides a critical standard that transcends every rationally conceived standard, necessary since the latter, as stated,

---

<sup>124</sup> *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, p. 1, 42.

<sup>125</sup> For example, see Niebuhr’s discussion of the early Church’s inheritance of natural law from the Stoics, which came with a distinction that allowed the insistence “in the same breath on the freedom and equality of all men before God and on the rightfulness of slavery as God’s way of punishing and controlling a sinful world.” *Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, p.133.

One might also argue that a dual natural law exists right now, at least implicitly, in the huge discrepancy between the rights that are argued for for citizens of wealthy nations versus those argued for citizens of less-developed countries; particularly the “right to shop” vs. the “right to health.”

<sup>126</sup> Gilkey, 99.

are easily misused. This critical task is the place of perfect justice in relation to imperfect justice.

The necessity and functions of basic justice are outlined efficiently in the following quote:

The ideal possibility for men involved in any social situation may always be defined in terms of freedom and equality. Their highest good consists in freedom to develop the essential potentialities of their nature without hindrance. There can be no development of personality without discipline; but the ideal discipline is self-imposed, or at least not imposed by agents who have other motives than the enhancement of the ultimate values of human life. Since human beings live in a society in which other human beings are competing with them for the opportunity of a fuller development of life, the next highest good is equality...<sup>128</sup>

The first sentence of this paragraph summarizes the principles of natural law, which principles are also in truth only a transcendent possibility since, again, nature is corrupted. Second, the “highest good,” that is, the ideal human state of existence is the ability to self-transcend to the point of unity with the ultimate, unhindered by contingencies of necessity or by conflict with competing beings, since all beings would be oriented toward the same end. The freedom to develop essential potentialities is the right to self-transcend and the freedom to make choices. Though in reality this development toward the good is coerced, true moral goodness defined as uncoerced orientation to transcendent ideals.

Ideally, the individual and the collective would naturally self-transcend or, move toward the good. However, and here Niebuhr shifts to the admission of the historical into possibilities of justice, society consists of conflict and cooperation, and so the next highest good to strive for is equality: “Since the law of love demands that all life be

---

<sup>127</sup> *Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, p.186.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, p.134.

affirmed, the principle that all conflicting claims of life be equally affirmed is a logical approximation of the law of love in a world in which conflict is inevitable.”<sup>129</sup>

For Niebuhr, a realistic view of the requirements of social justice must involve the understanding that it will not be established without some measure of coercion: “Society must strive for justice even if it is forced to use means such as self-assertion, resistance, coercion and perhaps resentment,” even though they go against the ethical wishes of most individuals.<sup>130</sup> Ethics which wish to exclude coercion, or even violence without qualification, are unrealistic, naïve, and ultimately irresponsible.<sup>131</sup> Even political action that claims to be non-violent must harm someone, as those who benefit indirectly from injustices will be deprived.<sup>132</sup>

This is not to say that Niebuhr proposes the use of all forms of coercion at will. Rather, since one has access to an ascending scale of morality according to one’s freedom, there are not only greater and lesser goods, but greater and lesser evils.<sup>133</sup> Since justice involves arbitration between conflicting powers, some will have to be suppressed in order for others to be allowed. “Moral goodwill,” he says,

...will never be so impartial as to persuade any group to subject its interests completely to an inclusive social ideal. The spirit of love may preserve a certain degree of appreciation for the common weaknesses and

---

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., p.136. The perfect law also can’t exist because the fact that it is a “law” infers that there is behavior happening that contradicts it. If the perfect law was fulfilled, there would be no (need for) law anymore. See Ibid., p.134-35.

<sup>130</sup> *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, p. 257.

<sup>131</sup> *Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, p.156; 169-171.

<sup>132</sup> Niebuhr uses the example of Gandhi’s non-violent boycott of English cotton (see page 114 of Chapter Two) . A more recent and topical example is the boycott campaign on Nike soccer balls after it was found out that they were being handsewn in Pakistan by “home-workers,” with production contracts from factories, who had their children helping with the work. Public outcry resulted in the company terminating the use of home-work. Many already poor women consequently lost income, since they had been working at home because they were not able to work at factories, due to children, location, etc.

<sup>133</sup> *Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, p.182; Patterson.1, p. 8-9.

common aspirations which bind men together above the areas of social conflict. But it cannot prevent the conflict.<sup>134</sup>

Moreover, the use of rational analysis is the use of an instrument of coercion, expressing “moral distrust,” no matter how much the law relies on and trusts the rational goodness of the subject. “To some degree the conflict between the purest individual morality and an adequate political policy must therefore remain.”<sup>135</sup>

The message to take from Niebuhr’s arguments regarding justice is that inaction regarding injustice is not neutral but is itself unjust. Though the means by which justice may be established, as well as the forms of justice that can exist, may be problematic and even, in ways, unjust, it is more just to act on behalf of freedom and equality than to withdraw for fear of perpetuating injustice.

Though Niebuhr offers no specific advice on what sorts of actions ought to be taken – fitting, considering his task here is to describe an existent transcendent ethic and how it is ahistorically relevant, rather than manufacture a new rational ethic – this adds to rather than removes the relevance of his position on the ethical life. The lack of any strict regulations on who is right and wrong, or specifics on what to adhere to or avoid (other than rationalistic morality based on natural law) gives the impossible ethic a flexibility that makes it a relevant lens through which to examine human behaviour and injustices over a range of cultures and times. This is particularly useful when considering cross-cultural issues such as the one focused on in this thesis.

---

<sup>134</sup> *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, p. 272-273.

<sup>135</sup> *Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, p.135-136.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Wal-Mart, the Global Market, and “Cheap Labor”**

Part of my aim in this chapter is to illustrate some of the complexities that one faces when trying to consume ethically. This requires description of the practical example to be analyzed. To those ends, this chapter outlines the links between the consumer culture of wealthy nations, in this case the United States, and sweatshop labor in poorer nations. Establishing these links serves to complicate the commonly-accepted free market concept of consumer sovereignty, and to highlight power relations involved in the production of consumer goods. Based on these points I examine views and questions of responsibility and complicity on the part of the consumer for the labor abuses committed by others in the production of goods.

As the chapter proceeds, a third theme will emerge, that of the discrepancy between economic theory and the reality it creates and affects. These themes: the question of consumer sovereignty, power relations, and the gap between theory and its implementation, will serve as the links between Tillich and Niebuhr, and the problem of sweatshop labor. The full analysis of these connections takes place in my fourth chapter.

In the present chapter I use Wal-Mart as an example of a corporate giant benefitting from cheap labor. I chose Wal-Mart because it is familiar, it is a very good example of a profit-making machine, it is popular for its prices, and is yet, due to its practices considered an ethically problematic place to shop. Last, it is considered an

example, or “template,” for other businesses aspiring to the same level or form of success. With much of Wal-Mart’s prosperity depending on remorselessly squeezing the lowest costs out of production chains, much emulation of its practices bodes badly for cheap labor and, I would argue, for consumers.

Wal-Mart Stores, Inc. is the world’s largest retailer and, as of 2003, “the largest profit-making enterprise in the world.”<sup>136</sup> With over 3800 stores in the United States, employing 1.3 million people, and over 2600 stores in the rest of the world, it continues to grow at a rapid pace. In 2004 Wal-Mart’s revenues equalled 2.3 percent of the Gross Domestic Product of the entire United States.<sup>137</sup> In 2005, its \$312.4 billion in sales was a 9.5% increase over its 2004 sales, an annual increase that has come to be expected.<sup>138</sup> In 2006, its “sales on a single day... topped the GDPs of thirty-six sovereign nations.”<sup>139</sup> Bethany Moreton states, “If it were the Independent Republic of Wal-Mart, it would be China’s sixth largest export market, and its economy would rank thirtieth in the world, right behind Saudi Arabia’s.”<sup>140</sup>

Wal-Mart operates under 9 different retail formats<sup>141</sup> but for North Americans the most familiar versions of Wal-Mart are the “big boxes”: Sam’s Club warehouse stores,

---

<sup>136</sup> Lichtenstein, Nelson. “Preface” in Nelson Lichtenstein, ed. Wal-Mart: The Face of Twenty-First-Century Capitalism. (NY: The New Press) 2006. p. ix.; “Wal-Mart: A Template for Twenty-First-Century Capitalism” Ibid., 3.

<sup>137</sup> “Learning to love Wal-Mart” *The Economist*, 4/17/2004, Vol. 371, Issue 8371. p.9.; Strasser, Susan. “Woolworth to Wal-Mart: Mass Merchandising and the Changing Culture of Consumption” in Nelson Lichtenstein, ed. Wal-Mart: The Face of Twenty-First-Century Capitalism. (NY: The New Press) 2006. p. 52-3.

<sup>138</sup> Wal-Mart Facts. <<http://www.wal-martfacts.com/default.aspx>> [Accessed May 26, 2006]; 2006 Annual Report. <<http://www.walmartstores.com/GlobalWMStoresWeb/navigate.do?catg=453&contId=5700>> [Accessed May 26, 2006].

<sup>139</sup> Moreton, Bethany E. “It Came from Bentonville: The Agrarian Origins of Wal-mart Culture” in Nelson Lichtenstein, ed. Wal-Mart: The Face of Twenty-First-Century Capitalism. (NY: The New Press) 2006. p. 59.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 59.

the general merchandise Wal-Marts, and the Wal-Mart Supercenters that carry products ranging from auto parts to fresh produce. “Big box” retailers are so called because of the stores’ designs as “big boxes”: windowless and fronted by sprawling parking lots. Differing from traditional merchants, instead of marking up prices, true big-box retailers derive their profits from high sales volume, the moniker “big box” reflecting this volume.<sup>142</sup>

As a big box retailer, the simple reason for Wal-Mart’s immense success is its consistently low prices on consumer goods, and in particular on brand name products. This has resulted in consumer faith that the best deal on products that they know can always, or most often, be found at Wal-Mart. This belief then transfers to the other products that Wal-Mart stocks. Consumers cease price-comparing with other stores and simply shop at Wal-Mart first.

#### **A. Why Wal-Mart? Wal-Mart as a Template Business**

The book of essays entitled “*Wal-Mart: The Face of Twenty-First-Century Capitalism*,” edited by Nelson Lichtenstein, centers on the premise that Wal-Mart is a “template business,” or “template economic institution.” A template business is identified as “huge, successful, rapidly emulated [, and embodying] a new and innovative set of technological advances, organizational structures, and social relationships.” Past examples of such institutions were Pennsylvania Railroad, U.S. Steel, GM, IBM, and Microsoft.<sup>143</sup>

---

<sup>141</sup> 2006 Annual Report.

<sup>142</sup> Bergdahl, Michael. What I Learned from Sam Walton: How to Compete in a Wal-Mart World. (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.) 2004. p. 11.

<sup>143</sup> Lichtenstein, 4.

The success of Wal-Mart, as of its predecessors and its emulators – other large discount chains such as Target and K-Mart – impacts economic, social, cultural and political standards globally. Through the reshaping of the global production chain, implementing increasingly efficient logistics and technology, these discount retailers with Wal-Mart at the head,

are legislating de facto wage and benefit standards, shaping and subordinating the once-powerful manufacturing sector, and generating the most profound transformation in the spacial and demographic landscape since the emergence of suburbia in the immediate post-World War II years.<sup>144</sup>

Besides certain visual transformations at the outskirts of many small towns, and the environmental impact that the wide availability of cheap and disposable products has, the biggest signs and effects of Wal-Mart's status as a template economic enterprise are, and arise from, its relations with its suppliers, both foreign and domestic. Wal-Mart was the first retail enterprise to wrest control over delivery, price margins, production costs and thus production itself, from the grasp of manufacturers.<sup>145</sup>

Wal-Mart's relationship with its suppliers is characterized primarily by its demand for the lowest possible prices. Its buying power permits it to squeeze concessions in price and product format from even the most formidable and well-established manufacturers such as Proctor and Gamble, and Dial Corporation.<sup>146</sup> The

---

<sup>144</sup> Lichtenstein, xi.

<sup>145</sup> Detailed histories and descriptions of Wal-Mart's development are found in Vance, Sandra S. and Roy V. Scott. Wal-Mart: A History of Sam Walton's Retail Phenomenon. (New York: Twayne Publishers) 1994., and in Nelson Lichtenstein's Wal-Mart: The Face of Twenty-First-Century Capitalism. (NY: The New Press) 2006.

<sup>146</sup> Miller, George (U.S. House of Representatives Representative, Senior Democrat) and the Committee on Education and the Workforce. Everyday Low Wages: The Hidden Price We All Pay for Wal-Mart. February 16, 2004. Available online at <<http://www.alarise.org/WALMARTREPORT.pdf>> [Accessed August 16, 2006].; Hemphill, Thomas A. "Rejuvenating Wal-Mart's Reputation" *Business Horizons* (Indiana: Indiana University Kelly School of Business) (2005) Number 48. p11-21. p. 16.

price that Wal-Mart will pay for “basic commodity products... must decline annually”<sup>147</sup> which forces suppliers to cut costs and improve their own efficiency. While this would appear to put suppliers at a profit-making disadvantage, “being a vendor to Wal-Mart can provide a supplier with significant increases in sales and market share... and, in many cases, manufacturers actually make more money through Wal-Mart than through other retailers.”<sup>148</sup> For example, in 2003 “7.5 cents of every non-automotive dollar spent in a U.S. retail store went to Wal-Mart, making a contract with the retailer a necessity for even the largest consumer goods companies in America.”<sup>149</sup>

This necessity, combined with Wal-Mart’s insistence on its own annually decreasing prices, means that manufacturers must continually find ways to cut costs. While certain efficiencies in production can be implemented, the most flexible cost, as in all industries, is that of wages. Since it would be difficult to convince most Western citizens to accept a pay cut on behalf of their employer (though this may, in some cases, occur if unemployment is the other option), it is often far less complicated to transfer the entire production process to areas where labor, as well as taxes, costs less in the first place.

Though Wal-Mart boasts that it “buys from over 61,000 U.S. suppliers,”<sup>150</sup> the reality of this purchasing is complex, and belies the apparent meaning of the claim. That a product is purchased from an American supplier says nothing about its actual place of production. The domestic sourcing claimed by Wal-Mart “is detached from traditional distribution channels... Wal-Mart does not manufacture or source locally, but merely

---

<sup>147</sup> Hemphill, 16.

<sup>148</sup> Vance, 110.

<sup>149</sup> Hemphill, 16.

acts as a global commodity supply chain, distributing globally sourced goods to local markets.”<sup>151</sup> Wal-Mart may hand its money over to representatives of domestic suppliers, but these suppliers have “to meet the prices of overseas competitors.” If suppliers can’t match these prices, “then Wal-Mart [will] either terminate the contract or step in and make bulk purchases of [raw or unassembled] material from overseas companies itself.”<sup>152</sup> This material will then be sold to the domestic supplier at a price well below that of domestically-sourced raw material, so that the domestic supplier is able to manufacture products at the requested low cost. The end product will then have been “Made in the USA.”

Of course, Wal-Mart is not alone in such practices, nor can it be held completely responsible for the current rise of corporate outsourcing to less-developed countries with lower wages. It would be more accurate to state that Wal-Mart benefits greatly from, and takes full advantage of, the availability of outsourced labor, and the laxities in worker rights and corporate responsibility that go along with the practice. Besides demanding low prices that can only realistically be met by accessing foreign labor markets, Wal-Mart also outsources the manufacturing of its own store brands, bypassing the middleman of the vendor, and contracting with lowest-bidding foreign factories. As competition among factories, even from country to country, is fierce, Wal-Mart can be assured that its

---

<sup>150</sup> Wal-Mart Facts - Suppliers <<http://walmartstores.com/GlobalWMStoresWeb/navigate.do?catg=220>> [Accessed September 14, 2006].

<sup>151</sup> Karjanen, David. “The Wal-Mart Effect and the New Face of Capitalism: Labor Market and Community Impacts of the Megaretailer” in Nelson Lichtenstein, ed. *Wal-Mart: The Face of Twenty-First-Century Capitalism*. (NY: The New Press) 2006. p. 152.

<sup>152</sup> Dicker, John. *The United States of Wal-Mart*. (New York: Penguin) 2005., 109.

store brands will cost so little that even at the lowest retail prices possible, the outsourced storebrand products will garner a substantial profit.<sup>153</sup>

In addition to the transformation of supplier-retailer relations, Wal-Mart is a template for a change in retail practices that occurs somewhat closer to home. It is widely agreed that Wal-Mart's in-store low wage and low benefit cost-cutting measures are having a negative effect on wages and benefits overall, as other retailers scramble for ways to compete with the giant or at least stay in business. This downward wage pressure and the lowering of standards for retail employees across the board – since other retailers cannot offer much better employment rewards than Wal-Mart and stay competitive -- reverberates from the paycheques of cashiers and stock clerks through local and regional economies that must make up for the shortcomings of employers.<sup>154</sup> Although this trend is related to the search for cheaper labor overseas in the effort to lower costs and increase profits, as are numerous other cutthroat practices that the retailer is accused of,<sup>155</sup> for the purposes of this thesis it is sufficient to focus on the issue of cheap outsourced labor.

To summarize:

Wal-Mart is a reflection of a new form of capital accumulation.... In contrast the to large enterprises of the Fordist era, which... at least tolerated, the regulatory hand of an intrusive welfare state, Wal-Mart and other labor-intenseive retailers have abandoned the Keynesian project and

---

<sup>153</sup> Ross, Robert J.S. *Slaves to Fashion: Poverty and Abuse in the New Sweatshops*. (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press) 2004. p. 128, 132.

<sup>154</sup> Lichtenstein, 13-14; Karjanen 154-155; Bonacich, Edna with Khaleelah Hardi. "Wal-Mart and the Logistics Revolution" in Nelson Lichtenstein, ed. *Wal-Mart: The Face of Twenty-First-Century Capitalism*. (NY: The New Press) 2006. p.181-4; Miller, 2, 11; Hemphill, 15; Anderson, Sarah, John Cavanagh, Thea Lee and the Institute for Policy Studies. *Field Guide to the Global Economy (Rev. Ed.)*. (NY: The New Press) 2005. p. 35.

<sup>155</sup> I.e., union-busting, predatory pricing, the elimination of small-town local businesses, sex discrimination in wages and promotions, the use of illegal aliens for janitorial work, wage abuses such as unpaid overtime or tampered timesheets, abuse of state welfare and medicaid programs. See most of the sources on Wal-Mart in the bibliography.

now seek complete flexibility to employ labor and source their product within a highly segmented and inequitable world.<sup>156</sup>

As such a template company, Wal-Mart has been central to introducing a new set of social relationships in North America and abroad, as well as between citizens of developed and less developed countries. While certainly some of these social changes are and have been advantageous to many, in particular the working poor of many North American communities, far too great a part of these advantages are built on the establishment of exploitative and coercive “social relations that re-create and perpetuate inequality” among humans.<sup>157</sup>

The form of unjust social relation to be examined in this chapter, and then analyzed with the ethics categories of Tillich and Niebuhr, is that found in the use of sweatshop labor. This situation is at base dehumanizing, both for those who labor in such conditions and for those who purchase the produce of that labor. This situation transforms the fulfillment-seeking human being into the euphemistically-termed, “cheap labor,” a reality which cannot be divorced from “consumer culture.”

This relation exists in a number of ways. For one, the availability of cheap labor that lowers the cost of production of consumer goods enables continued prosperity of a market of goods that are inexpensive to buy, upgrade, or replace. Promotion of the need or desire for having any particular product depends in many cases on the price of an object. While satisfying the consumers’ expectations of price and convenience, the price of a good must also satisfy the profit expectations of everyone involved in the good’s movement from factory to shopping cart.

---

<sup>156</sup> Karjanen, 161-162.

Since the driving force of consumer culture is the desire for massive and increasing profits,<sup>158</sup> the more product that can be sold, at the highest profit margin, the better this drive will be satisfied.

Cheap labor is also bound to consumer culture to the degree that this culture promotes and thrives on the informational and moral blindness of its members, a relationship that will be discussed in detail in my concluding chapter. Finally, consumer culture is individualistic, and it does not play by ideal or fair free market rules, despite assertions that the free market is the common playing field.

## **B. Chains of Production, Trade Agreements and Export Processing Zones**

Major retailers like Wal-Mart have a dominant position in the global market. Due to their size and purchasing power, they are able to control prices and demand concessions along the entire global production chain. They are aided in this position by trade liberalization and trade agreements between corporate bodies headquartered in wealthy nations and poor nations desperate for investment income.

Such large retailers stand, alongside “merchandisers,”<sup>159</sup> at the peak of a pyramid of manufacturing power. Directly below them, and greater in number, are the

---

<sup>157</sup> Tabb, William K. “Race to the Bottom?” in Stanley Aronowitz and Heather Gautney (eds.) Implicating Empire: Globalization and Resistance in the 21st Century World Order. (New York: Basic Books) 2003. p. 152-4, 157.

<sup>158</sup> Packard, Vance. “Growthmanship” extracted from The Wastemakers. (London: Longman) 1960, in Lee, Martyn J. (ed.) The Consumer Society Reader. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.) 2000. p.223-227.

<sup>159</sup> Gary Gereffi distinguishes “merchandisers” such as footwear or clothing companies who market brand and lifestyle, from “manufacturers” because merchandisers do not have factories. Gereffi, Gary. “The Organization of Buyer-Driven Global Commodity Chains: How U.S. Retailers Shape Overseas Production Networks” in Gary Gereffi and Miguel Korzeniewicz (eds.), Commodity Chains and Global Capitalism. (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press) 1994. p. 99.

manufacturers<sup>160</sup> and below the manufacturers are contractor firms, or suppliers. These firms, in turn, rely on the output of thousands of factories run by individual bosses, and at the bottom of the pyramid are the worldwide millions of workers who actually make the consumer goods that retailers buy and sell. Gary Gereffi characterizes the contemporary retail product industry<sup>161</sup>, as a “buyer-driven commodity chain,” meaning that “the manufacturing process takes place entirely through contractors and it is the retailers, or ‘buyers’ of the items that really determine production.”<sup>162</sup>

The power of the retailer stems from a variety of factors. Buying power, i.e. a market share the size of which makes contracts with a retailer indispensable to vendors, is one of these. Major retailers are today “also major importers. Among the top one hundred importers of apparel, retail chains controlled 48 percent of imports [to the U.S.] as of, roughly, 1995...”,<sup>163</sup> and as of 2004, six retail chains sold “more than half of all apparel bought in the United States...”.<sup>164</sup> Due to their movement of vast amounts of product, “a few large retailers can almost unilaterally determine price, delivery time, and quality for manufacturers and ultimately for thousands of tiny competing factories.”<sup>165</sup>

Manufacturers contract with firms that, though headquartered in specific countries, use factories set up in a variety of locations. These factories, run by local bosses, are highly mobile in that they require little to open and can be shut down and re-

---

<sup>160</sup> The manufacturers “make designs, marketing plans, and profits” – Ross, 127; they are the companies e.g. Kraft or Shell, that typically maintain a wide spectrum of brands. One such manufacturer in the garment industry is the VF corporation, the world’s largest apparel manufacturer, who makes “Lee, Wrangler, Rider, Rustler, Chic, Gitano, and Britannia jeans, among others. ...27.5 percent of the U.S. jeanswear market” in 2000. Ross, 127.

<sup>161</sup> I.e. of garments, toys, small electronics, and household items; excluding things like cars and heavy machinery.

<sup>162</sup> Gereffi, 95-122; Esbenshade, Jill. Monitoring Sweatshops: Workers, Consumers, and the Global Apparel Industry. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press) 2004. p. 37.

<sup>163</sup> Ross, 124.

<sup>164</sup> Esbenshade, 37.

opened elsewhere, with a new local boss, at short notice. Location and movement of production depends almost solely on accessing the cheapest labor pools and lowest import/export tariffs possible. Even domestic manufacturers that supply American retailers have begun to outsource their production in order to compete with foreign-based manufacturers. It is cheaper for large manufacturers to send materials for assembly to low-wage factories abroad and then re-import them to the U.S. than to assemble them at home.<sup>166</sup> The size of manufacturers places factories at their mercy since “any one of [their] orders might utilize a given factory’s annual output...”.<sup>167</sup>

Wal-Mart, as the world’s largest retailer, “maintains an extensive global network of 10,000 suppliers... [and o]verseas manufacturers are forced to engage in cutthroat competition...” in order to keep their contracts with the retailer.<sup>168</sup> This competition, or “race to the bottom,” is the movement of production according to costs. Through this relationship with labor, the manufacturer deflects the buying power of the retailer into its own buying power over factories. This, in actuality, is buying power over the labor and trade laws of poorer nations, and buying power over the wages of workers.

Thus, ironically, pricing “doesn’t start at the bottom, from the real costs of making the garment,” rather it is the price determined by the retailer that determines what the actual cost of production will be. “The retailer can always go down the street and find someone who can make it for less. The manufacturers and contractors are stuck.

---

<sup>165</sup> Esbenshade, 37.

<sup>166</sup> Esbenshade, 3; Ross, 144-45; Browne, Andrew. “As Congress Blusters about Trade with China, U.S. Companies Play coy Over Profits” in *Wall Street Journal (Eastern Edition)* (New York). February 13, 2006. p. A2.; Klein, Naomi. *No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies*. (Toronto: Vintage Canada) 2000. p. 226; Kline, John M. *Ethics for International Business: Decision making in a global political economy*. (London: Routledge) 2005. p. 94.

<sup>167</sup> Ross, 127.

<sup>168</sup> Miller, 11.

Everyone down the line is squeezed” by the retailer.<sup>169</sup> Since everyone also wants to make a profit and enough to keep their business running, the worst squeezed is the laborer.

Each of the thousands of factories has its own “relatively powerless” boss who is responsible for making sure that production costs are met and the factory earns a profit.<sup>170</sup> When it comes to Wal-Mart, though Wal-Mart is not alone in this, factories complain that because the retailer “demands such low prices, they have slim profit margins – if any. ... Obviously, one way to regain a profit for such suppliers would be to begin cutting back on labor costs.”<sup>171</sup> While there are legitimate ways to make labor costs of a business more efficient, the “cutting back” that occurs most frequently in such factories is in the area of wages. At best, workers are paid the legal minimum wage (though this does not necessarily equate to a “good” or “liveable” wage), and at worst they are not paid at all. Quite commonly they are paid below the minimum wage, though to what degree depends on the demands of the buyer that the factory produces for. Moreover, if it will attract foreign investments in export processing, national governments will “[shape] labor regulations to permit special exemptions and [permit] discriminatory treatment of foreign workers”.<sup>172</sup>

Despite the fact that it is the price-setting of the buyer that determines, at the end of the line, the conditions and pay of the worker, the nature of the contractual exchange formally absolves the buyer of any legal responsibility for labor abuses. In the “international ‘webs of production’ that form the structural basis of the global

---

<sup>169</sup> Retail executive quoted in Bonacich, Edna, and Richard Appelbaum . Behind the Label: Inequality in the Los Angeles Apparel Industry. (Berkeley: University of California Press) 2000. p.90.

<sup>170</sup> Esbenschade, 41.

<sup>171</sup> Miller, 13.

economy”<sup>173</sup> the putative and documented employer of factory workers is the contractor, not the manufacturer. This “preserves the legal fiction that the contractor, as the direct employer, is responsible for the conditions of employment of the workers”<sup>174</sup>, thereby allowing “manufacturers to avoid responsibility and sweatshops to flourish.”<sup>175</sup> This responsibility-avoidance arrangement exists to some degree in any factory system, but it is a highly-polished routine when it comes to the Export Processing Zones of less-developed countries.

Many sweatshop-type factories exist in industrial areas set up to facilitate free trade agreements between wealthy nations and corporations based therein, and poorer countries. These areas are referred to as EPZs (Export Processing Zones) or, alternatively, QIZs (Qualified Industrial Zones) or FTZs (Free Trade Zones).<sup>176</sup> EPZs are the result of global trade liberalization that purportedly places all economic players on the same level playing field. This liberalization is quite clearly to the advantage of more wealthy players, who promote it to the less wealthy as a way of improving their nations’ economies.

Erik Kramer explains liberalization as occurring in four steps. The first is privatization of public utilities such as water and fuel. When citizens become suddenly unable to afford these basic necessities protests erupt, often violent, such as those over food prices in Argentina, in 2001, and water prices in Bolivia, in 2000. “Such ‘social strife’,” says Kramer, “predictably causes capital to flee and governments to become

---

<sup>172</sup> Kline, J. 98.

<sup>173</sup> Esbenschade, 34.

<sup>174</sup> Ross, 129.

<sup>175</sup> Esbenschade, 3.

<sup>176</sup> Though sweatshops also exist in the United States, Canada and other wealthy nations, they are less systematically established and so I will focus on factory conditions in these zones.

insolvent. This situation allows for foreign investors and corporations to move in and cherry pick the carcass of remaining assets at fire sale prices.”<sup>177</sup>

The second step is deregulation of a nation’s capital market. This, in theory, “will allow investments to flow into a nation,” but most often “the capital that does then flow in is for quick speculation in the collapsed real estate and currency markets... [and] is not motivated for long-term development of the nation’s assets.” It is “opportunistic” and “predatory,” able to “strip out the value of a country in just days.”<sup>178</sup>

Third is “market-based pricing.” Ostensibly established with the intent of balancing out the effects of deregulation, market-based pricing causes severe inflation and “pauperiz[es] the vast majority of the population,” paving the way for step four, the “poverty reduction strategy,” or, free trade.<sup>179</sup>

Though Kramer’s language reveals a strong disapproval of the global free trade process, even economists who support free trade agreements acknowledge it is problematic. They refer, for example, to the inevitability of periods of “adjustment” and short-term costs that will be most painful for the already poor. Some such costs are cited as “losses of job, tradisional business and subsidies, and reduced public investment in the social and infrastructure sectors.”<sup>180</sup> Moreover, there is a lack of empirical evidence for the long-term benefits, e.g. income and labor turnaround, that are supposed to justify the

---

<sup>177</sup> Kramer, Eric Mark. “Vanishing Meaning, the Ideology of Value-Addition, and the Diffusion of Broadband Information Technology” in Jung Min Choi, John W. Murphy, and Manuel J. Caro (eds.), Globalization with a Human Face. (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger) 2004. p. 88.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 88-89.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 89; on the same page Kramer adds, in a tone which I find rather too indicting and inflammatory for something that he does not provide concrete examples of, that after step three, the pauperizing of the population, “is when the riots start and violent repression commences. Strikes are criminalized, universities closed, the mass media controlled, groups dispersed, curfews imposed, troublemakers detained or worse. [...] Once order is imposed, then the real systematic, ‘legitimate’ exploitation can commence.”

short-term costs; in trade liberalization's current form the likelihood of any general benefits for less-developed countries arising from entrance into free trade agreements is considered ambiguous.<sup>181</sup>

Once the stages of trade liberalization have been implemented the now essentially insolvent nation's government is left prey to the desires of whichever organization promises it income. This income may arrive in the form of loans, or it may come in the form of free trade agreements, which allow foreign investment into the struggling country. These trade agreements in a sense erase the boundaries – borders – that could limit trade and that could then give the less-developed country an actual income-earning advantage. The free trade agreements restrict the jurisdiction of “liberalized” nations over the actions of foreign investors, “requiring extensive changes in national laws to protect corporate rights.”<sup>182</sup> Once a country is a member of the World Trade Organization, for example, infringement on “corporate rights” results in trade sanctions against that nation. However, no such sanctions are in place for human labor rights – in fact the WTO deems labor standards “protectionist,” putting “low-wage countries” at a disadvantage by forcing them to withhold the resource (“cheap labor”) that might attract foreign investors.<sup>183</sup>

Further, foreign corporate investors “may make public statements about how a raise in the legal minimum wage could price a... country ‘out of the market’...”,

---

<sup>180</sup> Adhikari, Ramesh. “Trade policy reforms, growth and poverty reduction” in Ramesh Adhikari and Prema-chandra Athukorala (eds). Developing Countries in the World Trading System: The Uruguay Round and Beyond. (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd.) 2002. p. 202.

<sup>181</sup> Adhikari, p. 196-197; Bell, Clive. Developmental Policy as Public Finance. (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press) 2003. p. 90-93, 97; Stranks, Robert T. “Understanding Trade Liberalization.” Trade and Economic Policy Commentary No. 25. Government of Canada, Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade. December 1998.

<sup>182</sup> Esbenshade, 42.

affecting the public policy of impoverished nations through intimidation and making the government reluctant to enforce even existent labor laws.<sup>184</sup> In this way “[f]inancial aid is linked to many conditions” that redefine the role of government into one of ensuring loan and trade conditions are met, rather than of looking after the welfare of the citizens.<sup>185</sup>

Because in theory the money that goes into these zones will “trickle-down” through job creation and income that will in turn fuel the growth of the local economy, the “governments of poor countries offer tax breaks, lax regulations and the services of a military willing and able to crush labor unrest.”<sup>186</sup> Thus the EPZ factories where foreign capital is invested “exist within a kind of legal and economic set of brackets, apart from the rest of their countries.”<sup>187</sup> In effect, these zones become, or at least function as, corporate states. While placed geographically in sovereign nations, the real governing body within the zones is an ever-shifting and flighty group of multinational corporations.

The aspect of EPZs that may be most telling of their corporate nationhood is found in the title, “Export Processing Zone,” itself. When, for example, an American company manufactures products abroad, the movement of the product back into the United States is considered an export from the nation where it is assembled, even though the entire process begins in the United States and even though the unassembled parts were initially imported into the EPZ from the United States.<sup>188</sup> Though it is counter-intuitive that an American company may export to the United States, all of these

---

<sup>183</sup> Esbenshade, 43; Rodrik, Dani. Has Globalization Gone Too Far?. (Washington, D.C.: Institute for International Economics) March 1997. p. 32.

<sup>184</sup> Klein, 227, 210.

<sup>185</sup> Kramer, 89-90.

<sup>186</sup> Klein, 206.

<sup>187</sup> Klein, 207.

<sup>188</sup> Anderson, 43.

movements of goods in their various stages of production take place under the umbrella of free trade agreements that corporations legally exploit to their fiscal advantage.

Part of the purported advantage for poorer countries in signing a free trade agreement is duty-free access to the U.S. market when they export goods there. Therefore, when multinational corporations “export” from EPZs in these nations, they also are given “duty-free access” and pay no import taxes at the U.S. border.<sup>189</sup> Moreover, they generally pay little to no import or export taxes to the nation that hosts the export factories.

For fear of “factory flight” by highly mobile corporations in search of the cheapest manufacturing, and as incentive for their investment to begin with, governments of less-developed countries will offer corporations a limited time, e.g. five years, of tariff-free use of the EPZs, after which they will have to begin to pay the taxes.<sup>190</sup> For the future income of the nation, a brief tax-break seems a necessary sacrifice, only, once the tax-free period ends, corporations often either leave that EPZ altogether, or shut down that specific factory and open a “new” one nearby, beginning the tax-free bargain over again.

Of course, beneath all of this competition of economic theory with political reality are the bones and sinew of the EPZs, the local workers. To keep corporations invested, for the economic growth that must surely result, governments “put their own people on the auction block, falling over each other to offer up the lowest minimum wage, allowing workers to be paid less than the real cost of living.”<sup>191</sup> Though foreign money does arrive, in the forms of goods and wages, it is only barely enough to perpetuate their use of

---

<sup>189</sup> Klein, 207; National Labor Committee. March 2006 Report on Jordan, released May 3, 2006. <<http://www.nlcnet.org/live/article.php?id=10>> [Accessed May 23, 2006]. Part 15.

<sup>190</sup> Klein, 206-7.

<sup>191</sup> Klein, 206.

local land and labor, and never enough to revitalize the host country's economy. Thus the "temporary" set-up of the EPZs becomes interminable.

The majority of EPZs are located in Asia and Central America, with some more recently established in the Middle East. There are "at least 850 EPZs in the world... spread through seventy countries and employing roughly 27 million workers."<sup>192</sup> China alone hosts 124 EPZs, employing 18 million people, Nicaraguan EPZs employ about 35,000, and the list of countries also includes the Philippines, Saipan, Bangladesh, El Salvador, Mexico, Taiwan, South Korea, Malaysia and Jordan.<sup>193</sup> Mexico, as of 2000, "produced a little below 15 percent of all clothing imported to the United States" and the WTO "estimates that between \$200 and \$250 billion worth of trade flows through the zones" yearly.<sup>194</sup> Apart from apparel, the EPZs produce such items as cellphones, leather for shoes, computer screens, toys, and plastic parts for cars, as well as assemble modems and test circuitboards for electronics.<sup>195</sup>

In Asia and the Middle East the geographical proximity of many nations competing for manufacturers has resulted in a partially illegal "guest worker" industry. Labor brokers from places with less competitive minimum wages hire workers from poorer countries and bring them to work at factories for wages of "one-half to two-thirds

---

<sup>192</sup> Klein, 205.

<sup>193</sup> Klein, 205, 210, 211; Ross, 114; Kline, J., 98; Norman, Al. *The Case Against Wal-Mart*. (Atlantic City, NJ: Raphael Marketing) 2004. p. 81; Schilling, David M. "Making Codes of Conduct Credible: The Role of Independent Monitoring" in Oliver F. Williams, C.S.C. (ed.), *Global Codes of Conduct: An Idea Whose Time Has Come*. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press) 2000. p. 227; National Labor Committee (May 3); Greenhouse, Steven and Michael Barbaro. "The Ugly Side of Free Trade – Sweatshops in Jordan" in *The New York Times*. May 3, 2006.

<sup>194</sup> Ross, 114; Klein, 205.

<sup>195</sup> Stein, Nicholas. "No Way Out Competition to make products for Western companies has revived an old form of abuse: debt bondage" in *Fortune Magazine*. January 20, 2003. Found at <[http://money.cnn.com/magazines/fortune/fortune\\_archive...](http://money.cnn.com/magazines/fortune/fortune_archive...)> [Accessed June 9, 2006]; Klein, 211.

the rate paid local employees” enabling competition “with China and other low labor cost regions.”<sup>196</sup> For example, Taiwan, South Korea and Malaysia will import laborers from their poorer neighbours such as Vietnam, Thailand and the Philippines. In Jordan’s five EPZs, containing roughly 100 factories, “tens of thousands” of guest workers are employed, mainly from Bangladesh and China, as well as India and Sri Lanka.<sup>197</sup>

Though theoretically beneficial to those in need, guest worker programs in practice are commonly highly exploitative of foreign labor, constituting a form of indentured servitude, or “debt bondage,” rather than legitimate employment. Labor brokers charge exorbitant recruiting fees that place workers in debt to lenders in their home towns, who charge swiftly compounding daily interest. Once the workers arrive at the factory they may be informed of other fees and costs that leave them in debt to the factory as well. For months, or even years, they work just to pay what they owe and see almost no actual income. A 2003 Fortune magazine article describes a guest worker’s typical experience:

To secure work at the Motorola subcontractor, which is in Taiwan, Mary had to pay \$2,400 to a labor broker in her native Philippines. She didn’t have that kind of money, so, as is common, she borrowed from a local money lender at an interest rate of 10% per month. That payment, however, got her only as far as Taiwan. A second labor broker met Mary at the Taipei airport and informed her of his separate \$3,900 fee before delivering her to the new job.

Before she left the Philippines, Mary rejoiced at the \$460 a month she would be earning in Taiwan; it was a princely sum, more than five times what she could make doing similar work, if she could even find it, in her own country. But once in Taiwan she began to realize that after the brokers’ fees and other deductions, she would be left with almost nothing. Out of her monthly check came \$215 to repay the Taiwanese broker, \$91 for Taiwanese income tax, \$72 for her room and board at the factory dorm, and \$86 for a compulsory contribution to a savings bond she will get only if she completes her three-year contract. After 18 months she will

---

<sup>196</sup> Kline, J., 98.

<sup>197</sup> Greenhouse; National Labor Committee (May 3).

have repaid the Taiwanese labor broker. But she still must contend with the Philippine debt and its rapidly compounding interest.<sup>198</sup>

### C. Wal-Mart and China

The desperation for cheap labor resulting in such guest worker abuse arises in large part from the proximity of China, the “world’s factory floor,”<sup>199</sup> renowned for its federal labor union (whose first loyalty is to the government and only secondly the workers), and a seemingly endless supply of cheap labor in the form of impoverished peasantry migrating from farms and villages to factory cities in the southern coastal provinces of Shenzhou and Guangdong. Governments in countries whose labor laws are ignored by labor brokers and factory managers “are willing to look the other way because... [t]he labor trade means jobs and capital will stay in their countries and not get shipped to China.”<sup>200</sup>

Few things in the global marketplace are not made in China. The production of this country is “so massive and wide-ranging that it exerts deflationary pressure around the globe on everything from textiles to TVs, mobile phones to mushrooms.”<sup>201</sup>

“Between 1980 and 2002, China’s exports increased from \$14 billion to \$365 billion” -- in 2001 alone half of China’s exports, totalling \$266.2 billion, came from the ventures of foreign manufacturers – with more than a third of its exports going to the United States.<sup>202</sup> By 2003, imports from China accounted for over 12% of total U.S. imports.<sup>203</sup>

---

<sup>198</sup> Stein.

<sup>199</sup> Leggett, Karby and Peter Wonacott. The World’s Factory: Surge in Exports From China Jolts Global Industry. (New York: Wall Street Journal (Eastern Edition)) Oct. 10, 2002. p. A1.

<sup>200</sup> Stein.

<sup>201</sup> Leggett.

<sup>202</sup> Leggett; Anderson, 31.

<sup>203</sup> Bonacich and Hardi, 165.

Liberalization of foreign investment, “part of China’s ticket into the WTO” in 2001,<sup>204</sup> accounts for much of the incredible increase in China’s export production in such a short period and has resulted in hundreds of EPZs and thousands of factories in the country’s southern provinces. Yet the matter of China’s labor laws was not raised in negotiations over the country’s entry into the WTO, and “China’s [human rights] record improved little and sometimes actually worsened even as US-China trade and foreign investment ties increased.”<sup>205</sup>

The relevance of labor practices in China for workers in other, competing nations is stated clearly by Kimberly Elliot and Richard Freeman:

What happens in China is important for labor standards around the world. Because a large proportion of the global workforce is Chinese, changes in China’s standards affect more people than changes in dozens of smaller countries. [...] China’s entry into the global economy and accession to the WTO also means that Chinese labor market developments will have large repercussions for workers elsewhere.... Policymakers and leaders in many [less developed countries] worry... that they will be unable to maintain wages and standards in their country if Chinese wages and standards fail to rise rapidly.<sup>206</sup>

China, like Wal-Mart, can be viewed as a template, albeit of a somewhat different sort. Due to its immense population China has a massive workforce, and due to its labor laws this workforce is more popular with corporations who “have benefited from systematic repression that keeps labor costs low” than that of any other country.<sup>207</sup> Though China does have fairly progressive labor laws (aside from disallowing independent unions) these are regularly flouted by private-sector employees, and rarely enforced. The official government union, the All-China Federation of Trade Unions, is obliged to support the

---

<sup>204</sup> Dicker, 108.

<sup>205</sup> Anderson, 32; Kline, J., 40-41.

<sup>206</sup> Elliot, Kimberly Ann and Richard B. Freeman. Can Labor Standards Improve Under Globalization? (Washington, D.C.: Institute for International Economics) June 2003. p. 119-120.

government before workers and the “government’s desire for foreign investment trumps any concern for [workers],”<sup>208</sup> leaving laborers vulnerable to an array of abuses.

The most common abuse is underpayment. The minimum wage in China varies between provinces and cities, and even between areas within cities.<sup>209</sup> Workers inside EPZs may officially earn more than workers outside of them, but what they are actually paid is difficult to know. At the end of May this year the minimum wage in Shenzhen in Guangdong province was raised to \$100/month, or around 60 cents an hour.<sup>210</sup> In Guangxi province a typical wage for an average workweek of 55 hours is \$65 per month, or about 30 cents an hour, which gives the worker who lives at the factory enough to send home to his/her family. The U.S. government estimates the average wage to be higher, around 90 cents an hour, but there are reports of wages as low as 15 cents per hour, or even less.<sup>211</sup> The payment of minimum wage is a common confusion in the issue of EPZs and is easily explained in ways to make wages sound fair. But the labor abuse issue remains and it is less a matter of meeting the letter of the law than of exploiting workers to get the most labor for the least cost.

To that end, workers endure long hours and pay rent to live in cramped dormitories attached to the factories. Physical and mental abuse are not uncommon, nor are withheld or ludicrously low wages (as low as 2 cents per hour has been reported), which itself is mental abuse. Also frequently reported are dangerous working conditions,

---

<sup>207</sup> Anderson, 31.

<sup>208</sup> Miller, 3; Tabb, 154; Dicker, 119; Elliot, 52-53, 121; Ross, 111; Roberts, Dexter and Aaron Bernstein. “‘A Life of Fines and Beating’: Wal-Mart’s self-policing in a Chinese sweatshop was a disaster. What kind of monitoring system works?” in *Business Week* (New York) Iss. 3701, October 2, 2000. p. 122-128..

<sup>209</sup> People’s Daily Online. “China sets minimum wage rules.” February 6, 2004.

<[http://english.people.com.cn/200402/06/eng20040206\\_134134.shtml](http://english.people.com.cn/200402/06/eng20040206_134134.shtml)> [Accessed June 16, 2006]

<sup>210</sup> Mitchell, Tom. “China’s Shenzhen to lift minimum wage by 20%” in FT.com Financial Times, May 31 2006. <<http://news.ft.com/cms/s/2348c8f6-f094-11da-9338-0000779e2340.html>> [Accessed June 16, 2006]

<sup>211</sup> Lichtenstein, 6; Anderson, 31.

and extremely excessive working hours (80 to 100 hours per week), with impossible production quotas. In extreme examples there may be restrictions of basic needs, e.g., food, speaking, or bathroom access, and guest workers may be locked into the compounds with their passports confiscated, or they may be subjected, like prisoners, to mandatory searches, curfews and, for female guest workers, pregnancy tests (with deportation the penalty for a positive result). Most often, factory workers live in dormitories attached to and provided by the factories, or in shantytowns nearby. The dormitories are always overcrowded and sometimes windowless, and room and board is deducted from the paycheques.<sup>212</sup> Though all of these conditions do not exist in every factory, the instances of worker abuse are nonetheless systemic, and are worst for foreign contract workers.

Conditions that exist in Chinese factories also exist in the EPZs of many, or most, other nations. NGOs and labor advocacy groups, most notably the New York based National Labor Committee, report abysmal conditions in over a quarter of Jordan's EPZ factories. These are only the ones that they were able to gain access to, and speak to workers about, and so the percentage is possibly higher. This can be blamed in part on China's dominance of labor standards, but the demand from retailers and manufacturers for high output and low cost, as well as governments willing to look the other way in order to keep foreign investment, must not be forgotten as equal or greater reasons.<sup>213</sup>

---

<sup>212</sup> Anderson, 31; Elliot, 121; Ross, 110, 115; Roberts; Fortune; National Labor Committee (May 3); Greenhouse; Norman, 81; Klein, 207, 208, 211; Esbenshade, 43-44.

<sup>213</sup> It would seem that, if China's wages and standards were to rise rapidly, as things stand in the global marketplace China would merely trade places with those nations whose factories currently ignore labor laws in order to compete with China's cheap labor for manufacturing contracts. However it is China's size, as well, that makes it a template. If China's standards rose, some production might move elsewhere, but it would be a difficult task for the rest of the world's low-wage less-developed countries to absorb all of the work that the Chinese do.

Reports of worker abuses in such zones have been surfacing since the early 1980s, and continue to surface on a regular basis. In May 2006 the National Labor Committee released a report on EPZ factories in Jordan after a year of observation and interviews with past and present employees. The report describes conditions named above for 25 out of the approximately 100 factories in Jordan's 5 EPZs. Similar conditions have been reported for factories in all EPZs. Though there is clearly awareness of a problem, this does not appear to be impetus enough to cause change. This is a case in point of the moral blindness and apathy that consumer culture depends on.

Among the major retailers who benefit from EPZs and free trade, Wal-Mart has been found guilty of purchasing products from sweatshop factories numerous times. The two most infamous indictments occurred on national television, though there are and have been other instances. In 1993, NBC's *Dateline* program, during an interview with Wal-Mart's then-CEO, David Glass, revealed video footage of Bangladeshi children sewing Wal-Mart clothing in a factory behind barbed wire, with armed guards. Glass responded by questioning the veracity of the footage.<sup>214</sup> In 2002, Wal-Mart's purchases made up 14% of the 1.9 billion dollars worth of garments exported from Bangladesh to the USA.<sup>215</sup> Perhaps Bangladesh eradicated its sweatshops, maybe Wal-Mart ended its contract with the specific factory filmed, perhaps Glass' skepticism of the footage was just and verified, or maybe it didn't matter to Wal-Mart.

In 1997, it was found that Wal-Mart's *Kathie Lee* store brand garments and accessories, were being manufactured in a Honduran maquiladora factory, by 13 to 16

---

<sup>214</sup> Dicker, 110; Slater, Robert. The Wal-Mart Triumph: Inside the World's #1 Company. (New York: Portfolio) 2003. p. 188; Norman, 25.

year-old girls earning 30 cents an hour at forced 13-hour shifts. Shortly after public outcry resulted in the termination of that contract, the same product was found being made in an American sweatshop, in New York<sup>216</sup> and “[s]everal years after [this] controversy, *Kathie Lee* handbags were still being made in China by workers paid three cents per hour.”<sup>217</sup>

By the late 1990s, as well, Wal-Mart had become dependent on Asian suppliers for low-priced stock in order to maintain its profit margins and a rising stock value.<sup>218</sup> Wal-Mart has been buying in China since the early 1970s, but its purchases have increased dramatically in the past half-decade. In 2003 its 15 billion dollars of imports equalled nearly 11% of all Chinese exports to the USA. Deemed “China’s eighth-largest trading partner by [China’s] government-controlled mainland media,”<sup>219</sup> Wal-Mart currently “imports more goods from China than either the United Kingdom or Russia,” relying on more than 3,000 supplier factories in China.<sup>220</sup>

Separate studies of two factories in China’s Guangdong Province, by the National Labor Committee, one in 2004 and one in 2005, found workers making toys for Wal-Mart and for dollar stores. They “toiled as much as 130 hours per week for wages averaging 16.5 cents per hour ([this is] below the minimum wage) and no health

---

<sup>215</sup> Miller, 11.

<sup>216</sup> Dicker, 111-112; Schilling, 223.

<sup>217</sup> Achbar, Mark, Jennifer Abbott, and Joel Bakan. *The Corporation: a documentary by Mark Achbar (Volumes I)*. (Kelowna, BC: Filmwest Associates) 2003.

<sup>218</sup> PBS *Frontline*: “Is Wal-Mart Good for America?” (2003). Full program available online at <<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/walmart/>> [Accessed July 10, 2006]

<sup>219</sup> Flint, Robert. *How Wal-Mart Treads Heavily in Foreign Exchange Forest*. (New York: Wall Street Journal (Eastern Edition)) November 17, 2004. pC3.

<sup>220</sup> Petrovic, Misha and Gary G. Hamilton. “Making Global Markets: Wal-Mart and Its Suppliers” in Nelson Lichtenstein, ed. *Wal-Mart: The Face of Twenty-First-Century Capitalism*. (NY: The New Press) 2006. p. 140, 3; Hemphill, 16-17; Miller, 11; Leggett.

insurance.”<sup>221</sup> The National Labor Committee’s study of 25 factories functioning under the US-Jordan Free Trade Agreement reported that twelve out of the 25 factories were manufacturing Wal-Mart store brand garments, exploiting and abusing guest workers from India, Bangladesh and China to do so.<sup>222</sup>

It is important to stress that Wal-Mart is far from alone in its sourcing practices – the National Labor Committee report on Jordan fingers a number of other retailers and brands – though Wal-Mart’s marketing slogan, “Good Neighbours,” does become rather ironic in light of them.

#### **D. “Cheap Labor”**

The phrase “cheap labor” is familiar to most who have encountered discussion of outsourcing, the movement of domestic manufacturing to overseas facilities. It is a production resource that is found in abundance in poor nations, and in the rhetoric of economic analysis it is equated to any other resource. For example, one hears of the “deep pools” of cheap labor in China, or the “endless streams” of cheap labor “flowing” to the coastal provinces of that country from inland or from surrounding nations, as though cheap labor were water or oil. Certainly such language is metaphorical, but it points to a relational reality between investors and the labor that enables their profits.

Thomas Princen, discussing “cultural distance” in the actions of outsiders invested in others’ nations, describes attitudes toward natural resources that mirror contemporary sentiments toward cheap labor. He writes,

---

<sup>221</sup> Anderson, 36; China Labor Watch and National Labor Committee. Blood and Exhaustion: Behind Bargain Toys Made in China for Wal-Mart and Dollar General. (New York: China Labor Watch and National Labor Committee) December 21, 2005.

<sup>222</sup> National Labor Committee (May 3).

In general, mobile outsiders... view others' resources as frontiers, as opportunities to exploit and move on. These interveners treat others' property as open-access while ignoring or overriding with force or the lure of riches the closed access property regions of residents. Mobile outsiders relate to a resource as a mining opportunity whereas long-term residents tend to relate to it as a source of economic security.<sup>223</sup>

This description of the mode of operation of outside investors captures eloquently the attitudes displayed by wealthy corporations and nations toward less-developed countries in the establishment of EPZs. Mobile multinational corporations relate to cheap labor as an exploitable opportunity, offering free trade agreements and strategic development plans as a lure. When the price of labor rises, or cheaper is found, the investors move on. Meanwhile, the workers and their communities pin their hopes on exchanging their time and physical energy for enough money to live and eventually prosper.

The view of human efforts as the resource, "cheap labor," is supported by the fundamental economic notion of value-addition, wherein the creation or calculation of value depends on subjective interest in the object, not on a universal or objective truth. Thus labor "has no value until it is exchanged" and exploitable labor has the highest value: "To be practical is to be exploitable, and to be exploitable is to have value, and to have value is good."<sup>224</sup> From a utilitarian perspective, then, cheap labor is good; and the cheapest labor is child labor, prison labor, forced labor, indentured labor or, cheapest yet, unpaid slave labor. The theoretical perspective that asserts the "goodness" of this resource clearly lacks room for a more local understanding of the actualities of its implementation under human hands.

---

<sup>223</sup> Princen, Thomas. "Distancing: Consumption and the Severing of Feedback" in eds. Thomas Princen, Michael Maniates, and Ken Conca. Confronting Consumption. (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press) 2002. p. 119.

The purpose of this chapter was to demonstrate the complexities of practicing consumer ethics in the global market as we know it today. Multi-level chains of production, cultural and geographical distance from workers and factories, mystification of the economic processes of free trade and global agreements, lack of reliable information, and public relations denial of injustices are a few of the stumbling blocks encountered on the path toward ethical consumption. This maze is the dominant economic model that, while making some financially wealthy, impoverishes many – not only those in less-developed countries but also consumers. By participating in society as a “consumer” one objectifies oneself – impoverishes one’s own existence – because one is participating in a system which views people as merely objects in a world of objects to be produced and consumed.

---

<sup>224</sup> Kramer, 97.

## Chapter 4

### Conclusion

I conclude my thesis by demonstrating how the examples of Christian ethical philosophy provided by Paul Tillich and Reinhold Niebuhr are relevant to the contemporary global economy, specifically the use of sweatshop labour by wealthy multinational organizations, and the problems that consumers face when trying to shop ethically. The many “pro-sweatshop” arguments and other rationales for unethical behaviour seem to all add up, in the end, to apathetic and self-interested irresponsibility in the face of avoidable injustices – Niebuhr’s discussion of such irresponsibility is harshly relevant. Yet how much choice does each individual really have? How, and to what degree, are we able to be responsible and are we to be held accountable for the actions of groups, e.g. corporations, over which we have no power? Do we, in fact, *have* power over them, which we are not wielding?

As has been discussed, much of Niebuhr’s criticism of political or moral ideology rests on the discrepancy between the theoretical ideal and its outcome, or the reality which the theory describes. It is not the imperfection of the ideas that frustrate him, but the lack of acknowledgement that such ideas are finite and, as such, unavoidably self-interested, coercive, and limited. In contrast to such admissions, which would allow for a more just implementation of theory, most often answers are promoted as final solutions to the problem at hand. Still, the claim to ultimacy, as a culmination of the finite

tendency toward domination, can provide a clue to the dominant interests at the base of such claims.<sup>225</sup>

The will to dominate that is a characteristic of moral and political theory was well-noted by Niebuhr, and the self-destructive results of such an orientation are clearly outlined by both him and Tillich. Niebuhr discusses this in his description of such supposedly benevolent events as the Treaty of Versailles or the American acquisition of the Phillipines. The two thinkers agree that discrepancies between theory (or the ideal) and actual outcomes are manifestations of the ontological polarity of love and power, wherein power (or egoism) has overtaken love in an attempt to make itself absolute. Such imbalanced relations are viewed as structures of self-destruction. And such structures constitute the main supports of the aspects of global economics discussed in this thesis.

Dominant interests in the market are, logically, represented by dominant market theories, viz., neoliberalism and the free market. Stemming from these are many subsidiary theories and rationales, such as free trade and consumer sovereignty.

While the dominant theories and their subpoints can be said to be historical examples of Tillich and Niebuhr's shared view of the ahistorical structure of existence (as, of course, can all social relationships), they can also be regarded as examples of the two broad categories of self-destructive structures pointed to by Niebuhr.

---

<sup>225</sup> One might note that neither citizens nor a government would, for the most part, find a solution claiming partiality and probable error very impressive. In this sense the claim to finality is somewhat coerced because it is the desire of theory to be heard and respected. Yet this expectation stems from the general tendency of arguments to claim finality, which claim has become imbedded in Western cultural understandings of authority and policy. Not only this, but the desire of theory to be respected, irrespective of the false claims that this demands be made, is yet another case of dishonesty stemming from egoism.

The first category is that wherein the ambitions of dominant powers are presented as empathetic to the needs and desires of weaker, dominated powers in order to take yet more power from them in order to further advance already dominant interests. The examples used here are free trade and consumer sovereignty.

The second category is that of moral inventions: those human-contrived moral or ethical theories that, though historically contingent, claim universal relevance and timeless significance. I will discuss neoliberalism [in economics] as a moral invention of this sort and, further, one that serves as moral sanction in the dilemma created by the combined destructiveness of free trade and consumer sovereignty.

#### **A. Free Trade: A New Napoleon**

Discrepancies between the promises of free trade, or “trade liberalization,” and the reality of its outcomes are many and vast. In Chapter Three I provided the four steps of trade liberalization. To recapitulate: privatization of public utilities; deregulation of the capital market to allow an inflow of investments; market-based pricing, which causes severe inflation and inflicts poverty; and the “poverty reduction strategy,” free trade. This programme in itself demonstrates dominant interests “veiled and exalted” as the triumph of the weak while in reality satisfying Napoleonic lusts for power.<sup>226</sup>

Within the steps of trade liberalization are “thicker” realities that bring conflicting powers into a different sphere than that of nation vs. nation, economy vs. economy. These local and personal realities are the real reasons that current economic practices need to be recognized as unjust.

---

<sup>226</sup> See *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, p.17-18 for original reference, or page 43 of Chapter Two for my reference to it here.

In Chapter Three it was shown that, most often, trade liberalization does not work – except in the interests of the already wealthy. Rich nations invest in other rich nations the profits made through free trade agreements with poorer nations because this is a more secure investment.<sup>227</sup> Poorer nations who have entered into trade agreements with wealthy nations not only remain poor but are in important ways left worse off.

In the same chapter I described the mechanics of the search for cheap labor in “liberalized” nations, particularly in the factory compounds of Export Processing Zones, where millions of people work under dehumanizing conditions to produce affordable goods for consumers in developed nations. I also raised the issue of guest worker programs, an auxiliary option to local cheap labor, if the local labor is not cheap enough. Though still relatively “thin” descriptions – since I did not go to any EPZs for first-hand impressions of life as cheap labor – these issues nonetheless add depth, and evidence of real violence done, to the complaint of the irrelevance of theory.

In theory, workers in EPZs will earn a living wage that will fuel the suffering local economy. In practice, zone wages are so low, and “labor laws are under such severe assault... that there is little chance of workers earning enough to adequately feed themselves, let alone stimulate the local economy.” Workers spend most of their money on rent in shared dormitories, and on transportation and food.<sup>228</sup>

Economic theory, limited to “the flow of capital, products, and services,” enjoys a freedom from geographic barriers that prove extremely difficult for real workers to overcome. While trade moves electronically, or with vast amounts of capital behind it, “workers cannot keep up [with the accelerating movement of capital] even if they are

---

<sup>227</sup> Tabb, 155.

<sup>228</sup> Klein, 210.

willing to pack their bags and move. They are being forced to [live under] corporate/global economic law at the threat of starvation.”<sup>229</sup>

But what are the alternatives for sweatshop workers? Why do they leave home for the factories and, in many cases, go into extreme debt for work with so little reward? Some argue that a period of Dickensian exploitation is a necessary step in the movement toward industrialization and that sweatshops are “vehicles for technology transfer from the North to the South [which will, over time] enhance productivity and thereby raise wages.”<sup>230</sup> More frequently it is argued that the alternatives for these laborers are much worse, and that factory work offers an opportunity to better their quality of life.<sup>231</sup>

Without denying that abuse is real, this latter argument runs that sweatshop labor is “better than” such alternatives as even more severe poverty, unemployment or irregular employment, subsistence farming, oneself or one’s children dying of starvation or disease, “living on a garbage dump,” or prostitution – suggesting that sweated factory labor is a choice made by the workers, out of an array of choices available to them.<sup>232</sup> In other words, we must not ask how the situation of these workers compares to wages and conditions of comparable jobs in wealthier countries, but how they compare to their other choices.<sup>233</sup> Though this argument seems logical, logic infers neither morality nor justice. Equal freedom to choose is not equal freedom if the choices are not equal.

---

<sup>229</sup> Kramer, 100.

<sup>230</sup> Ross, 324; Anderson, 59; DeMartino, George. “Enslaved to Fashion: Corporations, Consumers, and the Campaign for Worker Rights in the Global Economy” in *Human Rights & Human Welfare*. Vol.1, Issue 2. April 2001. p. 33; Klein, 227-28.

<sup>231</sup> Another common argument surrounding the sweatshop issue is that of protectionism, where free market proponents accuse antisweatshop activists of merely working to protect vested interests in domestic jobs and production. Elliot, 128; Esbenshade, 43; Kline, J., 106; Rodrik, 33.

<sup>232</sup> Ross, 114, 120, 323-4; Dicker, 119-20; Krugman, Paul. “In Praise of Cheap Labor.”

<<http://web.mit.edu/krugman/www/smokey.html>> [Accessed June 21, 2006]; Kline, J., 94; Rodrik, 35.

<sup>233</sup> DeMartino, 33.

The argument continues: because the individual is in pursuit of his/her own profit, s/he “would not accept a job that does not improve his or her condition. Free acceptance of an employment offer thereby constitutes evidence of an ethical wage rate.”<sup>234</sup>

Sweatshop laborers, in other words, choose rationally to work there, under the conditions that exist, and so despite their mistreatment it is fair employment.

Criticism of the neoliberal argument focuses largely on discussion of the economic role and moral obligations of the corporation to society, the ahistorical premises of economic theory, and the type of choice that workers have. For my purposes I will focus on the latter two criticisms, beginning here with choice and returning to the ahistoricity argument in the later section on neoliberalism in general.

The critique regarding the nature of the choice that laborers have when they rationally decide to work in exploitative conditions is in some ways similar to the critique of the axiomatic implementation of free trade theory. The argument that one would not choose something that does not benefit oneself is similarly unresponsive to the actual situations of the agents in poor nations, situations that consist of choices that are not truly free, but made under constraint. To argue that sweatshop laborers are following the self-interested dictates of the free market is to ignore that their choices are coerced; one who chooses to be exploited rather than starve is “compelled to choose rationally actions that are against his rational plan.”<sup>235</sup> Free choice does not exist when there are no “viable alternatives... that provide an effective choice. In countries with insufficient market forces and structurally high unemployment, acceptance of a job that pays below a living

---

<sup>234</sup> Kline, J., 97; see also DeMartino, 32; Ross, 323.

<sup>235</sup> Ross, 324 – citing T.H. Irwin on Aristotle.

wage constitutes a desperate choice rather than a free and ethical choice.”<sup>236</sup> Moreover, “that workers agree to the conditions that lead to their indenture does not relieve abusive employers from the law against it”<sup>237</sup> though these laws are frequently weak and weakened further by the global actions of corporations.

The underlying problems raised by the presence of sweatshops and, in sharper focus, by the arguments in support of them are also flaws in the ideologies of consumer sovereignty and neoliberal economics. I will thus leave off from the topic of sweatshops for now, to return to it as incorporated with these latter topics.

When examining the dominant interests involved in global free trade and the resultant situations of local laborers in less-developed countries, one must remember that corporations are not the only beneficiaries; the consumer also benefits. Cheap labor enables companies like Wal-Mart and its emulators to make immense profits and still offer low-priced goods to their customers. In fact, in reality it is the collective will of consumers that creates the pressure forcing corporations and manufacturers to outsource production in order to remain competitive. At least, that is the current consensus.

It seems undeniable that potentially fulfilled lives are being surrendered for the financial good of citizens of wealthy nations, by the wealthy nations and their citizens.

---

<sup>236</sup> Kline, J., 98.

<sup>237</sup> Ross, 325; Ross also makes the case that the logic of the “better than” argument is “unrestrained by a moral boundary. [...] The sweatshop is *better than* picking garbage or breaking bricks; it is *better than* prostitution, which is *better than* bonded labor or sexual slavery. Slavery is *better than* death. Two cheers for slavery?”

Also, for large entities like corporations the law is a fairly loose constraint, unlike the authority the law holds over individuals. Though the judicial system exists just so that the instinct for self-interest remains somewhat bound, if breaking the law is cost-effective, then by neoclassical economic logic, the correct business / profit-making decision for a corporation would be to break the law. For the individual, on the other hand, though breaking the law might often be in one’s material self-interest, the threat of punishment is much more effective. [See *The Corporation*, Vol. I for discussion of this.]

Yet, are citizens of wealthy nations each, as individuals, “choosing” to sacrifice the fulfillment and potential of other humans to have \$8 t-shirts and \$15 shoes? This question approaches problems of egoism in individualism, and the propagation of moral perspectives for and by dominant interests.

In answer to the question posed in the above paragraph, orthodox economists would argue that, yes, the consumer is culpable, as it is his/her consumer choices that create the market pressures that send corporations and manufacturers “racing to the bottom” for the lowest costs they can find.

### **B. Consumer Sovereignty? Voting with Dollars**

Those who argue that the consumer is culpable would indict him/her for “everyday complicity in systemic evils” perpetuated by transnational corporations in the violation of workers’ rights,<sup>238</sup> and on the other side of the coin suggest that consumer demands can influence industries to provide improvements in social issues.<sup>239</sup> Consumer leverage is cited as the source of such industry changes as airbags and seatbelts, healthy alternatives at fastfood restaurants, more detailed nutritional information on packaged food, and the positive actions of corporations that are carried out in order to maintain brand reputation and a customer base.<sup>240</sup> This leverage is also blamed for the continual search for low cost production as, for example, adding “seventy-five cents to a garment’s sewing cost in order to meet a higher ethical standard can ... add more than two dollars to the retail

---

<sup>238</sup> Featherstone, Liza and United Students Against Sweatshops. Students against Sweatshops. (London: Verso) 2002. p.10.

<sup>239</sup> Golodner, Linda F. “The Apparel Industry Code of Conduct: A Consumer Perspective on Social Responsibility” in Oliver F. Williams, C.S.C. (ed.), Global Codes of Conduct: An Idea Whose Time Has Come. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press) 2000. p. 245.

<sup>240</sup> Golodner, 244; Esbenshade, 39.

price [which] may lead shoppers to look further down the retail track” for their purchases.<sup>241</sup>

Yet, the argument regarding the “choice” of the sweatshop workers, though applied from a different angle, is relevant in this situation as well. It seems ridiculous to suggest that any consumer is truly “choosing” to support labor abuses such as those described earlier, particularly when s/he has next to no way of knowing the conditions surrounding the construction of a garment. And even if s/he was somehow able to find out, are consumers really culpable for the actions of the companies they buy from? Again, according to the free market view of consumer sovereignty and leverage, the answer is yes:

if consumers truly care about corporate behavior... then as rational agents they will choose to cast their dollar votes for the good produced by those corporations that behave responsibly... in accordance with consumers' values. [...] If the consumer is truly moved by human suffering or environmental exploitation, she might be willing to pay twice the price to purchase a good produced under better conditions. And if enough consumers feel this way, then the problem [of corporate misbehavior] disappears, because rational firms operating at the dictate of the market will be forced to improve their behavior in order to survive. If consumers truly care, we should expect to find a virtuous ‘race to the top’.... If we instead are witness to a ‘race to the bottom’... with each firm rushing off to the newest low-cost production site, then we must infer that our concerned consumers are not truly all that concerned.<sup>242</sup>

Journalist John Dicker describes this logic as another form of outsourcing, saying that Wal-Mart, like many firms, has in addition to labor “taken to outsourcing its responsibilities to the consumers, who, after all, are the ones who want low prices in the

---

<sup>241</sup> Sweeney, Kevin J. “Voting with Their Pocketbooks: The Strengths and Limits of Consumer-Driven Codes of Conduct” in Oliver F. Williams, C.S.C. (ed.), Global Codes of Conduct: An Idea Whose Time Has Come. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press) 2000. p. 256-57.

<sup>242</sup> DeMartino, 35; also, from Princen (preface, 4): “According to prevailing economic thought, consumption is nothing less than the purpose of the economy. Economic activity is separated into supply and demand, and demand – that is consumer purchasing behavior – is relegated to the black box of

first place.”<sup>243</sup> As though Wal-Mart’s trademark slogan, “Everyday Low Prices,” is in reality a generous acquiescence to consumer desires, rather than a cutting-edge system designed to crush competition and gain incredible profits by cutting costs where and however possible. If Wal-Mart was truly interested in what consumers are after, it could lower its prices even further, pay factory workers a fair wage, and still make a profit. But that profit would not be the \$300 billion a year that it currently is.

Despite its improbability, the concept of consumer sovereignty in the market is successful. Consumers feel good about having some measure of control over the unseen influences on their lives, even if that control is token. Like the French peasants on whose behalf Napoleon fought, the sovereign consumer is an entity invented to benefit dominant ambitions.

At this moment, global bodies such as multinational corporations are accountable to no one but the rule of profit and, if they choose, consumers. There is no governmental body with multinational jurisdiction, nor is there any legal power to enforce any global legislation, were it to even exist. Arguments for “consumer sovereignty” want to convince us that this is not a problem. That it is not true that there is no means of control or accountability for these organizations – the consumer is in control. And as long as the consumer is in control there is no need to organize an external body of control.

Here again one can see dominant economic (and political -- as will be clarified further below) interests fulfilling the role of “New Napoleons.” Much like the argument that EPZs and sweatshops exist for the good of poor nations and laborers, the theory that

---

consumer sovereignty. The demand function is an aggregation of individual preferences, each set of which is unknowable and can only be expressed in revealed form through market purchases.”

<sup>243</sup> Dicker, 123.

consumer sovereignty is the control that best serves consumers disguises (thinly) the actuality of its primary service to global corporate and financial organizations.

Vital to the conclusions that free market economics reaches about the role of the consumer in the market is the premise that s/he arrives in the market “with her... preferences in place... fully formed [and] entirely independent of other market agents... fully durable and unreachable by even the most aggressive strategies of other economic actors.”<sup>244</sup> In other words, that the billions of dollars spent by corporations on advertising and marketing really have no effect on consumer choices, despite the decades of research and refinement that have gone into making contemporary marketing the most effective it has ever been. This premise “allows the economist to conclude that in a free market economy consumers make those choices that make them truly best off.” It also “insulates the corporation from ethical responsibility for its actions, because it is merely the servant of a higher, more powerful authority... the consumer” who is in control whether s/he knows it or not.<sup>245</sup>

A moral assumption is revealed here that reaches into the heart of neoliberal economics and its ontologically self-destructive pulse. Both consumer sovereignty and the free market economy rely on cultural acceptance of individualism – the absolutization of the ego and the consequent belief that “it is *my* life” and others mere contingencies.

This moral assumption is the basis of free market economies today and is a good example of a contemporary instance of what Niebuhr describes in his discussion of orthodox and liberal Christian misinterpretations of the gospel ethic in the early church.

---

<sup>244</sup> DeMartino, 34.

<sup>245</sup> DeMartino, 34.

Perfect justice, according to the definitions of both Tillich and Niebuhr, is one wherein all beings have the freedom to seek the highest good, that is to seek union with the infinite from which they are estranged. However, for the reasons outlined in Chapters One and Two, in our estranged historical existence this is an impossibility. In *An Interpretation to Christian Ethics*, Niebuhr discusses ways in which the perfect ethic has been interpreted for unjust ends, such as the support of wicked kings and the acquiescence of citizens. Like the doctrines, such as apocalypticism and perfectionism, that he mentions, neoliberalism corrupts and exploits the law of love. It removes the ultimate goal of freedom and fulfillment from the ultimate and claims to place it within the grasp of the individual in history. Only, this freedom is the freedom to fulfill one's corrupt nature, i.e., to pursue one's self-interest to its very end. Luigi Esposito puts it succinctly:

Neoliberals assume that people are, by nature, hedonistic and competitive. Any impediment to this natural human tendency is considered to be anathema to a free society. Accordingly, a moral order is one where people are free to exercise their innate desire for pleasure/profit without facing external restraints – other people. In effect, others become potential obstacles to personal achievement; others are impediments to the exercise of freedom.<sup>246</sup>

In other words, ideally, other people are merely contingencies, for or against one's own goals. If the free market could function precisely according to theory, each individual would be the center and entirety of his/her own world. Thus the moral assumption implicit in free market theory is that the highest good, the most moral goal, is complete non-recognition of the personhood of others: self-interest, individualism. Esposito continues his statement regarding economic morality:

the freedom to act in self-interest presumably promotes a fair and ethical order where social and economic positions are simply reflections of an

---

<sup>246</sup> Esposito, Luigi. "Toward an Embodied Global Ethic" in Jung Min Choi, John W. Murphy, and Manuel J. Caro (eds.), *Globalization with a Human Face*. (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger) 2004. p. 148-149.

individual's merit, talent, or ambition. In fact, even dismal social conditions related to extreme inequality and poverty are assumed to be neutral outcomes that carry no ethical burden, for they reside outside human purpose and reflect fundamental differences in people's worth and abilities.<sup>247</sup>

This version of individualist morality is supported by the free market's dependence "on a model of the garment economy that treats market forces as if they were physical laws – as if wages, like the weather, are a result that humans cannot affect."<sup>248</sup> Similarly, the idea that the developing world must endure the same processes that the industrialized world went through implies that history is not affected by human action. This is "a mechanical reading of history"<sup>249</sup> as ahistorical.

Free market theory is disconnected from its subjects by the distance of its proponents from them, and yet its proponents, as part of the overall economic system, are also subjects of the theory. Therefore the accusation that economic theory is "extremely abstract and unresponsive"<sup>250</sup> must be tempered by the realization that it is also a subjective manipulation of power. That is, it *is* historical, though ontologically it claims ahistoricity. Those who wish to dominate benefit from the view of goods and services, including the cheap labor of millions, as "merely contingencies within formulas."<sup>251</sup> Dominating power is increased by the failure to distinguish the produced from the producer, and by the subsequent objectification of humans as "cheap labor."

As mere contingencies, to be calculated like the cost and availability of any resource, nations and their labor have economic value as means to ends. This value is not dependent on the quality of life for the persons involved, for example, whether it is an

---

<sup>247</sup> Esposito, 149. This economic rationale for inequality, based on the 'value-addition' econometric (see Princen, Kramer) is one I would like to analyze further in the future.

<sup>248</sup> Ross, 325.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid, 328.

affirmed or degraded existence, but on their mathematically calculable qualities of cost and availability. The value of consumers to the economy is identical in principle to that of laborers, even though they seem to benefit more from it. Their economic value lies in the degree of potential that they possess to pursue their freedom of self-interest materially. In a world of calculable contingencies,

[a] 'booming economy' may boom despite all... life-insulting conditions. But since there is no life-value GNP, or any adequate set of life standards by which economies judge themselves, the global corporate market could unravel the life-webs of the planet with no markers to recognize the problem in its metrics of 'growth' and 'development'.<sup>252</sup>

The objectification of sovereign consumers and sweated laborers is thus entwined – so long as this remains unrecognized by those with the power to pursue their self interest.<sup>253</sup>

Here the importance of the ontological perspective becomes clear.

Interdependence with one's world is an aspect of being that is essential to being human. If one denies interdependence in one's own life then one denies an essential aspect of one's personhood. Interdependence involves being recognized as a person and recognizing the personhood of others, i.e. an exchange of subjectivity and objectivity.

When one withdraws from interdependence by absolutizing one's freedom, one no longer has access to that exchange. By absolutizing one's own freedom, one simultaneously absolutizes the determinedness of every other, since logically there can be only one absolutely free person in even a universe of people. Therefore, one's subjectivity can not be recognized because one is not recognizing the subjectivity of others. Since

---

<sup>250</sup> Kramer, 93.

<sup>251</sup> Kramer, 96.

<sup>252</sup> McMurtry, John. "The New World Order: The Hidden War of Values" in Gordana Yovanovich (ed.), The New World Order: Corporate Agenda and Parallel Reality. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press) 2003. p. 29.

subjectivity – personhood – is an exchange, viewing others as utter objects of one's own absolute subjecthood means that the half of the exchange that would recognize one's subjecthood is lacking. And so, by absolutizing oneself, one objectifies one's self – one destroys one's own humanity. In more Tillichian terms, "...a purely subjective *eros* and will to power make everything into an instrument or thing to serve its own interest."<sup>254</sup>

For Tillich, the polar opposite of domination, surrender, involves the same non-recognition of, and thus injustice toward, the personhood of others. As consumer, one both dominates and surrenders; one surrenders one's capacity to recognize the subjecthood of others by surrendering to the dominant ethos that demands the absolutization of the ego. One simultaneously dominates by participating in the consumption of goods produced through the objectification of others.

A dominated self gains power by resisting the efforts at domination by the other, that is, by refusing the absoluteness of the other and the consequent objectification of its self. In contrast, a dominated self, such as the consumer in the free market, that surrenders

has not received from himself the justice to which he is entitled, according to his intrinsic claim for justice. [This] surrender ...is the desire to annihilate one's responsible and creative self for the sake of the participation in another self... It is justice to oneself to affirm one's own power of being and to accept the claim for justice which is implied in this power. Without this justice there is not reuniting love because there is nothing to unite.<sup>255</sup>

The dominated (and dominant) position of the consumer is made more difficult (or easy, depending on perspective) by the unavailability of reliable knowledge, be that produced

---

<sup>253</sup> This is not to suggest that awareness of the problem would solve it, as the near thirty year history of outsourcing to sweatshops confirms. Rather I am emphasizing the connectedness of objectification, and that under the circumstances of estrangement and conflict it will not ever end in human history.

by dominant interests or by those who want to resist them. An example of this can be seen in the continual debate over global warming, greenhouse gasses, and what we need to do about it, if anything. Being “aware” becomes an arbitrary position. The same problem occurs in knowledge about foreign labor abuse. When instances surface they are downplayed or denied by corporate public relations, yet labor activists insist that people are being treated like animals. One knows neither what nor who to believe, and why should one believe any of them?

Though the global market system excludes awareness of “the conditionality of all life, conceiving of ‘the real world’ as decoupled transaction among self-maximizing buyers and sellers,”<sup>256</sup> it still seems odd that with the advent of globalization and the intensification of social cohesion – by physical proximity, media, communications, transport, etc. – the claim to ultimacy of the penultimate self through the denial of interdependence can still be so insistent. One would expect that, despite the free market hopes for self-interested indifference, even some knowledge of the social (and other) ramifications of one’s consumption in the lives of others would activate “irrational” moral empathy and result in large-scale denunciations of or demands about the questionable activities of global organizations. While theories of market control would have one believe that the reason this does not occur<sup>257</sup> is that consumers don’t care, Thomas Princen’s concept of “distancing” provides a more believable answer to the question of ignorance in an information age.

---

<sup>254</sup> Pasewark, Kyle A. A Theology of Power: Being beyond Domination. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press) 1993. p.287.

<sup>255</sup> *Love, Power, Justice*, p.69.

<sup>256</sup> McMurry, p.26.

<sup>257</sup> With the exception of a few specific boycott campaigns that were at least somewhat effective (though a study of literature on monitoring qualifies the well-publicized effectiveness considerably): Nike, the Gap.

Distancing, as opposed to “viewing consumption as the exercise of consumer sovereignty in the context of perfect (or near-perfect) information, ...highlights the increasingly isolated character of consumption choices as decision makers at individual nodes are cut off from a contextualized understanding of the ramifications of their choices...”<sup>258</sup> In other words, the problem is not only the unavailability of information, it is the interpretation of information that is available. Princen defines distancing, with regard to environmental impacts of consumption, as “the separation between primary resource extraction decisions and ultimate consumption decisions...”. This separation occurs “along four dimensions – geography, culture, bargaining power, and agency. At one extreme, zero-distance is production and consumption by one household or individual; at the other extreme, it is global, cross-cultural, and among agents of disparate abilities and alternatives.”<sup>259</sup>

At a cultural distance, knowing little about the economic or legal status of workers, about their ways of life, or about production practices, one has “no way of knowing if [one’s] consumption is supporting or undermining” the workers. Combined with little ability on the part of the individual to effect positive change were it necessary, and the need to purchase some goods, most people “prefer to assume, that [their] purchases are supportive... that all parties have entered the bargain voluntarily and that coercion or extreme dependency have not been the conditions” of production.<sup>260</sup>

This dilemma evokes Michael Walzer’s notions of “thick and thin” moral argument, outlined in this thesis’ introduction and alluded to at points prior to this.

---

<sup>258</sup> Princen, Thomas, Michael Maniates, and Ken Conca. “Confronting Consumption” in eds. Thomas Princen, Michael Maniates, and Ken Conca. Confronting Consumption. (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press) 2002. p.16.

<sup>259</sup> Princen, 116.

Princen's "zero-distance" separation from understanding of one's actions is the place where the "thickest" of Walzer's moral maximalism – linguistically idiomatic, culturally particular, historically contextual, detailed in description, including specific ways of "social conflict, political bargaining, cultural imitation, and (sometimes) religious revelation," all having been "worked out over a long period of time through complex social interactions" – could exist.<sup>261</sup> Princen's global distance is, then, that which necessitates "thin" moral minimalism.

Walzer stresses that moral minimalism "does not describe a morality that is substantively minor or emotionally shallow." In fact it is more the opposite. Thin morality consists of those universal demands such as truth and justice, principles that are universally recognizable even when used in a particular local context.<sup>262</sup>

Global distance, in addition to minimizing the depth of understanding that one can have of an other, exists in an imperfect economic world of "incomplete information, strategic interaction, and shaded costs," that prevents the ideal sovereign consumer from being able to make his/her ideally rational self-interested calculations. A truly self-interested act would take into consideration more than the immediate gratification of one's desires, but "cultural distance provides opportunities for some producers to ignore or avoid or misrepresent certain information, including that which reveals the long-term costs of a consumption decision."<sup>263</sup>

---

<sup>260</sup> Ibid., p.118.

<sup>261</sup> Walzer, 21.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid., p.6.

<sup>263</sup> Princen, p.118. Shaded costs occur "when the known cost [of a transaction] ...is only a part of the full ecological and social costs. A shaded cost is one that is neither externalized ("knowingly sent downstream," i.e. sloughed off onto uninvolved third parties without their consent) nor internalized (absorbed by the firm, or into the price), but rather "rendered invisible to the firm and to others". (Princen, 108)

For example, even if one determined that one would only purchase goods marked “Made in the USA” or “Made in Canada,” there is no guarantee of the conditions of production. Sweatshops exist in the United States and in Canada, even though not in EPZs. And there are some nations, specifically those of the Mariana Islands, that do have EPZs but are technically part of the United States, allowing anything produced there to be labeled, “Made in the USA.”<sup>264</sup>

To make matters even more difficult, the layers of dissemblance constructed by public relations and marketing divisions of firms, in addition to the complex legalities and constant movement within the contracting system of production, mean that even if a company or retailer advertises that it does not do business with sweatshops, nor purchase products from sweatshops, there is no guarantee that the products one might buy there do not, in fact, come from a sweatshop.<sup>265</sup> In some cases the company is simply lying, in others it is a legal fiction or it may be a case of deliberate ignorance, and in still other cases factory conditions may be hidden from monitors who visit to ensure that workers are not being exploited.<sup>266</sup>

With regard to this grooming of consumer sovereignty to represent the dominant global market interests in, specifically, the ongoing availability of cheap labor, Naomi Klein writes:

the enormous profits raked in by the superbrands are premised upon these worlds [of producers and consumers] remaining as separate from each other as possible. It is a tidy formula: because the contract factory owners in the free-trade zones don't sell... directly to the public, they have a

---

<sup>264</sup> Ross, p.139-140.

<sup>265</sup> The only guarantee would be a vertically integrated corporation, which itself houses the entire production process from the making of parts out of raw materials, to the assembling and the distribution.

<sup>266</sup> Esbénhede; Brown, Joshua Samuel. “Confessions of a Sweatshop Inspector” in *Albion Monitor*. September 1, 2001. <<http://www.albionmonitor.com/0108a/sweatshopinspect.html>> [Accessed June 8, 2006].

limitless threshold for bad public relations. Building up a positive relationship with the shopping public, meanwhile, is left entirely in the hands of the brand-name multinationals. The only catch is that for the system to function smoothly, workers must know little of the marketed lives of the products they produce and consumers must remain sheltered from the production lives of the brands they buy.<sup>267</sup>

This brings us full circle, to the situation of estrangement, the tragic human condition. Despite one's best efforts or intentions, the efforts of others less well-intentioned create a destiny and guilt that is ours because of our finitude. If our destiny, as Tillich, says, is "that out of which or decisions arise; ...the concreteness of our being,"<sup>268</sup> then our destiny is our "thick" reality: the cultural, familial, political, and economic situation into which each person is born; including a culture of egoism and including a desperately poor nation. However our destiny also includes our "thin" reality: the understanding that our lives are connected to the lives of *all* others, not just those immediate to us.

### **C. Responsibility, Freedom, Justice**

The dynamics of various power relations at play in the global market and consumer culture have now been articulated according to the ontological political ideas of Tillich and Niebuhr. In many ways, it seems an individual's freedom is only an illusion. Yet both thinkers agree on the principle of responsibility – that one is accountable for one's own choices, because one undertakes them freely. This might appear to support the idea of consumer sovereignty, but it must be remembered that consumer sovereignty is based on a false notion of the individual as unhampered by external forces in his/her decisions. However, this does not leave one powerless.

---

<sup>267</sup> Klein, 347.

Underlying Niebuhr's views on power is the principle that "[t]he individual is empowered by God with creativity and freedom, and therefore is responsible to act."<sup>269</sup> Likewise, as noted in Chapter One, for Tillich as well, the person is also obligated to answer for his/her decisions. "Each of us," he says, "is responsible for what has happened through the center of his self, the seat and organ of his freedom."<sup>270</sup> One would prefer to take responsibility for positive choices and blame circumstance for poor ones, but contingency, and one's responsibility, is equal for both: "...the relativity of all moral ideals cannot absolve us of the necessity and duty of choosing between relative values, and ...the choice is sometimes so clear as to become an imperative one."<sup>271</sup>

This perspective on responsibility and freedom is necessary to Niebuhr and Tillich's views on justice as a balancing force against the tendency toward domination or surrender in the corrupted relationship of love and power.

For both theorists there are three types of justice, two of which I will focus on here. Perfect justice or, in Tillich's terms, "creative justice," is that which maintains the balance and harmony between ontological polarities in their perfect natural state. If perfect justice existed then rather than try to dominate other beings with whom one is in conflict, all would exist in mutual relationships wherein the actualization of the other was of utmost importance to everyone. But perfect justice does not exist and so, even if one

---

<sup>268</sup> *Systematic Theology, Vol. I*, p.184-5

<sup>269</sup> Patterson, Eric. "Niebuhr and His Critics: Realistic Optimism in World Politics" in Eric Patterson, ed. *The Christian Realists: Reassessing the Contributions of Niebuhr and his Contemporaries*. (Lanham: University Press of America, Inc.) 2003. p. 42.

<sup>270</sup> *Systematic Theology. Vol. I*, p.184

<sup>271</sup> *Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, p.120.

or many attempt to live *more* justly or more mutually, the imbalance and tendency to destructiveness will always happen.

Despite this the human is obligated to strive for justice and this must therefore take the form of imperfect “basic” or “tributive” justice. Imperfect justice is oriented by the standard of perfect justice but is amenable to the inconsistencies and imbalances of finite existence. Moreover, according to Niebuhr, while perfect justice matches the ideal mutuality among beings, imperfect justice matches the conflicting and coercive relations among people. It is not an attempt to govern by an ideal that is divorced from reality, it works with the tendencies of corrupted nature.

Niebuhr comments on the impotence and misguidedness of efforts at justice which refuse to acknowledge the need for coercion in dealing with human conflict as well as the self-interest inherent in even the most well-intentioned acts. Social change, or efforts toward it, with the appearance of being non-coercive probably nonetheless are, as “groups usually behav[e] in terms of self-interest, although they [cloak] such egoism in moralistic slogans.”<sup>272</sup> Even the non-violent Indian resistance to the British, he says, was not only coercive but violent:

Gandhi’s boycott of British cotton results in the undernourishment of children in Manchester, and the blockade of the Allies in war-time caused the death of German children. It is impossible to coerce a group without damaging both life and property and without imperilling the interests of the innocent with those of the guilty.<sup>273</sup>

Though one might wish that were not the case, a desire born of *eros*, this is, again, the tragic condition of existence.

---

<sup>272</sup> Patterson.1, p.3.

<sup>273</sup> *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, p. 172.

In the global market, there is another form of justice that claims to be noncoercive, instead relying on the natural self-regulation of its component parts. The chief components of this system are free international investments and free trade, corporations, and consumers. These parts are all regulated by market pressures, i.e., self-interest. The corporation thus does not need to, and is not expected to, look out for the needs of people, but only for its own profit. Human needs and the social good, as conveyors of “market pressure” will be met “naturally” by the pursuit of profit. If corporations do not benefit society, then they will be punished in the marketplace. Likewise, the individual’s pursuit of personal gain will by proxy benefit the corporation. Though in theory there is no coercion, only the harmonious beneficence of self-interest, in truth the system depends on a great deal of coercion.

Tillich calls the type of justice that is self-regulating “autonomous justice.”

Autonomous justice is that which is:

reduced to a merely formal egalitarianism which severs justice from connection with the real individual beings demanding justice. Formal justice allows the material content of society to overcome it and use it for its own ends. When capital becomes dominant, therefore, relations of capital and its possessors to its nonpossessors cannot be controlled by social justice, for these relations have already been declared out of bounds to formal justice.<sup>274</sup>

This recalls Esposito’s statements, noted earlier in this chapter, regarding the moral order of the neoliberal economy:

...a moral order is one where people are free to exercise their innate desire for pleasure/profit without facing external restraints – other people [i.e., reality is immoral]. ...freedom to act in self-interest presumably promotes a fair and ethical order where social and economic positions are simply reflections of an individual’s merit, talent, or ambition. ...even dismal social conditions related to extreme inequality and poverty are assumed to

---

<sup>274</sup> Pasewark, p.292

be neutral outcomes that carry no ethical burden, for they reside outside human purpose...<sup>275</sup>

By shifting the source and definition of justice to within and by the order it is meant to oversee, an isolated system is created with no connection to an external reality, be that transcendent or social. This is Niebuhr's basic critique of all human-conceived moral systems.

Moreover, the "equal freedom" of the free market is an illusion. While on one hand it welcomes all to participate, showing no discrimination in that regard, on the other hand that is the only equality it knows. It makes no allowances for contingent limitations or advantages. In this sense it is a radical egalitarianism of the sort that Tillich's theonomous justice opposes.

Like Niebuhr, Tillich believes that an ontologically correct conception of justice "must recognize justice's participation in power. Justice must be based on the intrinsic power... borne by every being...".<sup>276</sup> This correct conception is Tillich's theonomous justice. In contrast to autonomous, or self-governing, justice, theonomous justice is governed by God. This concept envelops Tillich's "tributive justice tempered by creative justice," recommended for justice in human relations. It is different from creative justice, which neither governs nor is governed, and also differs from merely tributive justice, which answers to human notions. Theonomous justice

opposes radical egalitarianism almost as much as it opposes tyranny, for while the latter refuses to recognize any power outside itself, the former refuses to acknowledge differences in power of being which make some better or worse suited for particular activities than others. The difference between a formal right to just treatment forwarded on the basis of 'potential power' cannot be allowed to obscure actual differences between

---

<sup>275</sup> Esposito, p.148-149.

<sup>276</sup> Pasewark, p.292.

entities with the same potential power. Egalitarianism recognizes only potential power. In this sense, it is only autonomous justice run amok.<sup>277</sup>

In potential power, that is, by nature, all human beings are the same. But in terms of real, historically actualized power, the sweatshop workers' power has been depleted by the greed of mass consumption. The free market runs on acceptance of this state of history as "the way things are," and this acceptance leads to cynicism, depression, and apathy. While on one hand Tillich and Niebuhr would agree that in estranged history equality is unattainable, neither would suggest that a state of injustice is acceptable, or that the human condition should lead to apathy in the face of injustice. For Niebuhr, inaction is sin; it is as much an act of egoism as purposeful domination is.

In conclusion I would like to return to the question of the relevance of Niebuhr and Tillich's thought to contemporary issues of injustice. Though today's globalized market did not exist at the time the works that I use were written, their understandings of humans, society, and history remain relevant perspectives from which to view current events. The ontological ethic that emerges, and the analyses of power and responsibility, constitute a moral minimalism grounded in human being.

Combined with the pragmatic approach, the ontological viewpoint helps one transcend one's own narrow subjectivity, to think about justice in a more inclusive way. One might think about local justice as including a distant people, or think about economic justice as based on more than economy. In general, ontological discussion will remind one of the inseparability of many things that are habitually categorized separately: destiny and coercion, individualism and domination, consumption and *eros*.

---

<sup>277</sup> Ibid., p.293.

While, as noted, better understanding or awareness does not equal action, if understanding informs one's action then it can transmute into some change for the better. The law of love may not specify any action, nor target particular social needs, but it can remain a continually relevant standard for behavior, while others become outdated and fall by the wayside. Still the ethic must be articulated in practical plans, guidelines by which to make more specific policy, and as Niebuhr admits, there will be no unanimity of voices even when oriented by the law of love. This is the nature of imperfect justice. However, the law of love can strengthen justice by preventing the absolutization of any single politic or philosophy, always asking how these can be imaginatively transcended.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Achbar, Mark, Jennifer Abbott, and Joel Bakan. The Corporation: a documentary by Mark Achbar (Volumes I – III). (Kelowna, BC: Filmwest Associates) 2003. Produced by Big Picture Media Corporation in association with TVOntario. Based on Bakan, Joel. "The Corporation: The Pathological Pursuit of Profit and Power." (Toronto: Viking Canada) 2004.
- Adhikari, Ramesh. "Trade policy reforms, growth and poverty reduction" in Ramesh Adhikari and Prema-chandra Athukorala (eds). Developing Countries in the World Trading System: The Uruguay Round and Beyond. (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd.) 2002. p. 202.
- Anderson, Sarah, John Cavanagh, Thea Lee and the Institute for Policy Studies. Field Guide to the Global Economy (Rev. Ed.). (New York: The New Press) 2005.
- Bell, Clive. Developmental Policy as Public Finance. (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press) 2003. p. 90-93, 97
- Bergdahl, Michael. What I Learned from Sam Walton: How to Compete in a Wal-Mart World. (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.) 2004.
- Bonacich, Edna, and Richard Appelbaum. Behind the Label: Inequality in the Los Angeles Apparel Industry. (Berkeley: University of California Press) 2000.
- Bonacich, Edna with Khaleelah Hardi. "Wal-Mart and the Logistics Revolution" in Nelson Lichtenstein, ed. Wal-Mart: The Face of Twenty-First-Century Capitalism. (New York: The New Press) 2006, pp. 163-188.
- Brown, Joshua Samuel. "Confessions of a Sweatshop Inspector" in *Albion Monitor*. September 1, 2001.  
<<http://www.albionmonitor.com/0108a/sweatshopinspect.html>> [Accessed June 8, 2006].
- Browne, Andrew. "As Congress Blusters about Trade with China, U.S. Companies Play coy Over Profits" *Wall Street Journal (Eastern Edition)* February 13, 2006. p. A2.
- China Labor Watch and National Labor Committee. Blood and Exhaustion: Behind Bargain Toys Made in China for Wal-Mart and Dollar General. (New York: China Labor Watch and National Labor Committee) December 21, 2005.
- DeMartino, George. "Enslaved to Fashion: Corporations, Consumers, and the Campaign for Worker Rights in the Global Economy" in *Human Rights & Human Welfare*. Vol.1, Issue 2. April 2001. pp. 29-37.

- Dicker, John. The United States of Wal-Mart. (New York: Penguin) 2005.
- “Learning to love Wal-Mart” *The Economist*, 4/17/2004, Vol. 371, Issue 8371. p.9.
- Elliot, Kimberly Ann and Richard B. Freeman. Can Labor Standards Improve Under Globalization? (Washington, D.C.: Institute for International Economics) June 2003.
- Esbenshade, Jill. Monitoring Sweatshops: Workers, Consumers, and the Global Apparel Industry. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press) 2004.
- Esposito, Luigi. “Toward an Embodied Global Ethic” in Jung Min Choi, John W. Murphy, and Manuel J. Caro (eds.), Globalization with a Human Face. (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger) 2004, p.147-158.
- Featherstone, Liza and United Students Against Sweatshops. Students Against Sweatshops. (London: Verso) 2002.
- Flint, Robert. “How Wal-Mart Treads Heavily in Foreign Exchange Forest” *Wall Street Journal (Eastern Edition)* November 17, 2004. pC3.
- Gereffi, Gary. “The Organization of Buyer-Driven Global Commodity Chains: How U.S. Retailers Shape Overseas Production Networks” in Gary Gereffi and Miguel Korzeniewicz (eds.), Commodity Chains and Global Capitalism. (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press) 1994, pp. 95-122.
- Gilkey, Langdon. On Niebuhr: A Theological Study. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press) 2001.
- Golodner, Linda F. “The Apparel Industry Code of Conduct: A Consumer Perspective on Social Responsibility” in Oliver F. Williams, C.S.C. (ed.), Global Codes of Conduct: An Idea Whose Time Has Come. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press) 2000, pp. 241-252.
- Greenhouse, Steven and Michael Barbaro. “The Ugly Side of Free Trade – Sweatshops in Jordan” *The New York Times*. May 3, 2006.
- Hemphill, Thomas A. “Rejuvenating Wal-Mart’s Reputation” *Business Horizons* (Indiana: Indiana University Kelly School of Business) (2005) 48. p.11-21.
- Karjanen, David. “The Wal-Mart Effect and the New Face of Capitalism: Labor Market and Community Impacts of the Megaretailer” in Nelson Lichtenstein, ed. Wal-Mart: The Face of Twenty-First-Century Capitalism. (New York: The New Press) 2006, pp. 143-162.

- Klein, Naomi. No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies. (Toronto: Vintage Canada) 2000.
- Kline, John M. Ethics for International Business: Decision making in a global political economy. (London: Routledge) 2005.
- Kramer, Eric Mark. "Vanishing Meaning, the Ideology of Value-Addition, and the Diffusion of Broadband Information Technology" in Jung Min Choi, John W. Murphy, and Manuel J. Caro (eds.), Globalization with a Human Face. (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger) 2004, p. 87-108.
- Krugman, Paul. "In Praise of Cheap Labor."  
<<http://web.mit.edu/krugman/www/smokey.html>> [Accessed June 21, 2006]
- Leggett, Karby and Peter Wonacott. "The World's Factory: Surge in Exports From China Jolts Global Industry" *Wall Street Journal (Eastern Edition)* Oct. 10, 2002. p. A1.
- Lichtenstein, Nelson. "Preface" and "Wal-Mart: A Template for Twenty-First-Century Capitalism" in Nelson Lichtenstein, ed. Wal-Mart: The Face of Twenty-First-Century Capitalism. (New York: The New Press) 2006. p.ix-2 and 3-30.
- McMurtry, John. "The New World Order: The Hidden War of Values" in Gordana Yovanovich (ed.), The New World Order: Corporate Agenda and Parallel Reality. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press) 2003, p. 23-39.
- Miller, George (U.S. House of Representatives Representative, Senior Democrat) and the Committee on Education and the Workforce. Everyday Low Wages: The Hidden Price We All Pay for Wal-Mart. February 16, 2004. Available online at:  
<<http://www.alarise.org/WALMARTREPORT.pdf>> [Accessed August 16, 2006].
- Mitchell, Tom. "China's Shenzhen to lift minimum wage by 20%" *FT.com Financial Times*, May 31 2006. <<http://news.ft.com/cms/s/2348c8f6-f094-11da-9338-0000779e2340.html>> [Accessed June 16, 2006]
- Moreton, Bethany E. "It Came from Bentonville: The Agrarian Origins of Wal-mart Culture" in Nelson Lichtenstein, ed. Wal-Mart: The Face of Twenty-First-Century Capitalism. (New York: The New Press) 2006, p. 57-82.
- National Labor Committee. "March 2006 Report on Jordan" Released May 3, 2006.  
<<http://www.nlcnet.org/live/article.php?id=10>> [Accessed May 23, 2006]
- Niebuhr, Reinhold. An Interpretation of Christian Ethics. (New York: Meridian Books) 1958 [1935].
- Niebuhr, Reinhold. Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons) 1932.

- Norman, Al. The Case Against Wal-Mart. (Atlantic City, NJ: Raphael Marketing) 2004.
- O'Meara, Thomas. "Tillich and Heidegger: A Structural Relationship," *Harvard Theological Review*, 61 (1968), p.249-261.
- Packard, Vance. "Growthmanship" extracted from The Wastemakers. (London:Longman) 1960, in Lee, Martyn J. (ed.) The Consumer Society Reader. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.) 2000, p.223-227.
- Pasewark, Kyle A. A Theology of Power: Being beyond Domination. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press) 1993.
- Patterson, Eric. "Niebuhr and His Contemporaries: Introduction to Christian Realism" in Eric Patterson, ed. The Christian Realists: Reassessing the Contributions of Niebuhr and his Contemporaries. (Lanham: University Press of America, Inc.) 2003, p.1-23. [Patterson.1]
- Patterson, Eric. "Niebuhr and His Critics: Realistic Optimism in World Politics" in Eric Patterson, ed. The Christian Realists: Reassessing the Contributions of Niebuhr and his Contemporaries. (Lanham: University Press of America, Inc.) 2003, p.25-51.
- PBS Frontline. "Is Wal-Mart Good for America?"  
<<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/walmart/>> [Accessed May 2006].
- People's Daily Online. "China sets minimum wage rules." February 6, 2004.  
<[http://english.people.com.cn/200402/06/eng20040206\\_134134.shtml](http://english.people.com.cn/200402/06/eng20040206_134134.shtml)> [Accessed June 16, 2006]
- Petrovic, Misha and Gary G. Hamilton. "Making Global Markets: Wal-Mart and Its Suppliers" in Nelson Lichtenstein, ed. Wal-Mart: The Face of Twenty-First-Century Capitalism. (New York: The New Press) 2006, p.107-142.
- Princen, Thomas, Michael Maniates, and Ken Conca. "Confronting Consumption" in eds. Thomas Princen, Michael Maniates, and Ken Conca. Confronting Consumption. (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press) 2002.
- Princen, Thomas. "Distancing: Consumption and the Severing of Feedback" in eds. Thomas Princen, Michael Maniates, and Ken Conca. Confronting Consumption. (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press) 2002.
- Roberts, Dexter and Aaron Bernstein. "'A Life of Fines and Beating': Wal-Mart's self-policing in a Chinese sweatshop was a disaster. What kind of monitoring system works?" *Business Week* (New York) Iss. 3701, October 2, 2000. p.122-128.

- Rodrik, Dani. Has Globalization Gone Too Far?. (Washington, D.C.: Institute for International Economics) March 1997.
- Ross, Robert J.S. Slaves to Fashion: Poverty and Abuse in the New Sweatshops. (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press) 2004.
- Scharlemann, Robert P. "Tillich's method of correlation: two proposed revisions" in *Journal of Religion*, Volume 46, No. 1 (January 1966) p.92-103.
- Schilling, David M. "Making Codes of Conduct Credible: The Role of Independent Monitoring" in Oliver F. Williams, C.S.C. (ed.), Global Codes of Conduct: An Idea Whose Time Has Come. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press) 2000.
- Slater, Peter. "Tillich on the Fall and the Temptation of Goodness" in *The Journal of Religion* Volume 65, No.2 (April 1985) p.196-207.
- Slater, Robert. The Wal-Mart Triumph: Inside the World's #1 Company. (New York: Portfolio) 2003.
- Stein, Nicholas. "No Way Out Competition to make products for Wester companies has revived an old form of abuse: debt bondage" *Fortune Magazine*. January 20, 2003. Found at <[http://money.cnn.com/magazines/fortune/fortune\\_archive...](http://money.cnn.com/magazines/fortune/fortune_archive...)> [Accessed June 9, 2006].
- Stranks, Robert T. "Understanding Trade Liberalization." Trade and Economic Policy Commentary No. 25. Government of Canada, Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade. December 1998.
- Strasser, Susan. "Woolworth to Wal-Mart: Mass Merchandising and the Changing Culture of Consumption" in Nelson Lichtenstein, ed. Wal-Mart: The Face of Twenty-First-Century Capitalism. (New York: The New Press) 2006, pp. 31-56.
- Sweeney, Kevin J. "Voting with Their Pocketbooks: The Strengths and Limits of Consumer-Driven Codes of Conduct" in Oliver F. Williams, C.S.C. (ed.), Global Codes of Conduct: An Idea Whose Time Has Come. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press) 2000, p.253-264.
- Tabb, William K. "Race to the Bottom?" in Stanley Aronowitz and Heather Gautney (eds.) Implicating Empire: Globalization and Resistance in the 21st Century World Order. (New York: Basic Books) 2003, p.151-158.
- Tillich, Paul. Dynamics of Faith. (New York: Harper) 1956.

- Tillich, Paul. Love, Power and Justice: Ontological Analyses and Ethical Applications. (New York: Oxford University Press) 1960 [1954].
- Tillich, Paul. Systematic Theology. Vol. I. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press) 1951.
- Tillich, Paul. Systematic Theology. Vol II. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press) 1957.
- Vance, Sandra S. and Roy V. Scott. Wal-Mart: A History of Sam Walton's Retail Phenomenon. (New York: Twayne Publishers) 1994.
- Wal-Mart 2006 Annual Report.  
<<http://www.walmartstores.com/GlobalWMStoresWeb/navigate.do?catg=453&contentId=5700>> [Accessed May 26, 2006].
- Wal-Mart Facts. <<http://www.wal-martfacts.com/default.aspx>> [Accessed May 26, 2006].
- Wal-Mart Facts - Suppliers.  
<<http://walmartstores.com/GlobalWMStoresWeb/navigate.do?catg=220>>  
[Accessed September 14, 2006].
- Walzer, Michael. Thick and Thin: Moral Argument at Home and Abroad. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press) 1994.