As with virtually all of John Wesley's social thought, that concern- 
ing the realm of economics represented an ethical critique of economic problems rather than a theory of economic relations. England in the eighteenth century was a nation in economic transition. At the beginning of the period the country was largely agri- 
cultural, though commerce was a major factor in the economy. During 
the first half of the century Englishmen were feverishly accumulating "those great capital reserves which were destined to play so 
dominant a role in world history." The economic geography of 
England continued to be determined largely by the sea and by 
navigable rivers, with the result that financial control was passing 
to London.\(^1\) In the rural areas, however, away from the few commer-
cial centers where trade and manufacture were important, the 
peddler's pack afforded the only contact the people had with the 
riches of commercial England. The seventeenth century, too, had 
left a variety of problems—the enclosure process, transformation 
of the trade-guilds to the system of domestic industries, monopolies 
and monopolistic practices, the expansion of colonial trade, and the 
Elizabethan poor law to take care of the increasing hordes of paup-
ers.\(^3\) The life of the nation was characterized and complicated by 
lack of economic unity during the period.

Society in England was stratified with a heap of humanity at the 
bottom. Local landlords and magistrates were both the political and 
economic leaders of their communities. The boroughs in England 
and Wales were dominant in the political struggle, returning three-
fourths of the members of Parliament. "In most boroughs the im-
mediate control lay with a small urban oligarchy of attorneys, 
bankers, merchants and brewers entrenched in a self-electing cor-
poration."\(^4\) It was against these men and their power that Wesley 
often fulminated.

The unpropertied persons (by far the most numerous segment 
of the population) became the backbone of the industrial system 
which developed in the latter part of the eighteenth century. The 
whole social structure of the nation was upheld by and closely en-
twined with the Church of England. It might be said that on the 
level of political ideology the Tories were oriented toward the

\(^{1}\) J. O. Lindsay (ed.), The New Cam-
bridge Modern History, Vol. VII (Cam-
bridge: Cambridge University Press, 

\(^{2}\) Ibid.

\(^{3}\) Kathleen Walker MacArthur, The 
Economic Ethics of John Wesley (New 
35-36.

\(^{4}\) Lindsay, op. cit., p. 245.
Church of England while dissenting opinion formed the backbone of the Whig party. This fact accounts in part at least for the success of Wesleyanism; it ministered primarily to the class of people who were disfranchised politically, economically, and religiously. During the time that the labor force in England was being dislocated and alienated (by the enclosure acts and machine labor), the population was also increasing. The situation made for an abundance of cheap labor. This factor coupled with the accumulation of capital already mentioned set the stage for the advent of the Industrial Revolution. Then, as Kathleen Walker MacArthur points out, "Out of these conditions came hosts of problems centering around the psychological reconditioning of the people in character and morale."

It was into these conditions that John Wesley came with his religious movement, and it was to them that he addressed himself. While the specific economic order which confronted Wesley may have been peculiar to the eighteenth century, the way in which he dealt with it may be interpreted as a constant in the continuing evaluation of the ethical consequences of an economic system. In a very real sense, Wesley recovered the reform tradition of England. His was the approach of Wycliff rather than that of the continental reformation, and he brought it to some measure of fulfillment in the disinherited classes of England.

Wesley's economic views, like all of his social thought, were based on his ethics and theology. The two general concepts of greatest importance were his ideas of God and man. To Wesley God functioned in two roles—as Sovereign (or Creator) and as Governor. God as Sovereign was omnipotent, but God as Governor imposed self-restrictions. From God's role as Sovereign comes all of God's grace. This includes the whole of creation (both physical and social). Inherent in God's grace is the possibility of universal salvation, for God alone saves man. As a result of God's grace it is possible for man to achieve Christian perfection. Power and authority in such human institutions as church and state are grants made by God to corporate representatives on earth.

In the concept of God's role as Governor, Wesley sought an answer to the problem of freedom. In order for God's revelation in Jesus to make sense, man needed to be free, for without freedom man simply was not responsible. Thus, man's responsibility arose out of man's freedom and conscience which were functions of prevenient grace. In the ability of man to respond freely to God lies Wesley's synergism, that is, the cooperation of God and man, and

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6 Ibid., pp. 245-246.
7 MacArthur, op. cit., p. 44.
this contributes the individualistic, subjective, elements of Wesleyan
theological and political thought. Prevenient grace was a grant by
God to man enabling man to differentiate between good and evil.
If man could, in reality, distinguish between good and evil this
ability made sense only if man could choose, or not choose, God.
Thus, Wesley said, grace is resistible. Moreover, man can participate
in God’s love. Man has this capacity because God first loved man.
As a result of God’s love man has himself acquired the ability to
love both God and man. Out of this conception of love, arose (in
part) Wesley’s ideas of ethics, justice, and Christian perfection.
The love concept itself was a social idea and this was related to
Wesley’s thesis that Christianity is essentially a social religion.

The other major theological problem concerned the nature of
man. Basic to either theology or political thought is the concept of
man, and this is of great importance to the very negative view of
man held by Wesley. This was premised upon the Christian doctrine
of original sin which claimed that man’s nature was wholly depraved
as a result of Adam’s fall. All men were equally infected. The
revelation of God in man gave to all men the possibility of salva-
tion, though men were always capable of knowingly contravening
the will of God. Sin, therefore, had a twofold character. It was, on
the one hand, conceived in terms of the very depravity of human
nature which originated in Adam. On the other hand, it was thought
of as the transgression of God’s law. The impulse to break God’s law,
however, came partly as a result of the ongoing action of original sin
even after justification. It was as a result of sin, in both senses, that
the problem of evil arose, and Wesley found evidence of evil in
war, class exploitation, and other social problems. Because man is
responsible he can also be ethical and moral, and this leads to
Wesley’s concern for man in the ethical context. His ethics, based
on the love concept, are both personal and social. Out of this arises
his conception of righteousness. Moreover, because man is sinful,
the government has the rather explicit ethical imperative to pre-
serve order. Also, related to the love concept are Wesley’s ideas of
social justice and Christian perfection, the latter being the perfect
possession of the perfect motive.

A significant aspect of Wesley’s political economy was his concept
of property. This concept revolved around elements of his theology
associated with both God and man. From the vantage point of God’s
sovereignty came all property to man. Unlike John Locke, whose
ideas dominated much of eighteenth century political and economic
thought, Wesley refused to elaborate a theory for the absolute
protection of property “rights.” Both Locke and Wesley agreed
that God gave the earth to the whole of mankind in common. Locke
sought to show, however, that men “might come to have property
in several parts of that which God gave to mankind in common,
and that without any express compact of all the comoners.” Locke argued that individual men mixed labor with the grant of nature that had been provided, and the produce “excluded the common right of other men.”\textsuperscript{8} The reason for this is that “labor being the unquestionable property of the laborer, no man but he can have a right to what [it] is once joined to, at least where there is enough and as good left in common for others.”\textsuperscript{9} As a result of these assumptions, property became for Locke, an unalienable right which was to be defended. The defense of property was an important issue in his writings.

Wesley, unlike many in the eighteenth century, did not follow Locke. Property was never any man’s unalienable right, for any given man held property only as a steward of God, and God could at any time take the property away.\textsuperscript{10} In this lies the idea that God, in his capacity as sovereign, makes the final choice as to the disposition of property. Because God is sovereign “he must be the possessor of all that is.”\textsuperscript{11} Because God holds title to all that is, he might resume his own property at any time, and man may use property only for those purposes which God has specified. Men who fail to use property as God directs have no moral right in it. It is possible, though by no means clear, that Wesley thought a man’s legal right to property was also in doubt if he contravened God’s law in the use of the property. Thus, for Wesley, man was not an owner, but rather a trustee or steward of property.\textsuperscript{12} One difference between Wesley and Locke lies in the fact that Locke was interested in man’s relationship to man while Wesley was concerned with man’s relation to God. A further difference is accounted for by the role which each man assigned to government. Locke wanted, among other things, to protect the right to property, while Wesley was concerned about God’s relationship to man within the social context. In this sense perhaps it is fair to say that Locke’s concern was with a defense of a particular vested interest while Wesley’s was with man’s immortal soul.\textsuperscript{13}

The concept of property has a twofold relationship—with God on the one hand and man on the other. Since property was never any man’s unalienable right, man’s “right” to property came only

\textsuperscript{9} Ibid., p. 134.
\textsuperscript{10} John Wesley, The Works of John Wesley (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, n.d. [photo offset reproduction from the authorized edition published by the Wesleyan Conference Office in London, England, 1872]), vol. vii, p. 308-309 (Sermon cxix). These volumes are hereinafter referred to as Works, prefaced by the appropriate citations (Journal, etc.).
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 309.
\textsuperscript{12} Works, vol. vi, p. 136 (Sermon li).
\textsuperscript{13} For further information on Wesley’s concept of property and its implications see MacArthur, pp. 123-124; and Sherwin, p. 41.
through his good use of the property he possessed. The responsibility of man for the use of his property was the human side of the question of property in Wesleyan thought. This position is related not only to Wesley's view that God gave property to all men in common, but also to that aspect of his theology dealing with sanctification and man's capabilities after Christian conversion.

If a man did not rightly use the property with which God had entrusted him, then that man had no right in that property. The charge which Wesley directed at the rich was, "Be ye 'ready to distribute' to every one, according to his necessity."\(^{14}\) This is essentially what Wesley meant when he counseled people to gain all they can, save all they can, and give all they can.\(^{15}\) In its highest development, this concept of distribution according to need refers back to what Wesley thought was the highest concept of economic organization, viz., primitive communism, the kind of organization which he thought obtained among the earliest Christians.\(^{16}\) The outcome of Christian love was to be a society in which all things would be held in common. Thus, in the early church, "so long as that truly Christian love continued, they could not but have all things in common."\(^{17}\)

Wesley went so far as to advocate that some Methodists hold their property in common.\(^{18}\) His objective was to bring the Methodists as close as possible to the practices of primitive Christianity. The evidence for this position is clear. Among the rules set down for the Select Societies by the first Conference (1744) was the following: "Every member, till we can have all things common, will bring once a week, bona fide, all he can toward a common stock."\(^{19}\) Apparently there was a good deal of opposition to the goal Wesley had in mind. One Richard Viney reported in his diary for February 22, 1744, that Wesley "told me of an intention he and some few have of beginning a Community of goods, but on a plan which I told him I doubted could not succeed."\(^{20}\) According to Viney, the plan would be carried out on the formula familiar to socialist thought, from each according to his ability, to each according to his need. The fact that Wesley did not seriously promote this scheme after 1744 suggests that the opposition was great enough to dissuade

\(^{14}\) Works, vol. vi, p. 376 (Sermon xxviii).
\(^{15}\) This may be called the Wesleyan economic formula. For Wesley's exposition of this formula see Works, vol. vi, pp. 127-134 (Sermon 1). This sermon was published in 1760.
\(^{16}\) Ibid., p. 376 (Sermon xxviii).
\(^{19}\) The Benet Minutes of the first Conference, as quoted by Cameron, p. 70.
him. The three rules of gain, save, give, constitute a compromise (developed after 1744) between what Wesley considered as ideal and what apparently was possible.\footnote{As late as 1760 a pamphlet sought to dissuade "all serious and well-disposed Methodists" from "their Notion of the Community of Christian Men's goods." Alexander Jephson, A Friendly and Compassionate Address to All Serious and Well-Disposed Methodists, p. 33, as quoted by Wellman J. Warner, The Wesleyan Movement in the Industrial Revolution (London: Longman's Green and Co., 1930), p. 158. The conviction that Methodism stood for such a notion persisted so strongly that Thomas Coke, after the death of Wesley, was forced to issue an official denial.}

The foregoing discussion is not an attempt to argue that Wesley was an early day English socialist. From about 1744 on he did not try to force Methodists into the kind of framework he had once contemplated. The facts presented, however, do illustrate the depth to which Wesley thought the principle of the stewardship of property should go.

We are not justified in interpreting the Wesley position as a defense of what has been called the "Protestant Ethic." Max Weber, for example, wrongly contends that Wesley's theology and ethics simply fostered the notion that the number of possessions one has demonstrates the extent to which God's grace has fallen upon that individual.\footnote{Max Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, Talcot Parsons, trans. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), pp. 142-143.} Wesley objected to the "duty of getting a good estate."\footnote{Journal, Works, vol. i, p. 285 (August, 1740).} Any interpretation of Wesley to the effect that the "presence of success indicates a state of moral soundness,"\footnote{MacArthur, op. cit., p. 123.} is impossible to maintain in the context of the totality of Wesley's writings.\footnote{See, for example, the following rejections of such a position: John Wesley, The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley, John Telford, editor (London: The Epworth Press, 1931), vol. iii, p. 122 (to Sir James Lowther, October, 1754) (these volumes are hereinafter referred to as Letters); Journal, Works, vol. iii, p. 71 (August, 1761), p. 367 (June, 1769), vol. iv, p. 180 (May, 1780); Works, vol. vii, p. 1 (Sermon lxxxvii). Warner (p. 161) contends that the logical deduction from Wesleyan thought would follow the lines Weber suggested, but that Wesley refused to make the deduction. On the contrary, it would seem that Wesley's thought does not lead, logically or otherwise, to Weber's interpretation.} In a sense Wesley represents an exception to the general "Protestant Ethic" of Calvinism which influenced the eighteenth century so greatly. Tawney rightly says:

Conspicuous exceptions like Law, who reasserted with matchless power the idea that Christianity implies a distinctive way of life, or protests like Wesley's sermon on The Use of Money, merely heighten the impression of a general acquiescence in the conventional ethics.\footnote{R. H. Tawney, Religion and the Rise of Capitalism (New York: New American Library, 1961, first published, 1926), p. 161.}
that the right to property was bound up with its proper use. His original notion that property is a gift of God, his contentions about the purposive use of property, and his rejection of what has been called the "Protestant Ethic," justify this interpretation. Wesley’s concern with property led him to protest the monopolization of farms, and on one occasion he advocated, as a means of encouraging or compelling the redistribution of land, not allowing any farm to rent for more than a hundred pounds a year. Apparently Wesley was willing under some circumstances to accept governmental regulation of property.

The result of Wesley’s view of property was a cooperative spirit in Methodism. As H. Richard Niebuhr notes, "Among the poor members of the societies it fostered, as all such movements have done, a high degree of mutual aid and cooperation and laid the foundations for popular education." In one instance Wesley noted how a cooperative movement among Methodists began:

I rode through one of the pleasantest parts of England to Hornby. Here the zealous landlord turned all the Methodists out of their houses. This proved a singular kindness: For they built some little houses at the end of the town, in which forty or fifty of them live together.

Whether Wesley’s three rules can be put to use in the twentieth century, or, for that matter, whether they were realistic for his own time, is a moot question. What we seek to establish in this discussion is Wesley’s theological and ethical principles and some of the consequences of those principles for his thought. The remainder of this article is devoted to an analysis of Wesley’s views on more specific economic matters: 1) general economic problems (poverty, unemployment, inheritance, stock manipulation, lending, labor relations, and business ethics); 2) humanitarian reform (work projects, lending stock, relief, Strangers’ Friend Society).

Poverty and unemployment are, in a sense, two sides of the same economic coin. The one is often in the company of the other. Generally in the eighteenth century poverty was regarded as a stigma, a view still held by some in the twentieth century. In Wesley’s day some thought poverty was the will of God, or that it came to some individuals because they were unworthy. Rarely did the eighteenth century see poverty and unemployment as results of social inequity. In this sense it may be said that "Wesley discovered the poor," for he was at least able to see past these superficial analyses of the

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27 *Letters*, vol. v, p. 352 (to the Editor of 'Lloyd’s Evening Post,' Dec., 1772). Apparently he is referring to the enclosure movement.
causes of poverty and to point to some social sources of poverty apart from the individual's responsibility. While Wesley did not perceive all of the social sources of economic distress, he did recognize that unemployment was not normally the result of indolence. Wesley declared that it was "wickedly, devilishly false"\textsuperscript{32} to say that people are poor only because they are idle. A more honest evaluation, he said, would recognize that people are in want "through scarcity of business."\textsuperscript{33}

Perhaps the most extended analysis which Wesley made of the causes of poverty and unemployment at a particular period was in a letter to the editor of Lloyd's Evening Post, published in December, 1772, and brought out the next month in a slightly expanded form as a tract entitled, Thoughts on the Present Scarcity of Provisions.\textsuperscript{34}

This period was characterized by war, high prices, bad harvests and general distress. The letter opens with a description of the hardships Wesley had seen among the people of England, and it then asks, "Why is this? Why have all these nothing to eat? . . . They have no meat because they have no work."\textsuperscript{35} Why is no work available?

Because the persons who used to employ them cannot afford to do it any longer. Many who employed fifty men now scarce employ ten. Those who employed twenty now employ one or none at all. They cannot, as they have no vent [sic] for their goods, food now bearing so high a price that the generality of people are hardly able to buy anything else.\textsuperscript{36}

Why are prices so high? Here Wesley launches into an analysis which involves an oddly connected sequence of interrelated problems including the misappropriation of grains, lands, and so forth. One of the major causes of high prices, according to Wesley, is high taxes which in turn are the result of war and the national debt. Therefore, Wesley advocated ridding the nation of the national debt (a plea similar to that of Jefferson in the United States).\textsuperscript{37} How are these evils to be remedied?

\begin{itemize}
  \item 1. Many thousands poor people are starving. Find them work, and you will find them meat. They will then earn and eat their own bread.
  \item 2. But how shall their masters give them work without ruining themselves? Procure vent for it, and it will not hurt their masters to give them as much work as they can do; and this will be done by sinking the price of provisions, for then people will have money to buy other things too.\textsuperscript{38}
\end{itemize}

Wesley was always on the alert for indications of economic distress among the people. In a letter to the Earl of Dartmouth, Secretary of State for the Colonies, written in August, 1775, Wesley de-
tailed the woes of the people and pleaded for relief. Wesley suggested that specific curbs be placed on particular items in an effort to bring prices down and encourage production.

A second problem to which Wesley gave attention was inheritance. He thought that the “worst possible use is to accumulate money for posterity.” Sherwin says that for Wesley inherited wealth was a prime evil, “for it will be certain to injure those who receive it.” Illustrations of this view abound in Wesley’s writings, the following being representative. On seeing a woman who had inherited her uncle’s estate, he commented, “It is a miracle if it does not drown her soul in everlasting perdition.” This observation is a commentary on Wesley’s statement, “My part is to improve the present moment.” In effect, Wesley said, do not leave an inheritance to posterity for them to throw away. “Have pity upon them and remove out of their way what you may easily foresee would increase their sins, and consequently plunge them deeper into everlasting perdition.” Finally, if a man had a considerable fortune to leave, Wesley said he should will just enough to provide for his family and “bestow all the rest in such a manner as [he judges] would be most for the glory of God.”

The third and fourth elements of Wesley’s economic analysis, stock manipulation and lending, present similar ethical problems. During 1772 and 1773 the British government made preliminary efforts to regulate the East India Company in order to give the government some indirect control over the Company, and so to remedy the worst abuses of its rule, without either taking over the responsibility for its administration in India, or interfering with the management of its trade. As an illustration of Wesley’s concern for integrity in such areas of the economy his reaction toward a proposed stockholders election in the East India Company is informative. Sometime prior to October, 1773, the qualification for a vote as proprietor was advanced by Parliament from five hundred pounds to one thousand pounds worth of stock in an attempt to prevent the frauds which were prevalent at that time. As MacArthur has noted, in this situation Wesley “finds a good many people involved in the transfer of East India Stock, and, looking upon this practice as perjury he exhorted them not to have this guilt upon their souls.” The purpose of stock transfer was, apparently, to increase the voting power of particular interests. Thus, Wesley

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38 Ibid., vol. vi, pp. 175-176 (to the Earl of Dartmouth, Secretary of State for the Colonies, August 23, 1775).
39 Sherwin, op. cit., p. 113.
42 Works, vol. vi, p. 132 (Sermon 1).
43 Ibid., pp. 132-133.
45 MacArthur, op. cit., p. 89.
asked, "Are you the alleged stock holder either benefited or hurt by the rise or fall of the stock?" He goes on to note that "still you neither gain nor lose by the rise or fall of the stock, a plain proof that you have no property therein." Therefore, he makes his final appeal: "Weigh this in time; and do not, to oblige a friend, bring the guilt of perjury on your own soul."47 A similar problem ethically was what Wesley termed "that execrable bill trade."48 This involved both the questionable aspects of lending and borrowing. Thus, "Whoever endorses a bill (that is, promises to pay) for more than he is worth is either a fool or a knave."49

Perhaps the two final aspects of this discussion concerning Wesley's position on various economic problems should be considered together. Labor relations and business ethics are manifestly related, and Wesley was concerned with both problems. "Workers who migrated to centers where economic opportunity offered a livelihood constituted the 'very social material Methodism was wont to lay hold upon.'"50 Because of this attribute of Methodism, the employing classes were fearful lest Wesley should encourage a working-class movement. This aspect of the Wesleyan movement prompted employers to discharge workers for espousing or showing sympathy toward Methodism,51 despite the fact that Methodism often made a man a more dependable worker.52 For Wesley, the "labor relationship was an ethical one."53 The other aspect of this situation was Wesley's attitude toward business integrity. The primary question with Wesley was, "In what spirit do you go through your business? In the spirit of the world, or in the spirit of Christ?" He said:

I am afraid thousands of those who are called good Christians do not understand the question. If you act in the spirit of Christ, you carry the end you at first proposed through all your work from first to last. You do everything in the spirit of sacrifice, giving up your will to the will of God; and continually aiming, not at ease, pleasure, or riches, not at anything "this short-endured world can give," but merely at the glory of God. Now, can anyone deny, that this is the most excellent way of pursuing worldly business?54

Thus, Wesley regarded the whole realm of business and labor as one in which the Christian ethic ought to be given an opportunity to function. If this were done, he believed society would be able to

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48 Ibid., vol. viii, p. 26 (to Thomas Wride, Dec., 1787).
49 Ibid.
50 Sherwin, op. cit., p. 38.
52 MacArthur, op. cit., p. 124; Sherwin, op. cit., p. 45.
53 Sherwin, op. cit., p. 110.
54 Works, vol. vii, p. 13 (Sermon, lxxxix).
solve the problems posed by these elements of the economy. It should be noted that Wesley rejected here and elsewhere the concept of "free enterprise" in the sense of unbridled competition.

Wesley's desire to help the poor manifested itself in a variety of ways. Particularly important for him were what today would be labeled as humanitarian reform measures. Four elements of humanitarian action which have special relevance for an analysis of Wesley's economic ideas are: 1) work projects; 2) lending stock; 3) relief; and 4) the Strangers' Friend Society. A characteristic response of Wesley to unemployment was to try to find work for the unemployed. When unable to do this he established work projects of various sorts. For example, he trained and employed several people in the processing of cotton. Later, when concerned for the welfare of his people, Wesley tried to impress on the United Societies their responsibility for caring for the poor. One project called for the donation of garments, money and labor to assist a number of people.

Also, Wesley attempted to work out long range solutions to the economic problems which beset his people. To that end he established a "lending stock," a sort of credit union. Through this means people were able to borrow limited amounts of money without interest. This program was launched in 1747, and it continued in operation for many years. The normal mode of relief, however, was the outright collection of money either for direct distribution or for the purchase of clothes, food, fuel, and other necessities for the poor. The normal procedure was for Wesley or his stewards to determine systematically the needs of the poor in each local society and the appropriate method of relief, and then to raise the necessary money. Another example of Wesley's attempt to relieve distress through humanitarian action was the formation of the Strangers' Friend Society. This organization was instituted in London in 1785 by a group of Methodists and was supported by Wesley. It was "wholly for the relief, not of our society, but for poor, sick, friendless strangers."

These then were some of the ways in which Wesley sought to provide relief for the economically distressed. Taken together they were "a great effort to tackle a problem which now is the pressing

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56 Ibid., p. 309 (May, 1741).
concern of Councils and Governments, as well as individuals, [and
they had] an importance hard to exaggerate."60

Wesley's economic ideas are interesting and important not because
of the remedies he suggested for economic ills, not because of the
particular economic theories he set forth, but for the humanitarian
spirit they exemplified, a spirit which might well be an object lesson
for the church in the twentieth century. In historical perspective
Wesley's economic ideas may be designated as preindustrial; indeed,
in some respects they may have been more medieval than modern.
But even so, those ideas were founded on sympathy for human
need, and they prompted imaginative attempts to do something
about that need. Therein lies their significance for today.

Much of the foregoing is a commentary on Wesley's view of the
role of government in the economy of the nation. He believed that
at times governmental planning and control was necessary to alle-
viate conditions of distress. Most significant in this regard was the
expression of surprise evoked from Wesley by the reading of a
book in 1776. He said the volume contained "some observations
which I never saw before . . . That to petition Parliament to alter
[prices and fix money policies] is to put them upon impossibilities,
and can answer no end but that of inflaming the people against their
Governor."61 Wesley did not name the book, but the view it set forth
was typical of the laissez-faire philosophy of Adam Smith and Adam
Ferguson. Ferguson's An Essay on the History of Civil Society
appeared in 1766 while Smith's Wealth of Nations was published
ten years later. In the realm of economics both Ferguson and Smith
advocated governmental non-intervention.62

Judging by the evidence adduced in this article, it would seem
that Edwards' claim that nowhere in Wesley's works is there "an

60 Edwards, p. 154. It should perhaps be noted that the modern local church
almost completely fails to live up to the standards set by Wesley in ministering
to people in economic distress. This author, in 1961-1962, made a series of
studies of ten inner-city churches in New Orleans, Louisiana. These inquiries
showed that those local churches had little, if any, relationship with the people
of their primary parishes and the social work they undertook was almost nil.
Moreover, other investigations indicated that there was very little relationship
between pastors or local church officials and community organizations designed to
provide the variety of services which Wesley articulated through the Strangers'
Friend Society. Similar results would no doubt be found among churches in all
parts of the country, though in fairness, it should be said that some work is being
done (in New Orleans and elsewhere) to try to remedy the situation. The ques-
tion is whether it is too little and too late.


62 John Snell, "The Political Thought of Adam Ferguson," The Municipal Univer-
appeal for collectivist legislation,”⁶³ is too strong. If Wesley did not favor the welfare state he at least advocated governmental supervision in times of economic crisis. Taken together, Wesley’s concept of property and some of his specific proposals for alleviating unemployment, poverty, and other social iniquities remain inconsistent with the *laissez-faire* philosophy which developed in England during the latter part of his life.

In summary we may say that John Wesley was concerned with the here and now as well as the hereafter. The reasons for this were many, but primarily it was because his theology and his ethics projected themselves quite naturally into a concern for the present life of man. Wesley believed that Christianity should be relevant in terms of the economic life. He was less naïve than some of his contemporaries concerning the actual operation of the economic system, but on the other hand he is open to the charge of naïveté in regard to his three rules of gaining, saving, and giving. The latter is particularly true until his rules are placed in the context of his total thought on economic matters. The main theses of this article, however, has been to show the manner in which Wesley related his theology and his ethics to a concern for the economic life and the economic well-being of his followers.⁶⁴

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⁶³ Edwards, op. cit., p. 184. For MacArthur’s evaluation of Wesley’s economic position see pp. 111-112. In commenting on Wesley’s economic views J. A. Faulkner, *Wesley as Sociologist, Theologian, Churchman* (New York: Methodist Book Concern, 1918), p. 12, says “It only touches the surface of a condition that needed severer remedies—remedies that none in England then proposed and few now propose.”

⁶⁴ H. E. Luccock and Paul Hutchinson, *The Story of Methodism* (New York: The Methodist Book Concern, 1925), p. 210, note that Wesley “saw the evils, and he made Methodism the kind of religious movement which expressed its sanctification by its devotion to the removal of those evils.”