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Kenneth Boulding: A Friends' Economist[1]

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Abstract

This paper examines Kenneth Boulding's (1910-1993) religious beliefs and argues he was one of the most prolific religious economists in the 20th century. He was an enigmatic economist whose career spanned over six decades. He helped to establish the field of general systems and furthered peace studies and conflict and defense. His early work earned him the John Bates Clark medal in 1949. But behind Boulding's theoretical economics was a deep religious ideology. Strongly affected by World War I while growing up in Liverpool, England, Boulding became a lifelong pacifist. Raised Methodist, Boulding discovered Quakerism in high school. While Boulding published widely in the field of economics, he also published almost 100 articles in Quaker journals. Boulding's body of work in economics and Quakerism led to interesting crosspollination. His work on peace and conflict and defense were a direct result of his pacifism. Boulding's work shows deep concern for human betterment and prosperity that is steeped in his religious principles.

Keywords: human betterment, Kenneth Boulding, pacifism, Quakers, Religious Society of Friends

> Religion […] has been an important part of my personal life, and it would be surprising if this did not spill over into my professional interests (Boulding, 1968, p. vii).

Introduction

This paper studies how Kenneth Ewert Boulding (1910-1993) was one of the most prolific religious economists in the 20th century. This paper explores how Boulding's pacifist Quaker

[1] The author thanks John Anderies and Ann Upton at Haverford College's Quaker Collections; and research archivist David Hays at the University of Colorado-Boulder.

principles[2] led to work on population, peace studies, ecological economics, and conflict and defense. His concern for human betterment made him accept that economics is normative with moral implications. During a time when economics was becoming more positivist, Boulding advocated for a normative, humanist, and transdisciplinary approach. Boulding's economics stands in stark contrast to the mainstream economics that promotes itself as a value-free dehumanized science. Boulding's vision of economics is reminiscent of the political philosophers of Adam Smith, Thomas Malthus, and David Ricardo (also a converted Quaker).

Boulding wrote the following about his childhood, "I had a very happy and supportive childhood living in downtown Liverpool in what might easily have been called a slum" (Boulding 1992, p. 70). At that time coal was used in much of the industry in Liverpool, England and Boulding remembers that on winter days he could not see across the street from all the pollution. He was an only child, and his parents were both from working class families. His father was a self-employed plumber and his mother a homemaker (and amateur poet). Boulding never shied away from his family's heritage. He embraced their working-class roots and was always sympathetic to the struggles of that class. His childhood home at 4 Seymour Street was in the middle of Liverpool that in the early twentieth century was working-class cosmopolitan (Author).

The quality of education for children of working-class parents in Liverpool was poor. But Boulding was fortunate because he showcased his intelligence early and was able to get scholarships to excellent schools in Liverpool. This preparation led to an Oxford University scholarship to study Chemistry, which was an impressive achievement for a Liverpudlian

[2] Quakers, or formally the Religious Society of Friends, are generally Protestant Christians. Historically many Quakers are strong pacifists who abhor war and opposed slavery and played a significant role in the Underground Railroad helping to liberate American slaves by aiding relocation to northern states.

Methodist from a working-class family. After his first year he decided to abandon chemistry for economics. He wrote a letter to the warden of New College about his desire to change his studies and maintain his scholarship: And "with great generosity the College allowed me to do this" (Boulding, 1989, p. 369). England's economic depression was in full force while he was growing up in the inner-city of Liverpool, so Boulding saw the effects a weak economy has on real families. He argued that Chemistry was not likely to save the world, and "at that time the great problems of the human race seemed to be economic" (Boulding, 1989, p. 369).

Boulding published nearly 100 articles in Quaker journals[3] starting in 1938. Much of this work revolves around the economics of issues relevant to Friends (i.e., the Religious Society of Friends): peace, population growth, distribution, taxation, ethics, and politics. Boulding's religion played an important role in his public conversion from a mostly mainstream economist into a transdisciplinary social science philosopher. This transition is complete by the time of Boulding's American Economic Association presidential address "Is Economics a Moral Science" (1969), which may be summarized by his statement, "The concept of a value-free science is absurd" (Boulding 1969, p. 4).

The following paper proceeds first with an exploration into Boulding's early intellectual development. Then, we explore his early professional life from Edinburgh to America and his emergence as a leading Keynesian economist. Next, we see how Boulding's work diverges from the mainstream into concerns about broader social issues such as ethics, evolution, ecology, peace, conflict and defense. This divergence seemed sudden and strange for people who only

[3] There are many Quaker journals still publishing: Friends Journal and The Friends Quarterly. Pendle Hill has published many Quaker pamphlets and books since 1934. These publications discussed contemporary and historical issues that were relevant to Quakers. For example, Boulding wrote articles on a variety of economic topics from taxation to conflict and defense.

knew one side of Boulding's work; but in truth, Boulding's later work was an extension of his values and beliefs. Finally, Boulding's work from retirement until his death in 1993 is discussed in the context of the body of his life's work.

Pacifist

> I have lived most of my life on the uneasy margin between science and religion (Boulding 1974, p. 4).

Boulding's parents were devout Methodists. Early in Boulding's life he came to the decision to embrace his Christianity. He was greatly influenced by World War I. According to him, it was the experience of seeing his Uncle Bert, psychologically traumatized by trench warfare, that most impressed upon him the vulgarity of war. He wrote that he was very fond of Uncle Bert and that when he returned from the war he had "an expression in his eyes I can still see" (Boulding 1989, p. 367). Boulding writes, "I even recall being horrified at a toy I got, with wounded soldiers in little stretchers" (p. 367). There were many other injuries and deaths of close friends and relatives. So deeply affected was Boulding that it was around this time he developed a life-long stutter. So common is stuttering (or stammering as it was called at the time) among English boys that it became known as the mark of the English gentleman. It is a hereditary trait, yet no known person in Boulding's family had a stutter (Kerman 1974, pp. 211-212). Boulding's stutter became a trait endearing him to people.

Boulding's pacifism was resolute. In high school, he read John Williams Graham's "Conscription and Conscience" (1922)—a study of *conscientious objectors* from World War I and their struggle to live their faith during wartime. Boulding was impressed by arguments in the book and came to respect the Quakers for their commitment to pacifism. This knowledge led him

to talk with his friend, Robin Wall (a Quaker), about Friends and their spiritual practices (Kerman 1973, p. 117). Wall took Boulding to some Quaker meetings and Boulding felt an immediate spiritual connection with the Quaker method of worship—especially the silence at the beginning of meetings. Boulding started regularly attending the Liverpool Friends Meeting and continued while at Oxford. But Boulding remained an active Methodist during much of this time until he finally became a convinced Friend in 1931 (Kerman 1974, p. 138). Being a Quaker comprised his primary social circle during the rest of his life—and had a profound effect on his professional life. About half of Boulding's Quaker publications are on the topic of pacifism (and by his own estimates in 1989, over 17% of all his publications are on peace, war and conflict (Boulding 1989, p. 382)). Boulding discusses not only the immorality of war, but also the economic inefficiencies associated with war (see Bouding 1941; 1944; 1954).

Boulding's first Quaker article was published in *American Friend* in September 1938 and was titled "Making Education Religious." It discusses that wholly educated people must not only have book knowledge but also a sense of their place in the world. That same year he published "An Experiment in Friendship" that discussed the immorality of anti-Semitism in Germany. Also, in 1938 he wrote "In Defense of the Supernatural" published in *Friends Intelligencer*. Here we find that Boulding is a devout Christian who does not hide his love of God and belief in God (see also, Boulding 1987). Boulding's friend Anatol Rapoport, an atheist, wrote about a conversation with Boulding that revealed "he believed literally in Jesus's resurrection and miracles" (Rapoport, 2013, p. 485). In Boulding's William Penn lecture in 1942 "The Practice of the Love of God" he exclaims the value in the practice of religion (Boulding, 2004). He writes, "And to be 'religious' only, in the narrow sense, to be shut up in a little world of the purely personal, is to be a Pharrisee" (pp. 19-20). He goes on to write, "We can only truly express our

love for God, then, in expressing our love for God's family, for all creation" (p. 20). Against the secularism of the modern age, Boulding stated, "Dare to love God! Dare to practice that love everywhere…" (p. 3).

Early professional life

Boulding graduated from Oxford in 1931 and then won a Webb-Medley Scholarship in Economics that let him study for another year, which he did as a graduate student. The next year he received a Commonwealth Fellowship (essentially a Rhodes Scholarship in reverse) and studied economics at the University of Chicago and Harvard. After two years he had come to love America but had to return to England to teach, as required by his fellowship. He spent three years at the University of Edinburgh, which he found intellectually dead compared to the vibrant atmosphere in Chicago.

Serving as a Quaker delegate at the Friends World Conference in Philadelphia, PA in 1937 Boulding received a call from a friend about a job at Colgate University in Hamilton, New York. He interviewed immediately, and after some negotiating took the job. His two years at Colgate were largely spent writing a textbook "Economic Analysis" (1941). It was an immediate success that furthered his reputation and acceptance among economists, and he argued later it was a primary reason he won the John Bates Clark Medal in 1949 since it was "as pure as the driven snow" (Mott 1992, p. 356).

While at a Quarterly Quaker meeting in New York in 1941 he met 21-year-old Elise Bjorn-Hansen and within three months they married. Elise became a devout Quaker and later a first-rate Sociologist. Soon after the wedding they moved to Princeton, New Jersey so Kenneth could work at the League of Nations Economics and Financial Division to study European

agriculture. Boulding was part of a team whose work helped lead to the establishment of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration. His time at the League was short lived after he and Elise published a Quaker pamphlet titled "A Call to Disarm." His supervisor said if he published the work that he would be fired. Boulding published it and resigned—though he recounted the situation as being fired. They created a stir among the Princeton elite early on because they had a Black family over to their house for dinner.

From Princeton they moved to Nashville, Tennessee so Boulding could teach at Fisk University, which is a Historically Black College founded in 1866. He got the job because a friend and Quaker, Thomas Jones was the President of Fisk. Boulding enjoyed his time in Nashville. He and Elise lived on campus. They were involved in the local Quaker meeting, and Elise even started a newsletter South Central Friends Yearly Meeting (Morrison, 2005). While at Fisk Boulding wrote his second book *The Economics of Peace* (1945b). This book came from his work at the League of Nations. It primarily focuses on the reconstruction and development of countries and regions after war. Boulding was more focused on the period following World War II (in 1942) than focusing on the war itself. *The Economics of Peace* was a Keynesian treatment of post-war macroeconomics explaining how to handle the boom-and-bust economic cycle caused by war. Due to many factors, the book was not published until 1945 and did not garner popular attention. Besides his Keynesian economics, the book contained strong moralizing about how economics should have greater compassion and understanding of humans and their struggles. Boulding believed staunchly, perhaps naively, that the fastest way to achieve peace was for each of us to treat one another with empathy, respect, and love. But he also explains that institutions matter too:

> It is no exaggeration to say that responsible government is the key to the whole political problem, in internal as well as in external affairs. We have seen how the development of a responsible foreign policy is the way to the creation of a world order. It is equally true that in domestic politics the achievement of *responsible* government is the basic problem and is still far from full attainment. Democracy, significant as it is for human welfare, is not an end in itself. It is important mainly as a means to responsible government (Boulding 1945b, p. 251).

Boulding further argues that the problem is more complicated:

> In the last resort, the problem of responsible government is more than a political problem; it is a moral problem, affecting the thought and conduct of every individual—even the reader of this page. It is true that environments and institutions modify the character of individuals, yet change in institutions only comes about as a result of changes in the individuals whose character the institutions reflect. It is as true today as in Plato's day that the nature of the state is determined by the nature of the individuals that compose it. Responsible government, whether on a world scale or even on a national scale, can never develop unless there are responsible citizens (Boulding 1945b, p. 253).

The passage that may best summarize the economics in *The Economics of Peace* follows:

> Drawing an entirely false analogy from personal and business life, the conservatives argue that just as a private individual must balance his budget, so must a government. Oddly enough, this rule is relaxed in time of war—it is apparently quite proper to finance the destruction of life and property with a budget deficit, but not proper to finance slum clearance, good nutrition, and prosperity! (Boulding 1945b, p. 197).

Iowa State College offered Boulding a better position with more time to write. The chair of the economics department was Theodore Schultz (winner of the 1979 Nobel Prize in economics and American Economic Association president in 1960), who once stated, "Most people in the world are poor. If we knew the economy of being poor, we would know much of the economics that really matter" (Schultz 1981, p. 3). Schultz had the idea of bringing in a general economist and giving that person a year to study labor issues in order to specialize in labor economics. Boulding appreciated the idea of spending a year to learn an area of economics he knew little about. He spent that year traveling around the country, going to labor conferences, meeting with labor economists and activists and visiting various unions. He recounts visiting roughly 85 head offices of different labor unions during that year and all the unions in Iowa (Boulding, 1989, p. 374). He credits this experience with opening his mind to the understanding that economics alone cannot provide answers to social science questions. Boulding stated that this experience ruined him as a pure economist (1989). From then on, he argued that all social sciences are studying the social system—though from difference perspectives.

World War II was the only time Boulding remembered his pacifism quavering—seeing the atrocities of Nazism. He questioned deeply whether to support the war efforts and was conflicted. However, during this tumultuous time he had a religious "vision" after taking a bath. He wrote the following poem immediately after the experience (Kerman 1974, p. 119):

Hatred and sorrow murder me.
But out of the blackness, bright I see
Our Blessed Lord upon his cross.
His mouth moves wanly, wry with loss
Of blood and being, pity-drained.

Between the thieves alone he reigned:

(Was this one I, and that one you?)

"If I forgive, will ye not too?"

My vial of wrath breaks suddenly,

And fear and hate drain from me dry.

There is a glory in this place:

My Lord! I see thee face to face.

Boulding's pacifism during World War II cost him friends and some people's respect, but he remained committed to his ideals. For the rest of his life his pacifism only grew stronger. Threats of nuclear war and modern warfare gave Boulding confidence that his convictions were correct—war was never a solution.

While at Iowa, Boulding was not yet a United States citizen, but for some reason was still eligible for the draft. According to transcripts, Boulding got classification as a Conscientious Objector (CO). At this time, COs were assigned to a Civilian Public Service (CPS) camp. Boulding believed his work was more important than the "lands and forest projects" the CPS would have him do. He understood that refusing to go meant jail or deportation. He agreed to take the physical exam, which required him to travel by bus from Ames, Iowa to Minneapolis. Staying up all night he had anxious energy from the thoughts about whether he would be put in jail or not. Part of the physical exam was a psychiatric evaluation. The psychiatrist asked Boulding about his reasons for not wanting to fight. Boulding explained, as best he could, the Quaker belief in the "Inward Light" (see Boulding 1947). This doctrine confers on people the right to live their lives as they see right and proper—with mediation from God. Of course, one

must wait for guidance from the Inward Light. In the transition to the Liberal Quakerism of the twentieth century Quakerism moved from a cataphatic (outward) worshipping of God by wearing simple clothes and so forth to an inward worshipping. This approach meant one would meditate on issues and wait to receive guidance—or be led to a particular decision. Boulding tried explaining this to the psychiatrist, who became befuddled and took him to the chief psychiatrist. After being introduced the chief psychiatrist leaned on the table and roared at Boulding, "Do you ever hear the voice of God"? Boulding had a hard time answering this question, but he said "Well, not in a physical way." Boulding again went into the explanation of the Inward Light leading his decision making and the chief eventually could not take anymore and said, "Get out of here" and put a big X on his paper and issued him a 4-F, which meant he did not have to serve in the Second World War or go to jail (Author).

Around this same time, Boulding wrote a popular Quaker book *There is a Spirit (The Nayler Sonnets)* (1945a) for which he thereafter was often referred to as a Quaker poet. This book contains 26 sonnets, each a meditation on the final words of a dying Quaker leader James Nayler in 1660. While there is little in this book on economics (except about greed), it emphasizes his commitment to Quakerism at a time just prior to his economic thought transition, which was his intellectual metamorphosis. Boulding published three more volumes of poetry that covered a broad swath of his views on life, economics and family (1975; 1990; 1994). Boulding was also a talented artist. His archives at the University of Colorado-Boulder contain many wonderful drawings and paintings throughout his life.

Friends economist

> The idea that there is something called 'science' which detects truth faultlessly and cannot have anything to do with valuations is an absurd byproduct of the now largely discarded logical positivism (Boulding 1986, p. 9).

In 1949 Boulding accepted a position at the University of Michigan, which offered an excellent environment for him to evolve into the economist most people recognize today. He and Elise found an active Quaker community and engaging colleagues and raised their five children in Ann Arbor. His work at Michigan was different than his earlier work. It is important to note that the economics profession up to this time only knew one side of Boulding's personality. His Quaker writings were only known to other Quakers. From his Quaker writings it is clear that Boulding was focused on social and human betterment all along (e.g., Boulding 1938a; 1938b). Morality was critical to his thinking and served as a strong foundation for his later economic writing. He tried to keep his two personalities (pure economist and Quaker moralist) separate, but once at Michigan the two conflated into one another causing a transformation that continued the rest of his life. Free from the confining static models of economics led to his broad outlook on morality, history, society and spirituality.

Boulding's article "What About Christian Economics" (1951) provides insight into his thinking about the relationship between his economics and Christian values. In this paper he writes,

> "The inability of capitalism to command loyalty and devotion probably arises from the fact that exchange, especially monetary exchange, is one of the least emotional of human relationships, and a society built around the institution of exchange therefore is likely to be sadly deficient in emotional vitamins" (p. 361). Nevertheless our very proper fear of socialism must not lead us to abstain from the prophetic criticism of *all* societies. In a

> very real sense Christ stands above all human societies, and sits in judgment on them. It is perilously close to form of blasphemy to attempt to identify the Kingdom of God with any form of society, for this is clearly a problem which man has not yet solved (Boulding 1951, p. 361).

The idea that economics is a moral science was not new—e.g., Adam Smith's *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759)—but Boulding's open acknowledgement was an important part of his evolution into a social philosopher. Economics, however, was moving away from this thinking and aligning itself with the hard "positive" sciences rather than normative propositions. "Market morality" was supplanting the human morality that Boulding advocated. Making all economic questions answerable to the market eliminates any requirement of economists to think about the social or human implications of their theories. A concept such as profit maximization separates companies from the impact their decisions have on people, the environment, or the global economy—since profit is the only objective. Some people argue that companies that fail to consider their employees and environmental effects will be less successful, so it is in their interest to be socially responsible; but many examples suggest this is more myth than reality (see Boulding, 1951).

Perhaps because of this Boulding became involved with the General Committee of the Department of the Church and Economic Life of the National Council of Churches. His experiences led to the book *The Organizational Revolution: A Study in the Ethics of Economic Organization* (1953). This book was Boulding's attempt to understand how, why and to what ends over the past century the number, size, and power of various organizations has grown. He is particularly interested in both the growth of economic organizations, which arguably includes most of them, and the ethics of organization. On the second issue, Boulding writes,

> No matter how complex a society, it remains true that most of the moral problems which face an individual deal with person-to-person relationships. The personal virtues of honesty, truthfulness, kindliness, sincerity, sobriety, self-control and so on are still the sign of a morally mature spirit and are still the virtues which hold the world together, no matter how complicated it may become. The individual is ultimately the only bearer of moral responsibility; even when an individual acts in the name of others, or in the name of an organization, it is still the individual who acts, and who ultimately must bear responsibility for the consequences of his acts (Boulding, 1953, p. 9).

Religion and ethics were closely associated for Boulding. Once beyond orthodox economics, he freely blended his religious views and economics. Nowhere is this better presented than in two papers. First, the *Religious Perspectives in Economics* presented at a symposium on Religious Perspectives of College Teaching in 1950; and, second, *Religious Foundations of Economic Progress* published in the Harvard Business Review in 1952 (both articles reprinted in: Boulding, 1968). In these articles, Boulding argues that throughout much of history there are many examples where religion influences the economy, and vice versa. This is visible from the pyramids to the Vatican. Religion, in its early stage, can act as a "revolutionary force" that often occurs at the same time as rapid "economic development" (Boulding 1968, p. 178). As a religion matures, progress slows and a more conservative stance takes hold. Contrary to Karl Marx's historical materialism that asserted religions stand on foundations of economics, Boulding presents the work of Max Weber and his *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* as a study of the Protestant Reformation and how it helped foment the development of capitalism (in a similar vein as William Petty). It, therefore, reversed Marx's causation setting religion as the foundation upon which the economy is guided.

> Indeed, one can say with some confidence that when the tide of religion runs strongly in the minds of men it draws them away from worldly power, wealth and security, and offers them in return a power, a wealth and a security which are not of this world, not dependent on the favor of other men, but are secured by a secret inward covenant between the soul and its heavenly Lord (Boulding 1968, p. 184).

Perceptively, Boulding states in various ways, "[t]he nature of the dominant religion, therefore, is determined in an appreciable degree by the economic opportunities that are open" (1968 p. 184). Boulding writes that in areas where population is large and land scarce the withdrawn mystic life is held in the highest regard (minimalism). Contrast that with a more open American landscape where economic freedom is praised, and hard work and wealth accumulation is honored and the mystic is vilified you end up with materialism and mass consumption as the dominant cultural fabric.

While it may be impossible to conclude definitively whether economic behavior leads to religious emergence or vice versa, Boulding explains that "religions breed civilizations, and civilizations breed and spread religions in a continuous pattern" (Boulding 1968, p. 185). Finding any causality in these social movements is difficult. It may be easier to spot *invasions* occurring within society (e.g., deregulation and the rise of financialization) and *mutations* (e.g., technology and the rise of government spying). These invasions and mutations are constantly changing the social structure. Without these adjustments society would settle into a recognizable equilibrium. Instead, we have an evolving ecosystem that both acts upon and is affected by these changes. Accordingly, "we cannot, therefore, understand economic processes in time without reference to the whole universe of social phenomena, of which religion is a vital and significant part" (p. 186).

Of particular concern to Boulding was that,

> "[…] [T]he student of economics in our universities can easily get through his course and can be turned out as a full-fledged teacher of the subject, without any awareness of this interconnectedness penetrating his consciousness [….] The economist, by reason of the peculiar history of economic thought, is especially in danger of being *indifferent* to religion (1968, pp. 186-187).

Boulding argues that part of the reason for this is because Adam Smith, whose *Wealth of Nations* serves as the foundation for the study of economics. He notes that Smith was friends with David Hume who personified the 18th century age of enlightenment intellectuals and "[b]oth regarded religious enthusiasm as a serious break of good taste" (1968, p. 188). Yet, Boulding found that,

> It is indeed curious that no economist since Adam Smith seems to have dealt at any length with the economics of religion—perhaps it was felt that Adam Smith had said the last word on the subject! (Boulding notes possible exceptions such as Simon Patten and Richard Ely, but none of them had the effect of Smith.) (1968, p. 188).

There exists a thin line between religion and economics; and, therefore, temperance must be exhibited to separate the normative from the positive. Boulding, reflecting on his own experiences, wrote:

> Many people are attracted into the social sciences, and especially perhaps to economics, because they feel a concern for the ills of society or wish to learn how to reform them. This is a proper motivation, yet it needs to be disciplined by a strong sense of scientific integrity and by a willingness to acquire real skill in the abstract disciplines before venturing to make applications….goodwill is in no sense a substitute for scientific

> competence—nor, of course, is scientific competence a substitute for goodwill (1968, p. 190-191).

Boulding further noted that institutions of higher learning are so focused on scientific inquiry that there is little opportunity to lose one's way with fruits of religious fanciful thinking. In fact, for Boulding,

> It is the opposite danger which threatens [the economist]—that of becoming so engrossed in the refinements of scientific abstraction—and in the substantial rewards, which in these days often accompany proficiency in such abstractions—that he forgets the ills of society and becomes deaf to the cry of the hungry and blind to the misery of the oppressed. […] Those who have knowledge have a peculiar responsibility to be sensitive to the ills of the world, for if they are not then it will be the ignorant who will be the movers of events, and the value of knowledge will be lost (1968, p. 191).

Boulding states that for teachers of economics, the division between religion and economics is a little broader. When teaching economic history, for example, "the contact between religious and economic life becomes clear and significant" (1968, p. 192). So, no economic history course can adequately purge (nor ignore) the effects of religion.

The other aspect of economics that lends itself to considerations of religious influence is public policy. Here the ends and means can be affected by religious influence. When studying unemployment, pollution, or public finance it is difficult to look at these issues in an objective way without seeing the effects on people:

> For the sake of his own spiritual and intellectual health the economist must face the challenge of prophetic indignation: on the other hand the prophet also must be prepared

> to submit his moral insights to the rigorous discipline of intellectual analysis when it comes to translating these insights into policies (1968, p. 197).

The economy is a social construct, so when studying exchange, value and production we are ultimately studying decisions made by people or institutions of people. Boulding argues that where scientific abstraction is perhaps most dangerous is found in the study of labor markets. The pure "rational economic man" sees workers as commodities producing output (an automaton). Boulding, however, sees the value in each worker and each worker's output (like Marx). This is where an economics teacher's acquaintance with religion is important (and maybe more than an acquaintance). Boulding writes, "To seek God is to find man" (1968, p. 194). For Boulding, Christians see each person as special and important since each is made in God's image (he applies this logic to all religions, not just Christianity). Treating people as chattel upon which capitalists through their yokes and whip into productive fervor is as much immoral as it is dishonest, since no person is reducible to his/her economic output. If this were possible, it would likely resemble a diastrophic Orwellian nightmare in which people are more robot than human.

These examples also highlight why Boulding believes so strongly in a transdisiplinary approach to social problems. An integral approach considers the psychological, social, historical, physical, political, religious, and educational effects of "economic" decisions on people. It is a daunting task to consider this general systems macrocosm. After all, it is much easier to apply ceteris paribus and look at one or two factors ignoring everything else. But this oversimplification masks the real value in studying economics, which is to study social issues and systems. Only in the larger, broader view are we able to see if our observations are valid and if they have the potential of a lasting positive wide-reaching impact. Nowhere is this more

challenging than for the religious economist who balances the scientific and the mythical ethic in terms of value and morality. About this Boulding wrote:

> Communication between the intellectual and the religious subcultures is perilous in the extreme. It depends almost entirely on the doubtful abilities of a few individuals who participate in both. Society owes an enormous debt to those marginal men who live uneasily in two different universes of discourse. Society is apt to repay this debt by making them thoroughly uncomfortable and still more marginal (Boulding 1956, p. 146).

In the article *Economic Life* (1953), Boulding finds that "On the great question of socialism versus capitalism, for instance, the Quaker trumpet seems to speak with an uncertain sound. Despite—or perhaps even because of—this apparent weakness in clarity of the theoretical position, the practical impact of the Society of Friends on the economic life of the world has been enormous, and quite out of proportion to the small number of friends" (pp. 43-44). Boulding further states that Quakers played an important role in the industrial revolution. "It is perhaps sufficient to mention that the basic technical changes in such industries as iron and steel, lead and zinc mining, porcelain, and even railroads were to a large extent the work of Friends" (Boulding 1953, p. 45). Friends also cultivated economic institutions—merchandising, banking and insurance (e.g., Barclay and Lloyd). Quakers were deeply entrenched in the capitalist market-based system. "The two great features of the economic life of the Society of Friends were first, the practices of the 'minor virtues' of personal probity, thrift, simplicity of life, and hard work; and second, the willingness to innovate, to try out new ways of doing things, not only in manufacture and trade, but in human relations as well" (p. 47).

Peace testimony

During the 1954-1955 academic year, Boulding studied at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences at Stanford University. Two important events occurred while at Stanford that had a lasting impact on Boulding (and Elise) personally, professionally, and spiritually. First, soon after arriving at Stanford Boulding, Ludwig von Bertalanffy, Clyde Kluckohn, and Anatol Rapoport were sitting around the lunch table and it was discovered they were all studying general systems, but from different angles. So they decided to start an association. The Society for General Systems Research was born (now called the International Society for the Systems Sciences). Boulding became the Society's first president (1957-1958). General systems theory does not have a clear definition; but essentially it is an interdisciplinary approach to studying environments, societies, and institutions. For example, general systems thinkers study a forest and its complex ecosystem working in concert compared to studying one aspect of the forest and ignoring the rest. Only in its totality is the value of the forest fully appreciated. In addition, time plays a role in general systems thinking, because forests (and all ecosystems and institutions) change over time; and studying those changes is important for understanding what happened in the past and present as well as what might happen in the future.

The second event (closely related to the first) was a focus on research associated with conflict and peace. It was surprising to many of the interdisciplinary scholars at the Center that no one was studying war and peace in a rigorous way (other than historical accounts), yet these were critical issues. So after Boulding got back to Michigan, he and several others, including Elise Boulding, started the *Journal of Conflict Resolution* (which remains an influential journal in the field). The journal had the unintended effect of creating by way of inertia the Center for Research on Conflict Resolution at the University of Michigan. Elise, while getting her Ph.D. in

Sociology at Michigan, was actively involved in starting and helping to run the Center at the University of Michigan.

So strong were Boulding's feelings that in the mid-1960s he was at a meeting with Russian scientists discussing the implications of nuclear weapons on humanity. At the meeting he cried openly at the conference table, which was a turning point in the meeting. One of the Russian delegates said, "here [is] a man [we] can trust." Then the Russian delegates cried with Boulding. In the middle of the Cold War Boulding was able to use his convictions to reach people by showing his compassion for humanity (Rapport 1996, p. 69).

Boulding spent the 1959-1960 academic year at the University College of the West Indies in Jamaica where he wrote a classic book, *Conflict and Defense: A General Theory* (1962). This work was the result of his pacifism and desire to understand the nature and consequences of conflict. In the preface he wrote, "The origin of this book in my mind can be traced back to a passionate conviction of my youth that war was the major moral and intellectual problem of our age" (Boulding 1962, p. vii). In particular, Boulding saw that conflict is everywhere, but it can be either helpful or harmful. What Boulding developed was a two-tiered structure that identified harmful grants as those resulting from fear, where one party coerces another party to do something out of threat (unhealthy conflict). Essentially one person gains while another loses. Helpful grants are given without the expectation of reciprocation (e.g., love), where one party gives something unconditionally and another party gains. This interaction of love and fear (or benevolence and malevolence) was what emerged from *Conflict and Defense*, but Boulding had yet to fully form his thinking on this structure until several years later when developing his grants economics—more below (see Boulding 1969).

In 1965 Boulding presented his influential paper *The Economics of the Coming Spaceship Earth* (1966) that was remarkably prescient. This paper laid the foundations for much of the development of modern ecological economics. He argues that the traditional pursuit of economic growth leads to environmental and social misery. He states that what is needed is a movement toward renewable energy and a steady-state economy. The previous thinking about economics—that the environment is illimitable and economic growth can continue forever is an outmoded idea he calls the "cowboy economy." In the face of pollution, finite resources, and population growth we need to think of the earth as a "spaceship" that must be sustained. While he never states that this thinking had any religious influences—the ideas to live within our means, reduce wasteful consumption, be good stewards of the earth, and promote human betterment are all present.

A moral science

In Fall 1966 Boulding moved from the University of Michigan to the University of Colorado. He was brought in to work at the Institute of Behavioral Science (IBS). The director of IBS at the time was Gilbert White a geographer who was a fellow Quaker and eventual good friend of Boulding and his family.

Boulding was elected president of the American Economic Association (AEA) in 1968. His presidential address at the national meeting in December 1968 was "Economics as a Moral Science" (Boulding, 1969). Here Boulding puts forth his tripartite model of society. His most important point in the presentation is to argue that economics is not a value-free discipline that analyzes the economy from an unfeeling position of neutrality. Instead, economics is normative, and this is not a bad thing. He states correctly that Adam Smith was a professor of moral

philosophy and that economics was for a long time after a moral science. He writes, “In the battle between mechanism and moralism generally mechanism has won hands down, and I shall not be surprised if the very title of my address does not arouse musty fears of sermonizing in the minds of many of my listeners” (Boulding 1969, p. 1). He makes clear that “the largest part of human preferences are learned,” that society and culture define these preferences (p. 2). No science, to Boulding, is without some ethical standards and understand. Boulding further states that economic models must consider benevolence and malevolence to be accurate reflections of the world. Economics is too narrowly focused on pure exchange and easily disregard the role of an “economic ethic.” Yet, it is possible to measure benevolence and malevolence toward each other like other preferences. He relates this back to his peace studies by stating that “it apparently costs the United States about four dollars to do one dollar’s worth of damage in Vietnam, in which case our rate of benevolence towards North Vietnam is at least minus four” (p. 3).

Boulding states as a threat to the economic ethic is the “heroic ethic,” which includes military, religious, and sporting. He writes, “the enormous role which religion has played in the history of mankind, for good or ill, is based on the appeal which it has to the sense of identify and the sense of the heroic even in ordinary people. ‘Here I stand and I can do no other’ said Luther; ‘To give and not to count the cost, to labor and ask for no reward’ is the prayer of St. Francis” (p. 9).

> “No one in his sense would want his daughter to marry an economic man, one who counted every cost and asked for every reward, was never afflicted with mad generosity or uncalculating love, and who never acted out of a sense of inner identity and indeed had no inner identity even if he was occasionally affected by carefully calculated considerations of benevolence or malevolence” (p. 10).

Boulding helped (along with Martin Pfaff, Anita Pfaff and Janos Horvath) start the Association for the Study of the Grants Economy in 1968 (recently renamed the Association for the Study of Generosity in Economics). Grants economics was the culmination of Boulding's thinking about general systems, religion, economics, and peace. Essentially, he argues there are three parts of the social system. First, exchange, which economics is primarily concerned with. Second is the threat system, which is outlined in Boulding's work on conflict and defense (see Boulding 1962). The last part is the integrative system (or love, as Boulding refered to it early on). The integrative system is the grants economy, and Boulding argues that it makes up a substantial part of the economy. Of course, the three systems blend into one another in certain areas. Take for instance religion, where financial donations are "grants," but perhaps out of fear of damnation (threat system). "The reaction of the economics profession to the idea that grants economics should be a regular sub-discipline within the larger field was one of not always polite skepticism" (Boulding 1981, p. vii).

Boulding stated that the most important book during his time at the University of Colorado was *Ecodynamics* (1978), his "manifesto of the universe" (Boulding 1992b, p. 81). In this book Boulding explains his perspectives on evolution and how matter, beings, society and so forth have been subjected to evolutionary forces. The power of evolution is the emphasis on adaptability. Boulding did not see this as contradictory to his religious beliefs. Instead, he deftly weaves religion into the evolutionary process. He states, "[f]rom the beginning, therefore, religion has played a part in the great phyla of human and societal evolution" (Boulding 1978, p. 307). However, Boulding is also quick to point out that religion, as a divisive force, has not successfully eliminated war and at times is the cause of more war and tension than it resolves. However, he also argues "[r]eligion has had an important role to play in the integrative system,

as the very name suggests. ‘Religion’ and ‘ligament’ come from the same Latin word meaning something that binds together” (p. 308). Furthermore, “Religion like the nuclear family seems to be a very fundamental part of human society and no society has been found without some sort of religious practices and beliefs…. There are deep historical connections that link religion with sex; both are part of the deep emotional layer of the human make-up” (p. 337).

Market mortality

Boulding retired from the University of Colorado-Boulder in 1980. He remained prolific during his retirement years. He taught at several different universities and traveled extensively. He wrote several interesting pieces in Quaker publications on the intersection of economics and religion more broadly. This section discusses three writings from this period.

Boulding wrote a comment article in an edited volume titled “Morality of the Market” (1985b) in which he states “The case for Christian origins of capitalism is seldom made, but I think it is almost as strong. Capitalism could not come out of a spiritual culture, or even a gentlemanly culture, like Confucianism. It could only come out of a culture for which the material world is not only real and important but is the way in which the transcendent world is made manifest” (p. 253). “As my wife [Elise Boulding] once said very profoundly, ‘the difference between Buddhism and Christianity is that Buddha was a prince and Jesus was a carpenter.’ Science could only have come out of a culture founded by a carpenter or a like artisan” (p. 253).

> Christian culture which preceded capitalism, and yet which capitalism itself could not generate. Banks may be enormously useful and productive, but very few people love them. Governments are destructive and morally outrageous, yet they command

> remarkable amounts of human loyalty and affection. If, as I have argued, it is the integrative system, involving such things as loyalty, legitimacy, love, identity, and so on, which really dominates the other two major systems (which I have called the exchange system and the threat system), then the future of capitalism, and with it perhaps the future of democracy, looks rather bleak (p. 252).

In his Quaker pamphlet "Mending the World: Quaker Insights on the Social Order" (1986b) he presents how Quaker thinking has evolved. Quakers were always concerned with "mending the world." Quakers emerged from the devastation of the English Civil War (1642-1649). "Once the big rip that separates from God is mended, life is different. Things which perhaps were not seen in need of mending before are now seen as needing it, and there is a change both in personal behavior and in what is urged upon others" (Boulding, 1986b, p. 6). Boulding asserts that Quakers are people not only of promoting peace (as in the Peace Testimonies), but actively moving the world toward peace—particularly with political activism. Boulding observes that the great challenges have not changed—poverty, nuclear war, income inequality, and the rise of debt (pp. 24-25). Ultimately, "learning, indeed, is the key to mending the world. We have to learn to sew before we can mend. We have to learn how to live at peace or we will destroy ourselves. This is not easy, but it can be done" (p. 27).

Boulding's article "Religion and the Pathologies of Economic Life" (1986c) again discusses the interactions between religion and the economy. But he more explicitly notes important differences. "Religion stresses human needs. Economic life stresses wants. Religion stresses forgiveness, mercy, and grace. Economic life stresses the payment of debts, interest, legal justice, and the careful keeping of accounts. Religious life at its most intense stresses poverty, chastity, and obedience. Economic life stresses pleasure and is even pretty tolerant of

lust. Religion is poetry; economics is prose. It is not surprising that there is tension between the two" (1986c, p. 12). Boulding argues that the free-market is like an ecosystem, but it is susceptible to pathologies (e.g., Great Depression)—financial markets are particularly notable in financial markets where speculation results in sometimes vigorous price swings. Another pathology is one he calls the "Matthew Principle" (from the book of Matthew in the bible) "For whosoever hath, to him shall be given,…but whoever hath not, from his shall be taken away, even that he hath" (p. 19). This acknowledgement of the fairness of equality is difficult for economics to rectify since it sees disproportionate distributions as a "natural" outcome of market forces.

> "Religious criticisms of economic life and institutions has not been insignificant. […] It is less generally recognized that there is an economic criticism of religion, as we find it in Adam Smith's masterly twenty pages on the sociology of religion in Book V of The Wealth of Nations, in which he argues for free competition in religion and the separation of church and state, as over against his friend, David Hume, who thought that religion could best be handled by stated monopoly. […] The separation of church and state and the remarkable freedom of religion in the United States has not only contributed to the vitality of the American economy, but has also contributed to the extraordinary vitality of American religion" (p. 21).

Boulding ends this piece with the insight that "[b]oth religion and economic life are inescapable parts of the heritage of the human race and their mutual critique might help to cure the ever-present potential pathologies of both" (p. 22).

March 19, 1993

Boulding maintained his enthusiasm for teaching and writing up to his diagnosis of prostate cancer in October 1992 and passing on March 19, 1993. And soon afterword Elise wrote:

> "My fear that he wouldn't be able to use this time for spiritual growth has vanished. Later in February 1993, while in hospital after breaking his hip, he said to [me] with a smile, 'Death is a wonderful invention—everyone should try it'" (Boulding and Boulding 1994, p. vi).

Boulding's last diary entry was on October 16, 1992:

> Russell [Boulding's oldest child] has just gone home. He was here for more than a week. He was just enormously helpful. I can't say how helpful he was in getting me adjusted to my present state of life. We did go to an excellent new doctor and had a very frank conversation about how long I had to live. I gathered from him that he thinks this probably is my final illness and could easily last about six months. At any rate, I have got forward to look for it ending, and I must confess I have had an extraordinarily good life. I will be 83 in three months and I have absolutely nothing to complain about. If there is a future life, well, that's fine; if there isn't, I won't know about it, and that's fine too (Boulding 1992a).

Conclusion

Boulding had a tremendous academic career. Starting life in a working-class family in Liverpool, England Boulding realized early academic success and leveraged this into an ethic that produced a unique body of research. He was unapologetically Christian at a time when such thinking was considered antediluvian. His religious convictions were unwavering and resulted in writings that reached far beyond economics. Boulding always considered himself an economist, but more than

anything he wanted to understand society and how to make it better. As presented above, his thinking was greatly influenced by his Quaker beliefs. Starting in the 1930s he began writing about economics as the study of human betterment. This approach gave Boulding's writings a timelessness that makes them appear fresh many decades later. Boulding challenges economists and other social scientists to realize we are ultimately studying people (society, institutions, and nations) and trying to make their lives better, more peaceful, and fulfilling.

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