

Lecture 2, Part 1: From Renaissance to Early Enlightenment



Fresco from
Sienna's Town
Hall by A.
Lorenzetti, on the
Effects of Good
and Bad
Government
(from 1340 ad)



The Late Medieval Order in Norther Europe (1)

- (1) Much happened between 340BC and 1500 AD that we will skip over. The Roman Empire rose and fell, Roman Catholicism emerged as the dominant religions of Western Europe, Islam emerged as the dominant religion of North Africa and the Middle East, interest in Aristotle waned and waxed, and towards the very end of this period, Columbus, accidentally discovered North and South America.
- (2) In Western Europe, the medieval order emerged on the ashes of the Roman Empire, with its family-based governance (Kings, Dukes, Barrons and the like). Religion was more or less the same throughout Western Europe. It was Christian, as interpreted by the Roman Catholic Church. There was some commerce in cities and towns, but for the most part, individuals worked on farms—usually for noble or aristocratic families—farms that were largely self-sufficient.



The Late Medieval Order in Northern Europe (2)

- (3) Life was centered around the church and prospects for an afterlife, in part because life was hard and short. Most children died before the age of maturity, and many women died in child birth. There were no antibiotics, no vaccines, and no indoor plumbing or central heating, and not much literacy. Yet, life went on, much as it had for centuries.
- (4) A series of major changes were about to end the Medieval order and place Western Europe on a new social and economic trajectory. Columbus' discovery undermined medieval ideas about the nature of the world. A great revolt of northern Catholics would produce new Protestant doctrines and churches. New ideas about the nature of the world's place in the universe were soon to be adopted—as the Earth became something that rotated around the sun rather than vice versa. A “new” form of government was to emerge in the Netherlands. But none of this was known in 1500.



Two Late Medieval Scholars on the nature of markets and a good society: More and Erasmus (1)

- **Desiderius Erasmus (1466–1536)** Author of *Praise of Folly (1511)*, Catholic scholar and diplomat.
- But **the most foolish and basest of all others are our merchants**, to wit **such as venture** on everything be it never so dishonest, and manage it no better; who though **they lie by no allowance, swear and forswear, steal, cozen, and cheat, yet shuffle themselves into the first rank**, and all because they have gold rings on their fingers. Nor are they without their **flattering friars** that admire them **and give them openly the title of honorable, in hopes, no doubt, to get some small snip of it themselves.** (*The Praise of Folly*, KL 733–37).



2 Late Medieval Scholars on the nature of markets and a good society: More and Erasmus (2)

- **Thomas More (1478–1535)** a lawyer by training, author of *Utopia* (1515), a member of the English Parliament, diplomat, and advisor to Henry VIII.
 - His short book, *Utopia* is still read in many high schools and colleges today.
- ***Utopia***, as the title implies, attempts to characterize an ideal community. It turns out to resemble an idealized, self-sufficient monastery or university, which provides itself with the necessity of life and releases as much time as possible for contemplation and other intellectual activities.
 - There is no trade, no money, and no compensation for labor inside More's ideal community. It is run by benevolent groups of elders/wisemen referred to as magistrates.



2 Late Medieval Scholars on the nature of markets and a good society: More and Erasmus (3)

- Quotes from *Utopia*
- The magistrates never engage the people in unnecessary labor, since the chief end of the constitution is to regulate labor by the necessities of the public, and **to allow the people as much time as is necessary for the improvement of their minds, in which they think the happiness of life consists.** (*Utopia*, p. 50).
- Every city is divided into four equal parts, and in the middle of each there is a marketplace. What is brought thither, and manufactured by the several families, is carried from thence to houses appointed for that purpose, in which all things of a sort are laid by themselves; and thither every father goes, **and takes whatsoever he or his family stand in need of, without either paying for it or leaving anything in exchange.** (*Utopia*, p. 52).



2 Late Medieval Scholars on the nature of markets and a good society: More and Erasmus (3)

- It is important to recognize that More's utopian society requires persons with particular internalized norms to function well.
- Individuals have to be willing to work hard without obvious return (no wages were paid). They must have only limited desires for material comforts and none for decoration, ostentation, or status.
- They have to seek contemplative self-improvement—whether spiritual or secular is unclear, but likely both. The residents also have to be willing to defer to the authority of elders and leaders of their communities, who determine much about their daily lives, more or less as the head of a **monastery** would organize the lives of resident novices and monks.
- Utopia is essentially self-sufficient and trades little with the outside world. In many respects, it is similar to Plato's ideal self-sufficient republic ruled by philosopher kings, which was much criticized by Aristotle for its impracticality. **There would be many free-rider problems to be addressed in such a society.**



The beginning of the Enlightenment (roughly 1600)

- The seventeenth century is a period often referred to as “the Enlightenment.”
- It accelerated trends already present in the late Renaissance.
 - It was a period of many innovations in theology, ethics, epistemology, political theory, physics, and navigation.
 - Scholarly books continued to be written in Latin during the first half of the seventeenth century, although publishing in the natural languages of Europe—Dutch, English, French, German, Italian, and Spanish—had become commonplace by its end.
- **What is most relevant for this book** is the conclusions that theologians and philosophers reached about good character, and the proper role of commerce in a good life and good society.
- A small sample of remarks from serious, widely read works by influential persons is used to provide evidence of ideas and norms that captured the attention and imagination of literate persons in the Dutch and English societies of this period.



2 Protestant Dutch authors from the early 1600s (1)

- **Hugo Grotius (1583–1645)** was trained as a lawyer and scholar and wrote his first book at the age of 16. He was successful within the Dutch politics of his day, becoming an important legal official in Holland, mayor of Rotterdam, and subsequently Swedish ambassador to France.
- Grotius' books were less widely read than those of Erasmus and More during his own lifetime, but they were also influential, especially his *Mare Liberum* (1609; the *Free Sea*), which was one of the first serious books on free trade and freedom of the seas.



2 Protestant Dutch authors from the early 1600s (2)

- Quotes from *The Free Sea* (1609)
- And to this house or city built by him that great prince and householder **had written certain laws** of his, not in brass or tables, but **in the minds and senses of everyone**, where they shall offer themselves to be read of the unwilling and such as refuse. **By these laws both high and low are bound.** It is no more lawful for kings to transgress these than for the common people. (*The Free Sea*, p. 15).
- But as in man himself **there are some things which are common with all, and other some whereby everyone is to be distinguished from other**, so of those things which nature had brought forth for the use of man she would that some of them should remain common and others through every one's labor and industry to become proper [private]. But **laws were set down for both**, that all surely might use common things without the damage of all and, for the rest, every man contented with his portion should abstain from another's. If **no one can be ignorant of these things, unless he cease to be a man**... (*The Free Sea*, p. 15).



2 Protestant Dutch authors from the early 1600s (3)

- **The sea** therefore is in the number of those things which are not in merchandise and trading, that is to say, which **cannot be made proper [private]**. Whence it follows, if we speak properly, no part of the sea can be incorporated in the territory of any people. (*The Free Sea*, 1609, p. 31).
- ...[thus] **it is lawful for any nation to go to any other and to trade with it.**
- God himself speaks of this in nature, seeing he will not have all those things, whereof the life of man stands in need, to be sufficiently ministered by nature in all places and also granted some nations to excel others in arts. **To what end are these things but that he would maintain human friendship by their mutual wants and plenty...** (*The Free Sea*, p. 19).



2 Protestant Dutch authors from the early 1600s (4)

- **Eight steps in Grotius's reasoning** are revealed by these excerpts:
- (1) Knowledge of natural law (essential rights and rules of conduct) is an essential feature of human nature—written in the minds and senses of everyone. (2) Natural laws apply to all, to rulers as well as to the people ruled. (3) Natural law specifies that some things should be held in common and others private. (4) The sea, for example, is common to all, because it cannot be possessed. (5) **Free passage over the seas and international trade is lawful (ethical) under natural law. Indeed, (6) that trade is intended by the divine is implied by the uneven distribution of raw materials and talent in and among societies.** (7) Thus, no nation should interfere with it. (8) Moreover, trade is a source of amity among men.
- Note the sharp contrast between More's utopia and Grotius with respect to commerce.



2 Protestant Dutch authors from the early 1600s (continued in lecture 2B)

- At this point, it should be clear that Dutch culture had changed substantially during the previous century, from the time of Erasmus to that of Grotius, assuming that they were representative of Dutch thinking—at least among literate persons—during their life times.
- Many significant events had happened in the period in between their lives.
 - The Protestant Reformation: the founding of several new Christian churches with some what different theological practices than the Catholic church.
 - The Dutch Revolt (secession from the Hapsburgs), founded of a new country with a “new” form of government (without a King or Emperor), with a confederal structure, freedom of religious conscience, and openness to emigration and exchange. This revolution had taken place in the late sixteenth century.
- Those “revolutions” are also evidence that significant cultural shifts in what came to be called the Netherlands had taken place in the time between Erasmus and Grotius.
 - Next time we’ll continue with short overviews of another dutchman, Pieter De La Court and two English theologians, plus a somewhat longer overview of a major philosopher, John Locke.



Lecture 2, Part 2: From Renaissance to Early Enlightenment



**The Dam Square in
Amsterdam,
by Gerrit Adriaensz
Berckheyde, c. 1660**



2 Protestant Dutch authors from the early 1600s (continued from lecture 2A)

- **Pieter De La Court (1618–85)**
- La Court was a second-generation immigrant to the Netherlands from present-day Belgium. His family ran a successful cloth manufacturing business. He was educated at Leiden University (which now has a building named after him) and was politically active in the Dutch Republic for much of his adult life, writing books and pamphlets in support of the republican form of government, free trade, and religious tolerance.
- We will focus on De La Court's *The Interests of Holland* (1662) which was written about a half century after Grotius' *Mare Liberum* was written. It assesses the achievements of the Netherlands and its governance, in both economic and ethical terms.



La Court on governance and economic freedom

- God can give **no greater temporal blessing to a country in our condition than to introduce and preserve a free commonwealth government.** (*The True Interest and Political Maxims of the Republic of Holland*, p. 38).
- Next to a liberty of serving God [religious tolerance], follows the **liberty of gaining a livelihood** without any dear-bought city-freedom, but only by virtue of a fixed habitation to have the common right of **other inhabitants**. [Such liberties are] very necessary for keeping the people we have, and inviting strangers to come among us. (*The True Interest and Political Maxims of the Republic of Holland*, p. 74).



La Court on industry, public policy, and virtue

- The inhabitants **under this free government** hope by lawful means to acquire estates,...and use their wealth as they please, without dreading that any **indigent or wasteful prince**—or his courtiers and gentry, who are generally as prodigal, necessitous, and covetous as himself—should on any pretense whatever **seize the wealth of the subject. Our inhabitants are therefore much inclined to subsist by the forenamed and other like ways or means, and gain riches for their posterity by frugality and good husbandry.** (*The True Interest and Political Maxims of the Republic of Holland*, p. 56).
- **It is certainly known that this country cannot prosper, but by means of those that are most industrious and ingenious**, and that such patents or grants [monopolies and trade privileges] do not produce the ablest merchants. (*The True Interest and Political Maxims of the Republic of Holland*, p. 76).
- Moreover, it is apparent that **he who increases his estate by industrious and frugal living** is most burdened [by wealth taxes] and **he that by laziness and prodigality diminishes his estate will be less taxed.** So that **virtue is unjustly oppressed and vice favored.** Whereas on the contrary, the imposts on consumption fall heavy upon the riotous and indulge and encourage the virtuous. (*The True Interest and Political Maxims of the Republic of Holland*, p. 87).



2 English Theologians on Economics and Virtue (Baxter [1615-91] and Barclay [1648-90])

- We now shift from two Dutch secular writers who occasionally wrote about religious matters to two English theologians who occasionally wrote about secular matters:
- **Richard Baxter**, a moderate Presbyterian, author of *A Christian Directory* (1673).
- **Robert Barclay**, the most important Quaker theorist of his period and governor of the East New Jersey colony in North America for eight years (1682–1690).
- Their works remained in print for more than two centuries, and both were widely read by Protestants in the decades after their publication.



Baxter on secular “callings” and the duty to engage in profitable activities

- VI. The first and principal thing to be intended in the **choice of a trade or calling for yourselves or children**, is the service of God and the public good; and therefore (ceteris paribus) that calling which most conduceth to the public good is to be preferred. **The callings most useful to the public good are the magistrates, the pastors, and teachers of the church, schoolmasters, physicians, lawyers, &c. husbandmen (ploughmen, graziers, and shepherds); and next to them are mariners, clothiers, booksellers, tailors, and such other that are employed about things most necessary to mankind.** (*A Christian Directory* KL 20570–74).
- **If God shows you a way in which you may lawfully get more than in another way** (without wrong to your soul, or to any other) **if you refuse this**, and choose the less gainful way, you cross one of the ends of your calling, and **you refuse to be God’s steward**, and to accept his gifts, and use them for him when he requireth it; **you may labor to be rich for God, though not for the flesh and sin.** (*A Christian Directory* KL 20600–602).



Barclay on Free Trade and Ethics

- Our principle leaves **every man to enjoy that peaceably, which either his own industry or parents have purchased to him**—only he is thereby instructed to use it aright, **both for his own good and that of his brethren, and all to the glory of God**, in which also **his acts are to be voluntary** and **no ways constrained**. And further, we say not hereby that no man may use the creation more or less than another.
- God hath often a regard to magistrates and their state as a thing most acceptable to him. But if any can further doubt of this thing, to wit, if without confusion it can be practiced in the commonwealth, **let him consider the state of the United Netherlands, and he shall see the good effect of it, for there, because of the great number of merchants, more than in any other place, there is most frequent occasion for this thing** [honesty and promise keeping], and though the number of those that are of this mind be considerable, to whom the [Dutch] States these hundred years have condescended, and yet daily condescend, **yet nevertheless there has nothing of prejudice followed thereupon to the commonwealth, government, or good order, but rather great advantage to trade, and so to the commonwealth.** (*An Apology for the True Christian Divinity*, ch. 15, part VII).



John Locke (1632-1704) Ethics as a Science (1)

- John Lock wrote on a variety of topics, politics, economics, law, and ethics.
- For the purposes of this chapter, Locke's work on ethics is of greatest interest. Locke regards **ethics to be one of the three main areas of science**, which for him encompasses the full range of that which humans can potentially understand. Thus, ethics is a science.
- **Science may be divided into three sorts.** All that can fall within the compass of human understanding, being either, **First, the nature of things**, as they are in themselves, their relations, and their manner of operation: or, **Secondly, that which man himself ought to do**, as a rational and voluntary agent, for the attainment of any end, especially happiness: or, **Thirdly, the ways and means whereby the knowledge of both the one and the other of these is attained** and communicated. (*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, p. 538).



John Locke, Ethics as a Science (2)

- [With regard to the second] **Praktike, the skill of right applying our own powers and actions, for the attainment of things good and useful.**
- The most considerable under this head is **ethics, which is the seeking out those rules and measures of human actions, which lead to happiness**, and the means to practice them.
- **The end of this is not bare speculation and the knowledge of truth; but right, and a conduct suitable to it.** (*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, p. 538).



John Locke, Lack of Precision in Ethics and the Need for Education / echos of Aristotle

- **Another thing that makes the greater difficulty in ethics is that moral ideas are commonly more complex than those of the figures ordinarily considered in mathematics.** From whence these two inconveniences follow.
- First, that their **names are of more uncertain signification**, the precise collection of simple ideas they **stand for not being so easily agreed on**; and so the sign that is used for them in communication always, and in thinking often, does not steadily carry with it the same idea. (*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, p. 452). ...
- **Examples of [truly self-made men] are but few**; and I think I may say, that **of all the men we meet with, nine parts of ten are what they are, good or evil, useful or not, by their education.** (*Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, p. 540).



Locke: On Three Types of Laws—Religious, Civil, and Fashion and Moral Action

- **These three laws [determine] the rules of moral good and evil.** These three then, **first**, the law of God; **secondly**, the law of politic societies; **thirdly**, the law of fashion, or private censure, are those to which men variously compare their actions.
- And, it is **by their conformity to one of these laws that they take their measures, when they would judge of their moral rectitude, and denominate their actions good or bad.** **Morality is the relation of voluntary actions to these rules.** (*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, p. 452).



Locke On Good Governance, Equal Protection of the Law, and the Protection of Property (1)

- The commonwealth seems to me to be a society of men constituted only for the procuring, preserving, and advancing their own civil interests.
- **Civil interests I call life, liberty, health, and indolency of body; and the possession of outward things**, such as money, lands, houses, furniture, and the like.
- **It is the duty of the civil magistrate, by the impartial execution of equal laws**, to secure unto all the people in general and to every one of his subjects **in particular the just possession of these things belonging to this life.** (*A Letter Concerning Toleration*, p. 17).



Locke On Good Governance, Equal Protection of the Law, and the Protection of Property (2)

- **Locke concludes** that the one of the main reasons governments may be created by contract is the protection of property and opportunities to use it such as for trade and increasing one's wealth:
- And **thus the common-wealth comes by a power to set down what punishment shall belong to the several transgressions which they think worthy of it**, committed amongst the members of that society, (which is the power of making laws) as well as it has the power to punish any injury done unto any of its members, by any one that is not of it, (which is the power of war and peace;)
- and **all this for the preservation of the property of all the members of that society, as far as is possible**. (*Two Treatises of Government*, p. 30).



The trend in arguments and theories in support of commerce from 1500-1700 (1)

- There **are common elements** among all the authors who wrote after 1600. All are theists. They all argue that at least a subset of the grounding principles of their theories are divine. All reach similar conclusions about the nature of a good life and good society—at least insofar as economic activities are concerned. Nonetheless, the particular conclusions reached, and arguments used to reach them differ.
- In fifteen hundred—as per Erasmus and Moore—the good life was one in which trade/commerce was minimized and leisure maximized—these ideals resembled the life of nobles or monks.
- By 1600, this had changed—at least in the Netherlands.



The trend in arguments and theories in support of commerce from 1500-1700 (2)

- Grotius develops a theory of natural law and uses it to defend free international trade.
- A half century later La Court points to the prosperity generated by industriousness and trade—as may be supported by good governance, but threatened by poor governance. Economic freedom and prosperity were blessings, not distractions from a good life.
- Baxter suggests that “ordinary” jobs can be a “calling,” part of one’s divine duties—as can be the maximization of profits.
- Barkley suggests that a proper life is one of industry, but that the wealth accumulated should be used to advance religious and public interest.



The trend in arguments and theories in support of commerce from 1500-1700 (3)

- Locke suggest the governments—when they emerge from agreement rather than conquest—are largely founded to protect one's liberty and property.
- The duties of governments are, however, not of divine origin, but a duty because of the agreements of the persons forming a new government.
- There are **3 types of laws** religious, civic, and fashion—and that morality requires following all three—not simply the first.
- [Note that in these readings, we are seeing signs that reason-based secular arguments are beginning to replace or at least supplement religion-based ones. Locke (and Hobbes before him) stand at the beginning of a new secular approach to morality and good governance that in some ways represents a return to the Aristotelian perspective.]
- The accumulation of wealth, industriousness, and frugality had become virtues rather than corrupting temptations—when undertaken honestly and the wealth accumulated was used properly.



Discussion Questions

- The claim of this chapter is that the writings of some persons can be used as evidence of the internalized norms of their readers. Does this seem plausible? How does this differ from a persuasive interpretation of their works?
- That protestants in the Netherlands and England were “pro market” is evidenced in Grotius’, La Court’s, Baxter’s, and Barclay’s writings. What do they focus on that differs from that of Erasmus’ and More’s analysis of the role of markets in society?
- Locke’s social contract grounds a commonwealth in agreement. To what extent would Locke’s imagined agreements (if they are possible) differ from Thomas More’s?