



FAITH, REASON & SOCIETY

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Class of 2021

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Foreword

WE LEARNED IN DECEMBER 2021 of the passing of Arthur Ciocca, who, together with his wife Carlyse, has been a friend to the Röpke-Wojtyła Fellowship and has supported it financially since its inception. The Röpke-Wojtyła Fellowship is a program of the Arthur and Carlyse Ciocca Center for Principled Entrepreneurship at the Catholic University of America. The Fellowship is a year-long interdisciplinary conversation aimed at addressing important questions in social philosophy, history, economics, and Catholic social teaching. Each year, Art Ciocca was very pleased to see young minds interact with each other and with great teachers and texts to sharpen their intellectual tools. He would have been delighted to read this fourth volume of essays from Röpke-Wojtyła Fellows, these from the 2020-21 cohort. It is my pleasure to introduce the volume to our readers.

As was the case last year, the Fellowship was severely affected by Covid-19 restrictions. We had to meet online all year long and were forced to cancel our trip to Rome. This was very unfortunate, as a main purpose of the Fellowship is for these young women and men to spend time together in person, having actual interactions. The Fellowship aims at creating a community of fellows who travel together, exchange ideas, discuss texts, and share meals and experiences (and – we hope – forge bonds that continue throughout their lives).

In spite of the adverse conditions, the fellows persevered and were able to capture their thoughts and ideas on paper. Their essays are evidence of great intellectual motivation and curiosity. Many of them reflect on timely topics, such as the nature of relationships in the business firm, capital punishment, the idea of a living wage, and the role of art in relation to man and God. The essays are divided into three sections: (a) business and economics, (b) politics and social policy, and (c) God and man.

I thank the fellows for making the best of a difficult situation, and for remaining dedicated, joyful, and passionate in spite of the setback. My profound thanks as well to Elizabeth Shaw, Ph.D., for supervising the fellows in the production of this volume, as well as to Candace Mottice, our Fellowship manager, and my other colleagues at the Busch School and at the Ciocca Center for their participation and help.

We would like to dedicate this volume of essays to Art Ciocca – principled entrepreneur, business leader, benefactor, and friend – in the knowledge that his life will inspire fellows and students to serve others through business and help create new generations of leaders dedicated to principled entrepreneurship.

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Adam Smith's Views on Self-Interest and Sympathy: Contradictory or Complementary?

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WE ARE ALMOST ALWAYS IN NEED of the help of others, and we are more likely to succeed, not by relying upon others' benevolence, but by appealing to their self-love. This involves a bargain or a transaction that's voluntary and non-zero-sum – if you can give me that thing I want, I'll give you this thing you want. A market economy allows for just these kinds of exchanges, thereby coordinating the purposes of market actors who (we may assume) are pursuing their self-interest.

So goes Adam Smith's argument in the *Wealth of Nations*. As Smith sees it, there's a kind of harmony that results from each person pursuing his own individual interests. But does Smith go so far as to say it is precisely *because* of our selfish motives, and these alone, that we reach a desirable equilibrium in market transactions? Many scholars have reduced Smith to a heartless laissez-faire economist who rejected traditional morality, just as other Enlightenment thinkers did. But perhaps Smith was far more of a moral traditionalist and sensitive to ethical concerns than we give him credit for. I would like to explore this idea further by taking a closer look at the understanding of sympathy that he lays out in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*.

Scholars have often critiqued Smith for a seeming inconsistency in his thought. This began in nineteenth-century Germany with the formulation of the *das Adam Smith* problem.¹ The problem may be

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¹ James R. Otteson, "The Recurring 'Adam Smith Problem,'" *History of*

summarized by the following apparent tension. On the one hand, in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Smith expounds his views of virtue and sympathy, and the roles they play in public life. On the other hand, in the *Wealth of Nations*, Smith seems to emphasize the role of self-interest in human affairs – specifically with respect to economic transactions.

But is Smith's thought truly inconsistent? Is *das Adam Smith* problem real? Or are there complexities and nuances in his thought that need to be analyzed more thoroughly? Some believe that Smith changed his views of "self-love" after writing *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, such that he came to believe it is self-love, and not benevolence, that primarily motivates men. They argue, in turn, that this change in perspective influenced his argument in *Wealth of Nations*. On the other hand, it could be that Smith is simply dealing with two entirely different issues – that is, sympathy as the root of our moral judgments, and self-interest as what underlies our economic decision-making. If we think of these as two distinct spheres, the moral and the economic, then there is not necessarily any tension in Smith's treatments of sympathy and self-interest. Alternatively, perhaps there is a way in which Smith's writings on sympathy and self-interest actually complement each other, contrary to the *das Adam Smith* critics who maintain there is an irreconcilable tension in Smith's thought.

I will argue that Smith's moral philosophy does, in fact, underlie his treatment of political economy. His understanding of sympathy and self-interest are compatible – even if Smith himself didn't argue this explicitly. One's own interests can include a consideration of the interests of others. While we should not necessarily rely on others' "social passions," as Smith calls them in *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, to hold the economic order together, the pursuit of one's own advantage is not necessarily antithetical to our social and altruistic passions. In fact, in pursuing my self-interest I may also be considering and

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benefiting those around me (my family, friends, neighbors, coworkers, and so forth).

Self-Interest vs. Selfishness

In chapter 2 of the *Wealth of Nations*, Smith famously writes:

But man has almost constant occasion for the help of his brethren, and it is in vain for him to expect it from their benevolence only. He will be more likely to prevail if he can interest their self-love in his favour, and shew them that it is for their own advantage to do for him what he requires of them. Whoever offers to another a bargain of any kind, proposes to do this. Give me that which I want, and you shall have this which you want, is the meaning of every such offer; and it is in this manner that we obtain from one another the far greater part of those good offices which we stand in need of. *It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest.* We address ourselves, not to their humanity but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities but of their advantages.²

This passage has often been interpreted to mean that “capitalism” (a word Smith did not know or use) is motivated by greed and other base instincts but channels these into beneficial outcomes for all – something similar to what is articulated in Bernard de Mandeville’s *Fable of the Bees* (1714). In that poem, there is division of labor among the bees in the beehive, and they are all motivated by their own vices – avarice, pride, vanity, and so forth. These vices, in turn, produce wealth for the hive and sustain the common good. Eventually certain bees begin to grumble about the lack of virtue among their fellow bees, and so Jove grants them honesty and virtue. But this causes the order

² Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (New York: Modern Library, 2000), 15. Emphasis added.

in the hive to fall apart. As Mandeville concludes, it is not the “friendly qualities and kind affections” nor “real virtues” that are the foundation of society, but “what we call evil in the world.... The moment evil ceases, society must be spoiled, if not totally dissolved.”³ Analogously, in society, even when man seems to act on behalf of the common good, his underlying motive is always selfish (that is, he is seeking his own private benefit). Therefore, no actions are honorable or virtuous since they are all based fundamentally on vanity.⁴

About two centuries later, Ayn Rand seemed to make an argument in the same vein. In her collection of essays entitled *The Virtue of Selfishness*, she argues, as the title suggests, that greed or egoism is a rational motivation for action, while altruism is ultimately destructive. She accepts that people can be altruistic (by which she means self-sacrificial) but argues that they *shouldn't* be – that is, things go better if we operate on the basis of our selfish tendencies.

In the same orbit as Rand and Mandeville, some scholars have reduced Smith to purely a laissez-faire economist and champion of self-interest. For instance, George Stigler of the Chicago school of economics wrote, “The *Wealth of Nations* is a stupendous palace erected upon the granite of self-interest.”⁵ Stigler departs from the tradition of earlier thinkers of the Chicago school who affirmed that Smith’s understanding of self-interest should be more broadly construed, including Jacob Viner, who wrote, “Self-interest meant to Smith not only the desire for wealth, but self-love in all its possible

³ Bernard Mandeville, *Fable of the Bees: Or Private Vices, Publick Benefits*, 2 vols., ed. F. B. Kaye (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924; repr. Liberty Classics, 1988), 1:29.

⁴ Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications Inc., 2006), 311-12.

⁵ Patricia H. Werhane, “The Role of Self-Interest in Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations*,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 86, no. 11 (November 1989): 669-80.

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manifestations.”⁶ On this interpretation, self-love serves as a foundation for the other virtues.

If we turn directly to Smith, there certainly seems to be a kind of beneficial interplay between one’s own interests and the public good. The invisible hand guides people to “promote an end which is no part of their intention.”⁷ Smith maintained that in a normal market economy (what he called the “system of natural liberty”) we are usually better off appealing to someone’s “self-love” than to his beneficence. Even though we may depend on others’ benevolence in a market economy, it is not the case that economic agents always act out of greed or “self-interest,” as Rand thought. Nor is it the case that they *ought* to do so.

Sympathy

As Smith argues in *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, our motives can be mixed. He distinguishes three types of passions: egoistic, social, and unsocial. We are not merely selfish creatures but have the capacity to put ourselves in the shoes of another, which is owing to what he calls “fellow feeling” or sympathy. We are able to share in others’ pains and sufferings (pity), as well as their joys and passions (compassion). According to Smith, sympathy “denotes our fellow feeling with any passion whatever.... [I]t is the perception of similarity in the feelings of two people.”⁸

Unlike Rand, who argued that self-interest is and should always be our primary motive, Smith thought that we give equal weight to social and selfish passions because self-interest is moderated by our desire for approval, and self-interest makes sense only in the context of

⁶ Glory M. Liu, “Rethinking the ‘Chicago Smith’ Problem: Adam Smith and the Chicago School, 1920-1980,” *Modern Intellectual History* 17, no. 4 (2020): 1041-68.

⁷ Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, 485.

⁸ Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 41.

mutual cooperation, which is ultimately rooted in the social passions. While Mandeville maintained that private vices such as avarice and greed give rise to public virtues, Smith argued that self-interest, at least under the right institutional and market incentives, more likely leads us to *help* others, because we are not entirely vicious. Smith believed the egoistic passions can be channeled in virtuous ways, but the unsocial passions like hate and envy cannot. Indeed, Smith believed that avarice prevents good economic performance.⁹ As scholar James Halteman writes, “Smith’s notion of self-interest is not expressed as the isolated preference of an independent economic agent but, rather, as the conditioned response of an interdependent participant in a social process.”¹⁰

But fellow feeling alone is not sufficient to maintain a just social and economic order, for two reasons. First, private interests sometimes conflict with the interests of others and even with the common good. Second, human nature is such that our vicious instincts often override our virtuous instincts. For this reason, Smith argued that we also need an impartial spectator to be the judge for our actions. As he writes in *Theory of Moral Sentiments*,

I divide myself, as it were, into two persons; and that I, the examiner and judge, represent a different character from that other I, the person whose conduct is examined into and judged of. The first is the spectator, whose sentiments with regard to my own conduct I endeavor to enter into, by placing myself in his situation, and by considering how it would appear to me, when seen from that particular point of view. The second is the agent, the person whom I properly call “myself,” and of whose conduct, under the

⁹ Smith, *Wealth of Nations* 422-23.

¹⁰ James Halteman, “Is Adam Smith’s Moral Philosophy an Adequate Foundation for the Market Economy?” *Journal of Markets & Morality* 6, no. 2 (Fall 2003): 453-78.

character of a spectator, I was endeavoring to form some opinion.¹¹

The impartial spectator moderates our inner motivations and perspectives, so that our private interests are tempered and the public good can result. As Halteman puts it, “[f]or Smith there appears to be a private self-interest and a social interest with the impartial spectator drawing humanity away from the private to the social interest.”¹² Ultimately, when there is a moral dispute the impartial spectator cannot resolve, according to Smith “the only effectual consolation of humbled and afflicted man lies in an appeal to a still-higher tribunal, to that of the all-seeing Judge of the world, whose eye can never be deceived and whose judgments can never be perverted.”¹³

It is important to note, however, that by and large Smith believes our fellow feeling acts as a check on our egoistic passions, since we are social creatures concerned with the thoughts and approval of others. He writes in chapter 2 of *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, “Though it may be true, therefore, that every individual, in his own breast, naturally prefers himself to all mankind, yet he dares not look mankind in the face, and avow that he acts according to this principle.”¹⁴ We have an inherent sense of right and wrong based largely upon our sense of sympathy, such that we cultivate rules not “formed like the decisions of a court of judicatory” but “fixed in our mind by habitual reflection.” This tendency in human nature is “of great use in correcting the misrepresentations of self-love.”¹⁵ It seems that the impartial spectator is the voice of reason or conscience within each of us. While this is true, it seems Smith also sees institutions and authorities as playing an

¹¹ Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 113.

¹² Halteman, “Adam Smith’s Moral Philosophy,” 463.

¹³ Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 128.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 82.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 154.

important role as impartial spectators because we cannot always rely on our individual consciences to promote the common good.

The Importance of Institutions

Based on his writings in *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, as well as those in his lectures on jurisprudence, it is clear that Smith thinks unfettered self-interest can be harmful when our egoistic passions blind ourselves to the common good and are not channeled in virtuous ways. But he did not think this kind of self-restraint could come from civil authority alone; it also relies upon the individual moral agent. As scholar Jerry Evensky argues, “Smith believed the source of this security must be a system of justice that establishes and enforces principles of interpersonal behavior that insure individuals’ security.”¹⁶

In other words, Smith believed in the power of institutions in maintaining the social order. While a limited government is a key part of human flourishing, the market will not necessarily thrive in an environment entirely absent of civil jurisdiction. But we cannot rely on institutions alone, since Smith believed we ultimately must depend on “self-government” and the “ethical maturity of the citizenry.”¹⁷ In order to manage the negative aspects of self-interest, we should have a system that forces us to look beyond ourselves and to the public good. The development of virtue in the private sphere extends to political and social institutions. The important point is that (properly ordered) moral sentiments are the *sine qua non* of a liberal social order. As Evensky puts it, “[a] liberal society can only be constructive and sustainable to the degree that the hearts of its citizens embody a properly measured sentiment of justice and regulate themselves by that

¹⁶ Jerry Evensky, “Adam Smith’s Theory of Moral Sentiments: On Morals and Why They Matter to a Liberal Society of Free People and Free Markets,” *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 19, no. 3 (Summer 2005): 111-13.

¹⁷ Kendra Tully, “Adam Smith: Providing Morality in a Free Market Economy” (May 2014), https://vc.bridgew.edu/honors_proj/61/.

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measure.”¹⁸ Still, Smith understood that humans are imperfect and will never be fully virtuous, hence our need for an impartial spectator. Thus, according to this interpretation, the moral theory Smith presents in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* lays the groundwork for his political economy in *Wealth of Nations*.

Conclusion

Ultimately, it seems we would prefer a system that doesn't rely on personal altruism. Unlike Mandeville or Rand, who conflated the selfish passions and the unsocial passions, Smith believed these were two distinct classes of sentiment. The unsocial passions, such as hate or revenge, can never yield good social outcomes. But as Smith aptly observed first in *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, and then in *Wealth of Nations*, we also have self-interested passions that we generally act upon and can often be channeled into social virtues.

On the basis of this distinction we may develop a view of the market system that is more nuanced than the simplistic idea that it is based on greed. The argument is that under a system of economic liberty, individuals (and presumably firms) can pursue the things they are interested in and, by virtue of the market process (including institutions, laws, and virtue-forming institutions), also promote the greater good society in general. Contrary to the impression of many critics, Adam Smith was not an insensitive laissez-faire economist. In truth, he offered a hopeful and uplifting vision of how society may improve and flourish, even in a fallen world where humans act with less than perfectly altruistic motives.

¹⁸ Evensky, “Adam Smith’s Theory of Moral Sentiments,” 177.

Ownership and the Primacy of Spirit in Private Property

*Jorge Plaza**

JOHN LOCKE ASSERTS that human beings naturally understand an exterior thing as belonging to an individual if the individual has labored upon the thing to improve it, effectively mixing the work of his hands with the thing's substance.¹ However, a shortcoming of Locke's theory of ownership is that it is rooted in the labor theory of value, which has been rejected by modern economic thinkers. Israel Kirzner offers a way to remedy the shortcoming, however, by emphasizing the role of subjective value in assigning private property rights. According to Kirzner, the psychological discovery of subjective economic value in the exterior thing, rather than the objective mixture of labor, rightfully confers ownership. Yet the Lockean and the Kirznerian theories of ownership both suffer from the same limitation: They lack a discussion of human spirituality. As Pope John Paul II highlights in *Laborem exercens*, when the spiritual dimension is absent from economic analysis, a distorted view of human dignity results.

A theory of ownership that prioritizes the spiritual dimension of the human person while building on the premises that Locke maintains would help to address this deficiency. In this regard, I suggest that Robert Sokolowski's vision of spirit is an important opening. For Sokolowski, the exercise of human reason with respect to physical

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¹ In this essay, I borrow the language of Alfred Freddoso's translation of Thomas Aquinas's *Summa theologiae* in referring to objects subject to ownership as "exterior things." This term is helpful for generalizing all things exterior to the agent, including both corporeal and incorporeal substances that are transformed into tangible or intangible economic assets.

The Primacy of Spirit in Private Property

objects can leave a residue of the agent's spirit on the exterior thing. Hence, the exercise of reason brings together the agent and the product in an ontological way, as the product does not exist without the exercise of the agent's reason. The material reality of the exterior thing is intimately connected with the spiritual dimension of the human person.

Though Kirzner also discusses this ontological relationship, this vision of property distinctively emphasizes the spiritual dimension as a corollary of reason. This emphasis aligns well with Thomas Aquinas's and Pope Leo XII's assertion that the existence of private property has everything to do with the inherent distinction between humans and the other animals: reason. It is also important to note that, while a man and his property are ontologically connected, this connection does not grant to any man absolute ownership of his property; there always remains the moral requirement to share freely one's property with the poor. Considering the spiritual dimension of property ownership lends itself to the task of ordering the use of property well so as to serve both the spiritual and physical needs of human persons, a task that is rightly informed by due respect for human dignity. Thus, the emphasis on the spirit as the root of property rights both honors property as a human institution and respects the demands of justice to distribute property freely in service to the whole human community, meeting both material and spiritual needs.

An Overview of Locke and Kirzner on Private Property

According to Locke, though nature is held in common, human beings nevertheless possess the ability to exclusively appropriate exterior things from nature. This ability follows from the natural ownership of one's body. Though no human being inherently possesses an exclusive claim to an exterior thing, one's body naturally belongs to a man as it is intrinsically part of the self. Any extension of a man's body – in particular, the work of his body and the subsequent

effects of that work – therefore belong to him. Since ownership derives from one’s relationship with himself, it excludes ownership by others: Only the self can own the self, so the work of one’s body belongs first to oneself, not others. As Locke writes, “the *labour* of his body, and the *work* of his hands, we may say, are properly his. Whatsoever then he removes out of the state that nature hath provided, and left it in, he hath mixed his *labour* with, and joined to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his *property*.”²

Mixed with the agent’s labor, exterior things are removed from nature, which is commonly owned, and are transformed. For example, when a stick is appropriated as a hunting tool, it ceases to be something commonly belonging to all men in nature and becomes instead something useful to a particular man through the work of his body. Indeed, before its appropriation in the work of hunting, the stick is something very different from what it becomes when used as a tool: The latter is something improved, having been mixed with the agent’s body, and therefore it belongs to him. Rightful ownership, in Locke’s view, thus turns on the labor theory of value, that is, the idea that a product’s value is a function of the labor put into it.³

This association with the labor theory of value is an Achilles’ heel for Locke. Modern economic theory takes it as a given that price – the agreed upon value of a product – is determined not by labor inputs but by supply and demand (which themselves are influenced by subjective factors, namely, expectations of future prices and consumer tastes). And yet the idea that ownership is determined by a man’s creative act may still serve as a robust basis for deriving private property rights. Kirzner, for one, asserts that the act of discovery, rather than the addition of labor, is what rightfully confers ownership. Kirzner thus corrects Locke’s theory by aligning it with the modern consensus that

² John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Thomas Hollis (London: A Millar et al., 1764), 107.

³ “For it is *labour* indeed that *puts the difference of value* on every thing.” Ibid., 113.

value is subjective. He affirms the “finders-keepers” rule inasmuch as the finder creates value in the exterior thing that others did not previously realize. Economically speaking, no exterior thing has value before an agent discovers that value; the agent creates the thing of value precisely by discovering that value.⁴ While Locke seems to speak almost metaphorically of creating value by mixing labor with things, Kirzner sees the act of creation more literally:

Moral credit for, and economic ownership of the masterpiece belong to its creator, not because the marble was his, not because he used his own labor and his own chisel...but because he created it. Where an entity owes its existence, in every morally relevant sense, to the creative act of an individual, we feel very strongly that no one else has any right to deprive that individual of the enjoyment of that which he has created.⁵

By assigning property rights based on the literal act of creation, Kirzner affirms the ontological relationship of property and its owner. That is, the existence of the property as something of economic value depends on the exercise of the owner’s reason to discover such value. Though others may have physically encountered the exterior thing earlier, it does not exist as property until economic value is created via discovery. Thus, some immaterial act of reason interacts with the material reality of the exterior thing and thereby confers the right of ownership.

⁴ “What no one thought worthy of taking, was something valueless; economically – and morally – speaking, it did not exist. My discovery of the natural resource, my realizing its potential value, has meant that I have brought it into existence. I have assigned value to it; therefore it has become mine.” *Ibid.*, 148.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 147.

What Is Lacking in the Lockean and Kirznerian Views?

Kirzner helpfully establishes the crucial connection between the immaterial realm of reason and the material reality of the exterior thing, and yet a question remains. He restricts his discussion of discovery to the psychological domain, noting that the discovery of value occurs primarily in the mind of the discoverer; however, this restriction may fail to do full justice to the spiritual dimension of the relationship of man and his property. Locke's theory could be said to suffer from the same shortcoming.

In his encyclical *Laborem exercens*, Pope John Paul II addresses the absence of spiritual considerations in economics. According to the pope, the dignity of economic activity consists in man's participation in the creative activity of God.⁶ Hence, any activity, even the most mundane, ought to be seen as an occasion for developing the spiritual relationship between God and man, and thus as essential to human dignity.⁷ To lose sight of the spiritual dimension of human activity is to muddle the vision of human dignity, and in turn work is often an occasion of alienation – the dehumanized feeling that one is simply a cog in a machine.⁸ Over time man no longer recognizes himself as the image of God, and he fails to respect himself as a person with infinite dignity who is capable of acting rationally and independently for the

⁶ “For it shows what the dignity of work consists of: it teaches that man ought to imitate God, his Creator, in working, because man alone has the unique characteristic of likeness to God.” *Laborem exercens*, 25.

⁷ “Awareness that man's work is a participation in God's activity ought to permeate, as the Council teaches, even ‘*the most ordinary everyday activities.*’” *Ibid.*

⁸ “Which makes the worker feel that he is just a cog in a huge machine moved from above, that he is for more reasons than one a mere production instrument rather than a true subject of work with an initiative of his own.” *Ibid.*, 15.

sake of self-realization.⁹ His labor is no different from inanimate capital – tools, machines, raw materials, and so on; it is just another form of property to be manipulated at the whim of its owner. Man is thus objectified: He is no longer the subject – that is, the source and purpose – of his work, and his inherent dignity is gravely dishonored.¹⁰

Though both the Lockean and Kirznerean approaches fail to adequately consider the spiritual dimension of property, both thinkers affirm that human nature is the source of man's ability to exclusively appropriate what is held in common in nature. Indeed, the natural scarcity of resources and man's natural needs are conditions that require him to employ reason in order to survive. Reason enables man to hunt and prepare food, to devise adequate shelter for himself, and to keep safe from predators. Reason also enables him to deal with the reality of scarce resources, whereby necessary goods cannot be shared infinitely but must be appropriated and improved by individuals in exclusive ways.

Spiritual Ownership: Spirit as the Basis for Private Property

A friendly revision may build on the foundation of Locke's and Kirzner's insights while incorporating the spiritual dimension of human living. Robert Sokolowski's vision of spirit is helpful in this regard. According to Sokolowski, spirit is the human activity that transcends matters of the body; in particular, man's spiritual activity

⁹ "As the 'image of God' he is a person, that is to say, a subjective being capable of acting in a planned and rational way, capable of deciding about himself, and with a tendency to *self-realization*." Ibid., 6.

¹⁰ "It should be recognized that the error of early capitalism can be repeated wherever man is in a way treated on the same level as the whole complex of the material means of production, as an instrument and not in accordance with the true dignity of his work – that is to say, where he is not treated as subject and maker, and for this very reason as the true purpose of the whole process of production." Ibid., 7.

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derives from his reason.¹¹ Spirit interacts with the material domain, yet it is not restricted in that sense.¹² Spirit is present in corporeal, inorganic things as the residue left behind as the effect of human reason. For example, “furniture shows the effect of human reason, and therefore it has something spiritual about it; it has a residue of spirit, but it does not have soul, because the life of reason that generates furniture does not dwell in the wood itself; it dwells in the human beings who make the furniture.”¹³ Hence, spirit connects exterior things and human agents. The builder is in the building in that the building is the manifestation of the builder’s rational activity; the building is in the builder for it existed in the mind of the builder before it became manifest. In short, the building cannot exist without the rational activity of the builder; as such, the building belongs to the builder as a creation belongs to its creator.¹⁴

¹¹ “Only in man do we have both soul and spirit; we have the animation that makes a body into one organic, active entity, but we also have the capacity to act in ways that are not limited to the body, ways that transcend the space, time, and causation that are proper to the body.” Robert Sokolowski, “Soul and the Transcendence of the Human Person,” in *Christian Faith and Human Understanding* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2006), 155.

¹² Spirit is present in material things though material conditions may diminish this presence: “A crumbling ancient temple and the ruins of a castle also have a spiritual aspect; they show the presence of reason even while they are being reclaimed by space, time, and matter, and the traces of spirit in them are slowly vanishing.” *Ibid.*, 157.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 155.

¹⁴ This analogy is strikingly compatible with Kirzner’s theory of discovery. It is important to note here that this theory of private property need not conflict with Kirzner’s; nevertheless, to view private property ownership as primarily a spiritual activity adds the crucial dimension that is missing in Kirzner’s discussion. As stated above, to disregard the spiritual component of human living is to forestall the treatment of man as the subject of work since the dignity of work derives from man’s spiritual relationship with God.

The role of reason is central to Aquinas's discussion of private property. Aquinas affirms the same idea that we saw in Locke, namely, that a man's possession of exterior things stems from his capacity to use things for his own advantage.¹⁵ With emphasis on the fact that reason distinguishes man from the other animals, Leo XII maintains the same:

It is the mind, or reason, which is the predominant element in us who are human creatures; it is this which renders a human being human, and distinguishes him essentially from the brute. And on this very account...it must be within his right to possess things not merely for temporary and monetary use, as other living things do, but to have and to hold them in stable and permanent possession.¹⁶

Indeed, as Aquinas asserts, human reason is the image of God imprinted onto man, and man further shares in the likeness of God when he employs reason to create something useful for his own advantage.¹⁷ In his dominion over and use of exterior things, man images the natural dominion of God.

Though human beings share in the act of creation in this way, it is important to note that man does not create the underlying material that makes up exterior things; hence, man does not possess the dominion that God possesses over all things as the Creator of all things. Man's ownership, accordingly, is not absolute. Rather, it extends only insofar as he has created value in something. Similarly, Locke asserts, "[A]s much as any one can make use of to any advantage of life before it

¹⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* II-II, q. 66, a. 1.

¹⁶ *Rerum novarum*, 6.

¹⁷ "Now this natural dominion over other creatures that belongs to man in accord with his reason, in which the image of God consists, is made manifest in the very creation of man in Genesis 1:26." *Summa theologiae* II-II, q. 66, a. 1. Aquinas also holds that man is closer than angels to the image of God insofar as man shares in the power of creation in generation. See *Summa theologiae* I, q. 93, a. 3.

spoils, so much he may be his labor fix a property in: whatever is beyond this, is more than his share, and belongs to others. Nothing as made by God for man to spoil and destroy.”¹⁸

Insofar as man’s ownership is not absolute, he is always subject to the requirements of distributive justice that may call for him to freely share his property. On this point, Aquinas asserts that the rich man who excludes others from enjoying the benefit of his property does not lose his right to that property; rather, Aquinas maintains that “he sins if he prevents others indiscriminately from making use of the thing.”¹⁹ In other words, the rich man acts unjustly when he improperly uses his property to the disadvantage of others, and yet he still retains that property. The rich man owns the exterior thing in the first place because he has made it into something advantageous to himself, and thus his spirit resides in it.²⁰ For example, he owns a building because he has usefully turned the stone into a place to reside, thus imprinting his reason onto the building. It follows, then, that it is improper for property to be used in a way contrary to man’s advantage. However, as Aquinas asserts, the right remedy is not seizing the property but, rather, the owner’s free choice to share the benefits of it: “And on this score a man should hold his exterior things not as his own but as common, viz., in order that he might freely share them when others are in need.”²¹ In fact, freely sharing one’s property is the unique right of the owner, for no one can share what does not first belong to him.

The right of private ownership comes with the responsibility of sharing one’s property in order to serve the whole person. As John Paul II emphasizes, man is the subject of work and therefore the

¹⁸ Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, 109.

¹⁹ *Summa theologiae* II-II, q. 66, a. 2, ad 2.

²⁰ The act of laboring upon an object incorporates the whole human person, as John Paul II notes: “Since work in its subjective aspect is always a personal action, an *actus personae*, it follows that *the whole person, body and spirit*, participates in it, whether it is manual or intellectual work.” *Laborem exercens*, 24.

²¹ *Summa theologiae* II-II, q. 66, a. 2.

property associated with work must be ordered to human flourishing as its end. Owners ought to understand that the common flourishing of mankind is the end of their property, and they ought to seek to sustain their relationship with God through their work. With this attitude, the false antinomy of labor and capital may be destroyed.²² That is to say, it is a violation of justice if property replaces labor; instead, property best serves the human person when it facilitates labor, providing meaningful employment for greater numbers of people. The creation of greater numbers of meaningful jobs means more people have the opportunity to share in God's creative activity through their work, thereby cultivating their personal, spiritual relationship with the Creator.

Conclusion

In his critique of modern economic systems, John Paul II points out the common failure to reflect on property and its use in a spiritual way. But to ignore the spiritual dimension of human living is to detract from human flourishing insofar as the vision of human dignity in work is muddled or lost entirely. Though both Locke and Kirzner offer robust theories of private property, both thinkers fail to consider the subject from the spiritual perspective. A theory of ownership that turns on the shared spiritual nature of an owner and his property thus fills this apparent gap in the Lockean and Kirznerian approaches. Such a theory achieves the same goals as Locke and Kirzner but without forsaking the intuition that Locke takes as his foundation: It respects human nature as the basis for private property while maintaining the unity of human and divine dominion through creative activity. It also does not turn a blind eye to the moral constraints on the use of private property, as owners are called to share the advantages of their property

²² "Property is acquired first of all through work in order that it may serve work." *Laborem exercens*, 14.

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with others. Even so, it honors the owner's claim on his property if these moral considerations are not duly respected, for it emphasizes the owner's exclusive right to freely share his property for the sake of the needy. However, it also affirms the owner's responsibility to serve broader spiritual needs as necessary aspects of true human flourishing.

A Community of Persons: The Acting Person and Love in the Business Firm

*Joseph Galassi**

THE COUNCIL for Inclusive Capitalism with the Vatican, a collaboration between the Vatican and leaders in business and politics, launched on December 8, 2020. Since then the Council has publicly affirmed that “capitalism needs to adapt,” and it invited businesses of all sizes to work “to build a more inclusive, sustainable, and trusted economic system” that seeks to “create long-term value for all stakeholders.”¹ The Council calls this goal “inclusive capitalism.” This emphasis on the well-being of all stakeholders has currency today, in light of both the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the August 2019 Business Roundtable decision to revise a decades-long view of the purpose of corporations.

Business firms’ recent attempts to humanize the market and ensure more inclusive prosperity echoes the “great challenge” Pope Benedict XVI poses in his encyclical *Caritas in veritate*. There the pope states that “the great challenge before us...is to demonstrate, in thing and behavior...that in commercial relationships the principle of gratuitousness and the logic of gift as an expression of fraternity can and must find their place within normal economic activity.”² In this essay, I will argue that the “logic of gift,” or love, can and must be present in business firms for firms to become a “community of

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¹ Council for Inclusive Capitalism with the Vatican, “What is inclusive capitalism?” <https://www.inclusivecapitalism.com/what-is-inclusive-capitalism/>.

² *Caritas in veritate*, 36.

The Acting Person and Love in the Business Firm

persons,” while simultaneously operating efficiently in the long term. First, I will show how traditional models of the business firm appear to exclude love. Next, I will draw from Israel Kirzner’s alertness theory of entrepreneurship and Karol Wojtyła’s understanding of the acting person to show how a business firm is primarily about human persons and their actions, and not solely focused on material prosperity. Finally, I will draw on Catholic social teaching to conclude by showing how love plays a significant and practical role in the business firm, making it a community of persons that is properly ordered to the common good.

The Nexus of Contracts Theory

In mainstream economics, where existing resources are scarce and human needs are considered unlimited, the market is the best way to organize economic activity that satisfies as many needs as possible with the least amount of resources. In the market, rational agents, seeking altruistic or self-centered interests, need to cooperate with others to satisfy their needs. As Adam Smith wrote, “[i]t is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest.”³ In other words, benevolence or love may be, but is not necessarily, among the motivations of people.

One traditional view models the business firm as an aggregate of individuals united exclusively for reasons of power and interests through a nexus of contracts. According to this view, a business firm is “a collection of (physical or human) resources or assets (or of property rights on such resources or assets), which work together to efficiently produce goods and services for sale in the market; or a nexus of contracts, or routines.”⁴ Moreover, Robert Hessen, a proponent of

³ Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (Middletown, DE: Shine Classics, 2014), 10.

⁴ Antonio Argandoña, *From Action Theory to the Theory of the Firm* (Barcelona:

this view, writes that “every organization regardless of its legal form or features consists only of individuals.... The term corporation actually means a group of individuals who engage in a particular type of contractual relationship with each other.”⁵ This understanding of the firm derives from Ronald Coase, who considers the business firm from an economic point of view, emphasizing that it is an instrument of economic efficiency. According to Coase, hierarchical structures led by appropriate authority reduce costs and thus promote economic efficiency⁶ better than business firms operating through the actions of persons engaged in free and voluntary exchanges in the market.

Following this theory, a business firm operates through explicit and implicit contracts between two groups: principals and agents. Principals are the shareholders or owners of capital who hire managers as agents who act on their behalf and operate a firm in accordance with their interests. Managers procure material resources, hire employees who are paid agreed-upon salaries, and exercise their authority to organize employees’ actions, while ensuring that all activities are governed by contracts and legal and ethical standards.⁷ As the owners of capital, principals bear the financial risk associated with a firm’s operation. Management works to ensure that a firm is maximally efficient so that profit will be maximized.

Under this theory of the firm, there appears to be no accounting for the virtue of love. Each person simply abides by contracts. Any problems that may arise are resolved contractually and under the law, ensuring that employees work efficiently. But while efficiency and tangible returns are important motivators, they are only two of the

IESE Publishing, 2010), 10.

⁵ Robert Hessen, *In Defense of the Corporation* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution, 1978), xiii.

⁶ Ronald Coase, “The Nature of the Firm,” *Economica* 4, no. 16 (November 1937): 392]

⁷ Milton Friedman, “A Friedman Doctrine – The Social Responsibility of Business Is to Increase Its Profit,” *The New York Times* (September 13, 1970), 1.

possible motivations of human activity. Accordingly, this theory of the business firm entails an insufficient understanding of the human person.

Kirzner on Alertness

Having laid out the traditional theory of the business firm as a nexus of contracts, let us now shift to a discussion of the acting human person. The free economic order is not fundamentally a matter of efficiency in the allocation of scarce resources; rather, it is ultimately grounded in the reality of the human person. Persons and their motivations, decisions, and actions are central to understanding market exchanges. In *The Foundations of Modern Austrian Economics*, Israel Kirzner writes, “Economic explanations rely on human purposive action.”⁸ Kirzner argues for a deeper consideration of human action by introducing the concept of alertness. For Kirzner, entrepreneurship is a person’s alertness to profit opportunities owing to market ignorance. The entrepreneur’s actions in the market are understood to be economizing, but there is more to entrepreneurial action due to its human origins.⁹ For this reason, Kirzner’s framework contrasts with that of the neoclassical nexus of contracts theory.

The neoclassical model of the business firm is not grounded in the reality of human action. Instead, it presents man as *homo economicus*, or the maximizing self-interested individual. Kirzner sees this as a reductive view of human action – as static, passive, and mechanical instead of dynamic, active, and creative precisely as deriving from the unique human capacity of alertness.¹⁰ Even though human action can be economizing, not all human action is necessarily describable as

⁸ Israel Kirzner, “On the Method of Austrian Economics,” *The Foundations of Modern Austrian Economics* (1976), <https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/104>.

⁹ Israel Kirzner, *Competition and Entrepreneurship*, ed. Peter J. Boettke and Frédéric E. Sautet (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2013), 28.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 35.

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such. Therefore, the human person should not be reduced to one who seeks to satisfy as many needs as possible with the smallest amount of resources. Instead, entrepreneurship is about seeing a new means–end framework. Kirzner observes that

the concept of *homo agens* is capable of all that can be achieved by using the notions of economizing and of the drive for efficiency. But the human-action concept, unlike that of allocation and economizing, does not confine the decision-maker (or the economic analysis of his decisions) to a framework of *given* ends and means.¹¹

Homo agens – Kirzner’s preferred term in contrast to *homo economicus* – “is endowed not only with the propensity to pursue goals efficiently, once ends and means are clearly identified, but also with the drive and alertness needed to identify which ends to strive for and which means are available.”¹² However, entrepreneurial action is “not an end in itself; rather, it creates a space in which the human person can realize their personal dignity in creative action.”¹³ Kirzner’s distinction between economizing action and entrepreneurial action presents a broader understanding of the human person as one whose range of action is not limited to economizing.

Kirzner’s theory is an important contribution to a more comprehensive anthropological theory of the acting human person in economics, as it opens up the framework for a consideration of the role of the virtues, and of love in particular, in the business firm. However, any investigation into the reality of human action and the role of the human person in the business firm must include a more enriched anthropology that includes an understanding of the whole person in terms of the social, political, economic, and spiritual

¹¹ Ibid., 33.

¹² Ibid., 34.

¹³ John McNerney, *Wealth of Persons* (Eugene, OR: Veritas, 2016), 160.

dimensions of life. To that end, let us turn to the thought of Karol Wojtyła.

Karol Wojtyła on the Acting Person

In *The Acting Person* Wojtyła warns of the tendency to reduce the human person to what can be known through cognition. Furthermore, he writes that “[a]ction gives us the best insight into the inherent essence of the person and allows us to understand the person most fully.”¹⁴ Instead of “two separate and self-sufficient entities,” the human person and action are “a single, deeply cohesive reality.”¹⁵ Thus, Wojtyła understands the person as “the subject and the agent of an action” and “an action as the authentic act of a person.”¹⁶ In acting, a person experiences the “moment of efficacy,” which means a person experiences himself as the source and cause of the act.¹⁷ For Wojtyła, an action, which is “the effect of the person’s efficacy,” has at once the “traits of outerness and innerness” vis-à-vis the person.¹⁸ Every action “contains within itself an intentional orientation” toward “definite objects or sets of objects, and is aimed outward and beyond itself.”¹⁹ But when an action is performed, it is not only aimed at external objects but also oriented within the interiority of a person. In other words, human actions not only affect a person’s surrounding environment but also change and create who that person is. People become who they are through what they do and how they act.

According to Wojtyła, actions reveal the truth about the person and are the means of reaching one’s fulfillment.²⁰ But just performing

¹⁴ Karol Wojtyła, *The Acting Person* (London: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1969), 11.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 149.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 150.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 66.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 149.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

some action does not necessarily bring fulfillment; rather, fulfillment depends on the action's moral value. Wojtyła writes, "[T]hrough an action that is either morally good or morally bad, man, as the person, himself becomes either morally good or morally evil."²¹ In other words, human actions not only reflect the person but also always have some moral and existential significance to them. Those that are morally good contribute to human flourishing, while those that are morally evil detract from that end. Actions that are performed "leave their moral value"²² and form a person into "somebody" rather than "something."²³ Furthermore, Wojtyła writes, "[B]eing somebody he may be either *good* or *bad*."²⁴ When a person performs a morally right action, according to Wojtyła, he finds his true joy.²⁵

In examining the social life of the acting person, Wojtyła emphasizes the concept of participation, which is connected with transcendence, as a positive relation to the humanity of others.²⁶ By participation, Wojtyła means the ability to act with others in such a way as to simultaneously realize both the external results of communal acting and the personalistic value of one's action.²⁷ Through action the person who participates both exists and acts with others, but is not absorbed into the group. He does not cease to be himself or to fulfill himself in action. Participation allows the person to experience himself existing and acting with others, but it also points to his own recognition of the common good. In participation, a person wishes for both his own good and the good of those around him. Participation allows people to open themselves up to others by sharing their humanity, thereby becoming even more human.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 151.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 178.

²⁶ Karol Wojtyła, "The Person: Subject and Community," *The Review of Metaphysics* 33 (1979): 306.

²⁷ Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, 271.

In his discussion of the acting person participating in community, Wojtyła introduces the concept of neighbor. The neighbor is one capable of being and acting with others and of participating “in the very humanness” of others.²⁸ Wojtyła concludes that “this participation serves the fulfillment of persons in any community in which they act and exist. The ability to share in the humanness itself of every man is the very core of all participation and the condition of the personalistic value of all acting and existing ‘together with others.’”²⁹ A person’s participation derives from his self-determination and necessitates an openness to fulfill one’s role in a community, so that he can be both enriched by and enriching to others. This being enriched and enriching is the foundation of solidarity, which forms when each person contributes positively toward the realization of the common good, allowing the acting person to be fulfilled.³⁰ Further, solidarity is founded upon a person’s innermost act, which is the act of love that calls a person to share in humanity by regarding every other person as neighbor, as a unique and unrepeatable second self.³¹ Love is what makes a person transcend selfish motivations and be personally and communally fulfilled. Love is other-focused and culminates in self-giving. Self-gift is the inner nature of love, and a person is truly himself when he exists for others.

Karol Wojtyła’s insights regarding the acting person provide a more complete anthropology that serves as a foundation for considering the role of love in the business firm.

Love in the Business Firm

As discussed above, the prevailing model of the business firm assumes that the firm’s only important goal is to maximize profits. This

²⁸ Ibid., 94.

²⁹ Ibid., 295.

³⁰ Ibid., 283-87.

³¹ Wojtyła, “The Person: Subject and Community,” 306.

theory is rooted in the principle of human self-interest, and it fails to attend to the full range of human motives and actions. It assumes that a person is constantly weighing trade-offs and concerned only with the external effects of his actions, and it excludes selfless love as a motive for action. However, inspired by Kirzner's concept of alertness and Wojtyla's understanding of the acting person, we may move beyond the narrowness of this model and begin to consider the role of love in the business firm.

Wojtyla observes that any interaction between two or more people entails external, internal, and transcendent resulting effects. The external effect is some good outside the being of the actors themselves. The internal effect is something that both derives from and takes root in the person upon completion of his action. The transcendent effect is not something that the person receives or produces in himself but, rather, something that inheres in another person as an intended consequence of what the acting person does.

In the context of the business firm, the external effect is typically identified as the firm's financial performance and reputation, the internal effect is the satisfaction and development of the acting persons within the firm, and the transcendent effect is the fulfillment of the firm's desire to bring about certain outcomes for its stakeholders. Typically, emphasis is placed on external and internal effects, for a firm does not survive without healthy finances and the satisfaction of its management and workers. Yet while these external and internal effects are essential to any firm's success, firms also do well to concern themselves with the transcendent effects of their actions. This is precisely where love lives in the firm.

The business firm manifests love when it concerns itself with the totality of consequences of its actions, both for itself and for others outside of the firm who will be impacted by its actions. When businesses concern themselves with the external, internal, and transcendent effects of their actions, they grasp that negative actions will detract from their ability to maximize profit and from employees'

satisfaction and personal development. They also grasp that their positive actions contribute to their financial success and the fulfillment of those with whom they interact in the market and society in general. In their decision-making and transactions business firms need to be open to being enriched as well as enriching others, which is the foundation of solidarity. They accomplish this when they strive to “produce many of the important conditions that contribute to the common good”³² and “identify and seek to address genuine human needs at a superior level of excellence.”³³ For this reason the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace has stated that “businesses should be characterized by their capacity to serve the common good of society through the production of useful goods and services.”³⁴ A business firm exercises its entrepreneurial alertness and expresses love when it provides goods and services to fulfill customers and promote the common good. Accordingly, business firms are rightly founded on the moral and spiritual principles of human dignity and the common good, not just economic and legal principles.

Love is what transforms the business firm into a community of persons. Love and solidarity encourage commitment “to the good of one’s neighbor with the readiness, in the Gospel sense, to ‘lose oneself’ for the sake of the other instead of exploiting him, and to ‘serve him’ instead of oppressing him for one’s own advantage.”³⁵ In addition, love affords workers the initiative and responsibility for developing their gifts and talents to organize their work well to satisfy human needs. Good work allows for the creation of good goods and services, which are conditions for an authentic community of work. Unfortunately, far too few firms succeed in helping their employees to flourish. Far too many alienate workers spiritually and instrumentalize their

³² Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *The Vocation of the Business Leader: A Reflection*, 35.

³³ *Ibid.*, 40.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 41.

³⁵ *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 193.

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relationships within the firm. This happens especially when a firm's sole purpose is understood as maximizing profit, without regard for employees' personal growth, and when firms promote extraneous social and political ideologies that workers themselves do not support.

The business firm as a community means that all employees' and managers' actions collectively contribute to society. Business is a form of work, a human activity where something is done for someone else. All stakeholders have moral obligations to one another as a result of their participation in the business firm, which is more deeply rooted than the contractual obligations that they undertake. And so the business firm is not solely about contractual relationships and the maximizing individual; rather, it is about a creative community of interdependent persons. As John Paul II writes, "[T]he purpose of a business firm is not simply to make a profit, but to be found in its very existence as a *community of persons* who in various ways are endeavoring to satisfy their basic needs, and who form a particular group at the service of the whole of society."³⁶

Conclusion

Traditional theories of the business firm do not appear to take love into account. Moreover, this omission is likely rooted in an improper understanding of the human person and of the nature of social relationships in business firms. The latter are reduced to contractual arrangements that are often cold and distant, if not contrary to love, because the assumption is that I will want what is good for another only when that other intends harm to me and my interests. Against the background of Israel Kirzner's alertness theory of entrepreneurship and Karol Wojtyła's understanding of the acting person, we may move beyond this model to consider how love may live within a firm, transforming it into a community of persons focused not solely on

³⁶ *Centesimus annus*, 35.

material prosperity but also on serving the good of others outside of the firm and indeed the common good in general.

In conclusion, the business firm is a moral institution with many external, internal, and transcendent responsibilities. The actions of firms should be rooted in the moral principles of human dignity, love, and the common good if they are going to succeed in making the world a better, more inclusive place. Absent these moral foundations, any well-intentioned attempts will necessarily fail. We do well to recall the words of the gospel: “What profit is there for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?”³⁷

³⁷ Mark 8:36.

See for Yourself: Visualizing an Economy

*Marian Joyce**

The study of markets is too important to be left to economists.
– John Lie

THE GOLDEN HUES of the fading sun shimmer and sparkle off an immense expanse of rippling water surrounding a nest of fog. In the fog sits a city. The fog rolls down the city's streets and alleyways like traffic, so fresh and thick it tastes of ocean brine. Even on the sunniest days it can be seen floating in misty little clouds anywhere it has a chance to accumulate. It has such a quality that when it's around, the most mundane moment might be mistaken for a dream, and the harshest realities are softened and blurred under its blanket.

A town such as San Francisco, where a man may wander for hours and find at the end of its streets sunrises, sunsets, stars, foreign ships, limitless amounts of ocean but not even a few acres of open country, is a strange thing. Approximately 1,050,000 people are heaped onto this peninsula during the city's working hours, with 875,000 of them staying to sleep through the night.¹ Every hill in the city offers some magnificent view of human industry and genius – miles-long bridges, beautifully designed parks filled with imported eucalyptus and palm trees, skyscrapers and towers, and hundreds of ships and barges coming and going through the Golden Gate Strait. If Friedrich Engels

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¹ <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/profile?g=0500000US06075>.

visited San Francisco, he would not fail to marvel at the wondrous work human hands have developed there.

He would most certainly also take note of the alarming poverty and shocking conditions of the more than 8,000 homeless people within the city's seven square miles. Engels walked around the "great towns" of Europe to observe and assess the conditions of their working classes in 1845. Similarly, Tocqueville toured the United States in 1831, studying the nation's people. They both turned a critical eye on society, taking ordinary, everyday life and beholding it with a fascination that made it extraordinary. Through their respective economic lenses and sociological imaginations, they attempted to find rhyme and reason in the complex flux of society they witnessed. A place's economy reveals itself in perceptible but puzzling ways.

In "The Great Towns" Engels focuses on the poor and penniless like the ones described above. He is interested in the plight of the working class and their slums, how they survive and the conditions of their homes, health, and general well-being. He says, "Let us see what pay for his work society does give the working-man in the form of dwelling, clothing, food, what sort of subsistence it grants those who contribute most to the maintenance of society."² In his perhaps myopic view of the working man's struggle, he critiques the bourgeoisie – "the capitalists [who] seize everything for themselves."³ However, he fails to actually detail the living conditions of the majority of the poor working-class people. He instead attempts an ethnographic argument drawing on personal accounts of the extremely destitute, and passes these off as if they are sufficient evidence for drawing broader conclusions about the conditions of the majority of the working class. Given that 87 percent of the world population was living in extreme poverty at the time, perhaps these stories of impoverishment are not

² Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working-Class in England in 1844*, trans. Florence Kelley Wischnesky (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co. Paternoster Square, 1892), 3.

³ *Ibid.*, 2.

extraordinary but reliably representative.⁴ If that is the case, then the reasons for these deplorable conditions are worthy of further investigation.

By Engels's reasoning, the working people of great industrialized towns live in such regrettable conditions owing to the excessive greed inherent in the system of property and capital ownership. He writes, "[T]he poverty of these unfortunates...is exploited by the property-holding class."⁵ He diagnoses every problem of the poor as a symptom of capitalist exploitation. However, his analysis of the reasons why the working man becomes destitute and why exploitation occurs is more complex. At times he seems to point to the working man's immoral behaviors, such as drunkenness and prostitution, rather than exploitation by property holders as the cause of the indignant circumstances of the working class. This inconsistency is a defect in his argument. And yet it is true that the dreadful conditions of the poor cannot be blamed on one thing alone. The problem is multifaceted, as his treatment suggests, intentionally or otherwise.

Placing all the blame for the woes of society on one cause does not work. Neither does focusing on only the miserable aspects of life give credit or respect to humanity. Engels may have had admirable empathy for those who suffer, but his assessment implicitly strips the working-class people for whom he advocates of the personal agency whereby they may change the trajectory of their lives. In his analysis, the relatively few owners of the means of production have tyrannical power, and the working-class masses have none.

By contrast, Alexis de Tocqueville in *Democracy in America* is concerned about a potential tyranny of the majority, as he writes that "agitation and instability stem from the nature of democratic republics."⁶ Tocqueville attempted to take a more holistic look at

⁴ https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/world-population-in-extreme-poverty-absolute?country=~OWID_WRL.

⁵ Engels, *The Condition of the Working-Class in England in 1844*, 4.

⁶ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (1835), ed. Eduardo Nolla,

society in the United States in order to observe how it functions. The French traveler looked beyond the great towns and their most shocking conditions, and saw the people, their foundation, and their motivations. Through this lens, he offered an interpretation of American society as distinctively characterized by individuals' pragmatic application of skill, knowledge, and religious faith. In America, each person contributes to a democracy in which power is widely diffused. Surely in the towns he visited, such as Boston, New York City, and Philadelphia, he must have witnessed some great poverty. However, he relayed a far more optimistic social narrative than Engels did.

Inspired by Tocqueville's and Engels's observational approach, I too will take a close look at San Francisco as the city presents itself visually to determine what conclusions may be drawn from simple observation. Common visual indicators that are easily observed in a city or region are not necessarily determinative with respect to economic success, but they are revealing of a place's political leanings, economic system, and generally how the people in that system live. Such basic visual evidence includes public architecture and transportation systems, typical vehicles, and the housing and homelessness situation.

If Engels were walking through the city of San Francisco today, he would pass through the Civic Center. This district of the city is unique in that it is dedicated to promoting the city's culture with the seat of the city's government, City Hall, at its core, indicating how the city views and orders itself. The gleaming white façade and large central dome of the massive building command attention. Its neoclassical architecture suggests that the city's political beliefs are rooted in the ancient Greek and Roman traditions. These undertones are further enforced by the other centers of culture and art emanating from City Hall, many of which are also built in the neoclassical style, such as the

trans. James T. Schleifer (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2012), 2:484.

Main Library, the War Memorial Opera House, and the Bill Graham Civic Auditorium. The urban planning that intentionally links major cultural venues with the city's seat of government promotes a civic harmony between politics and the people that is inherently democratic in nature. In this city, the seats of government are in conversation with the people who gather in that space. However, these connections to the democratic tradition themselves suggest very little with respect to the city's economic situation.

A better indicator of the city's economy is public transport. Criss-crossing San Francisco's streets are cable lines that power electric trolley buses all over the city. It is hard to miss the abundance and variety of public bus transportation available around the city. Such widespread accessibility to public transport is necessary and cost-effective only in areas where there is a high concentration of people, jobs, and economic productivity. The quality and efficiency of these buses reflect the economic success the city enjoys. Even more than the city's impressive Civic Center, its public transport system declares the city's economic prosperity, as it facilitates the integration of a wide and diversely skilled labor force and promotes information exchange and innovation among these groups of people. It also indicates what some might consider a degree of socialism in the local political economy. I say this because public transit is a government-subsidized system that is produced and maintained by taxpayers dollars and regulated by the local government. The layout of the transport system promotes urban development where it exists by encouraging the local population to distribute themselves around the system's nodes and hubs within the city proper, where many live in leased properties. By contrast, the maintenance of the bridges and freeways for automobile use encourages suburbanization, which generally entails private home ownership and a more market-oriented economy.

In conjunction with, or perhaps in spite of, the availability of public transportation, San Francisco would feel empty without the density of privately owned and operated vehicles congesting its streets. These

cars range in size, condition, and value. For every vehicle driven on the street that appears cheap or old there is another that appears new or expensive, but for the most part the majority of vehicles seem to be well-maintained vehicles between five and fifteen years of age. This observation reflects the socioeconomic order of a city where many, if not most, inhabitants can afford the high cost of owning and maintaining a decent vehicle, and are therefore not dependent on public transportation. So the city apparently boasts a strong and large middle class. The variety of vehicle makes and models indicates the presence of a free market economy, and another strong indicator of a free market economy is the concentration of large, affluent corporations in the city's business district as well as the plethora of smaller businesses in surrounding quarters.

Moving outside of the densely corporate downtown district and into the residential neighborhoods of the city offers more insight into the living conditions of San Franciscans. Closely built houses, marked with more than one front door, or a series of numbers per address, are signs that what were originally built as single-family homes are now subdivided into several apartments or condominiums. In addition to these types of multidwelling units, there are also apartment complexes of varying height, size, and extravagance. The need for apartment complexes and the subdivision of homes into smaller apartments conveys the tight living conditions in this geographically small metropolis. To live within the confines of the city is to live with little personal space. One may deduce that such cramped conditions are not conducive to couples having many children. The vast amount of subdivided housing suggests that the majority of the city's inhabitants are either unmarried singles or childless couples. Of course, there are single-family homes, but their number is far fewer than the apartments and condominiums. Some neighborhoods are filled with large and extravagant family homes, and many others with more modest but charming homes. There are also neighborhoods where one observes severe poverty, with dilapidated streets and shabby, rundown

apartments and houses. These impoverished neighborhoods certainly do not outnumber the well-kept lower-, middle-, and upper-class neighborhoods. Again, the observation that the majority of homes appear to be middle-class residences indicates fairly well-distributed economic abundance. Living accommodations are of every size and type, and whether they are affordable is a different question but one worth asking since so many people in the city do not have the shelter of a home.

Ensuring that all people in any great town have adequate housing is a difficult problem to solve. Regardless of the many visible signs of economic prosperity and high standards of living in San Francisco, the living conditions of the large homeless population are appalling. Over 8,000 people live on the streets. Concentrated in certain neighborhoods and on specific streets, they pop up tents to live like urban campers, and scattered in their wake are accumulations of trash and junk littering the streets. Many struggle to maintain their hygiene, as evidenced by tattered clothing and general dirtiness, which gives rise to the question of whether they have a place to go where they can access bathing and laundry facilities. More unfortunate, however, is the erratic behavior and apparent mental instability among the most economically disadvantaged. It is not uncommon to find stray needles or empty liquor bottles on the streets and sidewalks.

Regardless of whether the desperate conditions of living without a home causes substance abuse, or vice versa – and this is not to say that every person without a home is an addict – these observations lead to questions about the city’s ability to address the needs of its citizens. Where are the homeless shelters and, even if there are not enough beds in the shelters, are there at least accessible sanitation services? According to 2017 data released by the city, San Francisco ranks fifth in the nation for density of homeless individuals per 100,000 city residents.⁷ These homeless make up just under 1 percent of the city’s

⁷ <https://sfgov.org/scorecards//benchmarking/homelessness>.

total population, and that number offers perspective, but it may also dangerously downplay the grave reality of these peoples' hopeless situation. The disparity of wealth in the city is underscored by the common sight of well-dressed professionals in the tech or finance industries maneuvering around homeless encampments while on their way to lunch or coffee in the middle of the day. However, to reduce this stark contrast to a matter of wealth inequality is an oversimplification of a far more complex problem and cannot adequately be approached by observation alone.

The shockingly disturbing conditions of the deeply impoverished people of this great town would stir pity in any heart. How do you sit with that feeling, amplified by the juxtaposition to the great economic prosperity and civic harmony observable in the rest of the city? Homelessness is a seemingly unavoidable problem, but does that fact detract from the assessment of the overall good conditions in which 99 percent of the city lives? That cannot be the case. The San Francisco economy works to bring prosperity and socioeconomic mobility to the majority of people who participate in it. One may conclude as much based on the general civic harmony, the availability of transportation options, and the diverse housing found in the city. Citizens of San Francisco undoubtedly must work hard to enjoy the fruits of their labor and participate in the local culture that promotes their engagement with the arts and politics.

Measuring the economic success of a place cannot be done by visuals alone, nor is it the case that data concerning employment rates and job growth are themselves sufficiently revealing. The value of culture, knowledge, opportunity, and social interaction – all very significant factors – is hard to quantify. However, these aspects of culture certainly do contribute to the economic well-being of a place, and one helpful way to approach their evaluation is through visual observation.

As the red sun sinks under the blue ocean horizon, boats and barges from all over the Pacific make their presence known with their

Marian Joyce

long, lonely sounds. That familiar fog rolls in and softens the brightest streetlamp. Suddenly the lights shining from curtained windows look cozy and inviting, more like something from a story book than real life. How can the economist put a value to the beauties and uniqueness of life in cloud city?

Postliberalism and the Popes: Pinpointing the Villain of Modernity

*Max Bodach**

WHILE DISAGREEMENT ABOUNDS, most intelligent religious people share the conviction that there is something wrong in America. No matter the subject – be it morality, theology, politics, or economics – Cassandras on the right decry decay and prophesy further doom; not unlike Cassandra herself, most are fated to be ignored. However, in their well-intentioned zeal to identify the true culprits, these critics often go awry in their search. In the present essay I seek to correct this tendency. I first lay out a representative version of the critique by considering Notre Dame political theorist Patrick Deneen. Then I point out what I think are some flaws in Deneen’s critique, in hopes of offering a refinement of it. Finally I turn to the magisterium of the Catholic Church to consider what recent popes have to say with respect to social teaching. In so doing I reaffirm the central importance of Catholic social teaching and, hopefully, help to further conservative discourse in a constructive direction.

Whither Decadence?

Critics of cultural decay and decadence tend to focus on a few specific categories. Primacy is given to cultural critique; conservative critics seek to pinpoint the causes of the degeneracy that seems to abound. Sexual practices once dismissed as absurd and obviously disordered now occupy pride of place in our constellation of group identity. Though it is true that statistics of teen promiscuity have trended downward for years, Ross Douthat has insightfully noted that

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this is because vice is increasingly virtualized.¹ New media help propagate cultural mores and standards in direct contradiction to the faith at a far greater degree than seemed possible even fifteen years ago.

The crisis is found not only in culture or sexual ethics, however. Andrew Breitbart famously said that politics is downstream from culture, but it increasingly seems as though politics is disconnected from cultural reality. Here virtualization rears its ugly head once again – large numbers consume political media in filter bubbles, safely ensconced in Republican or Democratic viewpoints that don't permit penetration by unwelcome ideas or heterodox policy positions. Politics as the art of living well in community is abandoned in favor of partisan gamesmanship and brute power struggle.²

Hobby Lobby, Polanyi, and Disembedding

Politics and culture thus seem to be broken. Patrick Deneen took a stab at explaining the underlying causes in a fascinating article in *The American Conservative*.³ To properly contextualize his argument, we must return to the heady days of 2014, when conservatives and liberals were

¹ Ross Douthat, *The Decadent Society: How We Became the Victims of Our Own Success* (New York: Avid Reader Press, 2020), 122-24.

² Americans seem increasingly bent on proving Nazi jurist Carl Schmitt correct. Schmitt famously argued that politics is essentially contained in the distinction between friend and enemy, and that the sovereign is one who can lead in the state of exception, that is, outside the rule of impersonal laws. The demonology with which ardent liberals and conservatives taxonomize their political opponents indicates the magnitude of the challenge before us, and in an age defined by partisan brinkmanship (see, for example, the passage of the Affordable Care Act or the confirmation of Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh), the stakes are too high to assume one's opponents act in good faith.

³ Patrick Deneen, "Even if Hobby Lobby Wins, We Lose," *The American Conservative*. (March 25, 2014), <https://www.theamericanconservative.com/hobbylobby/>.

battling over the legalization of same-sex marriage as well as the HHS contraceptive mandate of the Affordable Care Act. Both fights would eventually reach the Supreme Court, resulting in a victory for LGBTQ activists in *Obergefell v. Hodges* and a defeat for the Obama administration on religious liberty grounds in *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby Stores, Inc.*

Hobby Lobby eventually prevailed on account of the Court's expanding view of religious liberty, which was seen as a victory by most conservatives. However, prior to the Court's decision (in fact, on the occasion of the oral arguments in *Burwell*), Deneen took a contrarian view.⁴ His nuanced take on the issue proceeds in several stages. First, he affirms that as a religious conservative, he supports Hobby Lobby in its bid for a religious carve-out to the Affordable Care Act's contraception mandate. However, he then suggests that the case is more problematic for conservatives than it may appear at first glance. He complains that the dominant narrative completely misses "the fact that Hobby Lobby is a significant player in a global economy that has separated markets from morality," and that Hobby Lobby "participates in an economy that arose based on the rejection of the subordination of markets embedded within, and subject to, social and moral structures."⁵ This introduces his laudatory account of Karl Polanyi's seminal 1944 book, *The Great Transformation*. Deneen, summarizing Polanyi, laments how the "previous economic arrangements in which markets were 'embedded' within moral and social structures, practices, and customs were replaced by ones in which markets were liberated from those contexts, and shorn of controlling moral and religious norms and ends."⁶ In other words, "laissez-faire was planned" and, beginning with the thought of Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Adam Smith, markets ascended to primacy and individuated people as

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

consumers.⁷ Modernity is therefore a world of disembedded, atomized consumers with no ties to anything outside their base economic desires.

Globalization and Postliberalism

A conservative might suspect that economic disintegration alone cannot explain cultural degeneracy. It is not obvious why a more globalized economy that prioritizes economies of scale and mass-produced commodities over local communities of production would therefore lead to the widespread decay we see today. Deneen thinks as much and accordingly extended his critique in 2018 with *Why Liberalism Failed*. He opens that volume with a long epigraph from Barbara Tuchman's popular 1978 work, *A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous 14th Century*, including the famous lines: "When the gap between ideal and real becomes too wide, the system breaks down."⁸ Deneen believes that the gap between the ideal liberal regime and liberalism in practice has become too wide. Despite the ostensible intent of liberalism to "foster greater equity, defend a pluralist tapestry of different cultures and beliefs, protect human dignity, and, of course, expand liberty," he claims that it actually "generates titanic inequality, enforces uniformity and homogeneity, fosters material and spiritual degradation, and undermines freedom."⁹ He covers four broad areas: politics and government, economics, education, and science and technology.

⁷ There is a long literature contesting, denying, or modifying Polanyi's thesis. That said, we might be able to agree that a qualitative difference exists between the marketplaces of premodern society as compared with the increasing importance of finance and global capital we see today. One good inflection point is the Renaissance, while another could be the Enclosure Acts beginning in 1604. This allows us to begin a fruitful discussion, if nothing else.

⁸ Barbara Tuchman, *A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous 14th Century*, quoted in Patrick Deneen, *Why Liberalism Failed* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018), vi.

⁹ Deneen, *Why Liberalism Failed*, 3.

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Liberalism has turned politics into a hollow parody of itself, the economy into a ruthless sorting machine of “globetrotting” winners and alienated losers, education into mere lessons on consumption, and technology into the enslaver of man. In sum, liberalism has been undone by its own success.

For Deneen, liberalism is chimerical and duplicitous. As technology for governance, it is terrifyingly effective. However, in the classical sense of “soul-craft,” it falls short. Deneen believes that the liberal state as currently constituted can continue to impose its rule only by administrative and judicial fiat, and that liberalism will thus inevitably devolve to either an increasingly authoritarian liberal technocracy or a vicious quasi-fascist regime.¹⁰ To counteract this movement, he proposes a retreat from the day-to-day of the liberal regime that will allow people to coalesce in more authentic communities. These new communities will give rise to a superior political order that protects liberty without liberalism.

Forgotten Choices

We now have our villain. That said, we still need to ask whether the ideology of liberalism is truly to blame for this smorgasbord of societal ills. The first problem with Deneen’s Hobby Lobby argument that strikes me is that economic structures do not constitute the whole of life. This is not to say that they are unimportant, but it is to call into question his assertion that the market has disembedded us, that society is no more than a mere “adjunct” to the market.¹¹ He harps on the fact that the modern economy is not neutral, but it is unclear what the *telos* of the market is (or if it even has a *telos*). One of the underappreciated factors of modern markets is that they enable choice to an unprecedented extent. High levels of choice, while not an unqualified good, give ordinary people the chance to select products they want

¹⁰ Ibid., 180-81.

¹¹ Deneen, “Even if Hobby Lobby Wins, We Lose.”

based on internal valuations and varying levels of resource control.¹² Deneen may complain about deracinated communities festooned with strip malls, but he fails to engage with the fact that Americans asked for this (by voting with their dollars and their feet). Again, the market cannot be, in the main, the source of our ills because other options are available (for example, supporting local craftsmen and proprietors, moving to communities that satisfy your preferences, and grassroots activism). In other words, what Polanyi calls “disembedding” is less an inexorable march of unseen, powerful forces and more an aggregation of choices made by average people who prefer cheap goods and more variety.

Determinism and the Founding

A market alone does not make a society. That’s why Deneen then turns to criticizing the American Founding. If it is true that real people asked for these changes and got what they preferred, perhaps it is the case that the political regime that structures their lives and orders their desires is responsible for this calamitous situation. Yet it is not at all clear that the Founding has inevitably led to cultural degeneration. For every just-so story we hear about the Founders smuggling in secular-liberal dogma, we must recall the inconvenient truth about the American project: Its beginnings are messy – and very difficult to fit into a neat historical narrative. Just as there is a secular-liberal thread

¹² A helpful distinction here might be the difference between catallaxy and economy, discussed at length by both von Mises and Hayek. To grossly oversimplify: Economy as understood by Aristotle was the art of household management, while catallaxy signifies a spontaneous order deriving from the interaction of many different households. For some Austrians, the word “economy” implies top-down centralization and direction, while catallaxy more accurately allows for decentralization and, ideally, no political oversight of the market. In Austrian terms, the catallactics of modernity have spontaneously generated the particular market forms we experience today, and this generation is remarkably nonteleological.

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in the Founding, there is also a longstanding commitment to the value of religion, not merely as an instrument for inculcating basic social niceties but also as an intrinsic good that is integral to human flourishing.¹³ The other problem that stopped me from fully accepting the whole of Deneen's argument in *Why Liberalism Failed* is that he downplays historical contingency. In other words, he wants to emphasize the inevitability of collapse, which shades into an overly deterministic account that fails to engage with the novelty, improbability, and chance that seem to govern history just as much as ideas do.

Honoring both Theoria and Praxis

The second point above (that decline narratives can be unduly monocausal) also points to a larger tendency in conservative discourse to fall back upon intellectual genealogy. If we consider the speculative, or "ideas" broadly understood, as the prime medium for the practice of history, then we end up ignoring human practice and chance. Why would this matter? It comes down to a fundamental question of what philosophy of history we choose to subscribe to. If we overemphasize ideas relative to human action, then we end up with a flawed anthropology of man. We must represent man's interaction with the world and his fellows faithfully, for errors here can have consequences far down the line of our reasoning. Rather than the so-called primacy of the speculative, we must consider both ideas and contingency as interacting in concert, toward a great (if sometimes discordant)

¹³ See Dennis Teti's 1997 *Crisis* essay, "Why the Pope Loves America," for a short recounting of the classic examples of the Founders' valuing religion, <https://www.crisismagazine.com/issues/archive/1997/page/9>. For a representative example, examine George Washington's farewell address. There is a robust body of scholarship debating to what extent Christian and Catholic principles are evident in the Founding, but the most obvious preliminary takeaway is that a wholesale rejection of the Founding as some secular-liberal dystopia is rooted in nothing more than fantasy.

symphony of human life. One can only hear the symphony of human life if one is attuned to human nature. Is there any institution more capable of this perception than the Church?

Rerum novarum: Toward a Truce between Capital and Labor

Catholic social teaching incorporates a genuine and robust anthropology into its practical discussions of economic, political, and social questions. We first turn to Pope Leo XIII's 1891 encyclical *Rerum novarum* for the Church's reaction to nineteenth-century communism, socialism, laissez-faire capitalism, and liberalism. Leo sought to chart a middle course through the passions of his day, attempting to mediate a healthy truce between the forces of labor and capital. It is notable that while the pope harshly condemns socialism, communism, and unrestrained capitalism, his critiques of liberalism are nuanced and technical. The animating principle of the encyclical is that the natural right to private property must be protected, for to do otherwise is unjust.¹⁴ This helps explain Leo's call for mediation – liberalism tempered with religious devotion inflicts far less injustice than economic systems that lead to vast expropriation of property.¹⁵ So modern rights-based liberalism that protects human dignity¹⁶ and

¹⁴ *Rerum novarum*, 6.

¹⁵ While it is clear that orthodox socialism at the time of Leo's encyclical called for mass expropriation of property for redistribution, it is not immediately clear why Leo would lump laissez-faire capitalism in with its left-wing counterparts. However, we must historicize the encyclical. Leo wrote during the time of the great industrial robber barons, who accumulated vast amounts of capital and employed a massive proletariat of proletarianized workers. Thus he was concerned about an oligarchy of capitalists, on one hand, and a dictatorship of vanguard intellectuals, on the other.

¹⁶ Obviously modern liberalism also hosts pernicious ideas about bodily autonomy and sexual license that are incompatible with Catholic moral reasoning and the natural law. However, totalitarian states on both the left and the right also engage in the same evils coupled with other atrocities that

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allows for the productive improvement of the gift of God's creation through the mechanism of private property, and capitalism seems to be most in line with Leo's vision.

It should also be noted that Leo develops the twin principles of solidarity and subsidiarity. We see, for example, his call for a mutually beneficial detente between capital and labor in order to restore harmony to the body politic.¹⁷ If laborers and wealth owners are bound by webs of mutual obligation and respect each other's inherent dignity as *creaturae imago Dei*, then they would also provide for each other's material needs – with the capitalist paying a living wage and the worker honoring his labor contract. Leo rhetorically asks, if his precepts were “carefully obeyed and followed out, would they not be sufficient of themselves to keep under all strife and all its causes?”¹⁸ While in some ways this question is unanswerable, we can observe with some satisfaction that as more workers today become prosperous through honorable work of all types, they are treated with respect as they power the most productive economy in history.¹⁹ In Genesis, God places the burden of eating by the sweat of one's brow upon the sons of Adam. Modern society, for all its faults, economizes that sweat and allows more and more of us a comfortable and dignified existence.

John Paul II and the Culture of Death

However, we must return to the simple truth that a prosperous economy alone does not make a society. Pope St. John Paul II realized

cry to God for vengeance. Evils such as abortion are not exclusive to liberal regimes.

¹⁷ *Rerum novarum*, 19.

¹⁸ *Rerum novarum*, 20.

¹⁹ This may sound trite, but it is simply true that at no other point in history have workers been treated as well as they are today. This is the result of progress through labor activism as well as the underappreciated Fordist insight of managers that satisfied employees are good for a firm's bottom line.

this early in his papacy, and the flurry of encyclicals he wrote drew attention to the errors, both ancient and modern, that threaten political life and the dignity of each person. Importantly, John Paul II does not indict liberalism qua liberalism or capitalism qua capitalism; rather, he draws on the timeless truths of Catholic social thought to offer a Leonine witness to the modern world. In *Familiaris consortio*, he, like Leo, hallows the family as the quintessential society that forms the bedrock upon which the superstructure of political society is built. He notes that challenges to the family spring from a culture of sterility and death, a despair for the future despite the great technological progress visible in our age.²⁰ A hatred of life that flows from the absence of God in the hearts of man, the culture of death was the pope's greatest concern. Even in his encyclicals focused on political economy, such as *Laborem exercens*, ground their technical solutions in a proper understanding of anthropology.²¹

Here we find the root cause that we have been searching for in this essay. This cause is both simpler and more profound than blaming either modern economics or the political ideology we call liberalism. It is most simply expressed as the term "sin." However, it might be more helpful to think of the root cause as a flawed understanding of human nature and a rejection of God's love. This is why the Church's perspective is so valuable: Over the last 2,000 years, the Church has been able to articulate what is wrong about the world from a correct perspective that takes into account concupiscence, original sin, and the fullness of theological truth contained within the deposit of faith, shepherded by the magisterium.

²⁰ *Familiaris consortio*, 30.

²¹ See, for instance, how he phrases the Church's intention in speaking of work: "Relating herself to man, she seeks to express the eternal designs and transcendent destiny which the living God, the Creator and Redeemer, has linked with him." *Laborem exercens*, 4.

Benedict XVI and Francis: Univocity in American Addresses

We can now turn to our most recent popes, Benedict XVI and Francis. The latter's election prompted much talk of a rift within the Church between traditionalists and liberals, but the two men are unsurprisingly univocal when it comes to the primary task of the supreme pontiff. Namely, they both bear prophetic witness to the world, preaching the gospel of life and condemning the world's obsession with death. Returning to our original concerns about America, let us consider how each pope personally addressed the highest political authorities when visiting our land.

Pope Benedict XVI spoke at the White House in April of 2008. In his remarks, one of his first assertions is that “[f]rom the dawn of the Republic, America’s quest for freedom has been guided by the conviction that the principles governing political and social life are intimately linked to a moral order based on the dominion of God the Creator.”²² This religious patrimony flows down from the Declaration of Independence to great goods such as the abolishment of slavery and the civil rights movement, in the pope’s telling. Accordingly, we can understand American history as possessing a through line whereby, as we more perfectly live up to our Founding ideals, we do so through a shared Christian heritage. We can therefore take a different angle on the Founding from postliberal critics: Though we remain attentive to secularizing elements within modern culture, we do not find their source in the Founding. Benedict XVI even points out a similarity between his predecessor John Paul II’s arguments in *Centesimus annus* and in George Washington’s Farewell Address, wherein religion and morality function as essential backstops to true freedom and “political prosperity” in America.²³ Of course, this leads naturally into the commitment of the United States to the rest of the world, where

²² https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2008/april/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20080416_welcome-washington.html.

²³ Ibid.

solidarity and charity must reign. Thus, America becomes a bastion safeguarding the divine gifts of human dignity and human rights for both its citizens at home and foreigners abroad.²⁴

Developing these themes further, in September of 2015 Francis became the first pope to address a joint session of the U.S. Congress. In his speech Francis first reminded legislators of their solemn duty through a Mosaic lens – they are to enact just laws that protect all people created in the image and likeness of God.²⁵ He then offered the example of four Americans: Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King, Jr., Dorothy Day, and Thomas Merton. Each figure reveals in a different way how to fulfill our duty. Lincoln calls us, like Benedict, to more perfectly embody American ideals of freedom and dignity for all. Martin Luther King, Jr. illustrates how men and women of deep Christian faith can lead the nation as well as serve as its conscience and moral authority. Dorothy Day, the founder of the Catholic Worker movement, shows us how to channel our faith into practical charitable works, at both the individual and institutional levels. And finally Thomas Merton, the Cistercian monk, models both contemplative prayer and vulnerable dialogue – two essentially Christian activities sorely lacking in our day. Francis concludes by asserting that each figure – Lincoln, King, Day, and Merton – presents some of the “richness of your cultural heritage, of the spirit of the American people.”²⁶

²⁴ Benedict believes this is a responsibility of all nations, as evidenced in his speech to the U.N. on the same trip (https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2008/april/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20080418_un-visit.html). Given U.S. hegemony, Americans have a disproportionate duty in this regard.

²⁵ https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/september/documents/papa-francesco_20150924_usa-us-congress.html.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

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Conclusion

Perhaps this is where we may conclude as well. The problem with America is also the source of America's greatness. Our problem is not to be found in modern economics or political liberalism. Rather, our problems are to be found within ourselves, in the reality of sin and evil that our faith moves us to recognize and root out in our lives. But even as we see our problems there, we can also see a path forward. Decadence, decay, and degeneracy can be fought not through fanciful postliberal politics but, rather, through saintly living. This is eminently possible today, and it ought to be our first priority. America provides the ideal seedbed for a new generation of saints, and we owe it to our families and descendants to give completely of ourselves in pursuit of this ultimate goal.

The Natural Right to a Living Wage

*Margaret Juge**

ON APRIL 24TH, 2013, an eight-story commercial building in Bangladesh called Rana Plaza collapsed and killed 1,134 factory workers. Some 2,500 others were injured. The Rana Plaza collapse awakened the world to the horrible working conditions and incredibly low wages of factory workers in third world countries. As Jonathan Jacoby writes, “inside factories like Rana, workers [labor] long hours, often in unsafe conditions, earning an average of approximately \$50 a month—less than the cost of just one of the pairs of pants they were assembling for sale in Europe and the United States.”¹ Two years after the collapse, a documentary called *The True Cost* was released. The film follows a Bangladeshi factory worker named Shima “who made the equivalent of \$10 a month when first on the job” and eventually founded a union in order to demand a living wage and better working conditions.² *The True Cost* villainizes the fast fashion industry and praises ethical brands such as People Tree, the first fashion company to receive the World Fair Trade Organization certification.³ As the documentary makes clear, those who really pay the price for clothing are the workers who make it.

The outrage prompted by the Rana Plaza collapse demonstrates that there is some universal intuition, albeit vague, regarding unethical

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¹ Jonathan Jacoby, “What’s Changed (and What Hasn’t) Since the Rana Plaza Nightmare,” *Open Society Foundations*, 24 April 2018, <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/voices/what-s-changed-and-what-hasn-t-rana-plaza-nightmare>.

² Krystina Gustafson, “‘The True Cost’ attacks the business of fast fashion,” *CNBC*, 29 May 2015, <https://www.cnbc.com/2015/05/29/the-true-cost-attacks-the-business-of-fast-fashion.html>.

³ “Our Story,” *People Tree*, <https://www.peopletree.co.uk/about-us>.

wages and working conditions. Human beings are capable of recognizing injustice even if justice is difficult for them to define. Because we recognize that there are such things as unjust wages and working conditions, we must also conclude that there are some standards for wages and working conditions against which we are measuring the unjust ones. Yet here begin the complications. Public and private interests are divided on the issue of how to determine what constitutes sustainable living wages. Even so, I would argue that it is imperative that workers receive a living wage because such a wage is their natural right.

According to Pope Pius XI, a living wage is one “sufficient to support [the worker] and his family.”⁴ The natural right to a living wage is not only discernible by reason but also supported by the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. The Church’s teaching on a living wage builds on the idea of our natural right to acquire the goods needed to support our flourishing, and it affirms the good of the whole economy. In this paper I will draw from classical sources to develop the natural law foundation of the Church’s teaching on the dignity of work and the right to a living wage. After examining magisterial sources, I will turn to the work of Fr. John Augustine Ryan, whose theory of distributive justice tethers the Church’s teachings to economic realities. Finally, I will conclude with a reflection on Pope John Paul II’s *Laborem exercens*, which offers important insights regarding the dignity of work.

To begin, let us consider why human beings need material goods in order to flourish. It might seem that they are unnecessary distractions, after all. Socrates, for example, is said to have lived an ascetic lifestyle with very few material possessions in order that he might better philosophize. Similarly, Epicurus taught that in order to maximize pleasure by minimizing all pain, the best strategy is to detach oneself from material possessions. By contrast, however, in his *Politics*

⁴ *Quadragesimo anno*, 71.

Aristotle writes, “[A] good life requires a supply of external goods, in a less degree when men are in a good state, in a greater degree when they are in a lower state.”⁵ Although “mankind [does] not acquire or preserve virtue by the help of external goods,” we acquire and preserve “external goods by the help of virtue.”⁶ Moreover, Aristotle maintains that “the best life, both for individuals and states, is the life of virtue, when virtue has external goods enough for the performance of good actions.”⁷ Like Socrates, Aristotle prioritizes the life of virtue over the pursuit and enjoyment of external goods, but he does not dismiss the latter’s importance for happiness. For, without a sufficient amount of external goods to meet his basic needs, the individual cannot perform good, magnanimous actions.

Thomas Aquinas affirms Aristotle’s position in the *Summa theologiae*: “[E]xternal goods are required for the imperfect happiness which can be had in this life, not as being of the essence of happiness but as serving instrumentally for happiness, which consists in the activity of virtue.”⁸ Aristotle and Aquinas clearly observe that external goods are not the summit of human happiness. Even so, because they are necessary as means to a higher end, namely, human flourishing, man has a right to external goods.

I will not develop a detailed discussion of the language of rights here, but a few words of explanation are in order. For both Aristotle and Aquinas, man’s end, or *telos*, is happiness. For Aristotle, that happiness is achieved by acquiring and exercising the intellectual and moral virtues in this life, and for Aquinas, it is achieved in the beatific vision of the next life. For both thinkers, those things necessary for the achievement of one’s *telos* are also things to which one has a right. Josef

⁵ Aristotle, *Politics*, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle* (New York: Random House, 2001), 1295.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 1278.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 1279.

⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Treatise on Happiness*, trans. John A. Oesterle (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 51.

Pieper affirms this in *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, wherein he asserts a right is grounded in justice: “Whatever is due to a person, the *suum*, is something that one man may demand of another is owing to him, and him only.”⁹ Pieper states that “man has a right to some things as his due, which has no basis in any action of his,” but man also has a right to some things because of his work for another.¹⁰ Based on Pieper’s formulation, man has a right to external goods as his just due from another, which supports our discussion of wages as a natural right. However, since Aristotle and Aquinas maintain that external goods are instrumentally necessary for human flourishing, man has a right to external goods. Pieper writes:

Man...is a person – a spiritual being, a whole unto himself, that exists for itself and of itself, that wills its proper perfection.... [F]or that very reason, something is due to man in the fullest sense, for that reason he does inalienably have a *suum*, a “right” which he can plead against everyone else, a right which imposes upon every one of his partners the obligation at least not to violate it.¹¹

Thus, insofar as something is due to man as remuneration for work and he has rights and obligations for the sake of his human flourishing, man possesses a natural right to wages that affirm his dignity as a worker and support his flourishing as a human being.

Upon this foundation Pope Leo XIII, in 1891, wrote his encyclical *Rerum novarum*, subtitled “Rights and Duties of Capital and Labor.” A foundational text of Catholic social teaching, *Rerum novarum* was written as a response to the myriad social concerns raised during the Industrial Revolution and the rise in popularity of socialism in the nineteenth century. In it, Leo discusses the relationship between the

⁹ Josef Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966), 47.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 46.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 50.

economy and the dignity of the human person. Integral to the discussion is the concept of a living wage, which the pope states is based on man's "natural right to procure what is required in order to live."¹² By asserting that a living wage is a natural right, Leo situates the Church's teaching on a living wage within the natural law tradition. Living wages are a natural right that respects the dignity of human persons within the economy. Moreover, the living wage, though somewhat vague as a concept, does not necessarily mean the same thing as a minimum wage. Leo XIII makes this claim in *Rerum novarum* when he associates the dignity of the worker with the ability "to exert oneself for the sake of procuring what is necessary for the various purposes of life, and first of all for self-preservation."¹³ Because "the poor can procure [external goods] in no other way than by what they can earn through their work," businesses must pay their workers a fair wage.¹⁴ A living wage affirms the dignity of the worker by enabling him to procure the external goods necessary for his earthly happiness and for sustaining his life and the lives of his dependents.

Leo XIII's claim that a living wage is a natural right is supported by his successors Pius XI and John Paul II. In *Quadragesimo anno* Pius reiterates the natural right to a living wage and extends the idea to a living family wage. He writes, "Every effort must therefore be made that fathers of families receive a wage large enough to meet ordinary family needs adequately"; should a father be unable to meet the family's needs, "social justice demands that changes be introduced as soon as possible whereby such a wage will be assured to every adult workingman."¹⁵ Here Pius XI broadens the concept of a living wage to mean a wage sufficient to support a whole family, and he asserts that wages insufficient to sustain a whole family are a breach of justice. Pope St. John Paul II echoes this point when he writes, "[A] just wage

¹² *Rerum novarum*, 44.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Quadragesimo anno*, 71.

is the concrete means of verifying the justice of the whole socioeconomic system and, in any case, of checking that it is functioning justly.”¹⁶ The Church’s teaching may be summarized thus: A living wage is a natural right because man has a right to work and be paid so that he can obtain those external goods required to sustain the life and promote the happiness of himself and his family. Wages that are not sufficient to meet the needs of the worker and his dependents indicate some injustice in the socioeconomic system.

Papal teaching leaves much room for disagreement when it comes to specifying what actually constitutes a living wage. In “Is a Living Wage a Just Wage?” Patricia Lamoureux seeks to offer some precision on the matter. She offers a definition of a living wage based on the idea of “a floor beneath which wages ought not fall and a ceiling above which wages ought not to rise.”¹⁷ Lamoureux clarifies that a living wage is “the minimum amount due a wage earner [that] is not simply enough remuneration to ‘survive,’ but it ought to be sufficient to enable a worker and his or her family to live a reasonably comfortable life, in relative simplicity, and to experience participatory community.”¹⁸ That minimum amount is “sufficient to acquire food, housing and clothing; to educate children; to acquire property; to save for the future; and various social benefits such as vacation, health care, life insurance and pension.”¹⁹ Moreover, Lamoureux writes that an equitable living wage will recognize differences among people’s skills and talents and compensate them proportionately based on their relative contributions to the work of their employer.

Although Lamoureux gives a detailed explanation of what she argues constitutes a living wage, she does not offer solutions to any of the objections that she mentions in her paper. For example,

¹⁶ *Laborem exercens*, 19.

¹⁷ Patricia Lamoureux, “Is a Living Wage a Just Wage?” *America* 184, no. 5 (2001): 14.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

Lamoureux notes that some object to a living wage because it allegedly “leads to a loss of jobs, a decline in city services and a drain on city finances,” is a “quixotic challenge to the laws of supply and demand,” or that “linking the living wage with provisions for a family is not viable in a market economy.”²⁰ Others doubt that “a national minimum wage increase is the best way, or even a good strategy for achieving a living wage,” as it guarantees only the minimum just wage rather than a true living wage.²¹ Lamoureux acknowledges that these are common objections, but she offers no concrete replies to them. In turn, the objections lead one to suspect that a sustainable living wage is simply an aspirational ideal.

The lack of constructive responses to such objections is a major shortcoming in the conversation about a living wage; however, the often overlooked work of Fr. John Ryan is an important and useful source here. Ryan was an early twentieth-century priest and proponent of economic justice whose book *A Living Wage: Its Ethical and Economic Aspects* offers some practical proposals. In a reaffirmation of earlier Church teaching, he claims that “the individual has a right to all things that are essential to the reasonable development of his personality, consistently with the rights of others and the complete observance of the moral law.”²² But it is noteworthy that Ryan’s addition of “consistently with the rights of others” reorients the living wage within the realm of distributive justice, the framework utilized by societies for the allocation of benefits and burdens.

Ryan proposes six canons of distributive justice that compose a robust theory of economic justice. The crown of these is human welfare, in which benefits and burdens are distributed “according to that which promotes the well-being of all persons considered

²⁰ Ibid., 12.

²¹ Ibid.

²² John A. Ryan, “A Just Wage,” in *American Catholic Religious Thought*, ed. Patrick W. Carey (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2010), 369.

individually as well as collectively.”²³ The principle of human welfare grounds Ryan’s five other canons of distributive justice, and together they form the basis of an all-encompassing theory of economic justice. The five canons are: equality, wherein anyone who contributes to production is entitled to equal portion of its benefits; needs, based on the ability to use economic goods; efforts and sacrifices, that is, that which the individual is rewarded for their investment in production; productivity, the quantitative result of labor; and scarcity, where availability of skills and equipment determine a worker’s value.²⁴ Mark V. Rugani notes that Ryan’s canons are “compatible with economic definitions of welfare noting the advantage of a producer’s investment in labor and capital to evoke maximum net product to the point where diminishing returns to scale set in,” and that “human welfare, with its ethical emphasis on the dignity of the human person, becomes for Ryan the touchstone for any determination of distributive justice.”²⁵

Under the principle of human welfare, the individual person’s dignity is affirmed when he receives a living wage. Moreover, Ryan considers the collective economic good in human welfare, and so, I would argue, addresses the objections mentioned by Lamoureux. In the human welfare scheme of distributive justice, the living wage is adjusted such that it meets the needs of the individual and his dependents, but the living wage is not so high that it becomes a burden on the economic whole. This definition is intentionally broad, because what wage fulfills both requirements is contingent and determined by particular communities. Because man is a social animal and thus naturally inclined to live in community, the good of the community reflects the good of man and is necessary for respecting man’s dignity.

²³ Mark V. Rugani, “Whose Justice? Which Rationality?” in Catholic Debates on a Living Wage: John A. Ryan’s Canons of Distributive Justice as Locus of Contested Traditions of Enquiry,” *Catholic Social Science Review* 20 (2015): 44.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

Furthermore, neither the good of the economic community nor the good of man takes precedence; rather, these are balanced as the needs of the individual and the whole are both taken into consideration.

Even without a discussion of the origins of a living wage in the Catholic intellectual tradition and the practical application proposed by Ryan, a defense of a living wage can be made from the dignity of work. In *Laborem exercens*, Pope John Paul II outlines the Church's teaching on the issue as follows:

Man is made to be in the visible universe an image and likeness of God himself, and he is placed in it in order to subdue the earth. From the beginning therefore he is called to work. Work is one of the characteristics that distinguish man from the rest of creatures, whose activity for sustaining their lives cannot be called work. Only man is capable of work, and only man works, at the same time by work occupying his existence on earth. Thus work bears a particular mark of man and of humanity, the mark of a person operating within a community of persons. And this mark decides its interior characteristics; in a sense it constitutes its very nature.²⁶

As one of man's distinguishing characteristics, work has an inherent dignity because man has inherent dignity. The pope writes, "It is always man who is the purpose of the work, whatever work it is that is done by man – even if the common scale of values rates it as the merest 'service,' as the most monotonous even the most alienating work."²⁷ Even monotonous work performed in factories in Bangladesh has dignity because the workers themselves have dignity. Moreover, socioeconomic systems do well to honor the dignity of both the worker and his work. The justice of any system is measured by the worker's ability to receive as compensation for his work wages sufficient to provide for his needs.

²⁶ *Laborem exercens*, introduction.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

The Catholic theory of a living wage subordinates the whole to the individual person, but it is still true that, without a well-functioning economy, the individual cannot receive the goods he needs to flourish. Despite objections that a living wage is not practicable, it is still worthy of reflection insofar as the global economy remains fraught with serious injustices that need somehow to be addressed.

Vengeance, Proportionality, and the Fittingness of Capital Punishment

*Rachel Lyter**

ENTERING THE BASILICA of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C., one cannot miss the 3,610-square-foot mosaic, “Christ in Majesty.” This image of the Lord towers above and gazes down upon each person worshipping. The face of Christ is asymmetrical: The left brow is raised, and the right is relaxed. The Lord who came to rescue the lost sheep has also come to set the world ablaze. Mercy and justice are familiar terms, but their relationship tends to be puzzling. In common usage they seem contradictory. “Justice is served” means quite the opposite of “he got off scot-free.” Yet we do well to recall the words of Pope Benedict: “[J]ustice is inseparable from charity, and intrinsic to it.”¹ In what follows I will reflect on this idea. By illuminating the interrelatedness of justice and mercy in both punishment generally and capital punishment specifically, I will argue that capital punishment is not to be condemned.²

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¹ *Caritas in veritate*, 6.

² It is important to note the cases of those who have been wrongfully convicted and executed, only to be exonerated after they died. We may reflect on how Aquinas notes that “our Lord teaches that we should rather allow the wicked to live...rather than that the good be put to death together with the wicked.” Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, II-II, q. 64, a. 2. In prudential and practical terms, we may be called to consider carefully proposed reforms when it comes to the use of capital punishment in our criminal justice system.

Justice determines how we ought to live in community and conduct ourselves toward others, as it requires that we render to each person what is due. Aquinas defines justice as “the perpetual and constant will to render one his right.”³ The object of justice is *jus*. What Aquinas means by *jus* is “what justice is about and what doing justice secures...the right of some other person or persons – what is due to them, what they are entitled to, what is rightfully theirs.”⁴ As it “renders a human act and man himself good,”⁵ it is a virtue and thereby moves us toward our final end, our ultimate happiness. As a virtue moderating the interactions of men, it is exercised in both interpersonal and wider communal relationships. Commutative justice is a particular form of the virtue that “is concerned about the mutual dealings between two persons,” while distributive justice has to do with “distribut[ing] common goods proportionately.”⁶ Public justice or legal justice is a third term that refers to “the architectonic virtue which directs the exercise of the other virtues to its own object, the common good.”⁷

Sin is any unjust act that breaks God’s eternal law and thereby betrays God, society, and the sinner himself. It disrupts the natural order in each of these domains. Sin will be punished by God under his eternal law, and by the sinner himself through his conscience and experience of remorse. For its part, society carries out vengeance to rectify the imbalance caused by the sinner’s actions in that sphere. Aquinas states that punishing sins “is the concern of public justice” and, therefore, “is an act of commutative justice.”⁸ He characterizes

³ *ST* II-II, q. 58, a. 1.

⁴ John Finnis, *Aquinas: Moral Political and Legal Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 133.

⁵ *ST* II-II, q. 58, a. 3.

⁶ *ST* II-II, q. 61, a. 1.

⁷ Christopher Kaczor and Thomas Sherman, S.J., *Thomas Aquinas on the Cardinal Virtues: A Summa of the Summa on Prudence, Justice, Temperance, and Courage* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2020), 60.

⁸ *ST* II-II, q. 108, a. 2.

punishments as “instances of depriving the criminal of some good of which the criminal is no longer worthy.”⁹

Counterintuitive as it may seem, vengeance is in fact a virtue when it “consists in the infliction of a penal evil on one who has sinned.”¹⁰ Like every virtue, it is rooted in charity.¹¹ Through charity one regards faults committed against God and neighbor as faults committed against oneself.¹² Moreover, as a mean the virtue of vengeance is flanked by two extremes: The excess is brutality or cruelty, and the deficiency is a laxity that “consists in being remiss in punishing.”¹³

The virtue of vengeance always seeks some good, namely, to restore the right order of justice. It does this by associating negative experiences with evil choices. Normally the repetition of acts that promote our happiness and fulfillment is encouraged by attendant good feelings that we associate with those acts, which in turn increase the likelihood that we will repeat them. By the same token, evil acts unassociated with negative feelings, or associated with positive feelings, disrupt the natural order within a person. Aquinas concludes that earthly punishments are restorative or “of a medicinal character.”¹⁴ Punishment restores the “equality of justice...in so far as he who by sinning has exceeded in following his own will suffers something that is contrary to his will.”¹⁵

In addition to restoring the natural order, punishment can also preserve the sinner from future sin.¹⁶ Earthly afflictions in this life “cleanse...lesser faults” and raise the subject “up from earthly affections to God.”¹⁷ Right punishments and the restoration of justice

⁹ Kaczor and Sherman, *Thomas Aquinas on the Cardinal Virtues*, 121.

¹⁰ *ST* II-II, q. 108, a. 1.

¹¹ *ST* II-II, q. 108, a. 2.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *ST* II-II, q. 108, a. 3.

¹⁵ *ST* II-II, q. 108, a. 4.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *ST* I, q. 21, a. 4.

also bolster the common good, for the foundation of social order is truth, which Pope St. John XXIII has written “must be brought into effect by justice.”¹⁸ As the pope also explains, “before a society can be considered well-ordered, creative, and consonant with human dignity, it must be based on truth.”¹⁹

Punishment is virtuous to the extent that it restores the virtue of justice in the offender and promotes the common good in society. How exactly are offenders to be punished? To answer this question, we must appeal to the principle of proportionality, which affirms that “a punishment ought to be proportional to the offense.”²⁰ As Aquinas writes, “if there are degrees in virtuous acts and in sins, as we showed, there must also be degrees among rewards and punishments. Otherwise, equality would not be preserved.”²¹ Similarly, he refers to “different retribution on the basis of the diversity of good and evil.”²² A crime determines the severity and nature of its punishment, just as the virtue of an act determines its rewards. The most virtuous act of dying for the faith, for example, bestows on a saint “the crown of martyrdom.” By contrast, while helping your neighbor with his trash cans is admirable, the degree of virtue in this act is lesser and, accordingly, one’s reward is lesser. Likewise, murder is a greater sin than unfriendliness, and so it requires a greater punishment in order to restore the right order that was disrupted. Scripture confirms this idea: “Punishment should be proportionate to fault, according to the saying of Isaias (27:8) ‘In measure against measure, when it shall be cast off, thou shalt judge it.’”²³ To summarize, a punishment should correspond

¹⁸ *Pacem in terris*, 37.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 35.

²⁰ Edward Feser and Joseph M. Bessette, *By Man Shall His Blood Be Shed: A Catholic Defense of Capital Punishment* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2017), 43.

²¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles III*, trans. Anton C. Pegis et al. (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), 142.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *ST*, appendix 1, q. 1, a. 1.

to the crime in both degree and type. Not only the severity but also the character of the punishment must be proportional to the severity and character of the sin.²⁴

Proportionality corresponds to the idea that vengeance is a mean between the extremes of brutality and laxity. A sentence that is harsher than the crime committed would be brutal, while one that is insufficiently harsh would be lax. The crown of martyrdom for the trash-helper neighbor is excessive, while a simple “kudos” for the martyr would be insufficient. Truly just retribution is always proportional. Therefore, judges and others responsible for meting out justice in society must issue sentences that are proportional. As Aquinas writes, “every judge is bound to give each man his right.”²⁵ A guilty party who receives a disproportionate punishment is not rendered his right. He deserves to be punished as the natural consequence of his action. Aquinas affirms that punishment often means taking away that which man loves most in order to prevent him and others from choosing to sin. He includes among such things a man’s “life, bodily safety, his own freedom, and external goods such as riches, his country and his good name.”²⁶

Just as punishment seeks and brings about good effects, inadequate or lacking punishment brings about ill effects. Aquinas writes that a judge “remit[ting] punishment inordinately...inflicts an injury on the community, for whose good it behooves ill-deeds to be punished, in order that men may avoid sin.”²⁷ Scripture affirms the deterrent effect of punishment as godly: Stoning a man who worships a false idol is commanded so “that all Israel hearing may fear, and may do no more anything like this.”²⁸ Importantly, a judge whose sentence is less than what justice demands also falls short of delivering what is owed to the

²⁴ Feser and Bessette, *By Man Shall His Blood Be Shed*, 44.

²⁵ *ST II-II*, q. 64, a. 4.

²⁶ *ST II-II*, q. 108, a. 3.

²⁷ *ST II-II*, q. 64, a. 4.

²⁸ Deuteronomy 13:11.

victim, “who is compensated by having his honor restored in the punishment of the man who has injured him.”²⁹ If the only way to deliver justice and thereby restore the natural order is through a proportional punishment, then punishments are not rightly matters left wholly to judges’ discretion or caprice.

Among the most loved things that Aquinas identifies, a man’s life is of greatest magnitude. Under the principle of proportionality, therefore, capital punishment is suited to crimes of the greatest magnitude. Granted, there may be crimes of such magnitude that capital punishment does not seem adequate to effect retribution. A mass murderer, for example, cannot lose his life multiple times in retribution for the many lives he has taken, and in this quantitative sense capital punishment is not proportional to his crimes. Even so, it is the option that comes closest to proportionality. And so, to eliminate capital punishment as an option for punishing the gravest crimes would be contrary to the principle of proportionality.

Feser and Bessette emphasize that the absence of proportionality undermines the whole idea and reality of punishment.³⁰ Punishment restores justice by delivering the object of justice, *ius*, what is one’s due. If capital punishment is not an option in the worst cases, then we must call into question the proportionality the whole scale of punishments for crimes of lesser degrees. What is one’s due seems to become subjective instead of objective, which is contrary to the very nature of justice.

This is not to say that capital punishment must be used in every case where the crime is proportional. Rather, my claim is simply that it ought not to be denied as a fitting means of vengeance. Beyond the argument based on proportionality, we may appeal again to Aquinas. He writes that “the imperfect is directed to the perfect,”³¹ and in the order of nature there are creatures lacking human dignity that are

²⁹ *ST II-II*, q. 64, a. 4.

³⁰ Feser and Bessette, *By Man Shall His Blood Be Shed*, 54.

³¹ *ST II-II*, q. 64, a. 2.

rightly subject to the use of man. Moreover, “by sinning man departs from the order of reason, and consequently falls away from the dignity of his manhood” and “into the slavish state of the beasts.”³² Accordingly, as there is some good to be obtained from our use of lower creatures, it “may be good to kill a man who has sinned...for a bad man is worse than a beast, and is more harmful.” Regarding “the punishment of death,” Aquinas writes that it “is inflicted on those sins alone which conduct to the grave undoing of others.”³³

Capital punishment is appropriate for the most serious crimes that cannot be adequately avenged by any other means. Beyond its application as a matter of justice, the question of mercy remains. Opponents appeal to mercy in their arguments against the death penalty, implying that capital punishment is incompatible with mercy. But we should recall that mercy and justice are intrinsically linked. In fact, mercy can be extended only *above and beyond* justice. Rendering one his right, or giving him his due, is the “minimum measure”³⁴ of charity, in the words of Pope Paul VI. Mercy is not a revocation of justice: It is “doing something more than justice.”³⁵ Aquinas states that it “does not destroy justice, but in a sense is the fulness thereof. And thus it is said: ‘Mercy exalteth itself above judgment.’”³⁶ In beautiful simplicity, Pope Benedict states, “If we love others with charity, then first of all we are just towards them.”³⁷

Because justice precedes mercy, it must follow that giving less than what is due in punishment cannot be merciful, for it is not just. However, to the extent that a punishment orders one’s soul to its proper end, it may accordingly be means of mercy. Punishments may incline one to reject sin and to follow God’s law instead. Facing his

³² Ibid.

³³ *ST II-II*, q. 108, a. 3.

³⁴ *Caritas in veritate*, 6.

³⁵ *ST I*, q. 21, a. 3.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ *Caritas in veritate*, 6.

own death sentence, the man who has descended to the level of a beast is confronted with his own mortality. That his soul may be saved is an important spiritual benefit that can be seen only with eyes of faith. But what better motivation to accept God's redemptive grace? And herein lies mercy. The just punishment can bring human brokenness and isolation to redemption and fullness of life with God.

Should the Government Invest in Heterosexual Marriage through Legal Benefits?

*Catherine Patros**

The Debate about the Family in America

MANY AMERICANS FEEL that excluding some forms of unions from the definition of marriage is biased and hateful. “Love is love” is a popular catchphrase I see on many political yard signs near my home. Other Americans hold religious beliefs about the definition of marriage, but they believe that marriage should be left to the private sphere and government should stay out of it. A recent article in *Public Discourse* titled “When Marriage Becomes a Private Matter” detailed an interview with a young American who holds such an opinion:

Confusion about the public aspects of marriage has led some Christians to support civil (but not religious) same-sex marriage. For Thomas, a thirty-year-old married Catholic telecommunications manager from Austin, civil marriage is simply “a contract to live together and reap benefits from the state.” He’s content with extending the benefits to alternative arrangements: “Basically, any two people can get married, which is fine, because you turn it into a contract.”

This understanding enables Thomas to ignore much of the conflict between modern civil marriage and his faith’s sacramental understanding of the union. “So kind of my

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Should the Government Invest in Heterosexual Marriage?

argument is to get the government out of the marriage business,” he explained, “and have it just be the church.” (Never mind that this doesn’t account for the “contract” he just endorsed, which some entity must regulate). Thomas’s idea allows him to operate at ease in a world where marriage is thought of as socially constructed—a moving target, malleable.... This quiet enables him to acquiesce to whatever civil marriage definition holds, while retaining a religious definition in his heart.¹

As this article suggests, despite having strong religious opinions that marriage should be between one man and one woman, Thomas has reconciled himself to the idea that it is best for everyone if government does not favor one type of union over another when defining marriage and all its accompanying legal benefits. While Thomas would probably distance himself from those who think that “love is love,” he may not realize that his view is just as detrimental to the state as their view is.

If the state is going to function optimally, it needs to encourage behavior that is healthy for society and penalize behavior that is detrimental to the common good. Thomas’s solution of “getting government out of the marriage business” would work if marriage were an isolated arrangement that did not affect others, but in reality marriage “creates circles that ripple out ‘to the extended family, to the community, to the nation, and to the entire society.’”² And so it is in the interest of the nation for the government to take a stance on marriage.

In this essay I will argue that if the traditional family is the healthiest family structure for children, and if family health has a major impact on civic behavior in adult life, it is in the interest of the state to protect traditional marriage by awarding to heterosexual married

¹ Mark Regnerus, “When Marriage Becomes a Private Matter,” <https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2021/06/76384/>.

² Ibid.

couples legal benefits that other family arrangements do not receive. These benefits should include tax deductions for those who marry and have children as well as the exclusive privilege of filing taxes jointly.³

Historical precedent supports the idea that the state should confer legal benefits on those who enter into heterosexual marriage. Legislators have acknowledged that childrearing is a service to society, so the state has been involved in the definition of marriage since ancient times. Most recently in America, though, and especially since the sexual revolution of the 1960s, the government has changed its tune. Older legislation incentivized men and women to marry and have children, and it reflected a culture in which single-breadwinner households were valued and sustainable. By contrast, today in many families both parents must work to make ends meet. In addition, progressive interests are fighting for those in nontraditional unions to receive the same privileges as those in monogamous, heterosexual marriages. Having normalized the widespread use of contraceptives and oversexualized portrayals of women, the media have made it harder to uphold pro-family values. The debate over marriage and the family underlies all these issues and is increasingly pronounced. In view of these circumstances, I will argue here that the state ought to follow the wisdom of the ages and actively invest in healthy family structures in order to help young Americans to raise healthy and productive members of society.

Many Americans think that the traditional family is the necessary environment for raising children to be citizens. Some have characterized the family as the “most important special interest group in the country.”⁴ In a recent interview with VICE News, leader of the

³ For more information on the legal benefits of marrying in the United States, see Ivy Jacobson, “13 Legal Benefits of Marriage,” <https://www.theknot.com/content/benefits-of-marriage>.

⁴ “VICE News Writeup Highlights Impact of Pro-Family Group,” <https://catholicvote.org/vice-news-writeup-highlights-impact-of-pro-family-group/>.

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pro-family American Principles Project Terry Schilling said that “above Corporate America, above Big Tech, Big Oil, all of that, family should come first.”⁵ A brief video advertisement for his pro-family campaign, which raises funds to support candidates who promote traditional marriage and other policies that support large families, has over 100,000 views as of July 2021. Schilling claims that his campaign is drawing eyes because pro-family values are “a huge issue within the Republican Party, and everyone wants to be on board.”⁶ More and more conservative Americans are realizing that our country will rise or fall depending on the situation of the traditional family.

How the Traditional Family Stacks up against Other Models

At the core of the traditional family model are two married parents, a husband and a wife, and the children who spring from their love. This family model aligns with Catholic moral teaching, which holds that the sexual act should take place between two married spouses of the opposite sex.⁷ Many advocates also value and promote those conditions that encourage parents to have many children if possible and that allow one parent – typically the mother – to stay home with the children. As St. John Paul II wrote, “the family in its traditional form” is “the large family relying on the father as the breadwinner, and sustained internally by the mother, the heart of the family.”⁸

Strong arguments can be made that this traditional family model is healthier for children than other models common today. In support of this conclusion, I will review data from some recent psychological and sociological studies in order to examine how the childrearing

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1660, 2337.

⁸ John Paul II, *Love and Responsibility* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1981), 238, quoted in Scott Yenor, *Family Politics: The Idea of Marriage in Modern Political Thought* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2011), 229.

conditions in the traditional family measure up against those in divorced or single-parent families, cohabiting situations, and same-sex unions.

Perhaps the least contested claim in this discussion is that the traditional family model is more desirable than divorced parenting or single parenting. Divorce often leads to single parenting, and few would argue that it is better to be a single parent than a married parent. “Divorce severs far more than a solitary marriage”; it breaks apart extended families and ruptures friendships.⁹ Divorce can separate children from parents, force children to take sides, and cause trauma for children who feel like their parents’ decision to separate has rendered them unwanted, abandoned, or unimportant.¹⁰ Some children fall into depression or develop destructive, rebellious, and violent behaviors in the wake of a divorce.¹¹ Additionally, single parenting comes with its own set of challenges. Research from 2018 found that single-parent households “are more likely to experience multiple disadvantages, such as income poverty and material deprivation, due to their inadequate resources and inadequate employment.”¹² Further, being the sole disciplinarian at home raises stress levels for the single parent. While there are certain unfortunate situations where the separation of spouses is prudent, few people would claim that this family model, as a model, is preferable to one with two parents.

⁹ Regnerus, “When Marriage Becomes a Private Matter.”

¹⁰ This conclusion is based on my personal conversations with children of divorced parents.

¹¹ For more on depression and destructive behaviors that are the result of parental divorce, see Andrew J. Cherlin, P. Lindsay Chase-Lansdale, and Christine McRae, “Effects of Parental Divorce on Mental Health throughout the Life Course,” *American Sociological Review* 63, no. 2 (1998): 239-49.

¹² *The Triple Bind of Single Parent Families: Resources, Employment and Policies to Improve Wellbeing*, ed. Rense Nieuwenhuis and Laurie C. Maldonado (Bristol: Policy Press, 2018), 82.

Cohabitation also has a negative impact on children. While cohabiting may seem like a helpful arrangement in case the parents' relationship goes south, it promotes familial instability that is damaging for children. Sociologist Wendy Manning remarked in her 2015 article "Cohabitation and Child Wellbeing" that cohabitation can reduce a child's chances of success in a variety of ways. Cohabiting parents tend to have lower incomes and less education than married parents.¹³ Manning also found that "family stability is a major contributor to children's healthy development," and that "a fundamental distinction between cohabiting and marital unions is the duration or stability of the relationship."¹⁴ While the general trend is by no means a rule, Manning found that the average duration of cohabiting relationships was a mere eighteen months.¹⁵ Another study from the University of Texas focused on how transitions in and out of cohabitation increase the instability children experience by anywhere from 30 to 100 percent.¹⁶ "Only one out of three children born to cohabiting parents remains in a stable family through age 12, in contrast to nearly three out of four children born to married parents," Manning reports.¹⁷ Although there is no guarantee that a marriage will go smoothly, statistics seem to indicate that the traditional family tends to be a more stable environment for children than the cohabiting arrangement, and more stability is healthier for children.

Solid research on same-sex parenting is difficult to find because the number of same-sex couples with children in the United States has been and continues to be small. In 2005 the U.S. Census showed that the number of American children growing up in same-sex-parent

¹³ Wendy D. Manning, "Cohabitation and Child Wellbeing," *The Future of Children* 25, no. 2 (2015): 51.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 54.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ R. Kelly Raley and Elizabeth Wildsmith, "Cohabitation and Children's Family Instability," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 66, no. 1 (2004): 210.

¹⁷ Manning, "Cohabitation and Child Wellbeing," 54.

families was less than 1 percent,¹⁸ and in 2016 that number remained well below the same threshold.¹⁹ However, some studies indicate reason for concern that children have social difficulties when they do not grow up with parents of each sex.²⁰ Additionally, a host of studies support the idea that a father is “essential” for healthy child development,²¹ and another study found that daughters growing up without a mother experienced negative effects on their cognitive development.²² Although obtaining conclusive sociological research on the effects of same-sex parenting will require more time, there is currently evidence to suggest that having parents of each sex is healthy for children, which supports the idea that the traditional family is more conducive to children’s flourishing than a family with same-sex parents is.

Does Family Structure Affect Civil Behavior?

If the traditional family model is healthier for children than other family models, it is in the interest of the state to set up future citizens

¹⁸ Daniel Potter, “Same-Sex Parent Families and Children’s Academic Achievement,” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 74, no. 3 (2012): 558.

¹⁹ The number of same-sex families raising children in the U.S. in 2016 was close to 0.18 percent. See Shoshana K. Goldberg and Kerith J. Conron, “How Many Same Sex Couples in the US are Raising Children?” <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/same-sex-parents-us/>.

²⁰ Potter, “Same-Sex Parent Families,” 556.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 558. For more, see David Popenoe, *Life Without Father: Compelling New Evidence that Fatherhood and Marriage Are Indispensable for the Good of Children and Society* (New York: Martin Kessler Books, 1996); David Blankenhorn, *Fatherless America: Confronting Our Most Urgent Social Problem* (New York: Basic Books, 1996); *Men in Families: When Do They Get Involved? What Difference Does It Make?* ed. Alan Booth and Ann C. Crouter (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1998); James Q. Wilson, *The Marriage Problem: How Our Culture Has Weakened Families* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002).

²² Kevin Lang and Jay L. Zagorsky, “Does Growing up with a Parent Absent Really Hurt?” *The Journal of Human Resources* 36, no. 2 (2001).

for success by supporting traditional families. This is because a child's experiences within her family are closely tied to her civil behavior as an adult.

One reason for this is that children are so impressionable. Family life is where we form our first habits, suffer our first wounds, and receive love and belonging for the first time. By the age of eight, a child's experiences have already laid the foundation for her ability to succeed in the future.²³ Conversely, an unhealthy family environment sets up children to fail. For instance, a child who grows up in unsafe circumstances involving addiction, neglect, abuse, or instability will often learn behaviors in the home that promote delinquency and civil misbehavior later in life. A 1992 study of 700 adolescents, overviewed in an article titled "Parental Support and Control as Predictors of Adolescent Drinking, Delinquency and Related Problem Behaviors," connected parental neglect and adolescent delinquency. The data indicated that parents who failed to provide emotional support, establish clear expectations, and monitor their children tended to raise children who drank regularly, used illicit drugs, misbehaved in school, and engaged in sexual relations in their teenage years.²⁴ Another investigation of heroin users in the last fifty years connected drug use with familial instability.²⁵ As these data show, growing up in a healthy family is very important for positive long-term social outcomes.

Another reason is that the family and the state are both social institutions, and the family is where people learn how to live within the state. By institution, I mean an organization with a structured hierarchy

²³ Collette Taylor, "Learning in Early Childhood: Experiences, Relationships and 'Learning to Be,'" *European Journal of Education* 50, no. 2 (2015): 160.

²⁴ See Grace M. Barnes and Michael P. Farrell, "Parental Support and Control as Predictors of Adolescent Drinking, Delinquency, and Related Problem Behaviors," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 54, no. 4 (1992): 763-66.

²⁵ Mark Fraser, "Family, School, and Peer Correlates of Adolescent Drug Abuse," *Social Service Review* 58, no. 3 (1984): 435.

that is established to pursue some common good.²⁶ The common good of the family includes its own well-being, the well-being of its individual members, and the broader societal well-being. As an institution, the family has its own proper hierarchy insofar as parents have authority over their children. Similarly, the common good that government exists to promote also includes the well-being of the state as a whole, the well-being of its individual members, and the broader societal well-being. Within an optimally functioning government, there is a hierarchy in which officials exercise limited authority over citizens. In a sense, the family is a microcosm of the polity, and the habits a child acquires within the family will have an impact on her civil behavior. For example, families that foster healthy communication habits and generous sharing of resources teach their children to cultivate community life in these ways. These constructive habits benefit communities beyond the family unit, as well-formed children grow up to be contributing citizens. By contrast, parents who model selfishness and untrustworthiness are more likely to raise children who are themselves selfish and untrustworthy, attitudes that clearly have a negative impact in the civil context.

Conclusion

I have argued that if the traditional family is the healthiest family structure for children, and if family health has a major impact on civil behavior in adult life, it is in the interest of the state to protect traditional marriage by affording married heterosexual couples legal benefits that other family arrangements do not receive. I supported this claim, firstly, by providing an overview of the historical precedent for government support of heterosexual marriage. Secondly, I reviewed relevant psychological and sociological literature showing that traditional marriage tends to foster a healthier environment for

²⁶ I wrote my own definition of “institution” based on information from the Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. “institution.”

children. Lastly, I expounded upon the similarities of institutions of the state and the family, and I argued that behaviors learned in the home affect civil behavior in the long run. It is thus plausible that the state can and should seek to improve civil behavior by promoting and investing in traditional marriage.

The Appropriateness of Appropriation: A New Approach to the Characterization of Masculinity and Femininity

*Patrick Mitchell**

THE CHALLENGE of characterizing masculinity and femininity continues to be highly polarizing within contemporary cultural discourse. Most often, any attempts to establish gender-defining traits soon come into conflict with the desire to affirm unequivocally the shared humanity of the sexes.¹ If someone says that masculinity encompasses the virtues of courage, strength, and generativity, the immediate retort is that women should certainly possess these virtues as well. If someone says that the feminine is by nature relational, nurturing, and compassionate, the interlocutor rightly cautions that men should possess these qualities too.

To generalize, two camps have emerged in the discussion. On the one hand, there are those who wish to preserve a genuine distinction between the sexes. They assert that men and women are two unique expressions of humanity that exhibit distinct but complementary qualities. The stereotypical characteristics ascribed to each sex are rightly attributed based upon differences in biology, psychology, and social function. On the other hand, others argue that any gender characteristics are socially constructed and therefore variable based on culture, time, and personal attitude, as evidenced by the existence of

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¹ For the most part, I will use “sex” and “gender” interchangeably. In most instances, “sex” will be privileged when speaking of primarily biological or bodily characteristics, whereas “gender” will be used to denote the lived expression of sexual difference in a variety of personal dimensions.

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men and women who defy the characterizations of their gender and by the dramatic cultural revision of gender roles in the last century. They argue that there can be no essential formulation of masculinity and femininity because there are as many expressions of masculinity and femininity as there are people. People who hold this position commonly emphasize the shared humanity of men and women and resist overly rigid affirmations of gender-specific characteristics or social functions.²

In order to mediate this debate, this essay will provide an alternative method for speaking about the differences between the genders. This methodology will apply the language of “appropriation” used in discussions of Trinitarian theology in order to affirm simultaneously the distinctness and sameness of the sexes. I will first provide an overview of the language of appropriation as it is applied to the Trinity and then apply it to the genders. Finally, I will discuss some relevant caveats with regard to the application of the language of appropriation to the sexes.

The Doctrine of Appropriation

The doctrine of appropriation refers to the scholastic practice of ascribing essential attributes of God to one person of the Trinity in order to highlight the distinctive character of that person.³ As Aquinas

² In certain spheres, these two positions are termed complementarianism and egalitarianism, but I have decided to avoid these here because they often are used within the limited scope of the debate surrounding the role of women in positions of religious authority. I wish to speak to a more metaphysical debate about whether masculinity and femininity can be characterized at all. Something of the two extremes can be seen generally in the cultural debate concerning the rigid gender roles of fundamentalists and the gender fluidity articulated in modern gender theory.

³ I rely heavily upon the scholarship of Fr. Gilles Emery, O.P., with regard to this topic and upon two pieces in particular: Gilles Emery, “Appropriation,” in *The Trinitarian Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 312-37, and Gilles Emery, “The Personal

explains, “what we call appropriation is the disclosure of the persons through the essential attributes.”⁴ The language of appropriation is an attempt to make sense of a frequent practice of the scriptures and early creeds, in which the authors ascribe to one member of the Trinity an attribute or act that is most strictly said of God in his essence. For example, Christ’s title as the “wisdom of God” in 1 Corinthians 1:24 or the particular association of the Father with the act of creation in the Nicene creed appear puzzling at first glance; surely each member of the Trinity, insofar as each is fully God, should be considered the “wisdom of God” or the creator of the world? Here, the language of appropriation provides a way to express the relation between God’s essential attributes and the Persons of the Trinity. Rather than ascribing creation exclusively to the Father, the scriptural and creedal authors appropriate the title of “creator” to the Father in order to highlight the distinctive, personal character of the Father. Because the Father is the unbegotten, eternal origin of the Son, “creator” is fittingly appropriated to him. By means of this title, the Christian further understands that the Father is the source of all things even as he is the source of the Son, whom he eternally begets. In this way, the appropriated title “creator” discloses the distinctive character of the Father without denying that the Son and Holy Spirit, as God, are truly the creator as well.

In order to understand the practice of appropriation rightly, a few important clarifications must be made. First, the doctrine of appropriation assumes the real distinction and essential unity of the Persons of the Trinity; the practice of appropriation draws from what is common to the members of the Trinity to highlight what is distinct. Appropriations are not an attempt to conceal a modalism that turns the distinction of Persons into a mere linguistic game; rather, appropriations base themselves upon the intra-Trinitarian relations

Mode of Trinitarian Action in Saint Thomas Aquinas,” *The Thomist* 69, no. 1 (January 2005): 31-77, <https://doi.org/10.1353/tho.2005.0035>.

⁴ *Summa theologiae* I, q. 39, a. 7, quoted in Emery, “Appropriation,” 329.

that define the Persons. From this, we can subsequently affirm that the appropriations are not arbitrary. Appropriations like “creator” to the Father, “wisdom” to the Son, and “consoler” to the Holy Spirit are said of one or more of the members of the Trinity in preference to the others because his Person-defining relation has a certain correspondence to the essential attribute in question. By associating the attribute or activity with a particular member of the Trinity, the appropriation serves a didactic function, yet not one that is merely didactic; instead, the pairing also communicates something of the uniqueness of the Person of the Trinity to whom the term is appropriated.

Christ’s title of “wisdom of God” is a helpful illustration. Following the practice described above, the phrase “wisdom of God” appropriates an essential attribute of God, namely, wisdom, to one member of the Trinity, namely, the Son. By ascribing an essential attribute of God to the Son, the phrase affirms the divinity of the Son. More subtlety, however, the phrase also highlights the unique divine Personhood of the Son. According to Thomistic theology, what distinguishes the Son is his real relation to the Father and the Holy Spirit. In the case of the Son, the fact of his procession from the Father establishes a relation to the Father, that of being begotten, that defines the unique Personhood of the Son. What is communicated to us in the names of “Son” and “Word” is the real relation that defines the Person of the Son, namely, his procession from the Father and, together with the Father, his spiration of the Holy Spirit. The appropriation of the title of “wisdom” highlights this Person-defining relation of the Son. Aquinas likens the Son’s procession from the Father to the procession of knowledge from the intellect, which holds the conception of what is known within itself even as the conception proceeds from the intellect.⁵ Likewise, the Son’s procession has the characteristics of a sort of intellection of the Father, from whom the Son proceeds within

⁵ *Summa theologiae* I, q. 27, a. 1.

the Godhead. To appropriate wisdom to the Son highlights this feature of the Son's procession from the Father, a procession that parallels the birth of wisdom within a created intellect. In this way, the title "the wisdom of God" affirms the divinity of the Son and the essential unity of God while illuminating the distinct relation that defines the Son.

In addition to the unity and distinction of the Persons, the doctrine of appropriation expresses the intensely personal mode of Trinitarian action. Fr. Gilles Emery's work clarifies how exactly the language of appropriation accomplishes this. Emery argues that insofar as the members of the Trinity possess a personal mode of being, they also possess a personal mode of action, one that the doctrine of appropriation emphasizes. Following Aquinas, each person of the Trinity possesses a mode of existence according to the relation that defines him. For instance, the Son possesses the fullness of the divine substance, but he possesses the divine essence uniquely as the Son. Specifically, he possesses the divine substance as one eternally receiving this substance from the Father and eternally communicating it to the Holy Spirit with the Father. This distinct mode of existence necessarily colors his mode of action.

To illustrate this point, Emery explicates Aquinas's appropriation of "consoler" to both the Son and the Holy Spirit. According to Aquinas, both the Son and the Holy Spirit are the consoler but according to distinct modes because of their particular Person-defining relations.⁶ The Son is the consoler according to his existence as the Word, enacted by both teaching his disciples and sending forth the Holy Spirit for the benefit of the Church. The Holy Spirit acts as a consoler insofar as he is formally the Love of the Father and the Son given to the faithful in order to bring us into the life of the Trinity. In this way, Aquinas identifies the same divine act of consoling under two distinct modes; while each accomplishes the same consoling act of God, each does so according to his distinctive, Person-defining

⁶ *In Joan.*, 14:16, quoted in Emery, "Personal Mode," 61-62.

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relation to the other members of the Trinity. Using this example, Emery demonstrates how appropriation accentuates the distinction of the Persons by elucidating how the essential attributes of God are manifested in distinctly personal ways.⁷

Human Appropriation: Masculinity and Femininity

In regard to the masculine and the feminine, the practice of appropriation would be the appropriation of an attribute or activity that is common to human nature to one of the genders. Like divine appropriation, this practice would be for the purpose of disclosing the distinctive qualities of that gender rather than arriving at an exclusive characterization of masculinity or femininity. This practice would provide a middle way for the current debate concerning the characterization of the genders. Rather than oppose the common humanity of the sexes with the distinctness of the sexes, forcing interlocutors to prefer one or the other, appropriation draws from their common human nature while using the observable differences between the sexes as its justification for doing so.

For instance, one trait that is frequently associated with masculinity is the capacity for courageous strength.⁸ To say that this trait is distinctly masculine is not to say that it is exclusively masculine. Applying the language of appropriation, we would say that the appropriation of courageous strength to the masculine gender identifies a trait desirable for every human, namely, courage or strength, but specifically associates it with masculinity in order to disclose what it means to be masculine. The appropriation draws upon

⁷ See section 6 of “Personal Mode,” 59-65.

⁸ Understood here not as the mere output of physical exertion but, rather, as the capacity for the disciplined and controlled direction of one’s energies, whether physical, mental, emotional, and so on, according to the demands of a situation. This definition broadens the scope of courageous strength to encompass various areas in which a person must endure suffering or discipline his energy for the sake of some worthwhile end.

the natural biological, hormonal, and sociological dispositions of men, which find their fullest expression in the development of moral, physical, mental, and emotional strength. This should not be interpreted as providing an exhaustive characterization of the masculinity of each man: How exactly, and to what degree, this virtue takes shape in the life of an individual person adds a layer of complexity that will be discussed below. But for now, we can see that appropriations provide a way of speaking to the distinctive qualities of each gender while not prematurely assigning traits exclusively to one gender or the other.

At this juncture, it may appear as though the language of appropriation negates any real distinction between the genders, reducing the characterization of masculinity and femininity to a set of human characteristics that possess a mere conventional association with one gender or the other. However, this is exactly the opposite of the intended purpose of the language of appropriation. As in the case of the Trinity, the language of appropriation assumes a real, irreducible distinction between the sexes even as they share a common human nature. First, men and women differ in their biological constitution, most obviously with regard to their reproductive organs but also with regard to their hormonal and genetic features. The bodily reality is arguably the most critical and most visible difference between man and woman. In addition to this biological complementarity, man and woman reflect the Trinity in that they are characterized by a relation to another person. The theological account of the creation of man and woman in Genesis provides a narrative expression of this relationality. By describing Eve as originating from the rib of Adam, the author communicates the equality of the man and the woman, in the sense that both are made directly by God and constituted of the very same body. Simultaneously, the origin of Eve from Adam communicates a natural ordering that reflects the ordered processions of the persons of the Trinity – as Eve comes from Adam, so, too, does the Son find his principle in the Father, while the third, the child and the Holy Spirit,

respectively, spring from the union in love of the two. Like the Trinity, man and woman are intelligible only with reference to one another and can fulfill their common task of generation and communion only together. In this sense, the essence of masculinity and femininity lies in what Pope John Paul II terms the “spousal meaning of the body,” perfected in men through the transition from spouse to father and in women from spouse to mother.⁹ Only the woman can be a mother, and only the man can be a father; additionally, the enactment of these roles necessarily implies the participation of the complementary spouse.¹⁰ Any appropriation must assume this sexual polarity and mutual relationality; moreover, these relations provide a nonarbitrary justification for the appropriation of particular human traits.

Femininity, for example, is traditionally associated with the capacity for a deep, affective sensitivity or compassion. If we understand this as an instance of appropriation, the statement “the feminine is compassionate” is the attribution of a universally desirable human virtue, namely, compassion, to the feminine gender in order to disclose the distinct qualities of womanhood. As in the case of the Trinity, this is not mere linguistic sleight-of-hand. For the appropriation to hold, there ought to be a real, objective congruence

⁹ As John Paul II stresses, the spousal meaning of the body should not be construed narrowly in terms of only natural marriage and physical fatherhood or motherhood: “Marriage and procreation do not definitively determine the original and fundamental meaning of being a body nor of being, as a body, male or female.” John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, trans. Michael Waldstein (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2006), 69:4. Rather, the phrase communicates “that man is created as a person and is called to a life ‘in communione personarum.’” *Ibid.* Therefore, the spousal nature of masculinity and femininity encompasses the entire orientation of the human person toward communion and generativity, whether it be fulfilled in natural or spiritual fatherhood or motherhood.

¹⁰ And in the case of spiritual fatherhood or motherhood, someone to whom the person can offer his or her love, service, and devotion.

between the attribute and the definitive relational attributes of the gender, in this case, spouse and mother. Clearly a deep inner awareness and sensitivity to the needs of her child must be present in a particular way in a mother due to the infant's radical dependency during gestation and infancy. Consequently, an affective attunement to the needs of others can rightly be considered a properly appropriated quality of femininity. This appropriation does not negate the need for men to develop a deep sensitivity and compassion for the needs of other;¹¹ rather, it simply establishes a natural congruence between a human virtue and a particular gender based on the gender's defining relational attributes and specifications of its embodied personhood.

The language of appropriation likewise reinforces the way in which gender colors every human act, shaping the mode of activity insofar as it specifies the mode of existence for the person. Insofar as men and women exist according to their relational attributes, all appropriated features attributed to their humanity pass through the prism of their respective gender. Michele Schumacher provides a fitting example in her account of Adrienne von Speyr's Trinitarian anthropology. According to von Speyr, human persons are called to a self-surrender that culminates in the gift of the self in love to another. Taking her cues from the sexual act, von Speyr describes the masculine form of this surrender as a "generative, or initiating self-giving," one that is a "generous outpouring, or giving of oneself to another"; conversely, the feminine surrender is a "receptive self-gift" characterized by "a generous openness, docility, or readiness for the other."¹² In both these instances, the same human activity of self-gift passes through the prism of sexual difference. Rather than two natures or two activities, we have

¹¹ Should anyone argue to the contrary, he need only to look to the example of Christ in the gospels to be proven otherwise.

¹² Michele M. Schumacher, *A Trinitarian Anthropology: Adrienne von Speyr & Hans Urs von Balthasar in Dialogue with Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2014), 272. It is worth noting that Christ and Mary serve as exemplars of these two modes of self-gift.

two modes – that is, the masculine mode and the feminine mode – of the common activity of self-gift, modes that find definitive expression according to the relational dimensions that characterize the genders. The genders express two ways of being human and together express the fullness of what it means to be a human.¹³ By observing human virtues within the contrary mode, men and women begin to learn and live the perfections of the other gender while continuing to perfect the virtues of their own. It is within this constant exchange at the heart of the family that each of us emerges, and it is by means of this constant exchange that society thrives. Rather than erasing sex differences, appropriation gives us the language to see the commonality and difference of the sexes in a single gaze and to appreciate the unique value of distinctly masculine and feminine modes of human activity.

Some Qualifications and Caveats

In transitioning from the divine to the human, we must be attentive to a number of crucial considerations. The radical difference between God and humankind warrants some qualifications and clarifications of the use of appropriations.

First, there is the issue of the unity of human nature versus the unity of the Godhead. The language of divine appropriation can be used with greater exactitude because the unity of the Persons of the Trinity is not only one of nature but also one of substance. The Persons have a common act, a common mind, a common will – all of which are the one substance that fully is the being of God. Consequently, essential attributes and activities can be said of any member of the Trinity with a stronger affirmation: The Son *is* the wisdom of God as truly as the Holy Spirit *is* the wisdom of God, although the attribute is colored by the Personal realities of the Son and the Holy Spirit. With respect to men and women, this is not the case. Men and women do not share a common substance but, rather,

¹³ Cf. John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 13:2.

are individual instantiations of a common nature. Therefore, they have varying wills, intellects, bodies, and so on, which determine the character and development of their humanity in significant ways. What this requires of appropriations is a greater flexibility in applying any one attribute to an individual person. The practice retains its validity and didactic value because of the commonalities provided by universal human nature; however, it must be open to the varying expressions of this common nature by individual persons.

Relatedly, each human person exists as just one member of an entire class of humans and, likewise, as a member of a class of men or women. Whereas God does not belong to a “class” of divine beings but, rather, exhausts the meaning of divinity in his being, no single human being exhaustively instantiates what it means to be a human person. The same principle applies when we consider men and women: No man or woman exists as the paradigmatic manifestation of the gender. Instead, each man or woman embodies the characteristics of his or her gender according to the further determination of his or her unique and unrepeatable personhood. Just as masculinity and femininity color and specify the mode of human existence, so too does the radical individuality of each person color and specify his or her embodied, gendered human existence. And yet, even with the complexities that individuality introduces, it is true that the overarching characteristics of humanity, and more specifically of masculinity and femininity, are necessarily involved in the ongoing determination of the individual. These “planes” of the person mutually inform one another and exist as an integrated whole that is lived out by each person. In God, the Person is the relation, which is the substance or nature; in contrast, the human person is one instance of the relation – namely, man or woman – and one instance of the nature – namely, humanity. As stated above, this requires an additional flexibility and an additional openness to the diversity of human expression when trying to understand the manifestation of masculinity and femininity by any one man or woman. While appropriations can be stated in a

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nonarbitrary fashion, they must not be used to provide a definitive standard in the living out of the masculine or the feminine. The appropriations should sketch but not circumscribe what it means to be a man or a woman.

Conclusion

Commenting on the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, then-Cardinal Karol Wojtyła wrote, “Man’s resemblance to God finds its basis, as it were, in the mystery of the most holy Trinity.”¹⁴ By looking to Trinitarian theology, the philosophical anthropologist discovers a method of speaking about the delicate interplay of unity and difference between men and women that reveals humankind’s resemblance to its Creator. Mirroring the unity-in-diversity of the Trinity, men and women share a common human nature while remaining deeply colored by their masculinity and femininity. Appropriation allows the philosopher to affirm both the human and gendered dimensions of the human person, thereby mediating the current debate that tends to privilege one or the other. Once again, we must turn to the mystery of the Trinity to unlock the mystery of humanity.

¹⁴ Karol Wojtyła, *Sources of Renewal: The Implementation of the Second Vatican Council* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1980), 61.

Hidden Life and Revealed Beauty: The Role of Art in Relation to Man and God

*Michaela Peine**

Art as a Distinctively Human Behavior

AMID THE SHIFTING MOVEMENTS of human society, one truth becomes resoundingly clear: An understanding of the human person is the template through which man addresses himself, others, and God. Without a grasp of our place in the cosmos, these relationships quickly become murky, muddled by our self-interest and forgetful hearts. Although it is difficult to define the human person, it is possible to work in reverse; by looking at our actions, we work backward to arrive at self-knowledge. Our activities reveal important truths about ourselves and our place within creation. As we are created in the image of God, so too are we called to pursue works of creation; these works of creativity help us to realize our unique potential as the *imago Dei*. Furthermore, art offers an interpretation of nature through the experience of an individual, providing opportunities for communion among humanity. In this essay I will explore the capacity of art, as a distinctively human endeavor, to reveal goodness to us through our interactions with ourselves, with others, and ultimately with God.

Firstly, I will loosely sketch out the definition and confines of art. Rather than focusing on certain kinds of *products*, such as paintings or sculptures, it is more fruitful to characterize art as the result of an

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intentional activity that unifies true inspiration, the individual, and external materials. This definition gives us a guide from which to work, while helping us to distinguish art from many other things, ranging from natural beauty to pornography. For example, a sculptor who creates a *Pieta* unifies his own insight into the relationship of the Virgin and Christ with his individual talent and style, all expressed through the medium of stone and chisel. This is artwork, while the sight of a particularly beautiful sunset – unpreserved through an artistic medium – remains set apart as an occasion of natural beauty. Needless to say, exploitative or degenerated forms of exhibition – such as pornography or paparazzi photos – also must be distinguished from true art.

The concept of “true inspiration” is key to this understanding. What it entails is much more than a simple idea or a kind of “newsflash” moment. Rather, inspiration represents the mark of God on the human soul; it is the byproduct of mankind’s search for truth, beauty, and goodness. The soul’s inspiration is a form of preliminary creation that springs directly from mankind’s receptivity to the spiritual. This inspiration, when realized, must be linked to human activity in order to come into fuller being – and this is where mankind’s individuality comes into play. Activity and human personhood are deeply and intricately linked; in order for us to fully *be who we are*, we must *act* according to our desires and capacity.

Commenting on this relationship, Karol Wojtyła writes, “[T]o fulfill oneself means to actualize, and in a way to bring to the proper fullness, that structure in man which is characteristic for him because of his personality and also because of his being somebody and not merely something; it is the structure of *self-governance* and *self-possession*.”¹ Human persons are capable of free action, which in turn adds special significance to the actions in which they participate. Insofar as we are ensouled beings with free will, we are capable of moral action; we are able to either fulfill or reject our personhood through our actions. This

¹ Karol Wojtyła, *The Acting Person* (Boston: D. Riedel Publishing, 1997), 151.

is unique to humanity, placing us in contact with the divine both as individuals as well as through our community. Through our actions, we are able to participate in the spiritual dimension of reality; far from being transient and meaningless, our human actions as well as our individual personhood make possible our interaction with eternal things. As such, our actions and their products are of great importance and worthy of study.

This capacity for self-actualization and morality is key to our understanding of the artist. As Wojtyła writes, “in the inner dimension of the person, human action is at once both transitory and relatively lasting, inasmuch as its effects, which are to be viewed in relation to...the person’s engagement in freedom, last longer than the action itself.”² Creating art is a special situation in which both the action and its effect (the artwork) offer distinct, though complementary, insights into man’s existence. Only man is able to reveal himself in this way through the work of his hands. For art must be differentiated from other products of his labor. Great art possesses the capacity to take on a meaning of its own, even beyond the focused intention of the artist. The painter pours her labor, her inspiration, and her intention into a great masterpiece, yet once the painting is finished, it is understood only through an individual’s apprehension; as soon as the artist completes the work, she relinquishes control over the way it will be viewed and understood by others. While the great artist will be able to convey truth through her work, the piece itself grows and takes on meaning of its own, beyond her own explanations or intentions. A work of art stands independently, apart from its creator.

Who can say if one person, gazing upon Caravaggio’s *Calling of St. Matthew* will be struck with the same revelation as another? While there are certain aspects of the painting – the permeating, demanding light stretching out from Christ, the incredulity of Matthew’s expression, the squalor of the card hall – that every serious viewer’s eye will catch,

² Ibid., 151.

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who is any of us to claim to grasp the single definitive truth expressed by the painting? Any work of art has the capacity to reflect the artist's "souledness." In other words, the artist imbues his work with intention and thought, allowing it to become an object pointing toward the moral sphere. Among all creatures, only man possesses this capacity. Although a magpie may decorate its nest or a spider may weave an intricate web, the animal's labor – regardless of the beauty that may naturally occur through it – lacks the capacity to convey truth and goodness. Art, by contrast, is a distinctively human endeavor that is laden with meaning.

Art as Revelation of Man

Once we accept art as a uniquely human activity, we must recognize that it has the potential to reveal something special about us. Our similarities to the natural world connect us to the ordered whole of creation, but created in the image of God, we are set apart from the other creatures. Moreover, by understanding our unique attributes, we have access to a better understanding of what God has imparted to us by making us in his image, which in turn offers us a deeper understanding of God himself.

Just as God reveals himself to man through creation, so too can art be revelatory. One of the key elements of this revelation is the capacity for art to reveal man to himself; for not only are we as a race set apart, but also each individual human possesses a unique individuality, mirroring the complexity of God himself. In *The Person and the Common Good* Maritain explores the distinction between our individuality and our personality, writing that "the human being is caught between two poles; a material pole, which, in reality, does not concern the true person but rather the shadow of personality or what, in the strict sense, is called individuality, and a spiritual pole, which

does concern true personality.”³ Man’s personhood links him to the spiritual – or, in terms of artistry, to true inspiration – yet it is his individuality, his physical materiality, that allows him to reveal his unique self through art. This is a simple idea but essential to understanding art: Through his creation, the artist reveals something of himself. Indeed, this truth resides at the core of the artistic endeavor; through the union of the three elements of art – inspiration, individuality, and materials – the artist filters creation through his own self.

The photographer, discovering something beautiful, translates his experience into a single image, composed of the materials of his own artistic vision and the containment of the camera. The viewer, experiencing only the photograph, is given the gift of the photographer’s aesthetic judgment. For, indeed, this is at the core of art; to create art is to reveal an aspect of the individual’s interior, the hidden life. The artist possesses and exercises the capacity for a unique form of self-gift. Through this gift he offers something of his own person that also participates in the communion of humanity. Maritain writes that “by the very fact that each of us is a person and expresses himself to himself, each of us requires communication with other and the others in the order of knowledge and love. Personality, of its essence, requires a dialogue in which souls really communicate.”⁴ This dialogue, when given through the medium of art, is able to transcend historical time, cultural divides, and even geographical location. In preserved works of art, the artist has transferred his own artistic vision into something portable and permanent that outlives his own earthly existence.

For example, as we gaze upon a Rodin sculpture, we understand something more about the influence of emotion on the human body, even as we are given a beautiful insight into the way the world appeared

³ Jacques Maritain, *The Person and the Common Good* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1947), 429.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 433.

to Auguste Rodin. The viewer of Rodin's work sees his rough, bronze-cast fingerprints and understands something of Rodin's individuality; furthermore, the gestural, earthlike limbs of his sculpted bodies offer the viewer a unique understanding of man's place in the realm of creation. As with all great art, we are given the opportunity to see through the artist's transparent handprint a deeper truth about our common humanity. Art provides us a transfixed point where we may study the careful balancing act between individual and community.

Maritain offers insight into this dynamic when he writes, "[O]ur whole being is an individual by reason of that in us which derives from matter, and a person by reason of that in us which derives from spirit. Similarly, the whole of a painting is a physico-chemical mixture by reason of the coloring stuff of which it is made, and the whole of it is a work of beauty by reason of the painter's art."⁵ As a painting is a combination of physical materials as well as artistic individuality, so too is man an individual within a race of people. Art provides us a window through which we can study this truth; through the artist's creation and our beholding of it, we are brought into community through revelation – of ourselves, of others, and of humankind.

Art as Worship

However much we may learn of ourselves through the practice of art, creative expression is relatively unimportant unless oriented toward further communion with the divine. While any artwork offers us human relationship as through it we encounter the artist, only greater art offers the opportunity to place ourselves in the presence of God. Yet, in the mercy and grace of God, even imperfect and mediocre artistic inspiration and intention can be pathways to him. Again, the special "independence" of art is vital here. Art, once completed, is something separate from the artist. The value of the work subsists and

⁵ Ibid.

does not depend on the moral character of its creator. The spiritual beauty of *The Brothers Karamazov* is not tainted, for example, because Dostoevsky failed to live a saintly life; rather, the truths expressed in its pages are grace on their own, pointing the reader to Christ regardless of Dostoevsky's personal choices. Similarly, who am I to guess at Vermeer's artistic and spiritual intentions when I gaze upon *Woman Holding a Balance*? But do I need to? No. The quiet beauty of a pregnant woman transfixed in light is sufficient to lift my heart to contemplation of man's eternal soul. This is the inherent grace of human inspiration in the artistic endeavor – when man responds with truth to the call of beauty within him, his creations carry the seed of the Incarnation, thinning the veil between the temporal and the eternal and permitting us a glimpse of the things of God.

In his "Letter to Artists," John Paul II explores this connection between the artist and God. The pope distinguishes the work of man, which he calls "craftsmanship," from the work of God, which is true creation. He writes, "[T]he one who creates bestows being itself, he brings something out of nothing...[and this] is a mode of operation which belongs to the Almighty alone. The craftsman, by contrast, uses something that already exists, to which he gives form and meaning."⁶ These distinctions highlight the third element of my definition of art. Art requires the union of inspiration, individuality, and materials; and this third element, the *materials*, points to the human *incapacity* for true creation. The painter must rely on her pigments and oil, the writer depends on the conventions of language, and the dancer trusts the abilities and form of his own body. Every act of art necessarily presupposes something that already exists and is given to man; put another way, man's artistic craftsmanship is always at most an act of cocreation with God. Beyond the gift of our life and the rational nature that we have already received from the Creator – gifts that make possible our inspiration and individuality – man's physical labor is a

⁶ John Paul II, "Letter to Artists," 1.

restructuring and ordering of the materials he has received. John Paul II describes this process, writing that man “accomplishes this task above all in shaping the wondrous ‘material’ of his own humanity and then exercising creative dominion over the universe which surrounds him.”⁷ This is a beautiful act of communion between God and man.

Creating and apprehending art, we are given the opportunity to transform our actions into acts of worship. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* links the concept of *worship* to *adoration*, teaching that “adoration is the first act of the virtue of religion”⁸ and that “to adore God is to acknowledge, in respect and absolute submission, the ‘nothingness of the creature’ who would not exist but for God.”⁹ The practice of art offers an environment in which man can be constantly reminded of this truth, humbling himself before his Creator even while rejoicing in the beauty he has been given. Art, when oriented toward truth, beauty, and goodness, thus serves as a form of worship. John Paul II writes that artists “are led all the more to see themselves and the whole of creation with eyes able to contemplate and give thanks, and to raise to God a hymn of praise.”¹⁰ Furthermore, beautiful art can become an act of worship for those who gaze upon it, as it lifts their hearts up adoringly to God. Of all things wrought by the artist, this achievement is the highest of goods.

The Vocation of Masterpieces

Through the beauty of creation and the grace of the Incarnation, we possess the capacity to pour ourselves out in a gift of beauty, truth, and individuality. Undeniably, not all men and women are given the same talents and capacities for artistic creativity. Nevertheless, there is a different and greater form of beauty, moral beauty, that all are equally

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2096.

⁹ Ibid., 2097.

¹⁰ John Paul II, “Letter to Artists,” 1.

called and equipped to bring into being in our lives. All are created in the image of God and thus called to work with truth and love; like the laborers in the vineyard in the gospel of Matthew, the important thing is that we hear and answer the call of Christ. The influence of beauty, when oriented correctly, has the power to lift the hearts of both artist and viewer upward. As such, each of us is called to commit to the labor of responding to the beauty and goodness of art. Only by cultivating a sensitivity to the worship of God through art – in either its creation or its appreciation – may we begin seeing creation as a means of adoring of God.

Finally, through art we both give and receive the gift of self; through the beauty and the mystery of the Incarnation, the revelation of man to his fellows, to himself, and to God is something precious. To give and to receive this gift is a vocation to charity through which we may draw nearer to God; this vocation of selflessness, in turn, transcends the artistic endeavor, spilling over into the all the actions of our lives. In the words of John Paul II, “all men and women are entrusted with the task of crafting their own life: in a certain sense, they are to make of it a work of art, a masterpiece.”¹¹ Through contemplation of art and the artist, we gain insight into the unifying “craftsmanship” that John Paul II speaks of. We, as a community of individuals, must unite our hearts and minds with the creation of God the Father, the Incarnation of God the Son, and the inspiration of God the Holy Spirit. Only then we may cooperate with the divine and craft our lives beautifully, in accordance with the source of all beauty.

¹¹ Ibid.

Who You Are, and What You Were Made For

*Maggie Tynan**

VENERABLE FULTON J. SHEEN, the American theologian, philosopher, bishop, and Emmy-winning television personality, once said, “A thing is good if it attains the end and the highest purpose for which it was made.” If this is true, then for a human to be good, he must attain the end and the highest purpose for which he was made. And so we may ask, what is that end and highest purpose?

In order to determine the purpose for which something was made, it is helpful to understand how it is constructed. For example, a knife has a sharp edge for cutting and a handle so that it can be easily held. A chair has at least one surface suitable for sitting as well as some other structural support. The way things are made communicates their purpose. And so to understand what human beings are made for, we do well to begin by considering how we are made.

Understanding Our End

At first look, human beings are male or female, usually have two arms, two legs, a face, and so on. These are all physical characteristics of human beings. But these characteristics are also shared by many nonhuman creatures. So what is it about human beings that sets us apart?

Most people agree that our rationality is what sets us apart. Animals cannot talk, or communicate grand ideas, or make improvements in their way of life; they just live. Humans, on the other hand, do all of

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these things. They make progress and improve their quality of life. They learn and travel and wonder and love. All of these activities make us distinctively human, and not just another species in the animal kingdom. Moreover, this ability to reason is part of the soul, the essence and nature of being human. It is truly the soul and its special capacities that makes a human being different from other creatures.

Yet knowing that a human being is a composite of body and soul still doesn't fully reveal the end for which we were made. A knife could have a handle and an edge, but if it doesn't realize the purpose of those things, it could be misunderstood and misused. But if we grasp that an edge is used for cutting, and a handle for holding, then we are able to understand and use the knife correctly. Similarly, in the case of a human being, we need to know not only that he or she has a body and the ability to reason, but also what the meaning and purpose of the body and the rational soul are.

The body is made in such a way that makes it possible for the person to move and to live. Legs support the person and make walking and other movements possible. Arms enable us to reach for objects, to hold them, and to do all sorts of other things. Eyes make it possible for us to see, ears to hear, tongues to taste. When a person is not able to use his body in these ways, he is disabled, and we understand that this is not the natural norm. The various functions of our bodily parts are not difficult to discern. But the highest end that the body should be used for can be understood fully only when we grasp the nature of the soul. You can't fully understand the final end of a knife if it doesn't have a handle, or if you don't understand what a handle is there for. The same goes with the body and soul. One cannot fully understand the final end of a human being without understanding the purposes of both the body and the soul. And so we must determine what the soul actually is, beyond simply saying that it is what sets us apart from other creatures.

Aristotle describes the soul as “the first grade of actuality of a natural organized body.”¹ He affirms that the soul is the form or essence of the matter that is the body. This is because the soul is that actuality of life that the body lacking a soul has only potentially. Only certain bodies, however, have the potential to live, and for those particular bodies the soul is the actuality of that potentially. But their relationship is so intimate, so interconnected, that when the body is without a soul, we understand it very differently, as a corpse.

Aristotle emphasizes the interconnection of body and soul, and one might be inclined to think that the soul is inseparable from the body. But this is not the case, however, as Aristotle clarifies that “some [parts of the soul] may be separable [from the body] because they are not the actualities of any body at all.”²

Later in the *De anima*, Aristotle offers a narrower definition of the soul as “an actuality or essence of something that has a potentiality of being besouled.”³ He arrives at this conclusion by reasoning that because the soul is that by which we live, think, and perceive, it is the actuality of life, not just that which is capable of having life (which would be the body). This reinforces the idea that the body is not that which actualizes the soul; rather, it is the soul that actualizes the body.

In *De anima* book 3, chapter 4, Aristotle clarifies his understanding of the soul by a line of reasoning that appeals to our senses. The particular idea is that those things that sense other things cannot be that which they are sensing; they can only potentially be such things. For example, if your hand feels something cold, it is feeling that only because it is itself potentially cold. If your hand were already actually cold, it would not feel the additional cold object. You are able to perceive color because your eyes do not already have some color that they see. If you were always wearing red glasses, you would see the

¹ Aristotle, *De anima*, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. and trans. Richard McKeon, trans. (New York: Random House, 1941), 2.2.29.

² Ibid. 2.2.3.

³ Ibid.

world tinted red. But because your eyes do not have a colored lens, you are able to perceive rightly all colors. If we were to have a certain smell in our noses, such as that of ammonia, we would not ever be able to smell anything else for our sense would always be tainted by the smell already present in our nose. We can smell things rightly, not because we experience some particular smell, but because we are potentially receptive to all smells.

From this line of reasoning, Aristotle extrapolates that thinking is the part of the soul capable of receiving the form of an object. And because thinking is seemingly limitless and capable of receiving the form of *any* object, the mind (that part of the soul capable of thought) must not *actually* be any thing but instead *potentially* any thing. Therefore, it cannot actually be any part of the body, and since this part of the soul that is not an actuality of the body, it is separable from it. Thus, because the soul is separable from the body, and can exist without the body, it can continue to exist even after the death of the body.

So, what is the final end of the human person, in light of the connection of body and soul? The body and soul are connected here on earth, but that connection is severed at death. If the soul continues to exist after death, where does it go, and why does it matter?

Beyond This Life

In the *Summa theologiae* St. Thomas Aquinas continues the discussion of the relationship between the body and soul. In question 75, article 1 of the first part of the *Summa*, he considers “whether the soul is a body” and explains that the soul cannot be a body because not all bodies have life, and the soul is the first principle of life. For example, a rock has a body but does not have life. It does not have life because it does not have a soul; therefore, a soul is not a body because something can be a body without being or having a soul. Article 2 of the same question considers “whether the human soul is something

subsistent,” which is to say whether it can exist on its own. This is similar to Aristotle’s question whether the mind is that part of the soul that is independent of or dependent on the body. Following Aristotle, Aquinas affirms that the mind cannot have a bodily nature, for otherwise it would not have the potential to know other bodily natures besides its own, which it obviously does. Therefore “it is impossible for the intellectual principle [the mind] to be a body.”⁴ And so, since the mind is a part of the soul, there is a part of the soul that exists independently of the body. Therefore, at death, the soul of the person can continue to exist in separation from the body.

However, Aquinas moves beyond Aristotle’s perspective and incorporates the Christian view of the afterlife. Because the human being is body–soul composite, the existence of the soul alone after death is inadequate for concluding that a *human being* exists after death. Both a soul *and* a body are necessary for there to be a human being. The Catholic faith resolves this issue through the doctrine of resurrection. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* affirms, “All the dead will rise, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment.”⁵ At the end times, God will raise the dead and reunite bodies with souls, and so in the afterlife becomes not just the soul exists but, once again, a fully human body–soul composite.

This teaching reveals what we were made for. As human beings we were made as body and soul composites. But we were made for existence after death, for the resurrection of life. The *Catechism* says, “God made me to know Him, to love Him, and to serve Him in this world, and to be happy with Him forever in heaven.”⁶ Our souls were made to exist even after death in order that we might share in God’s love and eternal life. Our bodies were made to be animated by the soul

⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, ed. Thomas C. O’Brien (Cambridge University Press, 2006), I, q. 75, a. 2.

⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 998.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

so that we can act, move, and exist in a material way that will share God's love here on earth but also, ultimately, be judged worthy of sharing in his life in heaven.

Implications for Living

Given this understanding of the body and soul, death, and the ultimate resurrection of the body and final judgment, we can now consider how we ought to live in light of these things. What we do now in this life will determine where we are headed in the next life, and so we ought to order our lives in view of our death and final judgment. As German philosopher Dietrich von Hildebrand writes, “[t]he very reason for our existence is to be transformed in Christ, and thus, to glorify God. Because this transformation must be accomplished on earth, our life here is of great importance.”⁷ Similarly, St. Paul wrote in Ephesians 5:16 that we ought to “make the most of the time.” And centuries later J. R. R. Tolkien affirmed that “[a]ll we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us.”⁸ We were given this time on earth as human beings, and we need to determine how to use our body and soul appropriately so as to move toward the end for which we were made.

In the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle says, “The impulses of incontinent people often move in contrary directions.”⁹ Many people are like this – they let their impulses and passions rule them. Their desires fly in many different directions, either because they do not realize that they can be trained to follow our reason, or because they do not make any effort at such training. But Aristotle maintains that passions and impulses not only can but should be ordered by reason,

⁷ Dietrich von Hildebrand, *Jaws of Death, Gate of Heaven* (Steubenville, OH: Hildebrand Press, 2020), 55.

⁸ John Ronald Reuel Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings: Fellowship of the Ring* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2005), 51.

⁹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Richard McKeon, in *The Basic Works*, 1.13.21.

and this is the mark of virtuous people. Reason can and ought to rule the irrational parts of our being, including our desires. When reason rules the passions, one achieves higher levels of moral and intellectual excellence. Both types of virtue are necessary for living life well.

This is all much easier in theory than in practice. Everyone wants to end up in heaven, spending eternity with God, and we all would like to think that we are following his commandments and acting as Jesus would toward others. However, in today's world the traditional understanding of the requirements of God's law is frequently misinterpreted as unloving or even wrong, and this distortion stems from a misunderstanding of who we are and why we were made.

From a Christian perspective, we may affirm that our culture is in trouble. But even from a purely secular perspective, one can sense that there are serious problems in our society. While Aristotle held up as the model of excellence those who train their passions to follow reason, in the culture today we are told to live by our passions, to follow our passions, without reason or even in spite of it. If training your passions is essential for moral excellence and a well-lived life, as Aristotle argues, then we have a growing number of people who are utterly failing when it comes to both goals.

Take, for example, the state of sexual morality. While divorce rates in the United States had reached a fifty-year low as of November 2020,¹⁰ the number of couples actually marrying also reached an all-time low in 2019. In that same year, 40 percent of all births in the United States were to unmarried women.¹¹ Fewer people are getting divorced, which is a good thing, but it might be because fewer people are getting married, and yet many of the latter are still having children.

¹⁰ <https://ifstudies.org/blog/the-us-divorce-rate-has-hit-a-50-year-low#:~:text=According%20to%20the%20new%20Census,in%202020%2C%20despite%20the%20pandemic.>

¹¹ [https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/unmarried-childbearing.htm.](https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/unmarried-childbearing.htm)

It has been shown time and again that married parents are financially better off than single parents,¹² and children of single parents are four times as likely to live in poverty than children of married parents.¹³ Passions aside, it would seem reasonable that people should marry before having children, and then try to stay married, in order to have a better chance of staying out of poverty. Yet it seems as though we have decided to discard rational thinking when it comes to the realities of marriage and children. Access to birth control and abortion have further eroded our rational thinking about sex, marriage, and children – and these have actually led to an increase out of wedlock births and the attendant poverty of parents and children.¹⁴

Another issue to consider is the movement to normalize and encourage homosexual behavior. In June of 2015, the Supreme Court legalized same-sex marriage in the United States with the *Obergefell* decision. Since then, the push to promote the acceptance of homosexual behavior has continued in full force. Many large corporations openly promote this lifestyle, and those who align themselves with traditional Christian teaching on marriage and sexuality are bullied and silenced. Social media platforms often take down content that is pro-traditional marriage or offers reasoned arguments against homosexual behavior.¹⁵

In February of 2021, the House of Representatives passed the Equality Act, which aims to “end discrimination based on gender and identity,”¹⁶ and yet one upshot of this bill may be to the promotion of

¹² <https://www.usnews.com/news/newsgram/articles/2013/05/06/census-bureau-links-poverty-with-out-of-wedlock-births>.

¹³ <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/three-simple-rules-poor-teens-should-follow-to-join-the-middle-class/>.

¹⁴ <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/new-mothers-not-married-technology-shock-the-demise-of-shotgun-marriage-and-the-increase-in-out-of-wedlock-births/>.

¹⁵ <https://www.lifesitenews.com/news/tiktok-deletes-priests-video-explaining-why-christians-shouldnt-support-pride-month>.

¹⁶ <https://www.cnn.com/2021/02/25/politics/equality-act-passes->

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LGBTQ ideology among impressionable children in schools across the country. The promotion of this ideology is already widespread, with large healthcare organizations such as the Mayo Clinic¹⁷ and Boston Children's Hospital¹⁸ offering transgender educational material and emphasizing that children should have the autonomy to change their gender whenever they want, with full support from the parents and medical staff. It is argued that children should be able to elect hormone-blocking therapies and undergo surgeries to remove or alter their sexual organs if they insist that they are "not really" the gender they were recognized as at birth. That children should be able to make these decisions is promoted as normal and even necessary, even though statistics show that people who transition commit suicide at a much higher rate than the rest of the population.¹⁹

Christians adhere to traditional understandings of marriage, sex, and gender. They reasonably affirm the biological reality that men and woman are different, with different genetic makeup, and accordingly different natural dispositions and abilities. Marriage between a man and a woman was naturally ordained by God and clearly established as the best arrangement for having and raising children. Homosexuality and transgenderism, by contrast, are outside the natural norm, and yet our culture champions these, emphasizing the weight of feelings over reason. It stands to reason that in due time we will see the full negative impact of this trend.

Conclusion

Recall the words of Fulton Sheen: "A thing is good if it attains the end and the highest purpose for which it was made." Men and woman

house/index.html.

¹⁷ <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/childrens-health/in-depth/children-and-gender-identity/art-20266811>.

¹⁸ <https://www.heritage.org/gender/commentary/transgender-ideology-hurts-kids>.

¹⁹ Ibid.

are made as complementary beings, for each other and for their children. Reason acknowledges this reality, and it ought to order the passions accordingly. If it doesn't, the most serious consequence that will follow will be the one that comes after death, in the final judgment. If our culture continues to promote the unfettered pursuit of bodily pleasures, without regard for the well-being of eternal souls, for many there is little hope for reward in the afterlife.

Our culture suffers from a widespread failure to understand properly the nature of the human person and our final end as human beings. Restoring a proper grasp of the nature of the body-soul composite is crucial. By analogy, one who understands the nature of a knife does not make the mistake of trying to cut something with its blunt end. Likewise, one who understands well who we are and the end for which we are made will not glorify the body and its desires over reason. But neither will such a person honor the soul without regard for the dignity of the body. Both body and soul are honored as essential to our nature and ultimate happiness in heaven with God.

We do well to train our passions to follow reason and strive for intellectual and moral virtue, but we also called to perform the corporal works of mercy: to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the sick and those in prison, bury the dead, and support the poor. Because we ought to care for the whole person, we are also called to perform the spiritual works of mercy: to admonish the sinner, comfort the sorrowful, forgive others, and pray for both the living and the dead. As regards our own well-being, we should care for own bodies by exercising, eating well, and getting proper rest. But we also ought to pray and strive to love and serve others, because doing so is good for our souls. We were made to do these things, and in doing them we move toward our fulfillment.

The wisdom of many who have come before us, such as Aristotle, Aquinas, Hildebrand, Sheen, and many others, offers us insight into our human nature and, accordingly, how we are to live. We learn from them to order our lives in view of our death, with a proper

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understanding of what it means to be human. When we live in a fully Christian way, moreover, we share this important message in the hope that others may also come to understand who they are and what they were made for.

