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Wealth Creation in China from a Christian Perspective

Georges ENDERLE

Abstract

The first part discusses a few basic questions and assumptions that are relevant not only for business ethics but also for other kinds of applied ethics, such as the reasons for exploring Christian perspectives for China, the approach to addressing a “pluralistic” audience, and a comprehensive and differentiated conception of business ethics. The second part defines the purpose of business and economics as “wealth creation” and indicates the contributions Christianity can make to enhance important features of this conception such as sustainability, creativity, motivations for private and public wealth, and sensitivity for distributive justice and the plight of the poor.

INTRODUCTION

With China’s rise to economic superpower status, the question of ethics in business and economics in this country has become an even more important challenge. Foreign China watchers are pointing to a long list of ethical problems, and Chinese citizens themselves are concerned

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about many ethical issues in China's economy and businesses. These concerns from outside and inside the country certainly vary a great deal. However, they do not diverge completely, indicating a considerable number of points in common: unbalanced economic growth, increasing income inequalities, heavy environmental degradation, rampant corruption, unfair labor practices, serious health and safety issues in the food and drug sectors, and many more. Underlying these issues there seems to be a widespread "moral void" that leaves people and institutions without ethical guidance and favors a culture in which money is the measure of all worth. Needless to say, this situation presents challenges of enormous dimensions to business and economic ethics in China and in the world.¹

In order to meet these challenges, it does not suffice only to clarify and argue for the ethical standards that are necessary to guide economic activities and institutions. It is also necessary to have a sound understanding of business and economics that is relevant and accessible to ethical considerations. In other words, business and economic ethics have "to walk on two legs" and engage in productive interdisciplinary communication.² In the following I attempt to show that a clear understanding of the purpose of business and economics as wealth creation is essential, and to explore how a Christian perspective can take up, strengthen and guide this understanding. In proposing this approach, I hope to indicate a direction that helps to address some of the challenges mentioned above and to build up a solid foundation for business and economic ethics in China.

¹ See, among others, C. Fred Bergsten et al., *China's Rise: Challenges and Opportunities* (Washington, DC: Peterson Institute for International Economics, Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2009); Georges Enderle, "Business Ethics in China," in *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Management*, vol. 2, *Business Ethics*, 2nd ed., eds. Patricia H. Werhane and R. Edward Freeman (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 76–80; Lu Xiaohe, *Business Ethics: A Chinese Approach* (Shanghai: Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences Press, 2010); Lu Xiaohe and Georges Enderle, eds., *Developing Business Ethics in China* (paperback with new preface, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013; in Chinese, Shanghai: Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences Press, 2003); Michael A. Santoro, *China 2020: How Western Business Can—and Should—Influence Social and Political Change in the Coming Decade* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009); Zhou Zucheng, Ou Ping and Georges Enderle, "Business Ethics Education for MBA Students in China: Current Status and Future Prospects," *Journal of Business Ethics Education* 6 (2009): 103–118.

² Georges Enderle, "Business Ethics in the 21st Century Walks on Two Legs," in *Drieluijk. Godsdienst—Samenleving—Bedrijfsethiek: Liber Amicorum voor Henk van Luijk*, eds. Eduard Kimman, Arnold Schilder and Frans Jacobs (Amsterdam: Thela Thesis, 1999), 185–189.

My thoughts are presented in two parts. In the first part, I discuss a few basic questions and assumptions that are relevant not only for business and economic ethics but also for bioethics and other kinds of applied ethics. They concern: (1) the reasons why exploring Christian perspectives for China is suggested at all; (2) the audiences to whom I intend to speak; (3) the approach to adopt in addressing a “pluralistic” audience; and (4) a conception of business and economic ethics that is both comprehensive and differentiated (and applicable to other forms of applied ethics as well). In the second part, I characterize the field of business and economics as “wealth creation” with seven features that can function as “interfaces” between this field and the contributions which Christianity can make. They include: (1) sustainability; (2) a comprehensive notion of wealth that encompasses four types of capital and has both a material and a spiritual dimension; (3) the forms of public and private wealth; (4) creativity; (5) sensitivity for distributive justice and the plight of the poor and powerless; (6) motivations for creating private and public wealth; and (7) the purpose of business and the calling of business leaders. The paper ends with a few concluding remarks.

1. BASIC QUESTIONS AND ASSUMPTIONS

Before addressing the substantive issues of Christianity’s contribution to wealth creation in China, it might be helpful to clarify some basic questions and assumptions implied in this endeavor. Such clarification can characterize the purpose of this paper more distinctly and demarcate it from a number of misunderstandings that happen to occur quite frequently.

Why explore Christian perspectives at all for China?

Based on China’s experiences of humiliation in the nineteenth and twentieth century, there is widespread skepticism about, and even rejection of, western influence, often distinguished from the influence of modernization which, in turn, is embraced by many Chinese people, and China’s opening-up policy. Moreover, the uniqueness of Chinese culture is being affirmed and promoted, which, in the history of the People’s Republic of China, has involved a strong anti-religious com-

ponent. Therefore, to the extent that Christian religion is considered a western product, it comes as no surprise that this “foreign and religious influence” has met with opposition and hostility.

Obviously, this complex relationship between China and Christianity needs to be discussed in depth. It has also been the general subject of several conferences sponsored by the University of Notre Dame and it lies beyond the scope of this specific paper. At this juncture, suffice it to say that our endeavor of exploring Christian perspectives for business ethics in China is not meant to be a western “missionary” effort to persuade or even convert the Chinese to Christianity. Rather, in an intercultural effort, we attempt to better understand how Christianity may influence both ethical attitudes and conduct in business and economics in China. Given the enormous ethical challenges and widespread moral void in the country, we are led by the expectation that Christian perspectives can help strengthen China’s ethical “fabric.” We also hope that they can make a unique contribution to the development of business and economic ethics.

To whom do we want to speak?

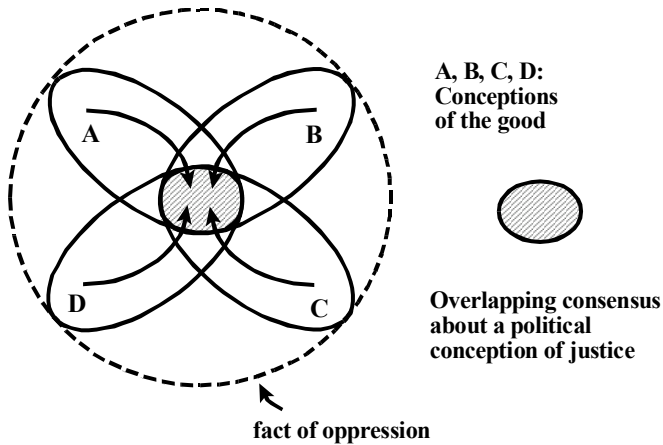
Having clarified the reasons for our exploration, it is also important to be clear about the audiences we intend to engage in our dialogue. For a successful conversation, it is crucial to keep in mind that, in China as in other countries and internationally, we face a “pluralistic” society composed of a wide variety of different and to some extent opposing philosophical and religious traditions. As a consequence, our targeted audience is not Christians (church leaders, business people, academics, citizens, etc.), with whom we share our faith and for whom we can argue from our common faith tradition (which, of course, we will do in separate conversations). Rather, we want to speak to all people, who might be interested in what we say (political and civil leaders, business people, academics, citizens, etc.), because what we offer is meant to be relevant for both non-Christians and Christians alike.

Striving for “an overlapping consensus” while drawing on Christian traditions

While acknowledging a “pluralistic” audience with Christians and non-Christians, believers of various faith traditions, non-believers, and people of various philosophical traditions, we strive for “an overlap-

ping consensus” that pertains to the normative-ethical substance (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: The Idea of an Overlapping Consensus (John Rawls)



This means that the principles and norms comprised by the overlapping consensus have to be the same, regardless of the religious and philosophical tradition that supports them. The “idea of an overlapping consensus” is borrowed from John Rawls³ and applied to our intercultural situation. On the one hand, this idea requires a common ethical ground that is necessary for living together. On the other hand, it forbids any religious or philosophical tradition (in Rawls’s terms, “any conception of the good”) from imposing its view on others. Without a common ethical ground, a society would fall apart; and the imposition of one’s view on others would result in “the fact of oppression” that has occurred in multiple forms throughout human history.

Going beyond Rawls, one may ask what special contribution each tradition—in our case, Christianity—can make to ethics in business and economics and other spheres of life. First, while the normative-ethical content of the overlapping consensus must be the same across cultures and religions, its justification may vary according to the philosophical and religious perspective. For instance, from a Christian-theological perspective, human dignity and human rights can be justified on the

³ Explained in John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 133–172.

basis that all human beings are believed to be children of God. Second, a religious tradition can provide a heuristic method for human conduct that opens a wider and longer horizon of meaning, as, for example, beyond death. Third, a religious tradition can offer a wide range of motivations for ethical acts, as, for instance, the will of God and the exemplary life of Jesus. Finally, a religious tradition can support the implementation of ethical norms through multiple forms of liturgy, rites, symbols, and institutional frameworks.

As these short remarks indicate, the striving for an overlapping consensus does not have to be disconnected from philosophical and religious traditions. Rather, it can be combined with and strengthened by these traditions in multiple forms.

Assuming a comprehensive and differentiated conception of business ethics

Since the 1980s, a comprehensive and differentiated understanding of business and economic ethics has evolved under the influence of globalization. The conceptual framework suggested here relates business and economic ethics to decision making and action, covers the entire field of business and economics, and structures it by identifying three indispensable levels of analysis, which have to be addressed in a balanced way.⁴

At the micro-level, the focus is on the individual, that is, on what actors, as employee or employer, colleague or manager, consumer, supplier or investor, do, can do, and ought to do in order to perceive and assume their ethical responsibility. At the meso-level, the focus is on the decision making and action of economic organizations, chiefly business firms, but also trade unions, consumer organizations and professional associations. Finally, at the macro-level, the focus is on the economic system as such and the shaping of the overall economic conditions of business: the economic order with its multiple institutions and economic, financial and social policies. It is important to note that

⁴ Georges Enderle, "Business Ethics," in Nicholas Bunnin and E. P. Tsui-James, *The Blackwell Companion to Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 531–551; Georges Enderle, "Clarifying the Terms of Business Ethics and Corporate Social Responsibility," *Business Ethics Quarterly* 20, no. 4 (2010): 730–732; and Georges Enderle, "Defining Goodness in Business and Economics," in *Dimensions of Goodness*, ed. Vittorio Hösle (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars, 2013), 281–302.

no one level can substitute for another. Even if all problems at one level are satisfactorily solved, problems at the other levels could remain. So this framework provides conceptual room for addressing the differences and conflicts of objectives, interests and motivations which are located not only at each level but also at the interfaces between different levels. In sum, it encompasses individual ethics, corporate ethics, and systemic ethics and requires a proper balance of all three.

2. WEALTH CREATION FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

After these basic considerations about the intention and methodology of this paper, I now turn to the substantive questions: What is the purpose of business and economics? And what can a Christian perspective contribute to a deeper understanding of this purpose? I propose to adopt a rich concept of wealth creation with seven distinct features and to explicate it more specifically by Christian ethics.

Although wealth is a fundamental concept in economics—"perhaps the conceptual starting point for the discipline"⁵—the current discussions about globalization, poverty, and corporate responsibilities rarely articulate the implied assumptions about "wealth." The notion of wealth creation we encounter is often very simple (as in "making money") or extremely vague (as in "adding value"), and used supposedly as the purpose of business and economics. On the other hand, as various humanistic and religious views hold, the purpose of business and economics is about people: their dignity, happiness, flourishing, or other human qualities. However, as I try to argue, it is misleading to define the purpose of business and economics in terms of either making money/adding value or improving the lot of people solely. In the first case, it is bad economics, and in the second case, it lacks specificity. Of course, the focus on people is important (we may add that people are embedded in nature and searching for meaning). But this holds for any human activity. Thus business and economics needs a more specific purpose, as education, health care, and other activities do.

⁵ Robert L. Heilbroner, "Wealth," in *The New Palgrave: A Dictionary of Economics*, vol. 4, eds. John Eatwell, Murray Milgate and Peter Newman (London: Macmillan, 1987), 880.

To define the purpose of business and economics, I propose to use a rich concept of wealth creation.⁶

Figure 2: Wealth Creation—A Rich Concept

	WEALTH	
CREATING ≠ possessing ≠ acquiring but: making something new and better	Contents physical, financial, human, social capital Forms private wealth public wealth Process production distribution Aspects material spiritual Time horizon sustainable in terms of expanding real freedoms that people enjoy (Sen)	MOTIVATIONS for creating wealth self- <u>and</u> other-regarding: self-interest joy of finding entrepreneurial spirit service to others
<u>Examples of countries:</u> “The thirty wonderful years from 1945 to 1975” of France “The economic miracle” of Germany (after 1945) “The East Asian Miracle” (1960–1990) in Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Thailand, and Indonesia China (since 1980) <u>Examples of companies:</u> Medtronic Inc. Grameen Bank		

⁶ Explained more extensively in Georges Enderle, “A Rich Concept of Wealth Creation beyond Profit Maximization and Adding Value,” *Journal of Business Ethics* 84, Supplement 3 (2009): 281–295; Georges Enderle, “Wealth Creation in China and Some Lessons for Development Ethics,” *Journal of Business Ethics* 96, no. 1 (2010): 1–15; and summarized in Figure 2.

It includes both a material dimension and a people-orientation, characterized by seven features: (1) sustainability; (2) a comprehensive notion of wealth that encompasses four types of capital and has both a material and spiritual dimension; (3) the forms of public and private wealth; (4) creativity; (5) sensitivity for distributive justice and the plight of the poor and powerless; (6) motivations for creating private and public wealth; and (7) the purpose of business and the calling of business leaders. It goes without saying that the focus on wealth creation defines only the purpose of business and economics as a subsystem of society. Other purposes, such as the creation of knowledge in the cultural subsystem and the dealing with power in the political subsystem, are equally important.

Sustainability in terms of human capabilities

As the term “sustainability” has become fashionable, carrying a wide variety of meanings, it is advisable to go back to the rather old and actually quite influential definition by the World Commission on Environment and Development. It states that “sustainability” means “to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”⁷ While this definition clearly presupposes a wide, intergenerational time horizon, it does not specify “the needs” of the present generation and “the ability” of future generations to meet their own needs. I, therefore, propose to substantiate the concepts of needs and abilities in this definition with the help of human capabilities or “real freedoms that people enjoy.”⁸ With this conceptual clarification, the first feature of wealth creation is to be truly “sustainable.”

Undoubtedly, this long-term, intergenerational perspective is of utmost importance for wealth creation.⁹ Suffice to mention a few examples. It is widely acknowledged that a major cause of the financial cri-

⁷ World Commission on Environment and Development, *Our Common Future* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 8.

⁸ Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (New York: Knopf, 1999), 3; Amartya Sen, *The Idea of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2009), 248–252; Martha C. Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2011).

⁹ See Georges Enderle, “What Is Long-Term Wealth Creation and Investing?” in *Business Ethics and Corporate Sustainability*, eds. Antonio Tencati and Francesco Perrini (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, 2011), 114–131.

sis has been “short-termism,” the fixation of many Wall Street firms on making quick money, disregarding longer-term concerns. The national debt of the United States and other countries has far-reaching consequences for future generations, and requires decisive action in order to reach a “sustainable” path. And the threat of climate change challenges the inhabitants of this planet for decades to come.

We may now ask how Christianity in China can raise the awareness for intergenerational justice and implement “sustainable” conduct. First of all, there seems to be a favorable predisposition for long-term thinking in China, although the booming economy has probably strengthened the people’s attention to short-term success. This predisposition manifests itself in multiple forms: the importance of the family tradition, the care for children, the extraordinarily high saving rate of households, the long memory of history, etc.

So what can Christianity specifically contribute to a long-term perspective? Three considerations can be mentioned: God is believed to exist beyond time and history, yet also to be engaged with humanity. Consequently, human experience is to be understood “sub specie aeternitatis” (from the viewpoint of eternity). Moreover, the Judeo-Christian tradition confesses that the world is God’s creation. This means: the world is purposeful (neither random nor value-neutral); contingent (wholly dependent upon its creator), yet distinct from God; in essence, “good”; made out of nothing; reflecting divine commitment. Humans are not the masters, but the stewards of creation and thus bear environmental responsibility. Finally, all human beings are endowed with human dignity and the freedom of the children of God, spanning past, present, and future generations.

This Christian view provides a strong theological foundation for sustainability in terms of human capabilities. But, of course, it needs to be translated into concrete attitudes, behaviors, and commitments, not only at the individual (micro) level, but also at the organizational (meso) and systemic (macro) level. For instance, what environmental stewardship can mean with regard to climate change has been impressively explained in a recent report by the Pontifical Academy of Sciences at the Vatican.¹⁰

¹⁰ Pontifical Academy of Sciences, *Fate of Mountain Glaciers in the Anthropocene: A Report by the Working Group Commissioned by the Pontifical Academy of Sciences*, The Vatican, May 11, 2011.

Understanding wealth as physical, financial, human, and social capital, including both a material and spiritual dimension

In his remarkable book *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations*,¹¹ David Landes depicts a fascinating economic history of “why some [nations] are so rich and some so poor.” He offers a much broader understanding of the wealth (and poverty) of a single nation than is usually measured in terms of GDP (gross domestic product per person). More recently, the World Bank (2006 and 2010) estimates the wealth of a nation in terms of natural capital, produced capital and urban land, net foreign assets, and intangible capital.¹² In a similar attempt, I suggest defining the wealth of a nation as comprising not only financial capital, but also physical (i.e., natural and produced), human (in terms of health and education), and “social” capital (as trust relations in Robert Putnam’s sense).¹³ So the wealth of a nation is the total amount of its economically relevant assets.

Moreover, wealth in this comprehensive sense is not a set of merely material assets because it includes “intangible” capital (in the World Bank’s definition) or human and social capital (in my own definition). These types of capital clearly involve a spiritual dimension. In fact, to acknowledge a spiritual dimension in wealth creation appears to make sense from a certain basic conception of anthropology. If an intimate union of body and soul is constitutive of the human person, her activities in business and economics cannot be either merely material or merely spiritual. They are always a combination of both, though in multiple forms and degrees.

We may now ask how Christianity in China can contribute to such a comprehensive notion of wealth. Based on environmental stewardship, Christians acknowledge the intrinsic value of nature and deal with natural capital in a precautionary manner. Financial capital is grounded

¹¹ David S. Landes, *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations: Why Some Are So Rich and Some So Poor* (New York: Norton, 1999).

¹² See World Bank statistics in: World Bank, *Where Is the Wealth of Nations? Measuring Capital for the 21st Century* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2006); World Bank, *The Changing Wealth of Nations: Measuring Sustainable Development in the New Millennium* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2010).

¹³ See Robert D. Putnam, Robert Leonardi and Raffaella Nanetti, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993); Robert D. Putnam, ed., *Democracies in Flux: The Evolution of Social Capital in Contemporary Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

and developed on sound economics. Supported by a Chinese tradition of health care and learning, human capital in terms of health and education is paid close attention in private and public life with a special focus on the less fortunate. Increasing social capital means building trust relations, based on trustworthy behavior, expanding beyond family boundaries, and hence reducing transaction costs. Such a comprehensive concept of wealth leads Christianity to acknowledge the material value of wealth without being trapped by materialism and, at the same time, to discover and make visible its spiritual dimension.

Forms of private and public wealth

In discussing the concept of wealth, it is helpful to concentrate on what is meant by the wealth of a single nation for a further reason. When we speak of the “wealth of a nation,” it is difficult to deny that wealth should encompass both private and public goods. Therefore, two types of assets or endowments are involved: those that can be attributed to and controlled by individual actors, be they persons, groups, or organizations, and those from which no actor inside the nation can be excluded. Such “public goods” are defined, in technical economic terms, by the characteristics of non-rival and non-exclusive consumption. Clearly they have a material component, even though it might be difficult to put a price on them. For instance, we may consider as public goods the natural resources of a country, basic security, an effectively functioning rule of law, a relatively corruption-free environment, a business-supportive culture, a decent level of health care and education of the citizens, etc., whereas the lack thereof can be called “public bads.”

The understanding of the wealth of a nation as a combination of private and public wealth has far-reaching implications. It means that the functioning of the markets and the production of private goods depend on public goods and can suffer from public bads. Individuals and companies need public goods to be productive. On the other hand, the production of public goods depends on the contributions by individuals and companies through taxes, philanthropy, and expertise in science and technology, arts and humanities, and in many other fields. In other words, there is mutual dependence of private and public wealth creation.

What can we expect from a Christian perspective in addressing this issue of private and public wealth? Christian anthropology conceives

the human person as a relational being, with a unique identity and constitutively embedded in relationships with human-fellows. Therefore, this view is incompatible with any collectivist and individualist doctrine. It affirms the freedom of individuals and companies to engage in market transactions, and it conveys a positive role to government and other public entities to ensure the provision of public goods. Obviously, to strike a proper balance between the creation of private and public wealth depends on many factors and is often not easy. But Christians are sensitive to gross imbalances and raise their voices when the creation of private wealth or of public wealth is dangerously neglected.

Creativity

What do we mean by the “creation” of wealth? It seems obvious, but nevertheless deserves emphasis, that wealth creation is more than both possessing and acquiring wealth, and constitutes a special form of increasing wealth. To create is to make something new and better. It is an innovative activity that is constantly searching for improvement, not only because pushed by competition but also and foremost for the sake of a better service to people and the environment. Examples can be found in rich and poor countries and in many economic activities, ranging from the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh¹⁴ to environmental pioneers such as Rohner Textil in Switzerland¹⁵ and the medical equipment corporation Medtronic in the United States.¹⁶

What role does creativity play from a Christian perspective? The Christian theology of creation, based on the Hebrew Bible, not only confesses that God created the heavens and the earth out of nothing. It also affirms that God made humankind in his image. This means, human beings are called to be co-creators, which pertain to all spheres of life, including business and economics. “To make something new and better” in terms of products and services, processes and jobs, means to participate in God’s creation that goes on until “the new heaven and the new earth” are established as the Book of Revelation prophesizes. In this light, economic activity cannot content itself with maintaining the

¹⁴ See the website of Grameen Bank, www.grameen-info.org.

¹⁵ See Michael E. Gorman, Matthew M. Mehalik and Patricia H. Werhane, *Ethical and Environmental Challenges to Engineering* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2003), Case Study: Rohner Textil, 109–145.

¹⁶ See the website of Medtronic, www.medtronic.com.

status quo, producing more goods, and acquiring more wealth. The very challenge is to be creative, which meets human ingenuity and best serves humankind. Christians encourage and support the change of mind and behavior that turns away from the fixation on the possession and acquisition of wealth and focuses on the creation of wealth.

*Sensitivity for distributive justice and
the plight of the poor and powerless*

It is easily ignored that wealth creation involves a distributive dimension permeating all of its stages from the preconditions and the generation process, to the outcome, namely the use of the wealth generated and its allocation to consumption and investment. In fact, the productive and the distributive dimensions of wealth creation are intrinsically interrelated. However, the separation between “producing the pie” and “sharing the pie” has marked for too long the ideological struggle between “the right” and “the left,” despite its flawed economic underpinning. The time has now come to correct this misleading separation and to take the interrelations between the two dimensions (again) into account.

To be sensitive to these interrelations between the productive and distributive dimensions of the wealth creation process is particularly important at the current stage of China’s economic development, in which the disparities of income and wealth have reached unprecedented extremes and the extent of poverty is still very great.¹⁷

We may now ask how Christianity in China may face these challenges. To begin with, it is noteworthy that distributive justice and the plight of the poor and powerless have been serious concerns in different ethical traditions in China, particularly in Confucianism, in the young republic (notably Sun Yat-sen’s Three Principles of the People) and in socialist ethics. Christian ethics can add the basic notions of justice and love, founded in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. A seminal text is the judgment of the nations (Matthew 25:31–46). The criterion for “inheriting the kingdom” (that is, for the salvation of the

¹⁷ The Gini coefficient for income inequality has risen from 30 to 45 over the past 25 years. See Huang Yukon and Alessandro Magnoli Bocchi, eds., *Reshaping Economic Geography in East Asia* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2009), 210. Some 254 million Chinese still live in extreme poverty by the UN’s standard of less than \$1.25 per person a day. See Jamil Anderlini, “China Tax Move to Narrow Wealth Gap,” *Financial Times*, April 21, 2011.

righteous) is whether or not one takes care of those who are hungry, thirsty, naked, sick, strangers, and in prison. Thereby, it does not matter whether the righteous saw the Lord hungry, naked, etc. It suffices that the righteous did good to one of the least members of the Lord's family, which then the Lord recognizes as having been done to him.

This and other biblical texts have inspired the theology of liberation and the promotion of "the option for the poor" in the last 50 plus years. They can powerfully enhance the sensitivity for distributive justice and awareness of the plight of the poor and powerless. But they are not really effective if the people ignore how producing and distributing wealth are interrelated. Neither the trickling-down of economic growth nor mere redistribution of wealth will bring out distributive justice and overcome poverty. Rather, creating wealth concerns all social groups and elevates the poor and powerless to become creators of wealth themselves. To become creators of wealth and not only consumers "at the bottom of the pyramid" seems to be a utopian goal; but it has proved to be achievable, for instance, in the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh and similar micro-credit projects in other countries.¹⁸

Motivations for creating private and public wealth

What motivates people, companies, and countries to engage in wealth creation? Common answers in the economic and sociological literature are self-interest, greed, the will to survive, the desire for power aggrandizement, the enjoyment of riches, and the glory, honor, and well-being of nations. However, these motivations, taken individually or in mixed combinations, are rarely related specifically to the creation of wealth, but instead drive economic activities in general and, most often, incite merely the acquisition and possession of wealth. When economic activities clearly focus on wealth creation, other motivations such as entrepreneurial spirit, desire to serve others, and *joie de trouver*¹⁹ become more important.

¹⁸ See Georges Enderle, "The Option for the Poor and Business Ethics," in *The Preferential Option for the Poor beyond Theology*, eds. Daniel G. Groody and Gustavo Gutierrez (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013), 28–46.

¹⁹ Or the "joy of finding" that, in Landes's judgment (Landes, *The Wealth and Poverty of Nation*, 58), was the distinctive motivation in medieval Europe as compared to Islamic countries and China.

When it comes to the creation of public wealth, the motivation of self-interest that plays an important but not exclusive role in producing private goods is utterly insufficient. Narrowly defined self-interest will take advantage of public goods without contributing to their production (causing the so-called free-riding problem). The more broadly defined self-interest is getting diluted, the longer the time horizon and the more uncertain the prospect of individual gain will become. The creation of public wealth needs other-regarding motivations such as entrepreneurial spirit and service to others and the nation. So we may conclude that, because the wealth of a nation is the combination of private and public wealth, its creation requires a combination of self- and other-regarding motivations. Neither the first nor the second motivation alone suffices.

How then can Christianity in China promote a balanced understanding of self- and other-regarding motivations? Before exploring this question, a clarification is in place. It would be a misconception to simply identify ethics with altruism as if self-interest were necessarily unethical (which was a prominent view in Mao Zedong's cultural revolution). By the same token, it would be misguided to extol selfishness as a virtue and reject altruism as unethical (which was the view of Ayn Rand, an influential philosopher in the United States).

Christianity can draw on a large set of motivations: the desire to listen to the Word of God, to discern and do God's will, to follow the example of Jesus, to forgive and try again, to live ethically in spite of the sinful conditions of human beings, to be aware of the importance of ethical decision-making in view of the Last Judgment, etc. In this context, most relevant is the commandment of love: you shall love your neighbor as yourself. It strikes a balance between self- and other-regarding motivations and can provide a suitable basis for the creation of both private and public wealth. It excludes both extremes: solely self-regarding and solely other-regarding motivations (which satisfies the purpose of this paper). But it leaves wide open as to how specifically this balance should be struck.

Purpose of business and calling of business leaders

Defining the purpose of business and economics as wealth creation in the comprehensive sense explained above has far-reaching consequences. The standing of business and consequently its role in society gets elevated. Business is no longer just about making money and acquiring wealth, relegated to the role of the ugly, yet indispensable,

servant that provides others with the material needs in order to pursue higher, that is, spiritual needs. Accordingly, it does not deserve a low reputation that is, unfortunately, even reinforced by those who stress the purely material and instrumental view. The purpose of business becomes a noble and sustainable goal that diligently serves customers, attracts talented and committed employees, provides decent returns to investors, contributes to public wealth, and protects the environment. There is no doubt that pursuing this genuine notion of wealth creation involves much critical potential for current business practices. Yet, it is a calling of business people, which is demanding, yet achievable and makes sense.²⁰

As we can see from the previous discussion, the calling to make business a noble activity is well grounded. The Christian perspective can reinforce the featured characteristics of wealth creation and, in addition, specify and expand them to some extent. What the calling for business people can mean is well explained in the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14–30) that, by the way, immediately precedes the text on the judgment of the nations with the demand to take care of the poor. The story goes that the master, leaving for a journey, entrusted his property to his servants; to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, each according to his ability. Then he went away. Upon his return, he praised the first and the second servant for bringing five and two more talents, respectively. However, he condemned the third servant because he hid, out of fear, his one talent in the ground and was not productive. The lesson to learn from the parable: we should use our talents to the fullest extent possible, be creative and look for long-term return on investment.

CONCLUSION

Basing our thesis on a right understanding of business and economics, we have explored how a Christian perspective can reinforce and specify this understanding. Sustainability requires a long term perspective of environmental stewardship and intergenerational justice. Wealth en-

²⁰ See Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Vocation of the Business Leader: A Reflection*, 2012, www.justpax.it.

compasses more than financial capital; it also includes healthy and educated people, and trust in interpersonal relations and in society at large. With the anthropological assumption of an intimate unity of body and soul, economic activity is not merely a material endeavor, but also has a spiritual dimension that needs to be articulated and developed. Because wealth is a combination of private and public wealth, both forms of wealth have to be advanced in a balanced manner. To be creative in business and economics is an imperative in a globalizing world; it frees one from the fixation on possessing and acquiring wealth and instead means participating in the creation of the world. Because distributive issues are involved at each stage of the wealth creation process, they should not be ignored nor repressed; rather, more sensitivity is needed to advance distributive justice and overcome the plight of the poor. Wealth creation also demands a proper balance between self- and other-regarding motivations, which can be guided by the commandment to love your neighbor as yourself. With this new understanding of wealth creation, business becomes a noble activity and finds a calling that uses its talents abundantly.

Wealth creation in China appears to be grounded on a firm overlapping consensus and can be strengthened and enriched from a Christian perspective.