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Moderator's Opening Remarks

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

May I begin by thanking you for joining us in what I hope will be the first of many annual conferences conducted under the auspices of the Acton Institute and focused on themes and ideas associated with economic personalism. Gathered here today are philosophers, jurists, economists, historians, and theologians—all of whom are committed to facilitating a meaningful conversation between Christian social thought and the modern discipline of economics.

This type of discussion is relatively rare in Christian circles, precisely because it is a difficult one. Though the roots of modern economics lie, intellectually speaking, in the thought of Aristotle, medieval philosophers, and the sixteenth-century Spanish Scholastics, there is little doubt that the dominant philosophical and anthropological influences on most modern economic thought have been generally positivistic in nature. Even today, there are many economists who are relatively uninformed of the ultimate roots of their discipline, and who have never questioned the moral-anthropological assumptions that underlie much of their work.

This state of affairs presents particular challenges for Christian scholars conscious of these issues, but who also believe that the Christian Church's ability to preach the Gospel and to evangelize the world would gain much from serious reflection on the character of subjective economic value, the reality of scarcity, the nature of self-interest, the difference between positive and normative economics, and the critical role played by law, constitutions, and other institutional

settings in shaping the free economy and the free society. The challenge is magnified by the fact that the same scholars believe that the modern world would also gain from listening to a Christian Church that grasped the importance of these facts. Christianity has profound things to say about the social order, as evidenced, for example, by its doctrine of Original Sin, the Kuyperian notion of sphere sovereignty, as well as its teachings on the ultimate origin and purpose of material goods and economic activity. In this regard, the moral significance of our freely chosen acts in the economic realm is especially important, as it is through such acts that we can struggle to achieve integral fulfillment through participation in the human goods to which Aquinas says we are directed by right reason:[1] the basic reasons for action that the encyclical letter, *Veritatis Splendor*, describes as "fundamental human goods."[2]

Such a conversation between the modern world—and, more specifically, modern economics—and Christianity is bound to be difficult. Part of the problem lies in the apparent inability of many contemporary Christian intellectuals to engage in a conversation with modernity that manages to be *meaningful* but also *consistent* with orthodox Christian teaching. There is, of course, no alternative to a Christianity that is fully engaged with modernity. But if such an engagement is to be meaningful, then Christians should maintain no illusions about precisely what they have been called upon to engage. Certainly, modernity has helped to create a world that is unquestionably more materially prosperous and scientifically advanced, but it has spawned some terrible beasts. The following list summarizes only some of the deep chasms between the respective visions of modernity and orthodox Christianity:

1. Modernity insists that God-talk is, at best, metaphorical and, at worst, irrational. Christianity teaches that the Creed professed by Christians every Sunday is the truth of the world.

2. Modernity's view of history remains that of the Continental late-Enlightenment: one of an "automatic" linear forward movement achieved almost by the passage of time and without enormous personal effort. Christianity, however, maintains that historical change is not necessarily *ipso facto* benign, and insists that without a shared knowledge, understanding, and belief in the objective moral order that transcends time, place, and culture, there can be no coherent, believable, or effective knowledge of how to improve either oneself or society.

3. Modernity imagines that salvation is a matter of achieving one's human potential. Christianity holds that while such achievement is important, salvation is ultimately a question of communion with God, in which our human potential is realized in an unsurpassable way by our free obedience to the truth.

4. Modernity understands evil primarily in social terms and largely as the

result of disordered structures. Christianity holds that, in the final analysis, evil and structures of evil proceed from original sin as well as the personal choice of human persons to do evil rather than good.

5. Modernity insists that the hope of life after death is, if not delusional, certainly irrelevant to human liberation in this world. Christianity teaches that the Christian hope of life after death liberates us in the most radical way and thus makes a genuinely liberating transformation of the world possible in ways that politics cannot even begin to approximate.

6. Modernity conceptualizes reason in instrumental, technical terms. Christianity also understands reason to be capable of knowing moral, metaphysical, philosophical, and theological truth.

7. Modernity conceives of human beings as "nonbodily" persons that somehow inhabit "nonpersonal" bodies. Christianity, while recognizing the reality of consciousness, does not adopt this metaphysically-impossible-to-sustain dualistic vision of the human person. Christianity holds that each human being is a *unity* of body and soul.

8. Modernity considers the greatest work of human beings to be the way in which we shape our world. While noting the importance of building a better world, Christianity believes that the most important work that every human person can accomplish is his or her own realization of moral good.

9. Modernity understands morality in terms of externalities, that is, the effects of one's actions on others. It speaks of "the greatest good of the greatest number," and is profoundly utilitarian—and thus irrational—in its inspiration and methods. Christianity disputes the consequentialist notion that the good is quantifiable. Instead, it insists that the morality of an act is determined by its object. Intentions may be noble, people may claim to be acting in good conscience, and circumstances may mitigate personal responsibility. Nonetheless, Christianity teaches that many human acts remain *everywhere* and *always* evil.

10. Modernity conceptualizes freedom as freedom of choice. Christianity underlines free will as a sign of our dignity as the *imago Dei*, but insists that one is only truly free when one lives in truth. As Deuteronomy states: "I set before you life or death, blessing or curse. Choose life, then, so that you and your descendants may live" (Dt. 30:19). This leads to a particular vision of freedom so aptly captured by Lord Acton's statement that liberty is "not the power of doing what we like, but the right of being able to do what we ought."[3]

Reflection on these points soon indicates that a genuine conversation between modernity and Christianity is bound to be difficult. It should also remind Christian intellectuals that a conversation between the church and the modern world is not necessarily one in which the world sets the agenda for the church.

A genuine conversation is a two-way process, and more than one observer would agree that in recent decades too many Christian intellectuals have simply articulated pale imitations of whatever happens to be the latest secular intellectual fade. At all times, we must recall that Christianity has made a unique proposal to the world. As it engages with modernity, the church always looks at history through the prism of the redeeming Cross of Jesus Christ. That God entered his created world to redeem it has fixed once and for all Christianity's understanding of the world. The Christian believes that the Christian story of creation and redemption *is* the world's story, and that telling the world's story as this kind of story, and thus bringing it to conversion, is the greatest service that the church can render the world.

In contributing to this end, Christian intellectuals need to recognize that the secular world has its own autonomy. Modernity has taught us that there is no such thing, for example, as Christian physics, Christian biology, or, indeed, Christian economics. There is physics, biology, and economics—and the truths of these things are truths in their own right. They do, however, need to be related to *the* Truth proclaimed by the Christian Church: the truth of man's redemption and our transcendent destiny.

For all these reasons, it is surely appropriate that we devote this conference to clarifying the guiding principles of the project of economic personalism—the project of bringing Christian theology and philosophy into dialogue with modern economics—in the hope of showing the way forward to the growth of a free and humane economy in a free and virtuous society. In the papers to be presented by conference participants, as well as the prepared responses, we hope to clarify further the foundation of this attempt to bring Christian social ethics into a meaningful conversation with modern economics. As part of our discussions, may I suggest that the following questions be factored into our reflections?

Are we to understand economic personalism as a project, an idea, a set of principles, a method of interdisciplinary investigation, a school of thought with a long-term horizon, or a combination of these approaches?

Should we be looking deeper into the Christian tradition, beyond nineteenth and twentieth-century personalist thinkers, to retrieve the wealth of Christian reflection on economic questions, whether it be found in Scripture, the writings of the Church Fathers, or the natural-law tradition of the Protestant and Catholic Scholastics?

How do we communicate the economic personalist synthesis of theological, philosophical, juridical, and economic thought to the Christian community?

How do we bring the insights of the path of economic personalism to the attention of secular thinkers who rely, and in many instances, continue to rely, often unthinkingly, on positivistic visions of mankind?

Each of these questions raises further issues. The history of the Christian Church shows us, however, that they are not new problems. They are questions that ask us to think about how truth is known and how it is communicated. Christians have always reflected on these issues. In his appeal to the "Unknown God" in the Areopagus of Athens (Acts 17:23), and in his reflections on the law written on the hearts of all (Rom. 2:15), the apostle Paul showed us the way to resolve such dilemmas. Likewise, in his later career as a professor in Paris, for example, Thomas Aquinas was asked: How should we settle disputed questions—by reason or by authority? His response remains as relevant now as it was then.

> Any activity is to be pursued in a way appropriate to its purpose. Disputations have one or other of two purposes.
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> One is designed (*ordinatur*) to remove doubts about whether such-and-such is so. In disputations of this sort you should above all use authorities acceptable to those with whom you are disputing; with Jews, for example, you should appeal to the authority of the Old Testament; with Manichees, who reject the Old Testament, you should use only the New; with Christians who have split off from us, e.g., the Greek [Orthodox], who accept both Testaments but reject the teaching of our Saints, you should rely on the authority of the Old and New Testaments and those of the Church teachers (*doctores*) they do accept. And if you are disputing with people who accept no authority, you must resort to natural reasons.
>
> Then there is the professorial academic disputation, designed not for removing error but for teaching, so that those listening may be led to an understanding of the truth with which the professor (*magister*) is concerned. And here you must rely upon reasons, reasons that track down the root of the truth and create a real knowledge of how it is that your assertions are true. Otherwise, if professors settle questions by bare authorities, listeners are indeed told that such-and-such is so, but gain nothing in the way of knowledge or understanding (*scientiae vel intellectus*) and go away empty.[4]

To appeal to reason in our modern world is, of course, a potentially frustrating exercise, given the truncated view of reason that dominates most secular thinking, not to mention the influence of Nietzsche, Derrida, and Foucault in destroying people's belief that reason opens the way to truth. Nonetheless, those involved in the discipline of economics should be more open than many others to proposals based on reason. Economics does, for example, affirm that people are reasonable and are capable of freely willed acts. Economics does not hold that these facts are true for some people but not for others. They are held to be *universally* true. The language of economics highlights the fact that the person is an agent who makes choices. Hence, economists generally do not argue that people do not have choices. For these reasons and others, we can say

that, as an intellectual discipline, economics does provide us with insights into the truth, while eschewing the relativism and skepticism that mires so much of contemporary culture. One wonders, then, how much more economics would reveal if it is brought into a meaningful conversation with the vision of the human person bequeathed to the world by the God who became man: the Lord Jesus Christ, the unutterable Mystery of Love. Such a conversation is and must be at the center of the project and method of economic personalism.

Notes

1. In Aquinas's words: "The good of the human being is being in accord with reason, and human evil is being outside the order of reasonableness." *Summa Theologiae*, I–II, 71, a.2. Or, as Aquinas states elsewhere, "Good is the first thing that falls under the apprehension of the practical reason, which is directed to action: since every agent acts for an end under the aspect of good. Consequently the first principle in the practical reason is one founded on the notion of good." *Summa Theologiae*, I–II, 94, a.2. Thus, for Aquinas, the way to discover what is morally right (virtue) and wrong (vice) is to ask not what is in accordance with human nature, but what is *reasonable*.

2. See, for example, John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Veritatis Splendor* (August 6, 1993), no. 48.

3. John Dalberg-Acton, *Selected Writings of Lord Acton*, vol. 3, *Essays on Religion, Politics, and Morality*, ed. J. R. Fears (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1988), 613.

4. Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones de Quolibet Quodlibetal*, IV, 9, a3c, in *Thomae Aquinatis Opera Omnia cum Hypertextibus in CD-ROM*, rev. ed., ed. R. Busa (Milano: Editoria Elettronica Editel, 1996).

The Affirmation of Genuine Human Dignity

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Catholic theology has always had to address the question of the human person's status within creation. Scripture itself makes unavoidable serious reflection on this problem. The opening chapter of Genesis, for instance, relates that man was created "in God's image" and that upon his creation God saw that all of creation was "very good." The prologue to the Gospel of John further reveals that while creation occurred through God's eternal Word, the Word also "became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth." Taking its bearings from such scriptural statements, Catholic theology traditionally has described the human person's place in creation, using terms borrowed from the broader context of Catholic cosmology. To understand the human person, one must first view him in relation to God and only then in relation to the rest of creation. Such a comparison reveals that the human person occupies a privileged place within the created order. The only temporal creature created in God's image, the human person has been elevated to a position somewhere above the brutes and somewhere below the angels, but over the past century, the Catholic Church increasingly has emphasized the dignity of the human person. Indeed, the notion of the fundamental dignity of the human person has become a major theme within both the Catholic Church's ordinary catechesis and Catholic social thought.[1]

Roman Catholicism's rich teaching on the inherent dignity of the human person is a good example of the fruits born from the Church's effort to speak to the modern world. Viewed from a theological perspective, the teaching on the dignity of the human person is a way in which the Church can articulate her traditional teaching on the created status of the human person to the contemporary world. At its core, the Church's teaching on the dignity of the human person reaffirms that human worth ultimately is something that is *given* to human beings by God. By grounding human dignity in the theological truth that the human person is created in God's image, the Catholic Church emphasizes that, though fallen, the human person is still "called to communion with God."[2] What is too frequently overlooked, however, is that the Catholic Church has found in the teaching on human dignity a rhetorically effective and theologically sound way to address modern human beings who increasingly understand

themselves as endowed with certain basic rights. This is particularly important given the brutal experience of totalitarianism in the last century. By consistently speaking "the truth about man" in language that is readily recognizable to modern human beings, the Catholic Church, particularly during the pontificate of John Paul II, has been able to provide an effective antidote to totalitarianism's systematic denial and obliteration of basic human dignity. Through her meaningful affirmation of the spiritual and moral implications of the dignity of the human person, the Catholic Church was able to play a vital role in exposing the great "lie" of Communist totalitarianism.

Yet in defending the dignity of the human person, there is a tendency in the social encyclicals and works inspired by them to draw from secular understandings of human dignity that are at odds with the animating principles of Catholic social thought. This tendency is most pronounced in the writings of Catholic thinkers who take their bearings from the political theorist John Rawls when addressing questions of social justice, for these writings too often adopt the subjectivistic language of soft, relativistic, democracy. Because Catholic social thought does not exist in a vacuum, it must avoid even the appearance of endorsing this kind of language. There is a world of difference between the ways in which the Catholic Church and contemporary political philosophy and social science understand the nature of human dignity. Catholic theologians must accordingly go out of their way to draw clear, sharp distinctions between the Church's substantive affirmation of human dignity and the soft and finally dehumanizing thought that currently goes by that name. Whereas the Church roots human dignity in what we can reasonably know about human beings, present-day thought characteristically roots it in skepticism about our inability to know anything substantial about the nature of human beings.

To appreciate the significance of this point more fully, let me briefly sketch the basic assumptions behind Catholicism's and contemporary social science's view of the dignity of the human person. As I already noted, the roots of the Catholic Church's teaching on the dignity of the human person lie in Genesis's revelation that man is created in the image of God. The idea of creation is crucial to this formulation. Genesis only identifies the ability—or more accurately the power—to create with God. Within Genesis, the term is used exclusively to describe God's act of bringing into continued existence something wholly new. To create is to cause the most radical kind of change imaginable, since it literally refers to God's act of bringing something out of nothing. Implicit in all of this is the fact that man, for all his skill and ingenuity, strictly speaking, does not have the power to create. Genesis makes clear that in contrast to God's power to create the universe and the physical and moral laws that govern it, human

beings possess only the real, but finally limited, power to *make* something out of some other preexisting thing.

The significance of God's creative act cannot be underestimated in Catholic theology, for without this teaching, the Church's message of the human being's redemption and sanctification in Christ finally would be unintelligible. On its most basic level, the acknowledgment of divine creation offers the most persuasive reason why a perfect God would have *any* concern for imperfect human beings whatsoever. In its most human terms, the acknowledgement of divine creation makes the human person conscious of the fact that he is first and foremost a *creature*. It reminds him that the visible universe of which he is a part owes its ultimate existence to God and that God then has a just claim on him. Within Catholic theology, the teaching of divine creation simultaneously describes a metaphysical and profoundly existential reality.

Reflecting on Genesis's account of creation, both the Church Fathers and the medieval Scholastics were led to associate the image of God in man with the spiritual powers of the human soul. This theological insight was built in part on the fact that the first chapter of Genesis does not speak of God's visible image. Nowhere in the first chapter, in fact, is God described in either material or in physical terms; rather, Genesis describes God in terms of his act of creation. God is seen to speak, signifying that he has the power of thought, and he is also seen to create, denoting that he has the power to will things into existence. Combining these scriptural observations with the fruits of the early trinitarian debates over the meaning of divine personhood, Catholic theology identified the image of God in man with God's spiritual powers of reason and free will. Like God, the human being was also best understood as a person, but the human person does not enjoy the full personhood of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Limited by his creation and by the effects of original sin, the human person nonetheless remains in the image of God.

Saint Augustine accordingly read the Bible's reference to the image of God in man as a reference to the human person's intellect, memory, and will, which, when taken together, form an imperfect image of the Trinity.[3] Saint Thomas further refined this understanding of the human person being created in God's image by interpreting Genesis to teach that the human person is an "intelligent being endowed with free will and self-movement."[4] Saint Augustine and Saint Thomas were in fundamental theological agreement: by creating the human person with a spiritual soul, God had privileged him above the rest of temporal creation. For by creating them with the ability to think and to act deliberately, God had made it possible for even fallen human beings to know and to love him.

As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* repeatedly points out, the dignity of the human person is rooted in the fact that man is created in the image of God.[5] In addition to describing the *theological* grounds of human worth, however, the idea of the dignity of the human person is often used within Catholic social thought to describe a *moral* reality as well. Catholic social thought, in fact, regularly appeals to the inherent dignity of the human person in its articulation of the fundamental moral and political obligations that every legitimate regime must meet. Yet in appealing to the language of human dignity to describe both a metaphysical and a moral reality, Catholic social thought periodically conflates these two realities. Due to an imprecise use of language, some references to human dignity could suggest that because God has given the human person a privileged position within creation, the human person is the source of moral legitimacy, and this kind of language can be used all-too-easily to justify the conflation of human dignity with radical moral autonomy.

An illustrative example of this occurs at the beginning of the *Catechism*'s crucial first article on social justice. The *Catechism* there makes the rather confusing statement that "respect for the human person entails respect for the rights that flow from his dignity as a creature. *These rights are prior to society and must be recognized by it. They are the basis of the moral legitimacy of every authority.*"[6] Despite its convoluted formulation, the *Catechism*'s point is clear: A free society must recognize the legitimacy of smaller societies such as families, churches, guilds, and markets to exist within the larger political community. The Church here is simply upholding her teaching on subsidiarity, but in its imprecise use of language, the *Catechism* can be read as affirming the legitimacy of an argument that is at odds with the fundamental principles of Catholic social thought. By jumbling together moral and political terms such as *respect* and *rights* with theological terms such as the *dignity of the human person*, the *Catechism* gives the impression that the dignity of the human person is "*the* basis of the moral legitimacy of *every* authority." Taken literally, this would mean that the human person himself—by the very fact that he exists—and not God or natural or divine law—provides the grounds of moral legitimacy. Without proper care, Catholic social thought's defense of human dignity can feed into the very kinds of subjective and even nihilistic views of morality that the Catholic Church traditionally has opposed.

Generally speaking, contemporary theories about human dignity are in one way or another vulgar forms of Kantian moral philosophy. For Kant, the upholding of a truly universal morality, the ultimate expression of human dignity, hinged upon postulating the existence of God, freedom, and immortality. Present-day social theorists, weaned on the alleged discoveries of modern sci-

ence, only see the necessity of postulating the existence of human autonomy, but in so doing, they manage to infuse the idea of human autonomy with even more significance than it had within Kant's moral philosophy. Human dignity and human autonomy are fused together to form a perfect circle: Human dignity is seen to require the exercise of human autonomy and the exercise of human autonomy is seen as definitive proof of human dignity. This way of thinking about human dignity is so influential today that upon publication of a revised version, the "bible" of this school of thought, John Rawls' 1971 *A Theory of Justice*, reappeared on the *New York Times* best-seller list.

The problem with this understanding of human dignity is that it radicalizes the idea of human autonomy to such a degree that it necessarily views the divinely created moral order as illegitimate. Combining the metaphysical reality of human dignity with a radical notion of human autonomy, it asserts that the person is bound only by laws he imposes on himself. In this view, the restraints that natural and divine law place on human freedom are seen not as revealing the cosmic foundations of human freedom but, rather, as directly affronting human dignity. All forms of natural and divine restraint, in other words, are interpreted as illegitimately limiting the human person's fundamental right to autonomy and self-mastery. This radical view of human dignity recently has been set forth by the so-called moderate sociologist Alan Wolfe—who, I should point out, is presently Director of the Boisi Center for Religion and American Public Life at Boston College. Professor Wolfe's latest book, *Moral Freedom: The Search for Virtue in a World of Choice*, goes so far as to say that human dignity finally includes the uninhibited right to express one's authentic personality.[7] Emphasizing the fundamental human importance of determining the moral worth of one's actions, Wolfe claims that the only legitimate brake that can be placed on moral freedom is that one considers all possible actions before he acts. This doctrine of moral freedom, which knowingly severs the moral order from all transcendent ends, can thus be used to justify almost anything—except, of course, the fundamental reason why "moral freedom" should be understood as a good that needs to be defended.

This is the view of human dignity that informs mainstream moral and political thought today. To acknowledge this fact is to understand why Catholic theologians must avoid seeming to affirm false and finally self-destructive notions of human dignity. When reflecting on the dignity of the human person, theologians must formulate their arguments precisely and with an eye to their philosophical and theological implications—which is simply to say that theologians who addresses this question must live up to their vocations as theologians. By doing this, they not only continue to reflect upon the Gospel's message

of the eternal destiny of human beings but also perform the salutary task of articulating the genuine grounds of human dignity. As Pope John Paul II has consistently pointed out in his writings, the defense of genuine human dignity requires the recognition of both "the spiritual destiny of the human person and … moral structure of freedom."[8]

Catholic social thought thus finds itself in a unique place within contemporary debates on the nature of human dignity. Able to draw on the Church's rich theological teachings, Catholic social thought at present is relatively alone in its ability to show how prevailing theories of human dignity actually devalue the true dignity of the human person. It is able to show that the supposedly humanitarian affirmation of the autonomous person's right to express himself completely can be used to justify the most dehumanizing practices. For this is precisely the moral posture behind so many of the arguments that are advanced today by what the Pope has aptly called the "culture of death."[9] In the name of human dignity, we are rapidly entering the brave new world of abortion, euthanasia, and, perhaps in the not-so-distant future, human cloning. Over and against the contemporary belief that "personal rights are fully ensured only when we are exempt from every [legal and moral] requirement," Catholic social thought can explain why "in this way lies not the maintenance of the dignity of the human person, but its annihilation,"[10] and that the human person "cannot live fully according to the truth unless he freely … entrusts himself to his creator."[11] Moreover, it can draw attention to the fact that, by severing human dignity from its transcendent origins, current theories of human dignity finally cannot even explain why human dignity is a genuine human good.

Yet the Church's teaching on the dignity of the human person should not primarily be viewed as a means of exposing the problems with contemporary theories about human dignity. To be sure, the Church's reflection on the dignity of the human person does shed light on the nature of human freedom: It shows that genuine human freedom must acknowledge the priority of the created moral order and that political communities have an obligation to recognize the dignity of the human person; but the Church's teaching on the dignity of the human person is first and foremost a *positive teaching* about the nature of human beings. It is, fundamentally, a *theological teaching*. Through her articulation of human dignity, the Catholic Church proclaims that, created in the image of God and redeemed in Jesus Christ, the human person is "called to communion with God."[12] In sharp contrast to its secular counterpart, the Church's teaching on human dignity does not try to elevate the moral life to the level of man's transcendent destiny, nor does it seek to lower man's transcendent destiny to the level of the merely moral life. Indeed, it is precisely because of this fact that

the Church realizes that her teaching on the dignity of the human person has something of vital importance to say to the modern world. The Church best serves the cause of human dignity when she refuses, as Jacques Maritain put it, to "kneel before the world."

Notes

1. See, for example, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 306, 356, 1706; *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 26; and *Dignitatis Humanae*, no. 1.
2. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 27.
3. Saint Augustine, *De Trinitate*, XIV, II.
4. Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I–II, 1, Prologue.
5. See, for example, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 27, 356, 357; See, also, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 19.1.
6. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1930 (italics added).
7. Alan Wolfe, *Moral Freedom: The Search for Virtue in a World of Choices* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001). For a thoughtful critique of this notion of moral freedom, see Jean Bethke Elshtain's review in *The Wilson Quarterly* 25, no. 3 (Summer 2001): 112–13.
8. John Paul II, "Address to the United Nation's General Assembly," *Origins*, October 19, 1995, 270.
9. For a profound discussion of how humanitarian views of compassion can become the basis for terror and tyranny, see Flannery O'Conner's "A Memoir of Mary Ann," in *Flannery O'Conner Collected Works* (New York: Library of America, 1988), 822–31.
10. *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 41
11. Ibid., no. 19.
12. Ibid., no. 1.

Reply to Marc Guerra's "The Affirmation of Genuine Human Dignity"

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Marc Guerra sharply distinguishes between the Christian and the modern notions of human dignity. He also adequately clarifies the sense of some affirmations of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* on the subject for, as with every written document, its meaning will be definitively and necessarily settled by a correct hermeneutic.

John Paul II's encyclical *Fides et Ratio* identifies a twofold direction in human understanding: from theology to philosophy (Chapter 2: *Credo ut intellegam*) and from philosophy to theology (Chapter 3: *Intellego ut credam*). Marc mainly follows the first direction—from faith-assisted understanding to natural knowledge. I merely want to add a few remarks with respect to the other direction, for I think it is important to look for common ground in which to dialogue with divergent viewpoints. One may wonder whether a metaphysically oriented discourse can be sustained in an antimetaphysical environment. This was the situation of Plato in his dialogue with the Sophists. As John Finnis states, in a yet unpublished work, "one cannot reasonably affirm the equality of human beings, or the universality and binding force of human rights, unless one acknowledges that there is something about persons that distinguishes them radically from subrational creatures, and which, prior to any acknowledgement of 'status', is intrinsic to the factual reality of every human being, adult or immature, healthy or disabled."[1] Thus, minimal agreement on human nature seems to be both necessary and possible. If we do not know what the human person is, how are we going to sustain a special dignity for him or her.

Human dignity will only be rightly understood if the human person is acknowledged as having a nature. Nature is a dynamic view of essence. Essence defines the species of the considered reality. The essential definition of a reality is composed by the genus and the specific difference. Consequently, when we endeavor to define something—i.e., to know what something is—we have to discern its essence or nature. Human dignity stems from what a person is, that is, from what a person is essentially. But getting to this point is not an easy task. Aristotle provided us with two related characteristics: Man is a political animal and a rational animal. In either case, an analysis of human nature shows that human persons are intelligent and capable of exercising free will. Mind and will reveal a spiritual dimension in the human being, which, in my estimation, constitutes an evocation of the Absolute. This relation to divinity can even be found in Plato and Aristotle (cf. *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book X; and *De Anima*, Book III).

Human nature is inserted into the divinely created moral order. Its freedom is limited, reflective, and thus, finite, meaning it is proportional to its created condition. Human nature is dynamic, teleological—as nature is—and, while not fully formed, is a complete nature. We could say that human nature is a task not a fact. This dynamic character does not reduce its proper dignity during the initial phases of development because a human being is human and therefore worthy of dignity from the very beginning. In the first phase of life the person has intelligence and will only *in potentia*.

Modern thought has set up an opposition between nature and freedom. What is natural for modernity is subject to necessity. On the contrary, what is free cannot be natural. For scholastic thinkers a free nature is possible without contradiction; however, for some modern thinkers such an idea is a contradiction in terms. For a gnosiologically skeptical position, essences cannot be grasped. Thus, objects are defined by what actually appears. In the case of the human person, then, modernity defines human nature not by its essence and species but by its individuality. As a result, for modern thinkers, human dignity stems from human beings' individuality and autonomy and not from their nature. The mistake here consists in attempting to base human dignity solely on individuality rather than on the individual as instantiating a human nature that evokes God. This mistake derives from the loss of the concept of human nature (or, at best, of a right concept of human nature). When the notion of human nature is severed from its creaturely condition and the fact that it is made in the image of God, the human person can appear as the ultimate source of moral legitimacy as Marc Guerra shows.

Hence, if we state human dignity to be the first principle of economic personalism, it is imperative that it be grounded in an understanding of human nature and the image of God.[2]

Notes

1. John Finnis, "Natural Law: The Classical Tradition," in *The Oxford Handbook of Jurisprudence and the Philosophy of Law*, ed. Jules Coleman and Scott Shapiro (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

2. For additional reading on the basis for human dignity, see Ana Marta González, *Naturaleza y dignidad* (Pamplona: Eunsa, 1996); John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio* (September 14, 1998); and Robert Spaemann, *Lo natural y lo racional* (Madrid: Rialp, 1989).

The Social Nature of the Human Person in Economic Personalism

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> "I ask you, how can God's love survive in a man who has enough of this world's goods yet closes his heart to his brother when he sees him in need?" (1 John 3:17)

In this single quote from the New Testament we understand that human beings are social and have economic obligations to one another, and especially to the least advantaged. To better understand what this means to us today, I will look first at our liberal dilemma, and then at a Christian personalist response.

The Liberal Dilemma

In the past, many thinkers have seen this obligation purely as a call for the redistribution of societies' benefits and burdens through the political sector and especially through the federal government. This was certainly the case with John Ryan who was and remains such a powerful influence on Catholic thought. It continues to be a majoritarian position in Christian ethics today as a review of the scholarly work of such thinkers as Daniel Maguire, John B. Cobb, Timothy J. Gorringe, John Tropman, David Hollenbach, Donald Dorr, and others would show. To be fair, this preference for intervention by the central government is surely a reaction to the individualism current today in which so many people recognize little or no obligation toward their fellow man.

A review of what is commonly recognized as among the most significant works in American political philosophy in a century, *A Theory of Justice* by John Rawls, shows that he is wrestling with the same problem. The pillars of Rawls' philosophical anthropology are liberty, equality, and rationality. Based on these, Rawls comes to two principles for justice:

> 1. Each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive total system of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar system of liberty for all.
> 2. Social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both:

> (a) to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged ("MAXI-MIN"), consistent with the just savings principle, and
> (b) attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity.

Principle 2 ("MAXI-MIN"), the more controversial of the two principles, can only be accomplished through massive redistributionism by the central government. He may be understood as laying a philosophical foundation for the political left. Rawls' work did not go unchallenged! *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* by Robert Nozick is also a work of liberalism but is radically individualist, laying something of a foundation for the political right. Indeed, for Alasdair MacIntyre, Rawls and Nozick have produced leading works in analytical moral philosophy that also give expression to the dominant popular perspectives in American politics today. So, the entire debate at the levels of philosophy and policy seems hopelessly ensnared in the rhetoric of libertarian freedom (a more republican party emphasis) versus state intervention in pursuit of a basic equality (a more democratic party emphasis).

As personalists, we wish to see that the needs of all persons are met while constraining the encroachment of the state as much as is reasonable. We have strong commitments to decentralization, local responsibility, and local control. So, on the one hand, we want to meet the needs of all, but, on the other hand, we have learned that state intervention can, in turn, generate disturbances in personal rights, initiative, and creativity. We cannot, I believe, be republicans or democrats uncritically, given our deep appreciation of the social nature of the human person in all its aspects.

The Social Nature

The personalism of Catholic social thought has always rejected the individualism that characterizes the work of Rawls and Nozick. Of course, Rawls and Nozick both agree that rationally self-interested individuals do cooperate and that they do enter into various relations with one another including families, churches, civic associations, and so forth. However, neither author understands our sociality as truly essential to a discussion of the human person. In the cases of both theories, we may speak of individual persons apart from and before they voluntarily join with others (if they do decide to join with others). This is an unacceptably superficial and sentimental understanding of our social nature.

For one interpreter of Catholic social thought, communitarianism appears as "the" guiding source of ethical insight. Michael J. Schuck proposes his own theory in this way:

> This theory holds that papal teaching coheres around a theologically inspired communitarian social ethic, which has yielded a cluster of shared, double-pulsed insights concerning religious, political, familial, economic, and cultural relations in society.

The fruitful tensions (or double-pulsed insights) common to Catholic social thought are, in essence, inspired by communitarianism. For Schuck, the pastoral approach of the pre-Leonine period (1740-1877) has an image of God as Christ the Good Shepherd; the natural-law approach of the Leonine period (1878-1958) has an image of God as Father-Creator; and the post-Leonine period (1959-present) has an image of God as dialogical-Spirit. These perspectives are linked in a communitarian understanding of the will of God for humankind.

> The Shepherd's ingathering, the unity of creation, the Spirit's dialogic invitation—all communicate the "gravitational" draw of God's will for community.

I believe that Schuck has taken what is perhaps the single most salient feature of Catholic social thought, particularly when viewed in the light of contemporary liberalism, and used it to represent an entire personalist theory. Nevertheless, Schuck does correctly point out the communitarian aspects within Catholic social thought.

The full realization of the human person is most closely connected with his social nature. Sin is understood primarily as whatever brings the person out of harmony with God, himself, and others. When the person seeks happiness and fulfillment apart from God and apart from others, the person lives "in darkness." Therefore, it is an end in itself requiring no further justification for us to belong to properly ordered families, neighborhoods, churches, professional associations, town communities, civic organizations, and other associations that help fulfill our social nature. Just how we can do this remains the issue.

Giving Our Social Nature Proper Expression Today

Of course, the modern world no longer offers us the sense of nearness and closeness offered by the premodern village. Fortunately, Catholic social thought does not require that we lament the loss of these little lost communities. Since Leo XIII, Catholic social thought has strongly supported many of the emerging new forms of associations, the modern labor union being an important example. In this spirit, contemporary interpreters of Catholic social thought and modern life ask us to consider positively the new but as of yet unappreciated new forms of community. Quoting from Michael Novak:

> I do not think that anyone has grasped clearly enough the spiritual ideal behind the new forms of voluntary association—the new communitarian ideal—involved in liberal societies.
>
> The most distinctive invention of the spirit of capitalism is not the individual as much as it is many individuals joining together in creative enterprise. It is, for example, the joint stock company, the corporation; or again, the credit union, as well as insurance funds and pension funds; and finally, the market itself, considered as a social mechanism obliging all who participate in it to practice a sensible regard for others... In actual practice, such (liberal) societies exhibit the most highly and complexly organized forms of life in all of human history.

Novak's point here is well-taken. We ought not let nostalgia for the small organic village impede our appreciation of the new forms of community when these new forms meet genuine human needs. At the same time, it seems to me too hasty to declare these communities to be a serious fulfillment of the personalist objectives.

When Catholic social thought speaks about community in the fullest sense, it is not referring to what sociologists have called *enclaves* that people form on the basis of their common needs, interests, and/or lifestyles. The important differences between many of these communities and community in the fuller sense are the elements of *commitment* and *memory*. Persons find fulfillment through joining communities not strictly on the basis of self-interest but out of commitment to other persons within the community and through the knowledge that the common good is also somehow served through joining. It has, for example, been a long and consistent teaching that workers join labor unions not only for self-interest but on the basis of "solidarity" with other workers, and precisely in order to contribute to the common good.

If persons ultimately aspire to communion with one another, then enclaves that people form on the basis of their common needs, interests, and/or lifestyles are not the ideal and ought not dominate social life. The elements of personal commitment, in the sense of commitment of the members to one another as persons and commitment of the community to the wider common good, are essential. The traditional structures of our families, neighborhoods, parishes, professional associations, town communities, civic organizations, and other associations have long included these two forms of commitment. The family, for example, is of course an important social-ethical unit. Catholic social thought has long stressed the enduring nature of the commitment between members of a family, highlighting especially the life-long commitment of the spouses to each other. At the same time, the mutual commitment within the family is not to be closed and self-centered but makes its own essential contributions to the life of the larger society. The family is a witness for life through its prophetic

mission in which conjugal love, fidelity, the training of children in love, hope, courage, faith, and justice are all indispensable to society. Analogously, we hope and expect that civic organizations of various types at the very least to foster commitment to one another and also within their proper context. Finally, it is most certainly the case that professional organizations such as those of nurses, lawyers, teachers, and doctors, are expected to work in solidarity not only for the mutual benefit of their members but also to keep the common good as a foremost consideration in all their activities and decisions.

Tragically, modern times have seen an erosion of this virtue of commitment in these traditional forms of social organizations. Divorce increasingly shatters marriages and wrecks what might have been a safe soil for the development of children. It has become increasingly common to hear the charge that the professions are no longer serving the common good as they ought. Our mobility as a culture, our tendency to work for the highest bidder, also results in severe dislocation and the weakening of our network of friendships. Membership in PTA's (parent-teacher organizations) is reportedly at an all time low. Personalism assigns responsibility to the moral-cultural, political, and economic sectors for this erosion.

While these traditional societies are losing this sense of commitment, many of the new forms of social organization have done little to achieve it. Certainly the joint stock company, the corporation, the credit union, insurance and pension funds all contribute to society through their existence as well-run and profitable organizations. Well-run and profitable organizations must make efficient use of scarce resources while supplying products that consumers are willing and able to purchase. This is a part of good stewardship. They furthermore supply employment opportunities for persons to provide for themselves and their families, as well as offer opportunities for self-realization in the exercise of creativity and freedom at the workplace. Therefore, these organizations must already show some regard for the well-being of others as a condition of their long-run profitability. *However*, it is, of course, often possible to make a profit while failing to show consideration for the well-being of others in different ways. The profit motive can also provide incentives for the degradation of the environment, employment practices that do not respect human dignity, greed and consumer fraud, and the betrayal of stockholder trust through abuses of senior managerial power.

The First Solution: Reform in the Moral-Cultural Sector

The first solution to these evils is admittedly a long-range one, and not a form of triage. Personalism, recognizing the social nature of the human person,

can only advocate the renewal and transformation of communities that give character to persons and groups. Although there will always be some role for government, the violence of increased government regulation will also find itself totally helpless to overcome every instance of these abuses that can only multiply exponentially among misguided persons oriented selfishly toward profit and power. So, I cannot offer a quick top-down solution that can be speedily executed through the fiat of social planners and the central government.

The renewal and transformation of communities comes about partially but not exclusively through voluntary actions in the moral-cultural sector. Churches, civic organizations, and families, should all reassert their own rights and, especially, responsibilities in these matters. Parents must once again parent in accordance with beliefs and values that they hold dear. In these days churches are increasingly retreating from playing a central role in American life. "The experts" in psychology, science, sociology, law, and education have in their own way marginalized religion to the enhancement of their own power and profit. Almost everywhere, groups must regain their sense of competence against "the experts."

The churches of all institutions ought to reassert their role in the formation of persons. How often have we all suffered sermons that seemed to be a mix of Thomas and Freud, with Freud receiving the lion's share of emphasis? The discussion and pursuit of value is an essential aspect to personal realization, and within religious traditions we do find discussion about and pursuit of what is ultimately real and valuable. Confidence in the human import of this theological discussion is essential. Within the churches one can find both the will and the important intellectual resources to contribute to the common good through its expertise in humanity. Of all places, the bonds of community that enable human action in solidarity should be present in the churches. Michael Novak has rightly, in my judgment, advanced the following proposals:

> Give welfare benefits to young mothers of small children in congregant settings only (such as local churches or schools) in which they can be brought out of isolation and also learn how to care for children, how to study or work with others, and how to prepare themselves both for independent living and a potentially successful marriage.
>
> Turn every institution of civil society (including churches) to focus on the development of human capital in poor urban areas through the organization of academies, competitions, and skill-oriented and habit-developing training programs. Among others, churches, religious lay groups, the U.S. military, auxiliary police forces, and sports associations—specialists in training young men—might run these programs... Personally, I (Novak) recommend the Marianist or Christian Brothers of old: tough disciplinarians, motivated by unsentimental love.

Second Solution: Reform in the Economic Sector

Because the political, cultural, and economic sectors are mutually conditioning, optimally, at least any significant reform strategy will actually help make the economic sector itself a contributing participant to good ethics. Therefore, this is the key problem for the economic sector: to demonstrate how it can show a real nonsentimental understanding of our social nature, to incorporate memory and commitment in its various groups, and also to help meet human flourishing in all its aspects.

There are a number of real-world efforts surfacing, which, I think, constitute such examples of reasonable projects. One particularly impressive initiative that I found and now support is "Workforce America" currently operating in Harlem. Philosophically, the intention of the organization is to raise the personal capital of those otherwise qualified adults who are trapped in low paying jobs and move them into the professional ranks.[1]

Another larger example taken from my book is The Share Economy (by economist Martin Weitzman), which is a reform agenda consistent with our Christian personalist theory; it successfully moves past the older Keynesian agenda and "Ryanism"; and the reform reflects the importance of decentralization, local responsibility, and control.

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Note

[1] Workforce America is the bridge from jobs to careers for inner-city adults. It is not a "welfare to work" program. Workforce America is a process of social support: members give and receive career counseling and help from others in the immediate group, those already well-networked in the professional labor force, those in other Five O'Clock Clubs, as well as highly qualified volunteer career counselors. Members often bring their friends into the group.

Workforce America prefers corporate to government funding because it does not fit into the usual government benchmark of simply getting a person a job, any job. It is trying to address the serious, long-term problem of moving people into good, productive, personally satisfying careers.

Reply to Richard Bayer's "The Social Nature of the Human Person in Economic Personalism"

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Richard Bayer makes two major claims regarding the social nature of the human person. First, sociality belongs to the very nature of the human person; second, the full realization of the human person is most closely bound up with communion (as distinct from mere social coexistence)—properly ordered families, neighborhoods, churches, professional organizations, town communities, civic organizations, and other associations that fulfill our social nature. Bayer sketches some of the difficulties hindering the realization of our social nature in contemporary society. Rather than focus on this aspect of his paper, I will build on his claim that sociality is essential to the human person. My aim is to probe more deeply into the theological foundation of the human person's social nature, at least as this comes to expression in the Second Vatican Council and in the writings of John Paul II.

In *Centesimus Annus*, John Paul II argues that the self-fulfillment of the human person demands self-giving in which a bond of true communion between human beings is formed.[1] The Second Vatican Council teaching on the human person in *Gaudium et Spes* (no. 24) is the starting point for John Paul II's reflections on the relationship between person and community. The Council proclaims that "man, who is the only creature on earth that God willed for itself [for its own sake], [nevertheless] can fully discover his true self only in a sincere giving of himself." Self-fulfillment demands self-giving—this teaching distinguishes Catholic anthropology from individualism and collectivism, and it is the basic reason why we can speak of a "third way" in the social doctrine of the Church. Let me explain briefly.

The human person is, quite precisely, a fundamental polarity of self-possession and self-donation.[2] This makeup of the human person is expressive of the image of God, says the Council in the same paragraph: "Indeed, the Lord Jesus, when He prayed to the Father, 'that all may be one … as we are one' (John 17:21-22) opened up vistas closed to human reason. For He implied a certain likeness between the union of the divine Persons and the union of God's sons in truth and charity." This is the truth concerning man's likeness to God. It

expresses the truth that God himself as Trinity, as a communion of persons who totally share one single being, life, knowledge, and love is the model for this interpretation of the human person.

On the one hand, the human person is an end in himself, existing as a being of his own, for his own sake, unique and unrepeatable, a whole of his own and never a mere part of any totality. Little wonder that John Paul identifies the fundamental error of socialism to be anthropological in nature: socialism depersonalizes human beings. Man is capable of self-determination and self-possession, of existing and choosing for himself. In this way he is the image of God's supreme self-possession. As John Crosby puts it, God "possesses himself by existing through himself and on his own; and we, who do not exist through ourselves, show forth something of God's being insofar as each of us is one's own end, a kind of whole of one's own, an unrepeatable being."[3]

On the other hand, the passage from *Gaudium et Spes* cited above also emphasizes that persons are made for communion with other persons and that in this way man's likeness to God is based on the truth that persons are united by reason of a relation, that is, by reason of their capacity for community with other persons. This is why man can only find himself by making a sincere gift of himself. This striving for self-fulfillment in communion with others is evidence of the transcendence that is proper to man as a person. "Each of us is capable of such a gift because each of us is a person, and the structure proper to a person is the structure of self-possession and self-governance." "Hence," adds John Paul, "we are capable of giving ourselves because we possess ourselves and also because we are our own masters in the dimension of ourselves as subjects."[4]

Self-possession, belonging to oneself, quite clearly, has nothing in common with the isolated unity of the Leibnizian monad, as if the human person is completely closed in upon himself.[5] But God did not create man a solitary being. He created us in his image, and since God is a community of three divine persons, it stands to reason that he would create persons who flourish living in the communion of truth and charity with one another. To quote Crosby again, "A world in which there could be only one person would make no sense. Such a solitary person would suffer a devastating deprivation by being unable either to utter a word to another person or hear the word uttered by the other. This is why we were created as man and woman. This is why God exists as a community of persons and not as a solitary person … We resemble the Trinitarian God through our interpersonal communion."[6]

At its most profound level, then, the truth and inviolable good of man is grounded in his being created in God's image and likeness (Gen. 1:27, 5:1-2). In one sense, this divine image consists in our participation in the intelligence

and freedom of a God who is three divine persons. In another sense, however, the divine image in man is reflected not just in the rational and free nature of the human person. Another aspect stressed by John Paul II brings us back to *Gaudium et Spes* that, as I said above, also emphasizes man's likeness to God "*by reason of a relation that unites persons*." The Council "speaks of a 'certain likeness between the union of the divine persons and the union of God's sons in truth and charity.'" "Human beings are like unto God not only by reason of their spiritual nature [being rational and free]," adds the Pope, "which accounts for their existence as persons, but also by reason of their *capacity for community with other persons*."[7]

Most important in this connection is that the interpersonal and social relation that occurs between persons and in which they fulfill themselves "is realized through the mutual gift of self, a gift that has a disinterested character." This gift is not given out of self-interest, for then it would no longer be a gift. "The whole tradition of Christian thought defends the transutilitarian dimension of human activity and existence"—this dimension of the divine image in man means that man is called to exist "for" others, to become a gift, as John Paul puts it.[8] In this way we resemble the trinitarian God who is an interpersonal community of love and in himself lives a mystery of love as total self-giving to another.

The mutual gift of self—*communio*—is the fruit of a personal encounter with the triune God. No less important, however, is solidarity. In *Ecclesia in America*, John Paul II affirms that "solidarity is the fruit of the communion that is grounded in the mystery of the triune God, and in the Son of God who took flesh and died for all. It is expressed in Christian love that seeks the good of others, especially of those most in need." "Conversion," adds the Pope, "urges solidarity, because it makes us aware that whatever we do for others, especially for the poorest, we do for Christ Himself."[9]

I began this reply with John Paul's thesis that man is alienated in a society where its forms of social organization, production, and consumption inhibit him from offering the gift of himself to others, and ultimately to God, and, as a result, from establishing solidarity between people. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches that there is no solution to this question of communion and solidarity apart from the Gospel. "Where sin has perverted the social climate, it is necessary to call for the conversion of hearts and appeal to the grace of God. Charity urges just reforms … This is the path of charity, that is, of the love of God and of neighbor. Charity is the greatest social commandment. It respects others and their rights. It requires the practice of justice, and alone makes us capable of it. *Charity inspires a life of self-giving*: 'Whoever seeks to gain his life

will lose it, but whoever loses his life will preserve it' [Luke 17:33]."[10] Observe that all the meanings of charity in this citation are ordered to charity as a life of self-giving, which brings us back to the concept of *communio*, namely, that it is through the free gift of self that man truly finds himself, and, in turn, to the trinitarian God who is an interpersonal community of love.

The path to conversion, communion, and solidarity lies in encountering the living Christ, since he is the only true response to human alienation. Alienation includes man's refusal to transcend himself and to live the experience of self-giving and of the formation of an authentic human community oriented toward their final destiny, which is God. Indeed, Jesus Christ not only reconciles man with the Father, transforming, enabling, and healing human nature so that man can enjoy trinitarian communion, but he also reconciles man with himself and thus reveals his true nature as well as the way that man can realize fully his true vocation. For John Paul II, the key to transforming man's alienation is stated by the Second Vatican Council in *Gaudium et Spes* (no. 22):

> The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man truly take on light. For Adam, the first man, was a figure of Him who was to come, Christ the Lord. Christ, the new Adam, in the very revelation of the mystery of the Father and of His love, fully reveals man to himself and brings to light his exalted vocation. It is in Christ, 'the image of the invisible God' (Col. 1:15; 2 Cor. 4:4), that man has been created 'in the image and likeness of the Creator'. It is in Christ, Redeemer and Savior [and Lord], that the divine image, disfigured in man by the first sin, has been restored to its original beauty and ennobled by the grace of God.

And then without missing a beat, the *Catechism* concludes with the central motif in the Holy Father's trinitarian view of the person, a view that should very much inform the social nature of the human person in economic personalism: "The divine image is present in every man. It shines forth in the communion of persons, in the likeness of the unity of the divine persons among themselves."[11]

Notes

1. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus* (May 1, 1991), no. 41. See also Aidan Nichols, O.P., *Epiphany: A Theological Introduction to Catholicism* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1996), 26.

2. On this point, I have profited from John F. Crosby, "John Paul II's Vision of Sexuality and Marriage," in *The Legacy of Pope John Paul II: His Contribution to Catholic Thought*, ed. Geoffrey Gneuhs (New York: Crossroad, 2000), 52–70; and especially his entry on the "Human Person" in the *Encyclopedia of Catholic Doctrine*, ed. by Russell Shaw (Huntington, Ind.: Our Sunday Visitor, 1997), 307–11. Cf. Crosby's *The Selfhood of the Human Person* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1996).

3. Crosby, "Human Person," 310. In a recent study of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, a crucial point is made that we should keep in mind when speaking of God's self-possession. "The One who created and sustains the universe dwells not in splendid isolation or in static self-possession but in the glory of interpersonal communion." This is the "uncreated interpersonal life" of trinitarian communion "shared by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." The Gospel of Jesus Christ reveals that "created persons have been invited" into this interpersonal life "and in which, through Christ, they can truly share." J. Augustine DiNoia, O.P., et al., *The Love That Never Ends: A Key to the Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Huntington, Ind.: Our Sunday Visitor, 1996), 24.

4. Karol Wojtyla, *Person and Community: Selected Essays*, trans. Theresa Sandok, O.S.M. (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), 319, 322.

5. See ibid., 254.

6. Crosby, "Human Person," 309–10.

7. Wojtyla, *Person and Community*, 318.

8. Ibid., 322.

9. John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in America* (January 22, 1999), nos. 52 and 26, respectively. For a marvelous study of this text, see Peter Casarella, "Solidarity as the Fruit of Communion: *Ecclesia in America*, 'Post-Liberation' Theology, and the Earth," *Communio: International Catholic Review* (Spring 2000): 98–123.

10. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1896.

11. Ibid., nos. 1701–02.

Catena sive Umbilicus: A Christian View of Social Institutions

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According to an old saw, there are two kinds of people in the world: those who divide the world into two kinds of people and those who do not. This is but another way of saying that one should be somewhat skeptical of simplistic bifurcations, of attempts to reduce the varied diversity and complexity of human social life into a neat twofold either/or. Nonetheless, I am still going to take the risk and suggest that there are fundamentally two postures that are taken with respect to social institutions.[1] First, a negative view that judges them to be alienating and oppressive and something from which we need to be liberated. This view is represented perfectly by the opening sentence of Rousseau's *Social Contract* ("Man was born free, and he is everywhere in chains"[2]), and by Karl Marx's notion of alienation. In a different way, it is also the view of social thinkers in the tradition of the Radical Reformation such as Leo Tolstoy and John Howard Yoder. The other view, obviously, affirms social institutions as built into our very humanity as social beings (Aristotle: "Man is a political animal") so that we only achieve our full potential as human beings when we are well-connected with others in a variety of relationships that nourish and feed us. This view is found in modern Christian social teaching including the Roman Catholic tradition from Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* to John Paul II's *Centesimus Annus* as well as the Dutch neo-Calvinist tradition of Abraham Kuyper. So, two options, chains or lifeline to the placenta, *catena* or *umbilicus*?

Though it is a debatable point, it seems to me that today's conventional wisdom clearly favors the liberationist viewpoint. Social institutions are regarded as obstacles to a free and fulfilled life as each individual person chooses to define the good life. So women need to be liberated from the slavery of marriage in which their roles are to some degree ascribed. Hence, a "woman's right to choose" so that she "has control over her own body" is such an essential plank in the women's liberation movement. Babies have this inconvenient way of making demands on us, thereby limiting our freedom. Heterosexuals need to be liberated from their homophobia; whites from their racism; men from their sexism; animals from humans, and so forth. Social conventions or institu-

tions are reified as active agents of repression. Liberationists are fond of ascribing an "-ism" label to all viewpoints different from theirs thus always arrogating to themselves the moral high road. After all, who wants to be a "sexist," a "militarist," or even a "speciesist?"

In this perspective all social reality is seen to be constructed, and so-called "traditional values" as only an imposition by the oppressor class to benefit themselves. (Cf. the bumper sticker that reads "Hatred is not a family value"). All social reality is viewed through the lens of a conflict between oppressors and oppressed, victims and victimizers. The Judeo-Christian understanding of sin and morality is transformed into social categories so that we no longer speak simply of justice or racism but target *institutional* racism and *social* justice (a redundancy at best; at worst a mischievous Orwellian abuse of language used to rationalize unjust actions in the name of justice or compassion as in the case of affirmative action). Our contemporary society is flush with attitudes that flow from this anti-institutional animus. This attitude is reflected in the following expressions: "I love God (Jesus), but I want to have nothing to do with organized religion (the church)"; "Why should we get married, we love each other, isn't that the important thing and not some ceremony or piece of paper" (That's all that public vows mean?); "What can possibly be wrong with two men or two women marrying each other if they truly love each other?" Common practices such as easy divorce, cohabitation before marriage, social disrespect for parents, teachers, policeman and various offices such as minister, judge, senator and the President (this includes those who show disrespect for their own office by their conduct as well as those who act disrespectfully toward persons in office); disrespect for place (backward baseball caps in church; cell phone conversations during funerals; public conversation about intimate, personal matters that used to be private [Oprah, et. al.]); all these are indicators that the individual person and his or her feelings, wants, needs, are king and that all social reality must accommodate that royal prerogative.

Now that our culture has been debased in the manner I described is one thing; what is even more troubling, in my judgment, is that those who traditionally were the custodians of our civilization, who passed on to succeeding generations the civilizing attitudes, habits, customs, and wisdom learned by the hard lessons of life over centuries and millennia (Moses, Plato, Augustine, Edmund Burke, Alexis de Tocqueville, Lord Acton, Leo XIII, Abraham Kuyper, Winston Churchill, Friedrich Hayek, Russell Kirk, Alasdair MacIntyre, Thomas Sowell, Ronald Reagan, and Robert Sirico), it is these custodians who are currently leading the charge of barbarian subversion of order and freedom. The academy has become, in my judgment, the most corrupt of our social institutions

and the task undertaken by many academics to deconstruct the wisdom of the past by reducing what used to be regarded as the "permanent things" to simple power struggles under the categories of race, class, and gender—all of this does not produce greater freedom as is commonly thought by the knowledge class. In fact, that is my one thesis in this paper: Those who seek to be liberated from the "tyranny" of social institutions end up forfeiting the only possibility of living freely as human beings with dignity, value, and worth. That goal can only be achieved by strengthening the bonds of associative life among a free and moral people. It may seem counterintuitive to the intelligentsia of our day, but strong social institutions are essential to liberty, human fulfillment, and prosperity. To prove that thesis, I will first take a brief look at Karl Marx's notion of alienation, then summarize the alternative vision of social institutions articulated with increasing clarity and persuasiveness over the years of the twentieth century by the two (overlapping) traditions inspired by Leo XIII and Abraham Kuyper. The paper will conclude with a reflection on contemporary issues and prospects.

Karl Marx's notion of alienation is not restricted to economics. It includes economics, of course, with his notion of "the surplus value of labor" along with Marx's contention that in the modern industrial world the workers lack all control over what they produce—both in terms of initial capitalization of factories as well as profits made from the workers' toil. Capital becomes an "alien power" of its own, controlling the workers.[3] "It is no longer the laborer that employs the means of production, but the means of production that employ the laborer."[4] (Think of Charlie Chaplin's magnificent assembly-line film vignette.) We can see how the notion of alienation is a metaphysical principle for Marx, extending far beyond work and economics because human beings are themselves the creators of the alien power that enslave them. "As in religion, man is governed by the products of his own brain, so in capitalistic production, he is governed by the products of his own hand."[5]

All social institutions, including religion, are human constructions, rather than metaphysically grounded entities. What is fascinating about this is that the invisible "alien power" (classism, sexism, racism) acquires metaphysical status even though one cannot identify it empirically, measure it, or discover when it has been defeated.[6] What Marx does is to provide a certain status to social institutions with the notion of "property." By "property" Marx has in mind more than land or tangible goods; included is the wide array of social institutions including marriage, family, science, art, and religion. For Marx, man is defined by his creative action, his production—he is *homo faber.* This must not be narrowly conceived in terms of toolmaking and productive industry alone, but in the broadest sense as the capacity for all creative work by which a man "raises a

structure in his imagination" and then "erects it in reality."[7] Alienation results from confusing these creations of human imagination (e.g., religion, capitalism) with actual human reality and giving them power to have control over us.

What is "actual human reality" for Marx? Here we need to come back to Marx's concept of "property." Marx argues that the fundamental alienation in a capitalist society boils down to the categorical division of "the whole of society … into the two classes of property owners and the propertyless workers" (the "proletariat"). Recall that "property" for Marx includes the whole array of human social institutions. Alienation is overcome when private property is abolished and we are restored to full human life. In Marx's words: "The positive abolition of private property and the appropriation of human life is therefore the positive abolition of all alienation, thus the return of man out of religion, family, state, etc. into his human, that is, social being."[8] Do not be misled by Marx's use of the word *social* here. He is not referring positively to the whole range of social relationships in which we find ourselves (family, community, church, nation) but to *universal* humanity, to what Marx calls *species life*. It is to the extent that man is free from *particular* social relationships and "relates to himself as to the present living species," that is, universal humanity, that he is truly emancipated.[9] In the words of a *Peanuts* character: "I love humanity; it's people I can't stand." Hence, the harsh attack by Marxist regimes on social institutions other than the state or the party. In particular, it is worth noting that monogamous marriage is usually the first target of revolutionaries. Exactly how we get there—the details of Marxist soteriology—are beyond the scope of this paper. Hegelian dialectics, even if I understood it, would take us far, far, afield.[10]

It is precisely on this issue that the tradition of Christian social teaching objects. In a tradition that goes back before Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* in 1891, an alternative social vision began to take shape beginning with the work of Wilhelm von Ketteler, Bishop of Mainz (1811-1877).[11] Two features stand out in this tradition: (1) a concern for the worker, particularly the plight of poor urban workers; (2) a sharp repudiation of socialism as the answer to (1). In *Rerum Novarum* there is a ringing defense of private property and a defense of, even encouragement for, workers to unite in labor associations (unions).

This emphasis on the right of association and rejection of statism arises from a profound sense that placing too much power in the state is dangerous. Abraham Kuyper knew this Catholic tradition well (in his 1891 address on poverty he cites von Ketteler and Leo with favor, even acknowledging that Protestants were way behind on this score)[12] and the right of association as well as the critique of socialism are common themes in the literature of the two traditions. That the dangers of growing state power was a major concern for both traditions is

clear from the signature terms that now identify their distinctive emphasis, *sphere sovereignty* and *subsidiarity*.

In his Stone Lectures on Calvinism, Kuyper defined sphere sovereignty thus: "In a Calvinistic sense we understand hereby, that the family, the business, science, art, and so forth are all social spheres, which do not owe their existence to the state, and which do not derive the law of their life from the sovereignty of the state, but obey a high authority within their own bosom; an authority that rules, by the grace of God, just as the sovereignty of the state does."[13] Though implicit in earlier social declarations, the principle of subsidiarity first gets explicit mention in Pope Pius XI's encyclical, *Quadragesimo Anno*, commemorating the fortieth anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*.

> Just as it is gravely wrong to take from individuals what they can accomplish by their own initiative and industry and give it to the community, so also it is an injustice and at the same time a grave evil and disturbance of right order to assign to a greater and higher association what lesser and subordinate organizations can do. For every social activity ought of its very nature to furnish help to the members of the body social, and never destroy and absorb them (no. 79).
>
> The supreme authority of the State ought, therefore, to let subordinate groups handle matters and concerns of lesser importance, which would otherwise dissipate its efforts greatly…. Therefore those in power should be sure that the more perfectly a graduated order is kept among the various associations, in observance of the principle of "subsidiary function," the stronger social authority and effectiveness will be the happier and more prosperous the condition of the State (no. 80).

The two concerns here are worries about the growing power of the state and the health of the various associative communities that make up society, with emphasis, it seems to me, on the latter. Key associations such as the family and the church have metaphysical grounding as well as serve as a buffer against state absolutism. The person who recognized the uniqueness of the level of associative life in the United States and that this flourishing of associations was a necessary check against tyranny, was Alexis de Tocqueville. As usual, Tocqueville captures this in a wonderful nugget of insight:

> Despotism, by its very nature is suspicious, it sees the isolation of men as the best guarantee of its own permanence. So it usually does all it can to isolate them. Of all the vices of the human heart egoism is that which suits it best. A despot will lightly forgive his subjects for not loving him, provided they do not love each other.[14]

Statists, in other words, do not want us to give our loyalty to anything but the state. Be suspicious, therefore, of those who would take away parental rights and give them to the "village."

It is for this reason that I said at the beginning that though it is counter-intuitive to conventional wisdom about liberation, emancipation *from* social institutions leads to chains. After the twentieth century we have empirical proof of that maxim. The destruction of associational life leaves only the naked individual person over against the almost illimitable power of the state. The path away from tyranny and toward liberty is the path of encouraging, nourishing, and defending a rich associational life with healthy social institutions. I think that this is a metaphysical truth rooted in our very nature as human beings created in the image of God, with inherent dignity, worth, and responsibility. So, *catena sive umbilicus*? Marriage and family are *not* chains inhibiting our self-development.

One quick concluding word: My subtitle says "Christian View of Social Institutions." Why is the positive view of social institutions particularly Christian or biblical? It is not possible, I believe, to draw a model for contemporary society directly from biblical examples or biblical teaching. What I would say is that the perspective I sketched in this paper is *consistent* with a biblical worldview in at least three respects. First, it affirms the dignity and worth of humans as image bearers of God. Second, it is consistent with the biblical pattern of separating throne and altar and placing the monarch under divine and prophetic judgment (Samuel/Saul; David/Nathan; Elijah/Ahab; Amos/Amaziah; Peter before the Sanhedrin). Third, subsidiarity is consistent with the biblical pattern that responsibility for justice and compassion begins with the family (Jacob and Levi; Levirate marriage, the right of redemption [Ruth and Boaz]). Fourth, it is a bulwark against the apotheosis of the state and the moral-religious obligation of the first commandment.

Notes

1. Theoretically, it is possible to consider a third option that is neutral toward or indifferent to social institutions. John Locke's *Second Treatise on Government* describes only two social realities: the individual and the state (civil society). Communities are formed when reasonable people subordinate their rights to the greater communal good. Even when Locke discusses marriage and family, he only does so in order to solve the problem of legitimating parental authority when "by nature" even children have the right to freedom. Social institutions have no ontological status in Locke, with the possible exception of "property," which is a part of a human's "natural right." John Locke, *A Second Treatise on Government*, ed. C. B. Macpherson (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1980), chaps. 6–7.

2. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, trans. Maurice Cranston (New York: Penguin, 1968), 49.

3. A reified "capitalism" as such does not exist; there are "capitalists," there are free-market economies that require capital to fuel the engine of commerce, but it is a Gnostic notion of an "alien power" that serves as a rationale for speaking of "capitalism" as a "power" on its own. On the ideological dependence upon the notion of "alien power," see Kenneth Minogue, *Alien Powers: The Pure Theory of Ideology* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985).

4. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1 (New York: Charles H. Kerr & Company, 1919), 339. I am indebted to Thomas Sowell for this citation, see *Marxism: Philosophy and Economics* (New York: William Morrow, 1985), 27.

5. Ibid., 680–81; cited by Sowell, *Marxism*, 28.

6. See note 3 above.

7. John McMurty, *The Structure of Marx's World-View* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 22. The terminology is taken directly from the first volume of Marx's *Capital*.

8. Ibid., 88.

9. Ibid., 81.

10. For a brief but clear summary of that tradition, see Michael Novak, *Freedom with Justice: Catholic Social Thought and Liberal Institutions* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984), chap. 4.

11. Abraham Kuyper, *The Problem of Poverty*, ed. James W. Skillen (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991), 24.

12. Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1931), 90.

13. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. George Lawrence, ed. J. P. Mayer (New York: HarperCollins, 1966), 509.

Reply to John Bolt's "*Catena sive Umbilicus*: A Christian View of Social Institutions"

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A Brief Review

John Bolt dichotomizes opinions concerning the relevance of social institutions. There are the liberationists/Marxists who reject social institutions (especially traditional family values, community, organized religion, and capitalism) and those of the Christian/biblical view who hold the opinion that "strong social institutions are essential to liberty, human fulfillment, and prosperity." Bolt's essay also delineates opposing views of statism, offering a strong defense for subsidiarity.

As explained by Bolt, Marxists regard social institutions to be an "invisible alien power" that is at the root of racism, classism, and sexism. Thus, the destruction of these social institutions is necessary for man's emancipation. But

the demise of the social institutions, Bolt warns, will cause individuals instead to forfeit their "… only possibility of living freely as human beings with dignity, value, and worth."

According to the tradition of Christian social teaching, Bolt states that there are two defining features: an enduring concern for "the plight of poor urban workers," and "a sharp repudiation of socialism." For example, *Rerum Novarum* points out the meaningful role of private property rights in improving economic and political outcomes for the masses. In addition, Bolt refers to writings by Abraham Kuyper and Pope Pius XI that caution us of the dangers to families, businesses, sciences, the arts, and religion when too much power is put into the hands of government. As Bolt explains, "key associations such as the family and the church … serve as a buffer against state absolutism."

Suggestions

Citing John Locke's *Second Treatise on Government*, Bolt entertains the possibility of a neutral view toward social institutions. It may be of interest to further explore the American Founders' vision of the relationship between social institutions and government. The American Founders envisioned a regime of individual rights and limited government with the presumption that such a republic required and would promote virtue in the citizenry. Religion, families, communities, and property rights were seen as basic conditions for a free and virtuous republic.

The Founders prescribe a neutral government in terms of religion, yet friendly toward religion and accommodating to individuals' private and social lives. Yet, beginning with F. D. Roosevelt, the United States government has become openly hostile to social institutions—religion has been run out of the public square by the courts and these court decisions have been upheld by Congress; numerous efforts have been made to legitimize homosexual unions by cities and states; the Federal government takeover of welfare programs has weakened private charities and associations; there have been increased regulations on private associations at all levels; distortionary taxes have been imposed to penalize marriages; and the list continues. To deepen his analysis, Bolt may want to examine how philosophical liberalism is seen to be compatible with the Christian view of social institutions.

Final Thoughts

Some contemporary liberals have extreme views on individualism and egalitarianism. Both share the liberationists' viewpoint on social institutions as "obstacles to a free and fulfilled life…." Egalitarians prefer no social authority except

the state. Their goal is to create economic not political equality through governmental means—socialism has always created an elite class of rulers. The expanded role of government reverses subsidiarity and thus damages social institutions. Individualists, however, share Bolt's view of subsidiarity but do not necessarily see the importance of social institutions, especially churches, heterosexual marriage, and the family.

It is surprising that theologians who are liberationists do not seem to recognize their support for the demise of social institutions or that their viewpoints end in "the apotheosis of the state." These theologians have an affinity with Marxism, but Marx is openly hostile to religion, as Bolt's citation clearly shows: "Alienation results from confusing these creations of the human imagination (e.g., religion, capitalism) with actual human reality and giving them power to have control over us."

Bolt provides an enlightening but simple message for Christians. We need to be wary of attempts by the government to empower itself through the erosion of social institutions. As the twenty-first century dawns, most of the intelligent world recognizes that the socialist promise of an improved economic and political life in return for allegiance to the state has proven to be disastrous. And yet, in the United States, the academy's affection for increased governmental regulation, control, and dependence is enduring, requiring us to be evermore vigilant and mindful of socialism's ultimate goal of taking away personal freedoms and of eliminating organized religion and the traditional family structure.

In conclusion, modern Western political systems, influenced by extreme tendencies in liberalism, have contributed to the decline of traditional social institutions and the public expression of religion, which supported them. How can this decline be arrested? Bolt insightfully draws on Christian social teaching, which has much to offer, but it must be brought to bear more widely in public intellectual life and more closely related to the American and Western political tradition.

Know Thy Limits: The Noneconomics of Abundance

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Introduction

The goal of this conference on economic personalism is to discuss, and possibly, to develop a set of principles that aptly describes economic personalism. Participants received a draft set of principles to reflect on before the conference. Item seven on the draft statement reads as follows:

> Value. The central role of human thought and action in economic life explains the fact of subjective economic valuation. Recognition of subjective economic values, however, is not incompatible with insistence on objective ontological value and objective moral truth.

This value statement (as I will refer to it) brings together essential components of Christian humanism and economic science in a provocative way. Economists use subjective preferences in their models and tend to be wary of any objective evaluation of preferences. Economics is primarily interested in the objective manifestations of subjective preferences appearing in the marketplace. Economists make assumptions about the structure of individual preferences, but not their content. Indeed, economics per se is not in a position to offer a critique of anyone's notion of value. Aside from the Austrian School, all of the economist's assumptions about human action proceed from a hypothetical, not an ontological base. For instance, a person with a taste for pornography is assumed to behave just as consistently as a person with a taste for fine art. Hence, the price and supply of pornography should respond to changes in income, the prices of related goods, and the costs of production in a manner that differs from the market for fine art only in degree.

Most Christian humanists would say that there is a great deal more difference between the markets for pornography and fine art than between the measures of their elasticities of demand. They might argue that pornography has a corrosive effect on the person because it damages an objective good. Fine art, on the other hand, leads a person to fulfillment in a way that pornography never can. It would be difficult to convince a humanist that pornography might lead to fulfillment in some people, and that fine art might lead to fulfillment in others. Economists would be hard-pressed to make such a distinction.

Both economics and Christian humanism are aiming for an understanding of reality, though on two completely different levels. On the one hand, the economist uses a hypothetical model of the human person to predict what happens to the unemployment rate when the minimum wage increases. With little alteration, the same hypothetical model could be applied to the behavior of lab rats. The Christian humanist, on the other hand, describes the value of work as a sharing in the work of creation. A humanist description of behavior, of course, could never be applied to lab rats. Christian humanists base their reasoning on far more secure premises than those of economics. Drawing equally from divine revelation as it has been articulated by the churches along with the natural law as developed through the centuries of the Western tradition, Christian humanists rightfully claim that the truth-content of their work begins with first principles. If any error emerges, it must mean that the principles have been incorrectly applied.

In the value statement, subjective preferences are posited as "not incompatible" with an objective moral order. The statement grants legitimacy to both Christian humanism and economics that is a necessary starting point for discussion. In this paper, however, I argue that the statement we have received needs to be strengthened. The paper highlights the fundamental distinction between institutions such as the family and institutions such as the market by reflecting on the reality of human life before the Fall. I refer to the former as *healing institutions* and to the latter as *coping institutions*. Coping institutions strive to make the best of a bad situation. Healing institutions aim to reverse the damage entirely. This occurs through a transformation (or conversion) of persons, which brings damaged subjective values in line with an objective moral good. It is vital to recognize that this transformation occurs through noneconomic means. Furthermore, the transformation is always costly for the participants. Sometimes it may seem better to cope with the scars of original sin than to work to overcome them. This is the temptation that economic personalism, and all participants in a modern market economy, must resist. These issues lead me, in the conclusion, to offer a reformulated version of the value statement submitted for discussion.

The Fall and Its Aftermath

There was indeed a time in human history when the linkage between the objective moral order and subjective values was strong. Indeed the identification of the two was complete. A plenitude of goodness characterized God's original creation. Like no other creature, man and woman bore the image of God himself. Hence, everything about creation, including the inner life of the hu-

man person, moved in harmony. This *original abundance* made for a world that we can hardly imagine. There was no need for property because nothing valuable was in short supply. Without property, trading would have been pointless. No one would have missed the absence of markets when all prices would have been zero or nonexistent. Moreover, because man's inner life was securely anchored in objective value, we can be sure that both trust and selflessness characterized human relationships, particularly those between men and women. Contracts would have been figments of the imagination and the prisoner's dilemma would have been an impossible theorem to explain. Work would have been a joy. The acquisition of knowledge would have been as effortless as breathing in fresh air. Without a neurosis driven by the certainty of impending mortality, the present moment would have been appreciated as simply another moment in a boundless set of moments.

We might speculate further on the precise structure of subjective preferences as they functioned in the Garden. Economists make the nearly universal assumption that diminishing marginal utility governs human consumption. By this they mean that any additional consumption of a particular good always adds to the well-being of the person, though at a diminishing rate. The classic classroom example is to ask whether the fifth beer tastes as good as the first beer. No student ever says yes. But if subjective valuation is completely identified with the objective moral order, marginal valuation would never be necessary. The person would simply *do* the right thing without concern for the consequence. There would be no need to calculate the precise relationship between the marginal benefit and the marginal cost of a particular action.

History has obscured the duration of the era of original abundance. What is obvious is that it has ended. The end came when man declared independence from God so as to live in a tragic-comic fantasy world as his own god. Scarcity, toil, ignorance, alienation, violence, fear, and death quickly followed in the train of man's foolishness. Essentially, our first parents made an erroneous value judgment. By this very act, the created link between man's subjective valuation and the objective moral order was damaged, though not destroyed.

After the Fall, history records man's persistent efforts to *cope* with the scars of original sin. Various institutions—armies, law, prisons, manors, guilds, universities, markets—have evolved and come and gone in line with their effectiveness as coping mechanisms. Usually these institutions have coexisted, more or less uneasily, with other institutions that proposed a more complete remedy. Religions, utopian governments, philosophies, among others, have typically shown a willingness to shoulder the burdens of a broken world while anticipating a new era in history. In almost all cases, these latter proposals involve a

transformation of the human person himself. They promise a renewal of harmony between subjective value and, however defined, an objective moral order. Christianity certainly falls into this latter group.

The science of economics, as it is taught on a typical college campus, firmly roots itself in pragmatic concerns. Though few professors would speak of it in these terms, it is fair to say that economics begins with the question, "To what extent do markets help us cope with the scars of original sin?" That is to say, in a world where property rights are protected and voluntary exchange allowed, how do markets direct resources to those areas where scarcity is the most acute? Most economists are convinced that free markets do an amazing job bringing time, talent, and resources to bear on the most pressing social needs. All this happens in a decentralized framework that produces results that far surpass what any central planner could possibly hope to accomplish. Students and market commentators often speak as if the market has a mind of its own. No such claim is necessary. Instead, the effectiveness of markets is directly attributable to the linkage between social need, as manifested through the price system and individual self-interest. This leads some to say that economics provides cover for the legitimization of selfishness, that our tables and charts add window dressing to what is essentially nothing more than a deal with the Devil.

I often refer to economics as "the science of original sin," but not in the manner just described. Instead, I suggest that economics can show how free markets effectively *cope* with the scars of original sin. But there is a much larger question at stake here. To what extent, can it be argued, that markets help *heal* the wounds of original sin? In other words, do markets make for better people?

Some have argued that markets, at least in some respects, make for better people. Successful market participants should be the most ingenious, the most disciplined, and the most frugal in their use of resources. In a stable economic order, one can even argue that markets build trust between people. Certainly one might expect that a handshake between business partners carries more genuine meaning than the same gesture between Soviet commissars. Yet it is easy for this kind of thinking to go too far. One can never say *a priori* that emergent goods did not come about through the destruction of other essential human goods. Few would say, for example, that someone who neglects his family in order to advance his career at work has succeeded in bringing his subjective preferences more in line with objective moral norms. No matter how ingenious or disciplined he might be, a broken family suggests that he *coped* with the scars of original sin in a humanly destructive way.

The Boundary Between Trading and Giving

While it can be said that markets assist in the realization of genuinely human goods, in the same breath one must add that markets may not strengthen the ties between subjective preferences and objective values. Christians refer to this restored harmony between the subjective and the objective as "conversion." What advocates of market processes must understand is that it is in precisely those areas where markets do not function that human conversion and hence, fulfillment, is most likely to occur. There must be a clear line of demarcation between the two.

Economists are quick to point out three areas where markets do not function well: externalities, public goods, and joint production. Externalities, both negative and positive, occur when someone's action imposes a cost or a benefit on another person. Because the benefits or costs are external to the decision maker, they are not taken into account in the decision process. As a result, resources are misallocated. Pollution is a common example of an externality. The polluting firm may take account of the effect of pollution on its own workers, but not necessarily of the health effects to the residents living near the pollution. Public goods are a similar story. Some goods are not exhausted when consumed by an individual person. When I finish eating a bowl of ice cream, there is no ice cream for anyone else to enjoy, but when I discover a simple cure for the common cold (eat more ice cream), it will be impossible to stop others from curing their colds in a similar way. Researchers are thus more likely to pursue projects that produce enforceable patents than projects that create public benefits that exclude no one. In a different way, the problem of joint production creates an incentive for workers to engage in production that can be easily measured. It is much easier to measure the effectiveness of a quarterback than that of a lineman, because only one person can throw the ball. Quarterbacks stand alone while linemen work as a group. In a market economy where individuals are rewarded based on the value of their marginal productivity, participants shy away from team production even if society greatly values the output of the team. Consequently, young boys imagine themselves as quarterbacks throwing the game-winning touchdown pass before they think about throwing a block that protects the quarterback who makes the pass.

It would be extremely difficult to estimate the degree to which resources in a modern market economy are misallocated because of market failures like those cited above. What can be said is that in a decentralized market economy, the price mechanism will fail to allocate resources in a socially optimal way in a manner proportional to the degree of market failure in the economy. Ordinarily in free markets, the pursuit of one's self-interest produces the unintended

result of advancing social welfare, but in the case of market failure, personal incentives become incompatible with social well-being. In short, Adam Smith's invisible hand fails to guide correctly. Therefore, some other mediating institution, some "visible hand," must step in to guide activity. Increasingly, governmental coercion of one form or another fills the void.

This fact has important implications for economic personalism. Secular economic reasoning reaches the above result because of its hesitancy to criticize individual subjective preferences. While economists do not necessarily deny that some subjective preferences might be better than others, the discipline offers no ready criterion on which the criticism might be based. This is not the case with economic personalism. The value statement we are reviewing offers several normative criteria by which the effect of individual economic choices might be assessed: human dignity, justice, family, culture, among others. But there is a deeper and more important implication as well. Market failure is more than simply the unintended failure of the invisible hand with which society must *cope*. It is original sin and its consequences that produced the failure in the first place. In other words, markets would not fail to deliver socially optimal results if subjective preferences were more in harmony with objective moral norms. Consider the case of the polluting firm. Management should take into account the effect of the pollution on all people, not just on the firm's workers, because all people are of equal dignity. If management based their production decisions on the health effects of residents nearby, the firm's level of pollution would not go to zero, but it would be reduced to a level where the marginal health costs to all people would be accounted for.

As I mentioned in the introduction, there are institutions whose purpose extends beyond coping with the scars of original sin. That the family, church, and other voluntary organizations can lead to authentic human development is well-known. What has yet to be articulated with sufficient clarity, I believe, is the boundary that separates institutions that *cope* as opposed to institutions that *heal*. Unless this boundary is understood, highlighted, and defended, coping institutions such as the market may overwhelm healing institutions such as the family.

It is not enough to say that voluntary associations like this emerge in precisely those areas where markets fail. The fact is that the family and the wider community came first, not markets. Any ideal of the family must be consistent with what we know of life before the Fall. This is not true of the market or any other coping institution, since they did not exist before the Fall. The essential truth is that genuine human community possesses a kernel of abundance even in a world plagued by scarcity. In genuine human community, there is no need

of trading for mutual benefit, just as there was no need for our first parents to do so. Goods may change hands in a fully human community, but only in terms of gifts. While resources remain scarce, distribution is made according to need and not according to ability to pay. What emerges in these communities is a vibrant *sense of surplus* that has the power to replace the zero-sum neurosis that makes life seem "solitary, nasty, brutish, and short." Persons who live in communities such as these find their damaged preferences gradually being transformed in line with the objective moral goods that bring human fulfillment.

Though this explanation may seem hopelessly idealistic, the fact is that families do it every day. As a result, they produce the scarcest public good of all: children with a well-developed moral sense. But no family fully realizes this goal. Once market principles of self-interest enter into a healing community, that community begins to behave like a localized market of its own. The grass may get cut and the laundry done, but the sense of surplus that has the power to transform preferences will be lost. Consider the case of the mother facing two children fighting over their toys. To solve the problem, she could assign clear property rights to the toys: "Jim, that truck is yours. Anne, the balloons are yours." So if Jim wants to the play with the balloons, he must strike a deal with Anne to make an exchange. It may well be the siblings will spend less time fighting after property rights have been assigned. The reduction in fighting would be an effective way to cope with the fact that there are not two sets of balloons and trucks. But, on the other hand, if they could learn to share the toys, their preferences would be broadened as Anne learns to take Jim's needs into account, and vice versa. The latter case is one of healing, even if in the short run the fighting and the tears may be difficult for the mother to endure.

This brings us to what, I believe, is the central issue with the statement on economic personalism currently under consideration. In no place does the statement mention the reality of human suffering and the dignity that can be associated with it. Persons scarred by sin already have seen enough suffering. We are averse to pain whether it is dignified or not. But the fact is that *healing* the wounds of original sin, as opposed to coping with them, is always associated with suffering simply because the healing occurs in a disordered world. When a person bears a personal cost so that a community of giving can remain such a community, all the members of the community are changed, for the better.

On the other hand, market-based solutions are powerfully tempting for a community that has had its fill of suffering. What is required is similar to what happened to Adam and Eve in the Garden: One must narrow the sphere of self-interest and begin to make trades accordingly. What had been a nonmarket zone of giving becomes a market zone that clings to the *Ersatz* virtue of mutually

beneficial exchange. As markets become ever more efficient at reducing human suffering in the short run, the temptation to abandon the noble ideal of human community is likely to overwhelm many. Current demographic trends in family and community life certainly seem to bear this out. Imagine a world where suffering is eliminated but preferences are unchanged. Life would be nothing but one numbing experience after another.

Conclusion: What This Statement on Personalism Can Achieve

When Christians pray the Lord's Prayer, they look for the arrival of a kingdom. Their anticipation is for a complete perfection of all creation, a complete reversal of the damage from every sin. In that kingdom, there will be no economics because there will be no markets. It is not that all prices will go to zero because of nascent abundance, but that prices will be nonexistent because all trading will be replaced by giving. Christians also recognize that it was suffering by the Son of God that gives them this hope of a new world filled with new people.

Though my arguments are consistent with the Christian vision, I hope they will be understood as more than an application of pious Christian hope. My aim has been to explore the fundamental economic problem of value in a wider context, indeed in the widest context imaginable. It is true that subjective economic valuation is essential to preserving the freedom and the benefits of the market. It is also true that objective moral norms exist. What I have tried to show is that it is not sufficient to say that a free-market economy is "not incompatible" with objective values. One must also humbly admit that marked-based solutions to human need are, at best, temporary. Only when human beings are transformed from the inside out can authentic human development be realized.

Even economists recognize cases where markets fail. Some would say that the proper role for culture and community is to fill in and correct for missing and malfunctioning markets. This line of argument completely reverses historical fact and the reality of concupiscence brought on by the Fall. In our present condition, subjective preferences are like a compass that no longer unfailingly points to the North. We cannot reach our destination without a correction to our human sense of direction and purpose. Nonmarket communities provide this correction and give us hope for a truly more just economic order. To return to a previous analogy, at best the economy is a football lineman, but culture and community are the quarterbacks. Woe to the society that reverses those roles! Given these observations, I would rewrite the value statement as follows:

> Though markets can function efficiently when individual subjective preferences deviate from ontological value, authentic human development

requires communities that, acting through nonmarket means, promote the development of the moral person. Only in an economy vitalized by such persons can a just social order be achieved, no matter what the level of material abundance might be.

Reply to Mark Brosky's "Know Thy Limits: The Noneconomics of Abundance"

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It has been a privilege for me to have the opportunity to read Father Mark Brosky's paper. The task that each of the presenters in this conference was asked to do was not an easy one. Each presenter had to examine one principle in the present form of our "Statement of Principles of Economic Personalism" and attempt to produce an improved version of such principle based on some insight that he found significant to bring to the fore. Father Mark did exactly this, and in his argument he produced for us distinctions that constitute, I believe, a very important contribution to our discussion concerning the communion of markets and morality. For example, Father Mark presents us with a contrast between economic life as we know it, and a hypothesis of economic life in the Garden. Furthermore, he examines the distinction he finds between acts of sharing, and the sage practice of striking a deal in everyday market exchange. Finally, and not of least importance, Father Mark introduces a new distinction for social institutions: that between healing institutions and coping institutions. He has given us in this way much to consider and discuss. I would like to begin, then, with a few observations that are directed at one assumption that underlies the text Father Mark suggests should replace the present definition of value in our "Statement of Principles."

The assumption can be expressed in this way: Subjective economic judgments *can* be replaced altogether by objective moral judgments. Consequently, Father Mark argues that we *should* aim toward this end. He presents scarcity as the inevitable result from man's fall from grace. He calls the market system "a coping institution," since it has served as an efficient vehicle for man to meet his needs in light of scarcity, but the family, which he calls "a healing institution," can bring about a transformation of judgments such that economic

judgments are no longer subjective but are, instead, in line with objective moral principles. In his hypothesis about economic life in the Garden, Father Mark suggests that, there, economic value judgments were identical to moral value judgments. Now, let us consider the plausibility of this claim. Fundamentally, economics is the study of choice. According to economic theory, every choice reflects an economic value judgment on the part of the agent. Subjective economic value arises whenever an agent perceives a causal connection between a thing and the satisfaction of an urgent need or want. In Father Mark's hypothetical case of the economics of the Garden, the scenario is that every choice is not only morally relevant but also morally good. If this is true, then two questions jump to mind: First, how could an error in value judgment be possible? This is a critical consideration, since an error did occur that brought about the fall of man. Second, are all instances of economic value morally relevant?

Let us begin by examining the last question by means of an illustration. Suppose that the only winter coat that a student living in Buffalo owns is stolen. If this occurs in the summer, this would not present an immediate problem to the student. However, let us further suppose that this occurs in the winter. Consequently, the student is confronted with an urgent need or want that will warrant a sacrifice of some other present satisfaction. In this case, let us suppose that the student substitutes the coat in place of another good he feels he can sacrifice since, relative to his present situation, it would provide him with the least utility. We shall recall that economic value is measured by the importance of the want whose satisfaction is dependent upon the possession of the good. The determination of which satisfaction is the dependent one is, then, reached by considering which want would be unsatisfied if the good were not in his possession. In our example, the student decides to sacrifice attending the Buffalo Symphony this season. Hence, the student attaches greater importance to being warm in the bitter Buffalo winter than to enjoying cultural entertainment. The coat thus acquires economic value for the student. This illustration shows the economic calculation involved in making a choice which, in turn, will bring about a cost, albeit subjective. Nevertheless, there is no moral relevance in this situation. Like this, there are many cases of choices that are by definition economic in nature, but they are not morally relevant. We must be careful, then, not to suppose that the spheres of economic value and moral value are identical. My guess is that this would also be true in the Garden.

Let us now address my second question: How could an error in value judgment be possible in the Garden? In Father Brosky's paper, the assumption is that all subjective preferences would be in accordance with moral values. Conversely, as we have seen by means of our illustration, some subjective prefer-

ences have no moral relevance, but only economic relevance. We know that needs or wants are genuine economic phenomena. What is important to introduce now is the notion of desire. A desire has no practical economic consequences. For example, I could desire to own a castle in France, but this desire plays no role in my evaluation of my wants that require satisfaction. In this sense, a desire is akin to a wish in the sense that it does not require one's personal involvement in bringing about the object of one's desire. Although desires and economic needs or wants often coincide, the latter are characterized by the necessity of their satisfaction. The student in Buffalo, for instance, does not merely wish to have a coat in the winter. He needs the coat and will strive to get it by sacrificing some other satisfaction in his total utility bundle. It is important to consider as well that one's desires do not have to involve only narrow or frivolous interests. One could desire something good that affects others. For example, I could desire the castle in France for someone other than myself. Even in this case, a desire does not coincide with a need or want until the former necessitates a cost calculation, a sacrifice of another satisfaction, and acts of striving to obtain the object of desire. If we now apply the distinction between desire and need or want to the case of the Garden, then it could be argued that a value judgment error occurred because a *desire* to know was tragically confused with a *need* to know. In any case, the distinction between want and desire is an important one to bring to the discussion of the assumption presented in the paper.

In general, I agree with Father Mark that the definition of value in our "Statement of Principles" is in need of clarification. Furthermore, I agree that Father Mark's discussion in his paper contributes toward this goal, but I would like to insist that the notion of value is complex and that we should not assume that the term will only refer to economic value or to moral value, as there are many other kinds of value such as aesthetic value, religious value, and others. The chief difficulties in the examination of value are, first, to distinguish each kind of value adequately; and, second, to discover the nature of the relations among values, especially when more than one value is present in a single act or judgment. For the practical purposes of our statement, I suggest that we include a clear definition of economic value and, if possible, of moral value, since both are the relevant values for our interests.

Economic Liberty

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> "For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men—as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God. Honor all people. Love brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king" (1 Peter 2:15-17).

It is the conviction of many economists that economic liberty is essential to human progress. However, such freedom is often viewed negatively by moralists who tend to regard such liberty as a license to oppress the poor. The conflict between these views has resulted in a great deal of political debate as various factions struggle to implement policies consistent with their different visions of the world. Is there a perspective that can reconcile the establishment of economic liberty within the framework of morality?

The nineteenth-century French economist Frederic Bastiat wrestled with this very question in his book *Economic Harmonies.*[1] In that work, Bastiat took the position that "All men's impulses, when motivated by legitimate self-interest, fall into a harmonious social pattern."[2] For the moralist, this pronouncement might seem like a brazen disregard of one's personal moral duty. However, a more complete assessment of what Bastiat meant will reveal that that is not the case.

Bastiat's position was similar to that taken by Adam Smith in *The Wealth of Nations*. Namely, if self-interested human action were constrained to the context of civil liberty, it would tend to promote the harmonization of the actions of all people. Bastiat's concept of civil liberty was common to his day and can be defined as the condition in which all people are free from the arbitrary dictates of others. That is, a situation where the laws of society are used to restrain the actions of every man from injuring or controlling his neighbor. When applied to the realm of economics, the establishment of civil liberty implies that a person is free to engage in any mutually agreeable exchange of goods that might legitimately be traded. These goods include tangible commodities such as wheat and bread, and intangible goods such as advice and labor services. In addition, it includes the exchange of future claims on goods.

While it is generally recognized that these conditions give rise to the advancement of material well-being, it is often argued that they may be at odds with moral well-being. Bastiat took the opposite position. Bastiat argued that the final interests of human beings are harmonious rather than antagonistic. As such, he saw liberty as the ultimate answer to the social problem. In presenting his case, Bastiat appealed to the fundamental problems inherent in the alternative view. If human interests are forever at odds, then coercion is the only option. But, among the infinite variety of plans that employ coercion to organize society, which is best? Furthermore, even if the "best" plan could be identified, why would we expect people to submit to it since our first premise is that the interests of individuals are always at odds with each other? And, finally, "If you consider individual self-interest as antagonistic to the general interest, where do you propose to establish the acting principle of coercion?"[3] With regard to this last question, it would have to be located beyond humanity if it were to escape the main premise, because arbitrary power entrusted to human beings will always explode into corruption. As a result, the "antagonistic" view has no place to end but in despair.

Bastiat rejected that position and focused on another option. He began with the assumption that God made the person as he is, a being motivated by self-love and naturally interested in social arrangements that better himself. With this as a starting point, Bastiat sought to examine how the social order would progress if people interacted freely with each other. It was that study that led Bastiat to assert that human interests are harmonious rather than antagonistic, because he discovered that such activity would give rise to human flourishing. Toward this end, he observed that people do not consider moral and intellectual issues of life until the basic conditions needed to sustain life are secured. Therefore, he argued that affluent societies tend to be more virtuous than those that are poor.

In the modern age, this conclusion likely seems astounding. However, as C. S. Lewis has pointed out, it should not be surprising. The problem is that modern moral philosophers have substituted the Kantian notion of virtue for the older Christian understanding. As Lewis wrote:

> If there lurks in most modern minds the notion that to desire our own good and earnestly to hope for the enjoyment of it is a bad thing, I submit that this notion has crept in from Kant and the Stoics and is no part of the Christian faith. Indeed, if we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child

> who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.[4]

With this in mind, we can begin to understand that there must be something to Bastiat's assertion. Bastiat did not mean to suggest that wealthy people have no vices. He was certainly well-aware of those. In fact, in commenting on the ever-present nature of evil, Bastiat pointed out its harmonizing role in human affairs:

> Deny evil! Deny pain! Who could? We should have to forget that we are talking about mankind. We should have to forget that we ourselves are men. For the laws of Providence to be considered as *harmonious*, it is not necessary that they exclude evil. It is enough that evil have its explanation and purpose, that it be self-limiting, and that every pain be the means of preventing greater pain by eliminating whatever causes it.
>
> Society is composed of men, and every man is a *free* agent. Since man is free, he can choose; since he can choose, he can err; since he can err, he can suffer... Now, all error breeds suffering. And this suffering either falls upon the one who erred, in which case it sets in operation the law of responsibility; or else it strikes innocent parties, in which case it sets in motion the marvelous reagent that is the law of solidarity. The action of these laws, combined with the ability ... of seeing the connection between cause and effect, must bring us back, by the very fact of suffering, to the path of righteousness and truth... But if evil is to fulfill this purpose … the freedom of the individual must be respected.
>
> Now, if man-made institutions intervene in these matters to nullify divine law, evil nonetheless follows upon error, but it falls upon the wrong person. It strikes him whom it should not strike; it no longer serves as a warning or a lesson; it is no longer self-limiting; it is no longer destroyed by its own action; it persists, it grows worse, as would happen in the biological world if the imprudent acts and excesses committed by the inhabitants of one hemisphere took their toll only upon the inhabitants of the other hemisphere.[5]

In this way, Bastiat pointed out a significant fact about liberty. When people are free, they are also responsible to bear the consequences of their actions. Moreover, those consequences, good or bad, are likely to fall primarily upon the one who acts. As the apostle Paul wrote, "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap."[6] In addition, when those consequences overflow to others, it will elicit the response of human solidarity. This reality establishes boundaries to human behavior. When a person acts foolishly or immorally, it often results in hardship and suffering. This suffering is a warning from God that he should change his behavior. Likewise, prosperity and success generally serve as signals that one's actions please our Lord. However, these signals will work well as long as people are unable to

impose the costs of their actions upon others. If human institutions are constructed in a way that allows people to transfer the costs of their behavior, then immorality can spread as the less-principled people among us seek to impose the costs of their immorality upon others. For this reason, the existence of material success is not the sufficient sign of moral living, and the occurrence of poverty is not the sufficient sign of immorality. To discern the issues of morality, we have to look more closely at the institutional structures and the human action that resulted in the prosperity or the poverty to make that assessment.

I believe that Bastiat was on the right road in his analysis. After all, consider the alternative. If the privilege of living a virtuous life is only possible for the poorest people among us, and the bane of immorality is the inevitable outcome for those who are well-off, what kind of society would be best? "We should therefore have to say that humanity is faced with the terrible alternatives of either remaining eternally poverty-stricken or of moving toward ever-increasing immorality. In accordance with this logic, all the forces that lead to wealth, such as enterprise, thrift, orderliness, skill, [and] honesty, are seeds of vice; whereas those that hold us back in poverty, like improvidence, idleness, dissipation, [and] negligence, are precious buds of virtue. Could a more discouraging discord be imagined in the moral world?"[7]

We know that suffering and hardship will end in heaven. Therefore, virtue and poverty cannot be linked. However, rather than rely on civil liberty as the foundation for human progress, societies everywhere have adopted various forms of coercive government. In each of these schemes, people are allowed to transfer the negative consequences of their immoral behavior. It was this point that caught the attention of Richard Weaver in his book, *Ideas Have Consequences*.[8] He compared the situation to that of a spoiled child. As Weaver put the matter:

> The spoiled child has not been made to see the relationship between effort and reward. He wants things, but he regards payment as an imposition or as an expression of malice by those who withhold for it. His solution ... is to abuse those who do not gratify him... The truth is that he has never been brought to see what it is to be a man. That man is a product of discipline and of forging, that he really owes thanks for the pulling and tugging that enable him to grow... This citizen is now the child of indulgent parents who pamper his appetites and inflate his egotism until he is unfitted for struggle of any kind... [If he could realize the reality that something greater than himself exists, if he could recognize the virtue of God] and not simply respond to coercion—he might genuinely realize human progress.[9]

Sadly, the hardship and suffering, brought on humanity by pandering to spoiled children has only led to further calls for more aggressive intervention.

The romantics and socialists among us point to such hardship as the sufficient reason to extend their favorite versions of coercion. In many of the Western societies these policies are promoted under the guise of securing the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people. "Demagogic leaders have told the common man that he is entitled to much more than he is getting; they have not told him the less-pleasant truth that, unless there is to be expropriation—which, in any case, is only a temporary resource—the increase must come out of greater productivity. Now all productivity requires discipline and subordination; the simple endurance of toil requires control of passing desire."[10] Of course, the demagogues rely almost exclusively on expropriation as their main means of providing the benefits that they promised when they were seeking election. As a result, their policies are largely destructive of the general welfare. Thus, the abandonment of liberty undercuts the chief means by which people actually recognize their own failings. Furthermore, since this hampers the ability of people to see their own sins, it also hinders their ability to repent of them. Beyond this fact, it also results in the situation where those who are more righteous are burdened more heavily by the suffering of the immoral actions of others. This world will always result in some imbalance because of sin; however, it ought not be the goal of man to extend it needlessly. Such an extension of human suffering would be tantamount to an attempt to crucify the Son of God again. Heaven forbid!

That this is indeed the case is borne out in the experience of the former Soviet Union. In that society, socialism was pervasive and coercion was the chief means of obtaining desirable ends. However, the system failed as greater immorality spread throughout the culture. Corruption of all sorts was rampant in the Soviet system and this immorality continues to hamper economic progress in Russia today. "Western economists have simply taken for granted the moral capital of the West. They have accepted it as a free lunch, as if it came without cost, like air and water. In fact, Russia's religious and moral capital was built up by one thousand years of patient development, but under seventy years of Communist mockery and abuse, such cultural capital has been covered with filth and sludge. In three generations, Russia's moral tradition has been buried so thoroughly that not more than a tiny flock of living persons has had full access to the moral knowledge possessed by their grandparents."[11]

J. Gresham Machen, a Presbyterian theologian of the early twentieth-century, saw the importance of liberty in promoting spiritual growth. He also understood the consequences that would follow the spread of socialism in all its forms. In his classic defense of traditional Christianity against the liberalism of his day he wrote:

> The whole development of modern society has tended mightily toward the limitation of the realm of freedom for the individual man... It never seems to occur to modern legislatures that although 'welfare' is good, forced welfare may be bad. In other words, utilitarianism is being carried out to its logical conclusions; in the interests of physical well-being the great principles of liberty are being thrown ruthlessly to the winds. The result is an unparalleled impoverishment of human life. Personality can only be developed in the realm of individual choice. And that realm, in the modern state, is being slowly but steadily contracted… When one considers what the public schools of America in many places already are—their materialism, their discouragement of any sustained intellectual effort, their encouragement of the dangerous pseudo-scientific fads of experimental psychology—one can only be appalled by the thought of a commonwealth in which there is no escape from such a soul-killing system... The truth is that the materialistic paternalism of the present day, if allowed to go on unchecked, will rapidly make of America one huge 'Main Street,' where spiritual adventure will be discouraged and democracy will be regarded as consisting in the reduction of all mankind to the proportions of the narrowest and least gifted of the citizens.[12]

Notes

1. Frederic Bastiat, *Economic Harmonies* (Irvington, N.Y.: Foundation for Economic Education, 1979).
2. Ibid., xxi.
3. Ibid., xxiii.
4. C. S. Lewis, "The Weight of Glory," In *The Weight of Glory and Other Essays* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1965), 1–2.
5. Bastiat, *Economic Harmonies*, xxx–xxxi.
6. Galatians 6:7.
7. Bastiat, *Economic Harmonies*, 38.
8. Richard M. Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948).
9. Ibid., 113–15.
10. Ibid., 124–25.
11. Michael Novak, *Business As a Calling: Work and the Examined Life* (New York: Free Press, 1996), 97.
12. J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (New York: Macmillan, 1934), 10–15.

Reply to Paul Cleveland's "Economic Liberty"

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I want to thank Professor Cleveland for his work in preparing such a helpful and theologically informed treatment of economic liberty. I found his analysis of Bastiat's divine pedagogy of suffering to be particularly insightful. However,

the issue that I want to address in this response, concerns the possibility of providing a moral case for economic liberty. Professor Cleveland raises this issue himself in the opening paragraph of his paper. Needless to say, we both agree that such a possibility exists. Professor Cleveland uses Bastiat's statement from the *Economic Harmonies* to address this possibility. As you will recall Bastiat writes: "All men's impulses, when motivated by legitimate self-interest, fall into a harmonious social pattern." Though I ultimately have no quarrel with this statement, I prefer to distinguish between different types of freedom, which, when taken together, can provide a strong moral case for economic liberty. The advantage of my approach may be that it enables us to develop a positive rationale for the morality of economic liberty.

It is important to begin by acknowledging that economic liberty is a subspecies of freedom in general. In the tradition of Christian social thought, freedom is generally divided into three types but not always with the following labels, negative freedom, positive freedom, and ontological freedom. Free-market thinkers such as Bastiat do a fine job of developing the concept of negative freedom, which can be defined as "the absence of coercion," but they usually have very little to say regarding the other two types. Consequently, freedom (and, by implication, economic liberty) is reduced to meaning the absence of external restriction or of any attempt to interfere with a person's rationally chosen end. I think that Bastiat's understanding of economic liberty can be classified as negative freedom. Thus, for him, social harmony results when people are left alone to pursue their legitimate self-interests. Professor Cleveland summarizes his view as follows: "Bastiat's concept of civil liberty … can be defined as the condition in which people are free from the arbitrary dictates of others…. When applied to the realm of economics, the establishment of civil liberty implies that a person is free to engage in any mutually agreeable exchange of goods that might be legitimately traded." The problem with Bastiat's view of negative freedom is not what it negates—arbitrary coercion by others—but that, taken by itself, it begs the question of why coercion or intervention is immoral in the first place. I would argue that one must have a full understanding of freedom in its positive, ontological, *and* negative dimensions to develop a sound moral case for economic liberty.

In *The Acting Person* and elsewhere, Karol Wojtyla offers a Christian personalist understanding of positive and ontological freedom that helps to overcome the moral ambivalence of negative freedom. Positive freedom, as Wojtyla understands it, follows from his account of self-determination, where self-determination is the idea that people choose to act in ways that show they are self-aware. "I will do x, but not y, if and only if she does z." It follows from the

fact of self-determination that people are ultimately responsible for their actions, as Bastiat also affirms. But transcendence is another aspect of positive freedom, and that is the freedom to act in accord with truth. In effect, then, every action ordered toward truth is also a step in the direction of freedom. Therefore, positive freedom can be defined as "the freedom *for* living a life that is in accord with the truth about the human person." Positive freedom presupposes that the human ability to act is seen not merely in terms of an absence of constraints but also in terms of what the goal of the action is. We must have not only the ability to act (i.e., freedom from coercion) but the ability to act toward some end that is worthy of our striving. For those who defend the morality of economic liberty, there must be an affirmation that the goal toward which an action is directed should be pursued. This means that some goods that may be legitimately (that is, legally) traded should not be traded because they undermine human dignity.

The concept of ontological freedom provides an even more compelling argument for the morality of economic liberty. Human beings, by virtue of their capacity for self-mastery, are aware of themselves as free in the sense that they are the authors of their own actions. Since the capacity for self-mastery is a constitutive and reflexive aspect of our humanity, it follows that freedom (what we are calling *ontological freedom*) is an essential part of what it means to be a human being. There can be no truly human act without a truly free actor. If an action is coerced, then the person fails to act as a person because, unlike animals, persons act in ways that exhibit self-possession, self-governance, and self-determination. To act in a fully human manner (which assumes acting in freedom), the action must be directed toward that which is true. This is so because actions are not merely internal states directed outwardly, but they also have an effect on the person acting. Actions directed toward ends other than the truth (or a person's basic good) can progressively undermine freedom as they are assimilated into the one who performs them. I think that Bastiat recognized to some extent the reality of positive and ontological freedom, for why else would he claim that people motivated only by self-love would act in such a way as to increase human flourishing?

The Primacy of Culture

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> "It is not possible to understand man on the basis of economics alone nor to define him simply on the basis of class membership. Man is understood in a more complete way when he is situated within the sphere of culture through his language, history, and the position he takes toward the fundamental events of life such as birth, love, work, and death. At the heart of every culture lies the attitude man takes to the greatest mystery: the mystery of God."
>
> —John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus* (no. 24)

Before jumping into my argument, let me tell a brief story. In 1998, I was at the meeting of the International Association for Christian Social Teaching in Angers, France. By coincidence, there was an international folk festival going on in the city the same weekend as our meeting. After one of our sessions, we went downtown to watch the folk festival parade.

I watched with Konstantin, my colleague from Russia. It was a gorgeous September afternoon with blue skies, and we enjoyed the colorful spectacle of dancers and musicians from various nations, each group dressed in festive costumes representative of their local traditions. One of the groups included Cossack dancers from Russia accompanied by a Russian band.

I asked Konstantin, "How do the Cossack dancers afford to come on this trip to France?" Konstantin thought I was asking about the state of the Russian economy, insinuating that the Russian currency was insufficient to pay for a trip to France. Trying to explain my question, I put it like this. "My son plays in a marching band in his high school. They travel to music festivals to perform, and in order to raise money for their trips, the band parents have formed an association. They sponsor various fundraisers throughout the year. Who paid for this group to be here? Is there an association such as the one I described?"

Konstantin looked at me with a stunned surprise. "The Russian government." This led to a long conversation about the free society, including the importance of a free culture and the place for social institutions other than the government or the market sector. The basic outline of the position that I tried to explain to Konstantin went something like this.

A Human Being Is Both an Individual and a Person[1]

Every human being is an individual. Considered in this way, one's materiality differentiates one from others. However, every human being is also a person. To be a human person includes both objectivity and subjectivity, both physicality and spirituality.[2] A person is endowed with the capacity for rational activity.[3] As such, every person is endowed with the capacity for self-reflection and interiority. The human person is a synthesis of two poles. On the one hand, every human person is always situated in one's physicality, in a particular environment, at a particular time and place, in a specific cultural milieu. On the other hand, every human person is endowed with the capacity to gain a critical distance from one's situation, to become self-aware, to reflect, and to become detached, taking up a stance over against one's position in the world.

Each of these two capacities, the ability to be immersed in the here-and-now as well as the ability to gain a critical distance from one's environment, is open to abuse. It is possible to throw oneself so completely into the moment, that one entirely neglects one's capacity for transcendence, for interiority, and for critical detachment. In this inauthentic mode of existence, one acts as if one is merely part of the crowd, neglecting that one is an individual person. Alternatively, it is possible to detach oneself from the everyday world, taking up the stance of a disengaged reasoner, acting as if one is detached and unrooted. Such a mode of existence latches onto a truth in the person—the ability to disengage—and then absolutizes this insight. The result is the deconstructed, decentered self of infinite masks that glories in radical solitariness and absolute self-determined choice. Either of these tendencies, unreflective immersion in the moment or hypereflective detachment from social attachments, is a distortion of authentic personhood.

Consequently, my first claim is that to be a human being involves both individuality and personhood. To be a person is to be an individual substance of a rational nature, endowed with the capacity for self-awareness and reflection. The human person is a synthesis of two poles (of embeddedness and detachment), a synthesis endowed with the capacity to realize oneself by making self-determining choices oriented toward the truth.

Personhood Is Developed Through Choice

The second step in my argument follows closely after the first: Personhood is developed through the choices one makes.[4]

One pole of the human person involves the whole range of concrete facticity. Each person is endowed with specific biological traits and genetic material. Each person has specific passions, talents, temperamental tendencies, and desires.

Each person is a product of a specific environment, history, and language, influenced by a specific social milieu. Each person is influenced by specific people at particular times and places in situated social institutions and a concrete social nexus.

The other pole of the human person involves the capacity to gain a critical distance from one's facticity. This involves the ability to reflect upon oneself and one's culture, to raise critical questions, to gain a detached perspective, to commune with transcendence, and to respond to the Divine.

Realizing oneself as a person involves developing the ability to make responsible choices that capture an appropriate equilibrium between these two poles. The decision to plunge oneself into facticity to the neglect of one's interiority and capacity for transcendence (a choice that is often made through duplicitous self-deception) is a choice that leads toward self-alienation rather than toward authentic self-development. Likewise, the decision to escape into abstraction in an unhealthy way such that one neglects one's commitments and responsibilities is likewise a turn-away from authentic self-realization.

In sum, personal self-realization is developed through the choices one makes. Authentic personal development involves making responsible choices that capture an appropriate balance between embeddedness and detachment.

Choices Get Repeated in Everyday Activity, Shaping One's Personhood

Personhood is shaped not only by big moments in life—in career choices, the decision to marry, the judgment to respond to a religious vocation, and so forth—but also and perhaps more important, in everyday activities repeated throughout one's life. Habits are formed by repeating choices that one makes. Little choices that one makes about how to navigate the balance between facticity and detachment, between social influences and the rejection of those influences, get repeated again and again throughout life. The accumulation of little choices, along with big, life-changing choices, together shape one's habits of character and form one's personality.

The Good of Authentic Personal Development Is Greater Than the Common Good[5]

While the common good is greater than the good of any individual (or as our high school football coach used to say, "There is no 'I' in 'TEAM'"), the good of the person is greater than the common good. The good of the person is something spiritual and eternal, while the common good is something temporal and passing. Further, the whole purpose for the common good is to promote the good of persons. The common good of a family (or an athletic team,

or a nation) is greater than the interests of any individual member of the group, but the common good of the group is not greater than the personhood of any individual member of the group.

The Good of Personal Development Demands Space to Make Responsible Choices

Since personhood is developed through responsible choices ordered toward truth, the good of authentic personal development demands space for each person to make one's own choices. Were someone's choices all made by another, it would deprive that person of the ability to develop his or her own habits. The development of authentic personal development, which is a great good, (even greater than any common good), is a good that is developed in a space where the person is appropriately influenced by positive factors yet given the opportunity to detach from others and make one's own choices.

This truth is seen in adolescent children developing the ability to make responsible choices. If an overbearing parent makes all of the adolescent's choices, the personality of the child will be stunted. On the other hand, if an adolescent is thrown into an overwhelming environment with a range of self-destructive options and too little positive influence about how to navigate such choices, the child will also likely fall into self-destructive choices. What is needed for authentic personal development is positive social influences, practice at making self-determining choices, and an appropriate space to make such decisions.

The Good of Personal Development Occurs Primarily in the Sphere of Culture

At this point in the argument, I am drawing a distinction between three spheres: the governmental sphere, the economic sphere, and the moral-cultural sphere. Among thinkers concerned with social questions, there is a tendency in some to focus solely on politics or economics to the neglect of the moral-cultural sphere. Yet, for the good of authentic personal development, the moral-cultural sphere is the most important.

In referring to the moral-cultural sphere, I am referring to a wide range of human activities and institutions. This includes not only artistic, literary, scientific, and intellectual pursuits, but also all of the social institutions involved in transmitting ways of living by human beings from one generation to the next. It helps to recall that the etymology of *culture* is the same as *cultivate*. The Latin origin means to till, since promoting growth in a crop is analogous to the cultivation of culture, of promoting talent, of fostering friendship, love, and the pursuit of truth. A culture is where we till and care for (*colere*) our development

as persons. Etymologically, it is correct to identify a culture with a place, since *colere* also means to inhabit. Our culture is where we live and where we till. There is a further etymological point that is helpful: At the root of culture is *cult*, a way of worship, a system of belief about what is ultimate and about what we should venerate.

The moral-cultural sphere includes families and neighborhoods, churches and clubs, bowling leagues and card groups, the arts and the sciences, language and literature, systems of meaning as well as the habits and practices by which we live together and seek the truth together. It is primarily at the level of culture that we develop the habits of making the choices that shape us as persons.

The Key Institution in the Sphere of Culture Is the Family

The most important institution in the moral-cultural sphere for the development of persons is the family. The family is a kind of school of deeper humanity.[6] There are a whole range of obvious factors that could be mentioned about the importance of the family for a healthy moral-cultural sphere: its centrality in passing on language, history, literature, music, science, medicine, love, social interactions, a sense of belonging, a sense of meaning, and so forth. Instead of reviewing these, I would like to call attention to the habit of self-reflection developed in a family. Consider the similarities and differences between a child's recognizing his face in a mirror and in his parent. It is well-known that one of the distinguishing features of humans is our ability for self-recognition in a mirror. What is less-noticed is how this phenomenon is almost always social in character. Almost always, it is a parent that points out to the child, "Look, it is you." This breakthrough into self-awareness, which usually occurs during the second year after birth, is also accompanied by a kind of joy, both on the part of the child and the parent. Along with the recognition on the part of the child that "the face in the mirror is my face," there is a growing recognition that "this is how I look to others." The child can then look into the eyes of the parents, which are also a kind of mirror, but a time mirror. The child can see his or her own likeness in the parent, both in the way the parent sees the child, and in the way the parent lives. The child can then reflect, "Do I want to be like that? What will I make of my life? Do I want to become like my parents? How would I be different?" A mirror provides a reflection that is separated in space, but a parent can provide a kind of time-reflection for the child. So, too, the child can be a time-reflection for the parent, bringing back long-forgotten thoughts or feelings. This capacity for reflection is tightly bound up with our capacity to make self-determining choices. The family provides a special opportunity for personal reflection and the development of the ability to make good choices.

The Most Important Ingredient for a Just Society Is a Healthy Moral-Cultural Sphere

From the preceding points, it follows that the most important ingredient for a just society is a healthy moral-cultural sphere. It is worth noting how this represents a challenge to the ways that modernity conceives of social justice.

Perhaps the most common way of thinking about social justice today is to think in terms of the government. According to this way of thinking, if we could just get a perfect government, then we could have a just society. The key, then, is to change the laws. Once we have just laws, we will have a just society.

Another common way of thinking about social justice is to focus primarily on the economy. If we could have a perfectly just economic order, then we would have a just society. Some think that a just economic order means that everyone would have an equal amount of material wealth, or that each would have what he or she needs. Others think that a just economic order means that everyone should have equal access to material wealth, and that there should be a level playing field. According to this line of thinking, as long as there is equal access, we will have social justice.

Both of these approaches are inadequate and incomplete. There is something missing from both those who identify social justice with a system of laws and from those who identify social justice with an economic system: the person. Both of these approaches put a primacy on "systems," but the person is not reducible to a system. Further, both miss the insight that justice is a virtue, a habit of character developed by choice that helps one develop as a person.

It follows, then, that the key to a just society is not primarily something at the level of the government or at the level of the economy but is primarily a healthy moral-cultural sphere. What is needed for social justice is a society that is both free and virtuous, where freedom is used responsibly to promote virtue and authentic personhood. What is needed is not primarily a change in laws (though that may be called for, in some cases) or a change in the economy (though that may be called for, as well), but a healthy moral-cultural sphere.

The Call to Work for Social Justice Is a Call for Moral-Cultural Change

The key to social justice is to have a society that promotes the dignity of the human person; that is, to promote a society that gives each person his or her due. Since a human person is a synthesis of concreteness and detachment endowed with the capacity to realize oneself by making self-determining choices oriented toward the truth, giving each person his or her due means allowing the person freedom to develop in virtue. The call to social justice (properly understood) is a call to a free and virtuous society.

A free society is composed of several spheres: a free polity, a free economy, and a free moral-cultural sphere. (Here is a topic for another day: In a society like ours, it strikes me that the kind of cultural change needed involves working to promote (1) an authentic understanding of freedom, (2) an appreciation of the importance of the family for authentic personal development, and (3) a culture of life.[7]) In this paper, I have tried to use a personalist argument to show the primacy of the moral-cultural sphere for the development of authentic personhood.

Notes

1. This is one of the central points in Jacques Maritain's *The Person and the Common Good*.

2. In this account, I am blending together three strands of personalism. Maritain describes the person in terms of two poles: the physical and the spiritual. Wojtyla describes the person in terms of objectivity and subjectivity. See Wojtyla's *Love and Responsibility* and *The Acting Person*. Kierkegaard describes personhood as a synthesis of two poles, one of facticity and one of detachment. See Kierkegaard's *Sickness Unto Death*.

3. The classic definition of the person is, from Boethius, "an individual substance of a rational nature." For a discussion of the meaning of being "endowed with capacities," see John Kavanaugh, *Who Counts As Persons?* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2001). Father Kavanaugh argues convincingly that humans whose capacities for rational activity are in development or impaired are still endowed with such capacities, and thus are deserving of the respect due to every human person.

4. This claim is shared both by the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition and by the tradition of existential personalism.

5. Maritain makes this point in a number of ways in his classic work, *The Person and the Common Good*. I take this to be a central tenet of personalism.

6. I have borrowed this phrase from *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 52.

7. There was a strong tendency in the twentieth century to separate freedom from virtue, so that freedom came to be understood merely as the ability to do whatever one wants to do. This unreflective tendency to distort the meaning of freedom has become a part of the broader culture, so that a free society is seen by many to be a society where each is allowed to choose whatever he or she wants, even death. In this way, when liberty is conceived of as license, the culture of tolerance becomes a culture of death.

A key challenge for those of us who want to promote social justice in a society such as ours is to promote reflection about the authentic meaning of the person, of dignity, and of freedom ordered toward goodness and truth. In this way, it might be possible to promote a culture that appreciates the importance of the family founded on marriage in which the mutual gift of self by husband and wife creates an environment in which children can be born and develop their abilities. Such a culture would be a culture of life.

Reply to Gregory Beabout's "The Primacy of Culture"

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I want to make only two points with respect to Professor Beabout's paper. The first is a quibble and the second is an idea to which reflection on the paper has given rise.

The quibble has to do with Professor Beabout's discussion of the common good. I suspect that our difference on this point is one of language and is a matter of clarification rather than of disagreement. The way the paper states the relationship between the individual person and the common good is this: The common good is "greater" than individual interests, but the good of authentic personal development is greater than the common good. I worry that this formulation does not sufficiently nuance the relationship between the person and the common good. More precisely, I worry that this formulation could be interpreted in such a way that it could allow the following kind of reasoning: It is good to be concerned about the common good, but in those cases where the common good and the personal good come into conflict, it is better to choose the personal good, because it is, in the final analysis, the more important (for the reasons Professor Beabout cites).

The language of "greater than" opens the possibility of conflict between the common good and the genuine personal good. This is a possibility, it seems, that Maritain (on whom the paper draws) would deny. Let us consider more carefully Maritain's discussion in *The Person and the Common Good*. The common good, he states, is "subordinate" to the personal good, but not as a "pure means"—that is, not as means to end—but as an "infravalent end."[1] Thus, within its own order, the common good is an end, not a means. Yet, considering the spiritual and eternal end of the person (as Professor Beabout notes), the good of the person transcends the common good of society. There is, of course, much more that could be said here—for instance, a discussion of the definition of the common good itself. I will leave it to the discussants and the moderator to determine if we should pursue that line. I will end this point with two quotes that I see as crucial for understanding the relation between the person and the common good. The first is from Maritain in *The Person and the Common Good*:

> The person as person insists on serving the common good freely. It insists on this while tending toward its own fullness, while transcending itself and the community in its movement toward the transcendent Whole. The person as an individual is necessarily bound, by constraint if need be, to serve the community and the common good since it is excelled by them as the part by the whole.
>
> This paradox, this tension, and this conflict are something natural and inevitable. Their solution is not static but dynamic.[2]

More concisely, there is this statement, in a letter from Yves Simon to Maritain: "To the degree that a created person is a person there is a tendency toward coincidence of personal good and common good."[3]

The second issue, the idea to which the paper gave rise, has to do with the very nature of the economic personalist enterprise. It raises questions such as: What will be its preferred subject matter? What will be its thrust?

I propose that the following argument, if not made explicit, is nonetheless contained in Professor Beabout's paper. One premise is: The most important ingredient for a just society is a healthy moral-cultural sphere. Another premise is: The most important ingredient for a healthy moral-cultural sphere is a strong family life. The conclusion, then, is that the most important ingredient for a just society is a strong family life.

This paper has prompted me to think that perhaps a discussion of family life as a key factor in the creation and maintenance of a free and virtuous society ought to be an important part of economic personalism. Perhaps, then, a sentence on the family should be part of the statement of principles that this conference aims to produce. A logical place for such a sentence, it seems, would be under the heading "primacy of culture." Another possibility would be under "the importance of social institutions."

Notes

1. Jacques Maritain, *The Person and the Common Good*, trans. John J. Fitzgerald (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1948), 44.

2. Ibid., 54.

3. Yves R. Simon to Jacques Maritain, 11 December 1945. Quoted in Ralph McInerny, "The Primacy of the Common Good," in *The Common Good and U.S. Capitalism*, eds. Oliver F. Williams and John W. Houck (Lanham, Md.: University of America Press, 1987), 82, n. 19. The statement was one of a series Simon drafted to mediate an agreement between Maritain and Charles De Koninck.

Statement of Principles for Economic Personalism

Dignity of the Person - The human person, by virtue of being created *imago Dei*, is an independent substance, individually unique, rational, the subject of moral agency, and a co-creator. Accordingly, he possesses intrinsic value and dignity, implying certain rights and duties with respect to the recognition and protection of the dignity of himself and other persons. These truths about the dignity of the human person are known through revelation, but they are also discernible through reason.

Social Nature of the Person - Although persons can find ultimate fulfillment only in communion with God, one essential aspect of the development of persons is our social nature and capacity for action directed to disinterested ends. The person achieves fulfillment through participation in moral goods that are at the root of human flourishing, and interaction with other persons. There are voluntary relations of exchange, for example, such as market transactions that fundamentally realize economic value. But these relations of exchange may also give rise to moral value as well. There are also voluntary relations of mutual dependence, such as promises, friendships, marriages, and the family, which fundamentally constitute moral goods. But these, too, may also coincide with the realization of other sorts of value, such as religious, economic, aesthetic, and so on.

Importance of Social Institutions - Owing to the social nature of the person, various social institutions have developed within human societies. The institutions of civil society, especially the family, are the primary sources of a society's moral culture. While these social institutions are neither created by nor derive their legitimacy from the state, government must both respect their autonomy and provide the support necessary to ensure the free and orderly operation of all social institutions in their respective spheres.

Human Action - Human persons are by nature acting persons. Through human action, the person is able to actualize his potentiality by freely choosing the moral goods that fulfill his nature.

Subsidiary Role of Government - The government's primary responsibility is to promote the common good, that is, to maintain the rule of law and to preserve basic duties and rights. Although the government's role is not to usurp

free actions, it must attempt to minimize those conflicts that may arise when the free actions of persons and social institutions result in competing interests. This responsibility should be conducted according to the principle of subsidiarity. This principle has two components. First, jurisdictionally broader institutions must refrain from usurping the proper functions that should be performed autonomously by the person and institutions more immediate to him. Second, jurisdictionally broader institutions should assist individual persons and institutions more immediate to the person when these are incapable of performing their proper functions until such time as they can resume these proper functions.

Creation of Wealth - Material impoverishment undermines the conditions that facilitate human flourishing. The most effective means of reducing poverty is to protect private property rights by means of the rule of law. This will give people the opportunity to enter into voluntary exchange circles in which to express the creative dimension of their nature as persons.

Economic Liberty - Liberty, in a positive sense, is achieved by fulfilling one's nature as a person by virtue of having freely chosen to do what one ought. Economic liberty is a species of liberty so-stated. As such, the bearer of economic liberty has not only certain rights, but also duties. An economically free person, for example, must be free to enter the market voluntarily. Hence, there is a duty on the part of those who have the power to interfere with the market to remove any artificial barrier to entry in the market, and also to protect private property rights as well as shared property. But the economically free person will also bear the duty to others to participate in the market as a moral agent and in accordance with moral goods. It is crucial, then, that the law guarantees private property rights and voluntary exchange.

Economic Value - In economic theory, economic value is subjective because its existence depends on it being felt by a subject. Economic value is the significance that a subject attaches to a thing whenever he perceives a causal connection between this thing and the satisfaction of a present, urgent want. But the subject may be wrong in his value judgment such that he attributes value to a thing that, in fact, will not or cannot satisfy his present, urgent want. The truth of economic value judgments is settled by those facts about the thing that make it the case that it can satisfy the relevant want as expected by the agent. While this does not imply the realization of any other sort of value by virtue of its economic value, the latter is not incompatible with the simultaneous realization of moral value in the thing by virtue of its objective moral goodness.

Priority of Culture - Liberty flourishes in a society supported by a moral culture that embraces the truth about the transcendent origin and destiny of the human person. This moral culture leads to harmony and the proper ordering of society. While the various institutions within the political, economic, and other spheres are important, the family is the primary inculcator of the moral culture in a society.

Significance of Interdisciplinary Work - The fundamental task of every discipline is to seek truth. Although each discipline is confined to a specific area of investigation, the truths discovered by any one discipline cannot contradict those discovered by another. This assertion is itself founded on a truth of logic called the principle of noncontradiction. According to this principle, if it is the case that something is, then it cannot simultaneously be the case that it is not. Nonetheless, reconciling the claims of different disciplines is a difficult project. But if the claims are valid and sound, they must be ultimately compatible and thus broaden our understanding of the world. Herein lies the significance of academic cooperation among scholars who specialize in areas pertaining to different disciplines.