

Nine Libertarian Heresies Tempting Neoconservative Catholics to Stray from Catholic Social Thought

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For the last four decades, a number of “neoconservative” Christian scholars have worked to great benefit in articulating the moral foundations of capitalism and its positive moral effects in socializing market participants. This has been much-needed work, as the Christian churches still have not grappled adequately with the systematic moral defense of self-interest in market relationships that has been employed in secular thought for three hundred years.¹ At the same time, however, many involved in this affirmation of capitalism have too easily found common cause with others on the political right, in particular libertarians, whose fundamental view of the human person and morality is at odds with a Christian and, in particular, a Catholic view of life.

There is no doubt that we need markets and economic freedom, individual ownership of property (including businesses), personal economic initiative, individual creativity, and a host of other things advocated by the people I will be criticizing in this essay. The point is that we cannot adequately sort out issues we face as people of faith unless we have a careful and self-critical understanding of religious social thought, something that neoconservative Catholics too often do not exhibit. For many, the tendency is to cultivate a sense of fidelity to the Catholic tradition by employing the parts of it they like while ignoring what they do not. Following the publication of Pope John Paul II’s *Centesimus Annus*, Michael Novak claimed the pope was a capitalist² even though the pope said in that encyclical that after the fall of the Soviet Union it was an error to claim capitalism as “the only model of economic organization.”³

However, the focus of this essay is not simply the selectivity of neoconservatives but on how unacknowledged libertarian presumptions in their work distort Catholic thinking. It is out of a need for a balanced affirmation of markets that I criticize those who advocate markets most energetically.

I would add a clarification about my use of the word *heresy* in this essay. On the one hand, I use that word informally, not intending it to refer only to errors formally condemned by church authorities. By heresy, I mean a conviction about humanity or morality conflicting with standard Catholic assumptions, particularly as articulated in official papal teaching. On the other hand, I neither claim that all libertarians hold every heresy identified here nor that all libertarians who hold any one of these heresies employ the same rationale for it. Nor do I claim that any particular neoconservative Catholic scholar is tempted by all of these heresies or holds any one of them in its pure libertarian form. The heresies operate more as lures that pull such scholars away from their Catholic roots. Furthermore, I do not claim that all neoconservative Catholic scholars are equally susceptible to going astray in this manner. It is very difficult to provide an accurate general critique of a group when it comprises considerable diversity, as is the case for neoconservative Catholics. The argument here, however, is that there has developed too close an intellectual relationship between a number of Catholic scholars and libertarianism. Much of what is wrong about libertarianism from the Catholic perspective has been integrated into purportedly Catholic ethical reflection on the economy.

Nine Heresies

Freedom

Heresy #1: *Governments violate people's freedom when they force people to act in particular ways (beyond forbidding theft, force, and fraud).* For libertarians, any government prohibitions beyond preventing theft, force, and fraud violate the freedom of citizens. The libertarian notion of freedom is that I act freely if I am the source of the decision to act. It is for this reason that some libertarians such as Robert Nozick have even argued that voluntary slavery (that is, a choice to enter into a contract to be a slave) should be made legal.⁴

The Catholic view of freedom is not this sort of “self-initiation” but rather the choice for self-fulfillment. To put it simply from the Catholic point of view, one cannot freely choose to be a drug addict or a slave. The fact that we end up shriveled, unfulfilled, and enslaved means that the choice was not free.

Neoconservative Catholics do not endorse all of the dimensions of freedom that libertarians endorse. However, one finds echoes of the libertarian view of freedom in their defense of right-wing economic policies. One of the key arguments of scholars on the political right has been against the use of government to legislate certain kinds of morality or to raise taxes to fund assistance for others. For example, in his book, *Catholic Social Teaching and the Market Economy*, Philip Booth has argued that “the state should not attempt to protect or alter a society’s moral ecology in ways that seek to force people to acquire virtuous dispositions.”⁵ Of course, too much tinkering is both inefficient and immoral, and no law can ever force a change in disposition. Law can, however, encourage it and support cultural changes already underway due to other causes. Booth’s statement would seem to indicate that laws against slavery, wife beating, and racial discrimination at lunch counters (to name but three laws that have contributed to an altered moral ecology in the United States) would somehow violate the proper role of government.

In contrast to Booth, Pope John Paul II has referred to the exercise of “true freedom,” constrained by the truth in part through a “juridical framework” for the market.⁶ As Thomas Aquinas argued, some people “must be restrained from evil by force and fear,” and “by being habituated in this way, might be brought to do willingly what hitherto they did from fear and thus became virtuous.”⁷

Neoconservatives often take a different approach. Father Robert Sirico demeans the moral significance of paying taxes:

If we are required to do anything by law, and thereby forced by public authority to undertake some action, we comply because we must. That we go along with the demand is no great credit to our sense of humanitarianism or charity. The impulse here is essentially one of fear: we know that if we fail to give, we will find ourselves on the wrong side of the state.⁸

Such a position would imply that the manager who virtuously avoids sexually harassing his female workers can no longer do so out of virtue the day after the state government makes sexual harassment illegal, surely a misunderstanding of the moral life.

A typical neoconservative claim is that “if solidarity is a virtue, it cannot be coerced,” so forced solidarity is “morally empty.”⁹ It is true that someone who avoids evil only because it is illegal is not virtuous, but the presence of a law does not of itself eviscerate the morality of action.

The Character of Justice, Part 1

Heresy #2: *Justice is commutative justice*. For libertarians, justice is no more than commutative justice, that standard of justice that should prevail in one-to-one voluntary transactions. For libertarians, distributive justice is wrong-headed and immoral. For the government to raise taxes to pay for goods or services provided to the needy violates the ownership rights of taxpayers. Many libertarians see taxation as theft.

In the Catholic view, there are three dimensions to justice. Commutative justice requires fair treatment in one-to-one relationships. Distributive justice requires that actions and institutions related to owning and using the goods of the earth must ensure that the needs of all are met. General justice (sometimes called legal or even social justice) refers to the obligation that every person has to contribute to society and to the obligation that societies have to enable all persons to so contribute.¹⁰

As a part of distributive justice, Catholic social thought defends the notion of economic rights. However, these have never been understood simply as claims on the public that individuals can exercise without making an effort to provide for themselves because both effort and contribution to society are required by general justice. Yet, papal teaching has long insisted that those who cannot provide for themselves do indeed have a right to basic necessities.¹¹ Pope Benedict XVI explains the importance of “political action, conceived as a means for pursuing justice through distribution.”¹²

Michael Novak has long criticized the Catholic notion of such “economic” rights,¹³ but perhaps a more instructive place where some neoconservative Catholics have adopted libertarian views of economic life has to do with the justice of prices and wages (the price of labor). Libertarians believe that the voluntary character of exchange generates justice because it ensures that both parties to an agreement will improve their situation, otherwise one or the other would have refused to participate.

However, as Albino Barrera, OP, has argued, in some circumstances markets generate “economic compulsion.”¹⁴ In *Rerum Novarum*, Pope Leo XIII taught that

there is a dictate of nature more imperious and more ancient than any bargain between man and man, that the remuneration must be enough to support the wage earner in reasonable and frugal comfort. If through necessity or fear of a worse evil, the workman accepts harder conditions because an employer or contractor will give him no better, he is the victim of force and injustice.¹⁵

From the Catholic point of view, neither mutual consent nor mutual gain is enough to guarantee commutative justice.

In contrast, many neoconservative Catholics reject the idea of the unjust wage—and reject the minimum-wage laws designed to prevent such “force and injustice.” Sirico objects on the grounds that minimum-wage laws “require the coercive hand of government to interrupt the voluntary actions of people acting in the free market,” telling a person without a job “that he or she cannot voluntarily negotiate a salary or wage with anyone he or she wants to.”¹⁶ Sirico makes no reference to Pope Leo’s arguments and instead sounds close to those of Robert Nozick, whose views have been described as elevating “the unimpeded exercise of the will into the supreme principle of morality.”¹⁷ Catholic neoconservative economist Antony Davies resists such arguments and instead claims that markets do indeed pay just wages.¹⁸

More frequently, neoconservatives simply ignore or marginalize concerns for justice. In *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism*, Michael Novak cites six theological themes important for a moral assessment of the economy—incongruously, justice does not make the list but competition does.¹⁹ Rodger Charles, SJ, in his two-volume work *Christian Social Witness in Teaching*,²⁰ purports to treat Thomas Aquinas’s perspective on the just price, yet inexplicably fails to report its central claims. For Aquinas, it was legitimate for a seller to charge a higher than normal price if he had an unusual need for the object at the time of sale, but it was immoral for the seller to raise the price simply because a buyer was willing to pay more.²¹

A number of neoconservatives have argued that premodern teaching on the just price actually endorsed the market price as the just price. However, if medieval scholars thought the market price in all circumstances was just, they would not have needed to include a special section on the just price in so many theological treatises. How to apply the just-price doctrine in markets is perhaps the greatest intellectual challenge facing Catholic economic ethics today. To respond properly, however, we must face the challenge directly.

Methodological Individualism

Heresy #3: *There is no such thing as society.* Friedrich Hayek argued that there is no such thing as war or society because these are simply shorthand ways of referring to interactions of individuals in large groups.²² Under methodological individualism, social scientists were supposed to explain an event by tracing it back to the thoughts and motivations of the individuals involved in the situation,

never to any social realities because these cannot have any causal effect independent of the individuals active at the time.

The inadequacy of this individualistic interpretation of the world is amply demonstrated by the sociologist's analysis of the interplay of individual agency and social structure. Margaret Archer helpfully describes this interaction by identifying the mutual causal influence and relative autonomy of these two dimensions to social life.²³ Archer resists the extremes of individualism, like Hayek's, that denies causal effect to structures, and of collectivism that envisions individuals as pawns simply pushed around by the social system.

In Archer's view, individuals are indeed the agents, but their agency is both restricted and facilitated by preexisting structures. Enablements make it easier for some people to do things; restrictions make it harder. Thus I, who was born in the United States, benefit greatly from the preexisting social fact that a very large number of scholars around the world can read English, while other scholars who grew up in Italy, Brazil, or Sri Lanka either have a much smaller potential audience or must pay an additional price (having to write in a second language).

Such restrictions and enablements are "emergent properties" that arise from the long-term interaction of human beings. They are created (often unintentionally) by humans, and, once in existence, they provide the structural framework that raises or lowers the price of certain actions for actors, typically in different ways depending on the actor's social location, with the poor facing more restrictions and fewer enablements. This does not mean the individual is determined to do this or that, but there is indeed a kind of structured causality, a causal force among others impinging on the individual, that occurs independent of the individual.

Official Catholic teaching reflects this dual analysis of structure and agency. Various popes have spoken of the influence of social structures in the lives of individuals, particularly the poor. Pope John Paul II identified what he called "the subjectivity" of society in recognition of the fact that, beyond the ideas and actions of individuals, structures arise out of the actions of persons in the past and subsequently have an independent influence.²⁴

Neoconservative Catholics rarely adopt the extreme version of methodological individualism, but many nonetheless ally themselves with some of the most individualistically inclined thinkers in the realm of economics, particularly the Austrian school of economics. In *Beyond Self-interest: A Personalist Approach to Human Action*, Gregory R. Beabout et al. endorse the individualistic method of Ludwig von Mises that "to understand a group is only to understand the meaning that individual members attach to their activities."²⁵

No one wants to be known as extremist, and in defending the use of an individualistic anthropology in *The Free Person and the Free Economy*, Anthony

Santelli and coauthors argue that their position (largely shared with von Mises) is not extremist because they are not “atomistic individualists”: they understand human action as embedded in social life.²⁶ The real extremists, they argue, endorse “moral individualism” in which individuals “tend to avoid marriage and family life, as well as various forms of intimacy.”²⁷ In *Human Nature and the Discipline of Economics*, Patricia Donahue-White et al. describe moral individualism as entailing “living life completely for one’s own sake, blind to the needs of others, and failing to maintain lasting social relationships.”²⁸

This self-perception of avoiding right-wing positions falls short. There seems to be no one, not even Ayn Rand, that most extreme of individualists, who holds so extreme a moral individualism. In truth, there is no school of economics to the right of the Austrians. Neoconservatives who adopt the Austrian view stand on the extreme right of social anthropology, far from the more centrist view of the human person in Catholic social thought.

The Character of Justice, Part 2

Heresy #4: *Justice is a virtue of individuals, never a character of systems.* Friedrich Hayek famously argued that there is no such thing as social justice.²⁹ As he puts it, “the concept of ‘social justice’ is necessarily empty and meaningless ... because nobody’s will can determine the relative incomes of the different people.”³⁰ Hayek’s view of justice here is clearly dependent on his earlier methodological individualism. Because all causality must be traced to individual decisions, there is no systemic causality and, thus, no way to judge such causality just or unjust in its treatment of people.

However, in Catholic social thought, there is indeed a social causality along the sociological lines described earlier and, thus, there is social justice. The term *social justice* was first employed in papal teaching by Pope Pius XI in *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931), where Pius associated social justice with the attainment of the common good and obligations of the wealthy as a class to care for the poor.³¹

In spite of this papal teaching, some Catholic theologians have largely endorsed Hayek’s point of view. Michael Novak, for example, wants to restrict the notion of social justice to individual virtue. “Social justice is a virtue, an attribute of individuals, or it is a fraud.”³² The notion should not be applied to an economy, a polity, or a social system as a whole.

Contrary to papal teaching, Novak claims that “the minute one begins to define social justice, one runs into embarrassing intellectual difficulties.... In other words, it becomes an instrument of ideological intimidation, for the purpose of gaining the power of legal coercion.” Novak claims that “the birth of the

concept of social justice coincided with two other shifts in human consciousness: the ‘death of God’ and the rise of the ideal of a command economy.”³³ Because every pope since Pius XI has endorsed the notion of social justice but none of them has endorsed either the death of God or a command economy, it would seem that Novak has not attended to the intellectual origins of the *Catholic* idea of social justice, perhaps because on this issue he holds a position closer to libertarianism than to Catholicism.

This restriction of justice to persons is shared by a number of other neoconservatives who argue that “structures in themselves cannot be good or bad.”³⁴ However, Pope John Paul II argued that nations need to reform certain “unjust structures.”³⁵ Catholic social thought rejects individualistic construals of justice.

Property

Heresy #5: *Property is a natural right, giving the owner complete control over the thing owned.* For libertarians, property tends to be a univocal concept. Persons own property, whether land or other things, material or intellectual. Once a person rightfully owns something, having either produced it or rightfully obtained it in exchange, no other person or group has any right to force the owner to use it in one way or another. What property is and what property rights entail are by no means simple matters, as scores of laws are necessary to define property rights (e.g., does your next door neighbor have the right to turn his garage into a convenience store?) and to specify how the inevitable conflicts over property rights should be adjudicated.

The Catholic notion of property has its roots in the Scriptures, the early church, and medieval teaching. In the Hebrew Scriptures, because the earth is a gift of God, there is a pervasive sense that the well-to-do have an obligation to care for the poor, both by choice and by means of legal requirements, such as harvest rules and the sabbatical and jubilee years. The classic Catholic argument in understanding property ownership is provided by Thomas Aquinas, who endorses personal ownership because it is efficient but, at the same time, insists on the “common use” of property, because in creation God intends that the material goods of the earth meet everyone’s needs. This teaching has been reaffirmed and extended institutionally by all of the modern papal social encyclicals. Pope John Paul II clearly advocated governments raising taxes to ensure, for example, “in every case the necessary minimum support of the unemployed worker.”³⁶

Neoconservative Catholics have generally avoided or downplayed the notions of common use and economic rights and instead call for a narrower definition of property. In *Economic Thinking for the Theologically Minded*,³⁷ Samuel Gregg

cites the three reasons Aquinas gives in defending the ownership of property by individuals but fails to mention the next two sentences where Thomas explains the obligation of common use: that “man ought to possess external things, not as his own, but as common, so he is ready to share them with others in their need.”³⁸

A typical example of neoconservative overstatement of property rights occurs when Santelli et al. argue that “in a free market people are permitted to buy, sell, own, exchange, and consume anything to which they have a rightful claim.”³⁹ The authors would seem to imply here that it is illegitimate for government to block particular exchanges, such as insider trading or the sale of cocaine or votes on election day. Philip Booth says quite openly that “taxation, of course, violates private property.”⁴⁰

Personal ownership is valued highly in the Catholic tradition, but as Pope John II put it, “private property, in fact, is under a social mortgage,”⁴¹ something the legal institutionalization of property must respect. It is telling that neoconservatives have generally ignored John Paul II’s claim that the ownership of capital is illegitimate if profits come not from creating employment in society but from curbing it.⁴²

The Market

Heresy #6: *The market is natural and morally neutral.* One of the fundamental convictions of most libertarians is that the market, where individuals encounter each other in voluntary exchange, is simply a natural interchange and as such is morally neutral in the sense that the individuals who voluntarily contract with each other in the market provide any and all meaning attached to economic exchanges. Hayek goes so far as to claim that this neutrality of the market is a great moral advance in human history, overcoming traditional “tribal” cultures that have stressed fellow-feeling within the group, a sentiment behind wars of all kinds.⁴³

The Catholic view is that markets are indeed human constructs—and that they should serve the human person in subsidiarity and solidarity. Pope John Paul II made this very clear when he spoke of the need for a proper “juridical framework” for the market, in large part to prevent too great an imbalance of power between market participants.⁴⁴

Neoconservative Catholics rarely go as far as Hayek, but Santelli et al. argue that “markets arise naturally and spontaneously from the logic of choice.”⁴⁵ Their endorsement of methodological individualism and the view of human action of the Austrian school of economics lead most to agree that to understand the meaning of market interactions “is only to understand the meaning that individual members attach to their activities.”⁴⁶

Catholic neoconservative William McGurn deals in part with the issue of morality and market neutrality by attempting to draw a bright line between two areas of life, one where the market appropriately holds sway and another where it should not (where fundamental Christian moral values call for prohibitions in economic life against slavery, abortion, opiates, and so forth). However, this artificial bifurcation of life is doomed to failure. Everything that happens in markets includes a moral dimension, whether employee-employer relationships, market transactions that impact the environment, or consumers purchasing goods in hopes of achieving a better life. In each of these areas, market forces encourage certain strategies and actions and discourage others. We need a moral evaluation of them all.

Markets are neither natural nor morally neutral; they are constructed, and the choice of rules and regulations for markets (their juridical framework) has a deep impact on human fulfillment.

Our Options Politically

Heresy #7: Our policy choice today is between free markets and central planning. Once they presume that the market or “the market economy” is a univocal entity having only one meaning (and not dependent on a myriad of decisions about the juridical framework), it is then quite easy for libertarians to presume that our policy choice today is between free markets and central planning. This has been a part of the libertarian argument for many years.

There is a great rhetorical advantage to pretending this is the choice we face. However, long before the fall of the Soviet Union, the debates that occurred in the legislative assemblies of Western democracies had nothing to do with that choice but rather with a choice among alternative ways of structuring markets.

Here again, Pope John Paul II has articulated this insight far better than the neoconservatives who claim to endorse his views. The pope’s talk about juridical framework for markets and his providing both a yes and a no in evaluating capitalism stands as a reminder that there are varieties of markets and important moral choices are involved therein.⁴⁷

Neoconservative Catholics, however, have taken up the false choice of “markets or central planning.”⁴⁸ Quite typical is the claim that there ought to be “few, if any restrictions” on markets.⁴⁹

A sizable portion of this extremism concerning markets and government is attributable to the phrase “the free market” because no one, including the most radical of libertarians, actually recommends a truly unrestricted market where there would be no laws about what would be allowed. Even libertarians want government to enforce laws against theft, force, and fraud, and other political

perspectives to the left of libertarianism have a longer list of prohibitions considered essential for basic justice to occur.

Thus a rhetorically advantageous invisibility of much necessary government activity is a central part of the libertarian and neoconservative defense of free markets. This prevailing inclination to ignore the beneficial role of government appears, for example, in neoconservative praise of more open trade: “History has shown that free trade is the best guarantor of human rights.”⁵⁰ However, to think that economic exchange plays a greater role in human rights than the democratically chosen legal prohibitions against violations of human rights (i.e., laws against murder, torture, rape, and so forth) would seem to seriously misunderstand social causality.

Catholic social thought allows for a range of options in structuring the economy. Here is where our real choices lie—not in a fictitious pitting of free markets against central planning.

Government and the Economy

Heresy #8: *Governments intervene in markets, which is a bad thing.* Our earlier descriptions of libertarian political philosophy indicates that libertarians aim for a minimal government that will enforce rules against theft, force, and fraud but will not otherwise intervene in people’s lives. Thus any government attempts to make the market more just are not only doomed to failure but are also violations of individuals’ rights to interact with one another as they see fit.

The Catholic view of markets, as we have seen, requires that governments establish a juridical framework to structure markets for the common good; thus it is not a bad thing that governments have a strong role in defining markets as long as it is done properly.

Neoconservative Catholics side quite strongly with libertarians on this issue. While they acknowledge a larger role for government in the economy than libertarians do (e.g., to forbid a number of morally objectionable activities such as prostitution, abortion, and so forth), their general discussion of government action in markets employs the noninterventionist paradigm. Thus Samuel Gregg defines intervention as “interference with natural market processes,”⁵¹ and objects to such intervention as founded on the false notion that “the market cannot regulate itself.”⁵² He opposes “interventionists,” who “do not believe that trade within a free market will produce benefit for everyone involved.”⁵³ Modern Catholic social thought has consistently argued that markets cannot regulate themselves and that they frequently leave vast numbers of people outside the benefits they generate for many.

Gregg also argues for a clear distinction between what he calls “the rule of law” (a good idea) and regulation of the economy (a bad one).⁵⁴ However, there is no bright line between the two. Nearly all forms of law and regulation concerning the economy are prohibitions against doing something or against doing it in some abusive way. The reality is that in setting rules for the economy (both laws and regulations) governments do not intervene in markets; they structure markets, aiming to prevent the worst abuses. The libertarian arguments against intervention are rhetorically helpful to them because such language implies a bright line like the one Gregg attempts to draw. In reality, of course, the debate is over which actions or which particular ways of doing something are sufficiently abusive that government ought to forbid them.⁵⁵

In Catholic social thought, governments must not replace markets but must structure them in service to justice and the common good.

Convenient Causal Asymmetry

Heresy #9: *Government-related failures constitute definitive evidence against reliance on government, but market-related failures do not count as evidence against reliance on markets.* Libertarians have for many years employed a double standard in evaluating markets and government: they exhibit *a priori* aversion to relying on government and an *a priori* inclination to relying on markets. Thus, for example, in the debate over education policy, a student’s underachievement is often attributed to badly run public schools (a government system) and not to family, culture, or an inner-city environment. On the other hand, in the debates over the welfare system, an unskilled worker’s unemployment is attributed to family and environment—the culture of poverty—and not to a market system that provides too few jobs for the number of people seeking them.

Government failure is often attributed to the unintended consequences of shortsighted legislators. Since no legislator is omniscient, the libertarian solution is to stop the government from making so many decisions. However, unintended negative consequences of market transactions—such as atmospheric pollution, economic recessions, or consumerism—are rarely blamed on markets and are instead described as unfortunate consequences of free individual initiative.

Neoconservatives have quite frequently employed the double standard approach libertarians have found popular. William McGurn analyzes the Enron and other corporate corruption schemes and sees them not as the result of markets where competitive pressures encourage the cutting of moral corners but rather as the result of a flawed culture and immoral individuals.⁵⁶ Robert Sirico similarly described the corruption and failure of Long-Term Capital Management as

“not institutional failure but human failure.” Sirico goes so far as to say, “What does any of this have to do with corporate greed or the failures of the capitalist system? Nothing. Critics who say that it does have confused human error with a social structure of sin itself.”⁵⁷ Philip Booth even attributes the “exploitation of individuals or resources by multinational corporations” in the developing world to the failure of governments there to fulfill their roles “of protecting and enforcing property rights and contracts.”⁵⁸

Similarly, consumerism (which neoconservative Catholics have rightly criticized) is understood not as an unfortunate result of large firms convincing people through advertising to buy things they ought not but instead as the result of a defective culture, weak individual choice, and misplaced values.⁵⁹

Underneath this set of arguments is the question of whether markets encourage virtuous activity. A wide variety of neoconservatives have argued that markets encourage such virtues as cooperation, perseverance, and honesty because with these things you are more likely to succeed in the market.⁶⁰ However, it is far more accurate to say that the market will encourage anything that will lead you to be more successful in the market. Markets encourage not just virtues but also some very nasty behaviors, including corruption, murder of one’s competitors (as is currently happening in Russia), and a host of other morally disruptive behaviors. Most of these are less obvious to us in the United States because they are infrequent: we have already passed laws against them—a critical contribution of government to morality that neoconservatives tend to ignore.

Conclusion

The nine libertarian heresies just identified are provided here not as a theological treatise but simply to encourage clearer thinking about the relation of morality and economic life in Christian ethics. As mentioned earlier, the argument here has been that too many neoconservative Catholics have found such libertarian ways of thinking attractive and have integrated “un-Catholic” elements of libertarian thought and rhetoric into their moral arguments while claiming simultaneously that they stand within the Roman Catholic tradition.

I do not claim that any neoconservative Catholic endorses any one of these libertarian heresies exactly the way libertarians define them (though some come close) or that any is tempted by all nine of these. However, there is sufficient evidence that the discrepancy between neoconservative Catholics and church positions on the economy is large. Neoconservatives have done much selective reading of official church teaching in recent decades and employ a more individualistic

orientation than Catholic moral theology can warrant. (I should add here that many liberationist Catholics on the left engage in an analogous picking and choosing from Catholic social thought in defense of their position as well.)

My hope here is not to raise hackles and even less to insult colleagues striving to relate economic life and Christian morality. Rather, this is a call for more careful and self-critical articulation of the view of Catholic social thought and an avoidance of the temptation to hold free markets and individual freedom as first principles and then to employ only those portions of Catholic social thought that would provide warrants for this starting point. Our globalized world needs the insights of the full depth and complexity of the Catholic tradition.

Notes

1. We might mark the start of this defense of self-interest in markets from 1705, with the publication of Bernard Mandeville's *The Fable of the Bees* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924).
2. Michael Novak, *The Catholic Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Free Press, 1993), 101.
3. Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus* (May 15, 1991), 35. For a fuller treatment of the many ways Novak strays from the work of John Paul II, see Todd David Whitmore, "John Paul II, Michael Novak, and the Difference Between Them," *Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics*, 21 (2001): 215–32.
4. Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974), 331.
5. Philip Booth, *Catholic Social Teaching and the Market Economy* (Great Britain: Institute of Economic Affairs, 2007), 269.
6. John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 42.
7. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I-II q.95, a.1.
8. Robert Sirico, *Religion and Liberty* 17, no. 4 (Fall 2007).
9. Samuel Gregg, *Economic Thinking for the Theologically Minded* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2001), 5–6.
10. For a standard Catholic treatment of the three dimensions of justice, see Josef Pieper, *Justice* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1955).
11. See, for example, Pope John XIII, Encyclical Letter *Pacem in Terris* (April 11, 1963), 18–22.
12. Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate* (June 29, 2009), 36.

13. Michael Novak, "The Rights and Wrongs of 'Economic Rights': A Debate Continued," *This World* (Spring 1987): 43–52.
14. Albino Barrera, *Economic Compulsion and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
15. Pope Leo XIII, Encyclical Letter *Rerum Novarum* (May 15, 1891), 34.
16. Robert Sirico, "How Much Impact from Higher Minimums?" *Washington Times* (February 3, 1995), 21.
17. Thomas Nagel, "Libertarianism without Foundations," *Yale Law Journal* 85, no. 1 (November 1975): 144.
18. A. Davies, "The Role of Religion in the Economy," *International Journal on World Peace* 21, no. 2 (June 2004): 37–42.
19. Michael Novak, *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism* (New York: American Enterprise Institute/Simon & Schuster, 1982), 344–46.
20. Rodger Charles, *Christian Social Witness in Teaching: Catholic Tradition from Genesis to Centesimus Annus*, vol. 1, *From Biblical Times of the Late Nineteenth Century* (Herefordshire: Gracewing, 1998), 198–99.
21. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, q.77, a.1.
22. F. A. Hayek, "The Facts of the Social Sciences," in *Individualism and Economic Order* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), chap. 3, 69–75.
23. See Margaret S. Archer, *Realist Social Theory: The Morphogenetic Approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
24. Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (December 30, 1987), 15.
25. Gregory R. Beabout, Ricardo F. Crespo, Stephen J. Grabill, Kim Paffenroth, and Kyle Swan, *Beyond Self-Interest: A Personalist Approach to Human Action* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2002), 25.
26. Anthony J. Santelli Jr., Jeffrey Sikkenga, Robert A. Sirico, Steven Yates, and Gloria Zúñiga, *The Free Person and the Free Economy* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2002), 14.
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31. Pope Pius XI, Encyclical Letter *Quadragesimo Anno* (May 15, 1931), 57.
32. Michael Novak, "Defining Social Justice," *First Things* 108 (December 2000): 13, 11–13.
33. *Ibid.*, 11, 11–13.
34. Gregg, *Economic Thinking*, 197.
35. See, for example, John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 44.
36. John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 15.
37. Samuel Gregg, *Economic Thinking*, 71–72.
38. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* II-II, q.66, a.2.
39. Anthony E. Santelli Jr. et al., *The Free Person and the Free Economy*, 75.
40. Philip Booth, *Catholic Social Teaching and the Market Economy*, 112.
41. John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 42.
42. John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 43.
43. Frederich Hayek, *The Mirage of Social Justice*, 147.
44. John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 15.
45. Anthony E. Santelli Jr. et al., *The Free Person and the Free Economy*, 69.
46. Gregory R. Beabout et al, *Beyond Self-Interest*, 25.
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51. Gregg, *Economic Thinking*, 101.
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58. Philip Booth, *Catholic Social Teaching and the Market Economy*, 35.
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