

options for economic interaction that now exist in the world, without reference to the crisis. The spreading of market players' reputations is more efficient than in the past, and this could lead to greater accountability. Arvidsson and Peitersen have begun to connect this with virtue and might have gone much further in that direction. Yet, again, reputation has always played an important role in economics, so we are not talking about something fundamentally new. Nonetheless, the Internet has enabled us to speak of a "reputation economy." Sometimes the cumulative effect of quantitative changes can bring about a qualitative change.

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## Victorian Sacrifice: Ethics and Economics in Mid-Century Novels

**Ilana M. Blumberg**

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The metaphor of penal substitution (Christ as propitiation; Rom. 3:25) was the dominant doctrine of the atonement across the Anglican Church during much of the Georgian era of British history—the time span of the reigns of the four Georges, from 1714 to the early 1830s. By the end of the era, however, sizeable cracks in that doctrinal orthodoxy were appearing. Suspicions about the expanding realm of "enthusiastic" evangelicalism had opened the door to liberal German theology, and invited the apt moniker of Latitudinarianism for the broad breadth of doctrinal positions within the Church. William Paley's recasting of theological orthodoxy in utilitarian calculation in the late 1700s had been an invitation to include prudential considerations as part of religious belief. Then, in the early 1830s, the Tractarians' reaction to the Church's slide away from orthodoxy led them to reserve definitive public statements on the atonement because an understanding of the mysteries of faith required, they argued, incorporation into the Church, participation in its liturgy and rituals, and appreciation for the nuanced balance of Scripture and church doctrine. Meanwhile, evangelicalism grew in importance, as did utilitarianism, which, while often seen as a radical challenge to orthodoxy, was also often linked to the classical political economy that evangelicals and others admired.

What does all this theological history have to do with economics? Historian J. C. D. Clark (*English Society, 1660–1832: Religion, Ideology and Politics during the Ancien Régime*, 2000) reminded us that we could not study how people in England talked about social and economic organization in the eighteenth century without thinking about how religion shaped their talk. If Deirdre McCloskey (*Bourgeois Virtues: Ethics for an Age of Commerce*, 2006) is right, we also cannot avoid thinking about how talk about economic activity shaped the way English society conceptualized other aspects of human relations, including theological concepts. By the mid-nineteenth century, the changes wrought by the upswing of economic prosperity were fully in view. Market activity had

become dignified in ways that it had not been before the eighteenth century. Not only did we dignify the ordinary activities of life but we also began to appreciate the role that the lower virtues—those associated with bourgeois life—played in our general welfare. It took a while, of course. Classical political economy and the defense of *laissez-faire* become an integral part of British social policy long after Britain ended the Corn Laws in 1846. By that time, Britain was well into the Victorian era. Victoria's consecration occurred in 1837, five years after the Reform Act, nine years before free trade became official policy, and six years after the end of slavery in the dominion.

In *Victorian Sacrifice*, Ilana Blumberg picks up one implication of McCloskey's argument: the way in which mid-nineteenth century English novelists wrote about self-sacrifice and atonement. Following the lead of Jan-Melissa Schramm (*Atonement and Self-Sacrifice in Nineteenth-Century Narrative*, 2012), Blumberg argues that these were central themes in Victorian literature. However, she sees them evolving in the novels she considers in tension with the demands of economic reasoning. The sacrificial ideal of Christian morality, which necessitates "human singularity that makes of one figure a victim, and the other, a survivor or beneficiary" (225), sits uneasily, she tells us, with an economics "that presumes full fungibility among values" (225). How, then, were these competing languages of moral actions reconciled by Victorian novelists?

Blumberg begins, quite appropriately, with Charlotte Young, the adherent to that return to orthodoxy we know as the Oxford Movement, whose novels were all published *Pro Ecclesia Dei*. Surely, Young will revive the ancient language of Christ's sacrifice as the pure ethical ideal, in contrast to the modern search for subjective pleasure? In Young's *The Heir of Redclyffe*, Blumberg finds a complex mix of self-sacrifice, the demands of justice in social life, and the individual's problem of figuring out whether sacrifice can be meaningful. Even Jesus Christ as a sacrificial figure is problematized by Young, Blumberg argues. Is he the epitome of the manly heroic figure, actively sacrificing himself for his people, or can women also claim his mantle in their self-sacrifice for family and society, thus sharing equally in Christ's inheritance?

Blumberg then addresses a difficult theme that Charles Dickens took up from classic literature and gave a Victorian twist in *A Tale of Two Cities*: suicide as sacrifice. Here again, Blumberg shows that the mid-Victorian authors transmuted ascetic Christian morality into something different. With the suicide of Sydney Carton, Dickens once again vilifies both the sacrificial ideal of evangelicalism and utilitarianism's notion of the greatest good for the greatest number. As Blumberg tells us, Dickens' challenge is a rejection of "both systems because of their tendency to dismiss individual happiness" (71). She then goes on to show how Carton's suicide is a model, for Dickens, of Christ's substitution for us, as well as a reflection of the Victorian obsession with sinfulness. Her treatment of Dickens, which I would argue is as central to the book as is her consideration of Trollope (yet to come), thus finds Christ's substitutionary atonement linked not only to the innocence of a single person whose death by violence transcends this world, but also to the "interdependence of mortal human sinners" (98) who continue to live in it.

With the theme of interdependence as a moral category introduced, Blumberg then turns to three writers who make personal benefit part of the moral sacrificial calculation. In George Eliot's *Adam Bede*, the redemptive substitution of an individual for collective humanity is also a story of a sacrificial ethic that cannot justify the means used to accomplish its moral end. In Wilkie Collins' novels, Blumberg finds an author who considers the act of writing for a public as a sacrifice atoned for by mutual benefit: the pleasure of his readers, and the income and reputation earned by the writer. However, it is in Anthony Trollope's *Chronicles of Barssetshire* that Blumberg finds the transmutation of self-sacrifice into mutual benefit completed. Entitled "Unnatural Self-Sacrifice," Blumberg's chapter suggests that, in Trollope's work, self-sacrifice had become a morally empty ideal. Its unnatural demands are explored in the politics and economics of the all-so-ordinary Barssetshire. Blumberg focuses on a frequently unobserved feature of two of the Barssetshire novels. In both *The Warden* and *The Last Chronicle of Barset*, the daughters of clergymen try to sacrifice their lovers to save their fathers from criminal charges, with unsuccessful results. While theft and sacrifice were common themes in Victorian literature, not until Trollope were they seen as sharing common features. The thief was an egoist, as was obvious to all Victorians; but so, too, might be the self-sacrificer, whose denial of self resulted in one's "magnification . . . at the expense of others" (141).

Blumberg could leave us here, with the decline of the self-sacrificial ideal leading to either modern industry, with its ethical ideal of the entrepreneur and the mutual benefit to be gained from trade, or to a nihilist "will to power" (and hence inevitably to the horrors of World War I, which engaged the literary moralists of the next century). She chose instead to close with Mary Augusta Ward's *Robert Elsmere*, the popular study of a young pastor and his wife, which simultaneously renewed the debates over what was essential to Christianity and whether a free economy provided benefits to all. Blumberg argues that Ward, perhaps even more than any of the other authors in her book, captures the fundamental tension between Christian ideals and the language of exchange she is addressing. She concludes with a question that we continue to face long after the Victorian era: What is it about the language of exchange that has led theological ethics to turn to it again and again "since ancient times . . . to express itself in spite of the risks and difficulties" (225) that come with its analogies? Good question, and one that you will learn to think about better by reading Blumberg's book.

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