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# Foreword

**T**HIS IS AN UNUSUAL VOLUME, as it offers a series of essays written by a remarkable group of young people from around the United States in their final year of undergraduate studies. It is the first fruits of the newly established Röpke-Wojtyła Fellowship, a program started during the academic year 2017-18 at The Catholic University of America by the Arthur and Carlyse Ciocca Center for Principled Entrepreneurship. The Fellowship exists to bring future Catholic intellectuals and business leaders into a conversation about the market order and social thought.

The Röpke-Wojtyła Fellowship consists of a series of colloquia in which students and scholars address important questions of social philosophy, such as the makings of a good society, the civilizing aspect of commerce, and the tensions between markets and community. Its ambitious goal is not only to offer an intellectual experience, but also to create a basis for “fellowship” in the companionable sense of the word: a journey into friendship. Aristotle saw that the deepest friendships cannot be based on mere utility or pleasure but are a quest for the good in which friends journey together, through mutual support and challenge, toward virtues to which they are passionately committed. Röpke-Wojtyła Fellows cultivate this kind of friendship during their year together, as they come to know each other, sharpen each other’s ideas, and share a path toward community and the common good. Throughout the year, the Fellows reflect together, converse, and learn about philosophy, history, political economy, politics, and more. These exchanges have given rise to the present volume.

My first reaction after reading and discussing these essays with the Fellows was one of delight at their inventiveness and academic rigor. It is a great pleasure for a teacher to encounter young people with “fire in their bellies” – with passion and imagination as they think about the just society and their own roles within it. The essays are here divided

into three sections: (a) politics and political philosophy, (b) economics, and (c) culture and the human person. A brief word now about each.

Discussing first principles and American democracy in the context of racial discrimination in 1964 Alabama, Joshua Peine reminds us that, “long before the American project proclaimed liberty as an unalienable right of man, the Christian tradition espoused the sacredness of liberty, demonstrated through free will, as a fundamental element of the human soul” (p. 9). The American experiment was first built on human dignity and then on liberty, Peine argues.

Catherine Francois, in her essay on materialism and Marxism, learns from Whittaker Chambers’s Christian conversion and rejection of Communism. Francois argues that modernity, including and especially Communism, sacrificed the human person to the social project based on the false premise of material perfectibility. A most grave error, as she ably shows us.

I learned something from Margaret Schuhriemen’s essay. Prior to her pointing it out, the commonalities between phenomenology and Ordoliberalism had not occurred to me. “Both Ordoliberalism and phenomenology attempt to recover and develop elements of ancient and medieval thought as well as Catholic social teaching,” she argues (p. 34). Husserl intended to recover an anthropology that accounts for human persons in very much the same way as Walter Eucken, Franz Böhm, and Wilhelm Röpke attempted to recover an economic science that accounted for the dignity and freedom of the human person.

Catherine Swope tackles a topic dear to my heart: the relationship between the market order and the community. A problem is that we all benefit from the advantages of mass production through the division of labor, but most also aspire to live in human-size communities based on personal ties. Can the two interests ever be reconciled? “The best and most practical approach to reintegrating individuals with themselves and their neighbors is through small and localized social and economic institutions. Communities and individuals thrive when personal relationships are healthy, when

individuals are directly involved in and responsible for problem-solving, and when members of a community share a significant and uniting vision,” explains Swope (p. 45). This theme runs through the works of Robert Nisbet, Wilhelm Röpke, and Friedrich Hayek, to name a few, and Miss Swope provides an excellent introduction to it.

As I write these lines, news has come of the passing of Jack Bogle, who invented the index mutual fund and eliminated fund commissions. Bogle was a man of the highest ethical standards who forwent a fortune by choosing to structure the firm he created using a mutual ownership model. Eschewing riches for himself alone, he enabled countless individual investors to earn higher returns. In an *à propos* essay, Joseph St. Pierre explores the morality of mutual fund investing, as he explains the nature of mutual funds and offers an ethical analysis using St. Alphonsus Liguori’s *Theologia moralis*. The result is a thoughtful essay on the thorny issue of ethical investing.

Justin Callais likewise explores a moral and economic question: organ markets. His essay, with good reason, led to one of the most animated discussions among the Fellows. Does the idea of selling organs rest on a false anthropology? Or could such markets provide a solution to organ shortages that is more charitable toward the poor and the sick? Callais’s thorough analysis helps improve the discussion among defenders and opponents of the idea.

Next on offer, in a highly practical and insightful contribution, Nicholas Vance asks if it is at all possible to base effective advertising on the principles of Catholic social teaching and the dignity of the person. In a world in which hundreds of thousands of products compete daily for our attention, Vance questions the emotive content and moral weight of advertising, especially when advertising leads to more mindless consumption, fewer savings, and lower levels of happiness. His is a remarkable exploration of advertising and excessive consumerism.

While a staunch defender of the market order, Wilhelm Röpke was also concerned with the effacement of the individual in the sea of the

marketplace. A natural order does not put the market first, he thought, but integrates it into a larger view of life, extending beyond supply and demand, to respect for the dignity of each person. Kacey Reeves's fascinating essay on the humane economy and the Catholic imagination uses Evelyn Waugh's novel *Brideshead Revisited* to consider fascinating ways to reconcile the market order with a more natural order of things. Reeves argues that "Catholic imagination lays the foundation for a successful humane economy by rejecting collectivism and encouraging humility and care within the community" (p. 87).

Philosophers have pondered the notion of private property for centuries. Tristan Smith offers an exploration of the topic through the works of Plato and Aristotle. Smith argues that private ownership is part of natural law, is rooted in human nature, and "originates from the soul's charge to exercise dominion over the earth through work" (p. 102).

Isaac Owen presents a robust defense of the personalist school of thought that argues that the fulfillment of human nature comes through the gift of oneself to others and to God – contra John Locke and Plato. Admirers of Locke may find themselves in disagreement with Owen's view of Locke's materialism. Whatever he himself intended, a dominant interpretation of Locke's theory of the person focuses mostly on our material nature, and this has not been without consequences in the development of modernity. Against an incomplete view of the person that one may find in Locke and Plato, Owen presents anew John Paul II's philosophy of the person and some of its implications.

Finally, but not least, Emily Dalsky discusses the interplay between Karol Wojtyła's *The Acting Person* and Josef Pieper's *Leisure: The Basis of Culture*. Her essay is a call to rediscover authentic leisure as a celebration of God's goodness. Self-actualization can occur only if leisure is "the basis of activity so that from our peace we can pour out fruitfully in self-gift through our work" (p. 123).

Beyond their academic value, these essays are testimonies to the lives these young men and women intend to live. I am inspired by their dynamism, their commitment to the common good, and the hope with which they face the future. May these good young people influence their families, friends, and the world around them through the lives they live, the ideas they champion, and the virtues they practice.

I thank all the Fellows for making the Röpke-Wojtyła Fellowship a reality in its inaugural year, and for their dedication, joy, and love. I would also like to thank Dr. Elizabeth Shaw for supervising the Fellows in the production of this volume, as well as Candace Mottice, the Fellowship manager, without whom the program would not exist. I thank as well my other colleagues at the Ciocca Center for their participation and help.

Dr. Frederic Sautet  
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# Discussions of Man and Meat: First Principles and the American Democratic Project

*Joshua Peine\**

THE CLOSER THE CLOCK'S HOUR-HAND got to the twelve, the more frequent Mr. Booker's glances became. Generally, the rush to the lunch joint was motivated by the hot Alabama sun and the back-sweat that the extra time in line at the take-out counter would produce. Despite his position in front of the office fan and the morning rain that had melted the heat, Booker's grey collar was already turning dark from perspiration. At noon Mr. Booker walked the few blocks over to Ollie's Bar-B-Q, where he sat down and ordered lunch.

By the time he was home from work that evening, the radio was already blaring incessantly about his simple lunch hour. The constant clamoring was that no diner should be forced to serve his kind, and if one of them wanted a pulled pork sandwich from Ollie's, they would be lucky to wait at the take-out window. The governor of his state, Mr. George Wallace, said forcing the diners to serve blacks was "a staggering blow to the free enterprise system and the rights of private property owners." Mr. Booker never returned to Ollie's. Mr. Wallace, however, returned to his seat as Alabama governor for fifteen more years.

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The 1964 Supreme Court case *Katzbach v. McClung* was motivated by the fact that Ollie McClung, the owner of Ollie's Bar-B-Q in

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Birmingham, refused to seat blacks in his restaurant. This racial discrimination was in apparent violation of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which outlawed segregation in schools and public places and was predicated on the commerce clause of the U.S. Constitution,<sup>1</sup> which gives Congress the power to regulate interstate commerce.

When Ollie McClung challenged this application of the commerce clause, the Supreme Court found that discrimination in restaurants posed significant burdens on “the interstate flow of food and upon the movement on products generally.”<sup>2</sup> Therefore, because racial discrimination affected commerce, Congress’s solution to this problem was appropriate and within its bounds. Mr. Booker was allowed to eat a barbeque lunch at Ollie’s, not because human equality demanded it, nor because racial segregation was morally repulsive to American legislative bodies, but because, by eating a pork sandwich, Mr. Booker was participating in interstate commerce and, apparently, his not doing so could be bad for business. Thus, the breakdown of racial segregation in America came as a result of an appeal to economic and commercial values rather than an appeal to human rights or dignity.

Catholic priest and American theologian John Courtney Murray, S.J., in his reflections on the American democratic project, condemns this sort of utilitarian usurpation of morality when he states: “The barbarian is the man who reduces all spiritual and moral questions to the test of the practical results. Society becomes barbarian when economic interests assume the primacy over higher values.”<sup>3</sup>

Although the *McClung* ruling landed a blow to segregation in America, it was a backhanded, stealthy stroke. After reaching for the first principles of equality and human dignity and coming up empty handed, the Supreme Court clutched at any implement within its reach,

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Constitution, article 1, section 8, clause 3.

<sup>2</sup> *Katzendbach v. McClung*, 379 U.S. 294 (1964). Justia Law, available at <https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/379/294/>.

<sup>3</sup> John Courtney Murray, *We Hold These Truths: Catholic Reflections on the American Proposition* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1960), 12.

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using the commerce clause to strike the final blow that should have been struck by truth. Following the overreach of the *McClong* ruling, the subtle balance between state and federal power tipped, opening the door for federal regulation to seep into every corner of American life, from fair labor standards to drugs, guns, sex trafficking, endangered species, sports gambling, and more. Professor of law James Chen remarks on the government's use of the commerce clause following *McClong* case: "There was no real limit. And in fact, the only question was whether the government even had to make the argument itself." The tenth amendment, which states, "The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people," ceased to delimit federal action as it had previously, and a new precipice of lawlessness came into view.

For over 100 years, the fourteenth amendment had guaranteed equal protection and privileges of all citizens, but somehow it couldn't solve lunch time at Ollie's Bar-B-Q. The power present in the fourteenth amendment was ineffective at regulating the behavior of those who insisted on segregation. Because the original principles, which were intended to regulate behavior, were not agreed upon, it was the commerce clause that finally strong-armed dissenters into compliance.

Public radio host and producer Jad Abumrad of WNYC Studios commented on the *McClong* case:

Hopefully we are Americans with principles that matter. We believe in equality, we believe in racial justice. But really, we just believe in money. And we can do all the other stuff by bootstrapping it to commerce, but somehow the pure principles don't have teeth. It is deeply troubling that we have to use commerce to achieve our higher principles.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> "Radiolab Presents: More Perfect – One Nation, Under Money," available at <https://www.wnycstudios.org/story/radiolab-presents-more-perfect-one-nation-under-money/>.

*First Principles and American Democracy**We Hold These Truths: Consensus amid Pluralism*

Today, as it was in 1964, the brink of barbarism seems to be the constant habitat of American society and politics. Social moral formlessness and disagreement have resulted in political pandemonium, and if any public consensus exists, it seems to be hesitant and ill defined. As Murray pointed out, if total barbarism is to be avoided, the first principles of the American democratic project must be given priority over all lesser values, such as economic wealth.

At moments such as this, America must be more clearly aware of what it proposes as its short- and long-range goals, and more purposeful in its execution of the means toward those ends. What is at stake is America's understanding of itself. Without consensus regarding first principles, America cannot lay claim to an identity or to a purpose that this identity serves. If truth can be pursued and realized through dialogue and society can be led toward communion and flourishing through public discourse, there must exist fertile ground for argumentation and the exchange of ideas. However, there can be no argument and discussion except within a context of agreement on first principles. Only upon these first principles can society build; without such a foundation, political and social incoherence abound, and America teeters on the edge of the barbaric abyss.

The American democratic project has been unique in its composition and challenges from the beginning. Since its founding, America has existed as a pluralist society, meaning that multiple groups with divergent and sometimes incompatible views with regard to religious and other fundamental questions have coexisted as one political community. This pluralism in America was not the consequence of a decline in religious unity, as it was in England, but rather the intentional establishment of a new project of unity in spite of religious differences.

Thus, American pluralism naturally entails disagreement and dissension among the members of the community. However, it also

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implies the presence of a community within which there must be some agreement and consensus. As John Courtney Murray points out:

There's no small political problem here. If society is to be at all a rational process, some set of principles must motivate the general participation of all religious groups, despite their dissensions, and the oneness of the community. On the other hand, these common principles must not hinder the maintenance by each group of its own different identity.<sup>5</sup>

Despite the fact that American citizens held a variety of often incompatible religious beliefs, they established consensus regarding certain fundamental principles. This consensus came into being not simply for the sake of its practical value, but as an affirmation of key substantive truths concerning the nature of man and creation. It provides the foundations and aims of the community's action, both internally with respect to itself and externally in the world.

Most recently, Senator John McCain used his final letter to the people of the United States to draw out from amid the political firestorm a clear vision of America's goals and the rich rewards that their accomplishment provides. He stated: "To be connected to America's causes – liberty, equal justice, respect for the dignity of all people – brings happiness more sublime than life's fleeting pleasures. Our identities and sense of worth are not circumscribed but enlarged by serving good causes bigger than ourselves."<sup>6</sup>

*Religion and Consensus*

"We hold these truths to be self-evident" was the first proclamation of the American project. As the first cry of America's

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<sup>5</sup> Murray, *We Hold These Truths*, x.

<sup>6</sup> John McCain, "Farewell Letter," available at <https://www.cnn.com/2018/08/27/john-mccain-in-final-message-before-death-says-do-not-despair-of-our-present-difficulties.html>.

infancy, it announced the truths that would infuse its structure, en flesh its beliefs, and nurture its institutions. This declaration may be striking to the ears of today's American body politic in its unequivocal assertion that truth exists and can be known. To our forefathers, the political and social life of man did not rest upon tentative hypotheses. On the contrary, they declared that man and society are founded on a body of objective truths, universal in its import and accessible to the natural reason of man.

Formally this consensus was political, and it comprised, in Murray's words, a "whole constellation of principles bearing upon the origin and nature of society, a function of the state as the legal order of society, and the scope and limitations of government."<sup>7</sup>

The truths pronounced in the Declaration of Independence find their credence and gravity in the foundational principle of the sovereignty of God over individual man and society. It is a truth that lies beyond politics. It imparts to politics a fundamental human meaning and grants the works of men weight and holiness, recognized by the authors in the pledge of their "sacred honor" in support of the Declaration.

The initial settlement of British America was undertaken by people who brought with them various forms of Christianity. Notwithstanding their theological differences, they found common precepts, in both the New and Old Testaments, that were the basis for establishing the first principles that were operative in their common political life.

The Christian view of God as the Father of mankind obliges one to see his fellow man as brother, to honor God above all else, and to love his neighbor as himself. Creation of man in the image and likeness of God obliges Christians to recognize God's endowment of every human with unalienable rights, and the concept of equality itself

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<sup>7</sup> Murray, *We Hold These Truths*, 31.

derives from religious principles that individuals are equal in their standing before God.

French historian and political theorist Alexis de Tocqueville argues that religion necessarily draws man away from self-interest and disposes him toward civil community: “There is no religion that does not place the object of man’s desires above and beyond the treasures of earth and that does not naturally raise his soul to regions far above those of the senses. Nor is there any which does not impose on man some duties towards his kind and thus draw him at times from the contemplation of himself.”<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, American economist Vincent Ostrom argues that, unlike in sovereign states, where authority is rooted in the state itself, “[p]eople in a democratic society depend on a Transcendent Order, whether called God or the Way of Heaven, to recognize the place of human nature and nature as being grounded in a common Source of Creation.”<sup>9</sup>

In a similar vein, Tocqueville concluded: “Religion in America takes no direct part in the government of society, but it must be regarded as the first of their political institutions.”<sup>10</sup> Religion shapes the way people think about themselves, as well as their relationship with others and their world. Citizens pledged together to form a society by drawing on transcendent religious principles to organize the way they think, communicate, and relate with one another. Chief among these is the idea of the sovereignty of God over man and society.

There is and has always been dissent from these first principles. Secularists and relativists, for example, deny foundational religious truths. However, from the Founding up to the present day, those holding views such as these have largely been in the minority, and have

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<sup>8</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2010), 742.

<sup>9</sup> Vincent Ostrom, *The Meaning of Democracy and the Vulnerability of Democracies* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 193.

<sup>10</sup> Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 476.

from time to time served to underscore American first principles by forcing Americans to articulate clearly their foundational beliefs, such as when the Supreme Court in 1952 reaffirmed that “[w]e are a religious people whose institutions presuppose a Supreme Being.”<sup>11</sup>

It is imperative to recognize that public consensus is not simply the least common denominator of society’s collection of opinions. Its coherence and validity do not derive from the sheer fact of widespread agreement, but from the evidence amassed that shows the truths affirmed are indeed true, good, just, and useful. This deposit of commonly held and affirmed truths is the product of a vast body of thought and experience that has been shown to reflect the true nature of man and society. Thus, its validity is radically independent of its status as majority (or minority) opinion. The Declaration of Independence does not hazard the conjecture, “We hold these opinions in general majority”; rather, it asserts that truths commanding public agreement rest on the merit of their self-evidence.

True, the original affirmation of first principles expressed by the Declaration of Independence happened over 200 years ago. Still, the public consensus does not remain stagnant and in the past. It is indeed a legacy from the past, but not in the form of a single deposit that admits no changes or additions. The consensus on first principles is never finished or complete. It is an open-ended action, a historical process in need of constant renewal and development, in which each generation needs to reaffirm for itself these views, to own them and apply them in its own circumstances. Murray argues that the public consensus on first principles, as a historical process, “must obey one or the other all of the alternative laws of history, which are growth or decline, fuller integrity or disintegration.”<sup>12</sup>

Although the consensus of first principles is received as an intellectual heritage, its final depository is the living public mind. In

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<sup>11</sup> *Zorach v. Clauson*. LII / Legal Information Institute, available at <https://www.law.cornell.edu/supremecourt/text/343/306>.

<sup>12</sup> Murray, *We Hold These Truths*, 99.



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this perilous place it is exposed to the rot of skepticism, the corrosion of forgetfulness, the pollution of distraction, and the dust of apathy. Only through the continual renewal and vitalization offered by discussion, application, and argument can the first principles be preserved in the public mind.

Murray affirms the need for a return to original values when he writes:

In the public argument there must consequently be a continued recurrence to first principles. Otherwise the consensus may come to seem simply a projection of ephemeral experience, a passing shadow on the vanishing backdrop of some given historical scene without the permanence property truths that are held.<sup>13</sup>

The first principles of the American democratic project must be sustained in the same manner in which they were born, namely, through argument and persuasion that appeal to careful reflection on experience and truth.

*Primacy of First Principles*

Long before the American project proclaimed liberty as an unalienable right of man, the Christian tradition espoused the sacredness of liberty, demonstrated through free will, as a fundamental element of the human soul that distinguishes it from all other created beings, angels and beasts alike. The sacredness of this gift is so deep that the virtue of its presence and practice in the world outweighs the evil in the world that it necessarily brings. Love of God and neighbor is possible only in the presence of liberty and free will. It is from this tradition and upon these first principles that the American project builds its veneration of liberty.

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

Despite this reality, liberty alone does not define the constellation of American first principles. As Tocqueville observed, “Until now no one has been found in the United States who has dared to advance this maxim: that everything is allowed in the interest of society.”<sup>14</sup>

In the United States a necessary tension exists between liberty and first principles. While the scientific, political, economic, and social spheres of American society seem open ranges where the audacity, entrepreneurship, and imaginations of citizens may take flight, all exercise of citizens’ liberty is checked and restrained by an accepted behavioral standard based on the first principles of society. These habits of restraint, which range in their application from biomedical ethics to fair punishment of prisoners and beyond, create proper moral boundaries within which liberty can work for the flourishing of society. A democratic nation, subject to no political authority but itself, must still submit to the sovereignty of first principles or risk wanton lawlessness and incoherent purpose.

Tocqueville eloquently describes the subtle process by which society loses sight of first principles and becomes unmoored: “If the light by which we are guided is ever extinguished, it will dwindle by degrees and expire of itself. By dint of close adherence to mere applications, principles would be lost sight of; and when the principles were wholly forgotten, the methods derived from them would be ill pursued.”<sup>15</sup> This danger is revealed in the ruling of the Supreme Court in *Katzenbach v. McClung*. In fervent and honorable pursuit of the end of segregation, the way forward was made impassable when it became apparent that human dignity and equality had been abandoned as operative first principles. In their place, the legal and policy experts argued the particulars of how much pork traveling across state lines constituted interstate commerce and examined the participation of African-Americans in society as an economic rather than human rights

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<sup>14</sup> Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 475.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

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problem. These discussions, while they ultimately forced business owners to desegregate, did little to renew society's dedication to its first principles. The depositories of civil consensus were found empty, and rather than replenishing them through public discourse, the logistics of pork transportation took the front page.

Alexis de Tocqueville lamented this sort of abandonment of first principles when he wrote:

You see men who allow, as if by forgetfulness, the object of their most cherished hopes to escape. Carried along by an imperceptible current against which they do not have the courage to struggle, but to which they yield with regret, they abandon the faith that they love to follow the doubt that leads them to despair. During the centuries that we have just described, you abandon your beliefs by coldness rather than by hatred; you do not reject them, they leave you.<sup>16</sup>

If first principles are lost by coldness, then we may still hope that discordant times such as ours may serve, if they do not discourage us altogether, to warm our eagerness and swell our ardor to regain them. For in fire gold is tested, and through discord and argument this American project renews the principles to which it clings.

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 485.



# Materialism, Marxism, and Modernity

*Catherine Francois\**

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY was one that rejected traditional views of morality and religion. The world was no longer governed by a vision of man that included a nature and a purpose. Modern thinkers such as Sigmund Freud and Jean-Paul Sartre attempted to explain away the idea that man has a nature and a purpose, reducing him to his material dimension. These errors of the modern world are not without consequences. When man is reduced to his animal instincts, he cannot truly live *as man*. Furthermore, if man is no more than the sum of his material components, then his ultimate goal becomes material perfection.

Nazism and Communism came about in the wake of this crisis. These totalitarian ideologies attempted to fill a void in civilization that modern thinkers had created. They tried to recreate religion, promising perfection on earth. They ultimately failed, however, because they were not based on sound notions of human nature.

In his work *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Sigmund Freud speculates about the world and what man needs in order to flourish. Freud tries to understand man from a purely psychological standpoint and attempts to reduce him to something that can be measured quantitatively. However, there are truths about the nature of man beyond mere quantitative analysis that Freud must grapple with. He begins with a question about the purpose of life. He writes that “[t]he question of the purpose of human life has been raised countless times; it has never yet received a satisfactory answer and perhaps does not admit of one. Some of those who have asked it have added that if it

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should turn out that life has no purpose, it would lose all value for them.”<sup>1</sup>

The question of whether life has purpose is critical for the way people live. If there is no broader picture that man sees himself as fitting into, then he is left to define the meaning of his own existence. But where can man look to find this broader picture? In Freud’s view, religion provides the best answer for this question. As he writes, “Only religion can answer the question of the purpose of life. One can hardly be wrong in concluding that the idea of life having a purpose stands and falls with the religious system.”<sup>2</sup> Without religion, man is simply another material thing, devoid of any sense of the transcendent and values that follow from it, such as justice and truth. He has no reason to live or behave *this* way rather than *that*.

People are more than pieces of matter, however. Freud identifies elements of society that are not easy to quantify and thus difficult to account for or explain in materialist or utilitarian terms. As he writes, “Beauty, cleanliness and order obviously occupy a special position among the requirements of civilization. No one will maintain that they are as important for life as control over the forces of nature or as some other factors with which we shall become acquainted. And yet no one would care to put them in the background as trivialities.”<sup>3</sup>

Though it is hard to explain why these things are significant in society, Freud asserts nonetheless that they cannot be dismissed as trivial. With regard to beauty, in particular, Freud is even more assertive, saying, “Beauty has no obvious use, nor is there any clear cultural necessity for it. Yet civilization could not do without it.”<sup>4</sup> Ultimately this need for beauty and order cannot be explained by a

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<sup>1</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Norton & Company, 2010), 42.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

utilitarian approach; something more is needed to explain and appreciate their value.

Freud asserts that a key aspect of civilization is the respect for man's higher capabilities. As he writes, "No feature, however, seems better to characterize civilization than its esteem and encouragement of man's higher mental activities – his intellectual, scientific and artistic achievements – and the leading role that it assigns to ideas in human life. Foremost among those ideas are the religious systems."<sup>5</sup> Religion clearly supplies something that is necessary for man's fulfillment. While it may not be strictly necessary for survival, it encourages those abilities and desires in man that bring civilization to a higher level. Man has an intellect, a yearning for truth, and a desire for beauty. Freud ultimately tries to explain away these tendencies as a product of aggression and the sex drive. Thus he attempts to explain man in a quantifiable way, denying the real need for religion.

Existentialism was another current of thought associated with the rejection of traditional religion and morality in the twentieth century. Without religion to give life purpose and meaning, people were at a loss. The writings of existentialist thinker Jean-Paul Sartre offer a view of this crisis. In his book *Nausea*, for example, the protagonist is searching for meaning but cannot seem to find it. He lives a life of emptiness, with nothing to drive him. Sartre writes, "Nothing happens while you live. The scenery changes, people come in and go out, that's all. There are no beginnings. Days are tacked on to days without rhyme or reason, an interminable, monotonous addition."<sup>6</sup> Sartre describes a world where people are unfulfilled. People are not made to live a monotonous existence. People are not truly living *human* lives if they do not have a greater reason to live. This is the world that gave rise to communism.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>6</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea*, trans. Lloyd Alexander (New York: New Directions, 2007), 39.

The rise of ideological religions came as an attempt to fill the void that the rejection of religion created for society. Michael Burleigh identifies this phenomenon in his description of Hitler's Nazi regime in Germany. As he writes,

Hitler . . . knows that human beings don't only want comfort, safety, short working hours, hygiene, birth-control and in general, common sense; they also, at least intermittently, want struggle and self-sacrifice, not to mention drums, flags and loyalty-parades. Whereas Socialism, and even capitalism in a more grudging way, have said to people 'I offer you a good time,' Hitler has said to them 'I offer you struggle, danger and death,' and as a result a whole nation flings itself at his feet.<sup>7</sup>

Hitler clearly realized the same problem that Freud pointed to: Human beings are not completely satisfied simply by the fulfillment of their animal needs. More important, they need a purpose outside of themselves. People inherently desire to belong to something that will answer the question, "Why am I here?" When religion has been dismissed, something else must come to stand in its place.

Marxism attempts to answer the question of the purpose of life by claiming that human beings can bring about utopia at some point in the future. Marx thought that man could be perfected by his own power, and that human society could be engineered into a utopian society by economic means. He ends his *Manifesto* with a prediction of a perfect society, made up of ultradeveloped men, free from all class antagonisms:

When, in the course of development, class distinctions have disappeared . . . the proletariat . . . [will] have swept away the conditions for the existence of class antagonisms and of classes generally. . . . In place of the old bourgeois society,

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<sup>7</sup> Quoted in F. Flagg Taylor, *The Great Lie: Classic and Recent Appraisals of Ideology and Totalitarianism* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2001), 202.



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with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.<sup>8</sup>

In a world where such equality and perfectibility of society is possible, the ultimate purpose of life becomes the creation of that perfect society. According to Waldemar Gurian, “[i]f men become masters of society through and in Socialism and Communism, the Bolsheviks as followers of Marxism pretend there will be no need for a God Who has created men and the world – all religious mysteries will evaporate when faced by the reality of the perfect, man-made world of the classless society.”<sup>9</sup> If man is perfectible in himself and by himself, then there is no need to believe in a Being greater than man. Thus ideology seeks to replace man’s need for religion by creating a different purpose for mankind: the perfection of society. Gurian continues, “The totalitarian doctrines are not only political ones, they claim to provide the key to the whole universe, to all realms of human life.”<sup>10</sup> When men are without religion to give their lives purpose and meaning, something else must step into this place, which is exactly what totalitarianism did.

Totalitarian ideology ultimately failed to fulfill man. The writings of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn demonstrate the critical reality of the apparent needs Freud speculated about: for beauty, truth, and order. It is truly in man’s nature to seek truth and beauty and order. These desires cannot simply be reduced to physiological tendencies. Communism attempted to suppress these functions, thus crushing humanity. Under Soviet Communism, human beings were reduced to their material aspects. There was no room for art or literature or true

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<sup>8</sup> Karl Marx, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1969), 98-137.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Taylor, *The Great Lie*, 11.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

friendship – none of the things that Freud said were necessary elements of human civilization.

In his book *The Gulag Archipelago*, Solzhenitsyn describes a place where human beings are valued exclusively for their ability to produce. Rather than as individuals with inherent value, people were viewed as commodities in the production process. This was especially evident in the labor camps. Solzhenitsyn writes, “They say that in February-March, 1938, a secret instruction was circulated in the NKVD: Reduce the number of prisoners. (And not by releasing them, or course.) I do not see anything in the least impossible here: this was a logical instruction because there was simply not enough housing, clothing, or food.”<sup>11</sup> One can see from this example that the dignity of the human person was completely ignored by those in charge of the labor camps. If there were not enough resources to maintain the current number of prisoners, they could simply be eradicated. Prisoners were not human beings with inherent worth, but simply numbers that had to be fed and clothed.

Furthermore, human beings were not supplied with the means necessary for human flourishing. They were deprived of truth and every road to it: art, literature, real friendships. Every aspect of life was monitored, which stifled the ability to think independently. Without the freedom to express unique thoughts, thought itself began to disappear. According to Solzhenitsyn, “[l]iterature did not exist in our country in the thirties, forties, and fifties. Because without the full truth it is not literature.”<sup>12</sup> Without literature, people were not able to live a full human existence. While people had the bare minimum requirements for biological survival, they were not able to flourish in the way human beings are meant to.

In the labor camps, as well, people did not have opportunities to utilize their intellects. Freud earlier argued that the best civilizations

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<sup>11</sup> Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*, trans. Thomas P. Whitney (New York: HarperCollins, 1985), 211.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 320.

cultivate these higher human abilities, but the labor camps failed in this regard. Solzhenitsyn describes the way the minds of prisoners were left to disintegrate in the *Gulag*: “And all that endless time, after all, the prisoners’ brains and souls are not inactive?! In the mass and from a distance they seem like swarming lice, but they are the crown of creation, right? After all, once upon a time a weak little spark of God was breathed into them too – is it not true? So what has become of it now?”<sup>13</sup> Solzhenitsyn understood that human beings have a higher in their nature that comes from the divine. But when they are treated like material objects, they lose something of their humanity.

Prisoners who realized that they were being stifled in this way were able to move beyond these limitations, finding a way to let their humanity out. Solzhenitsyn did this by writing poetry. He was uplifted by poetry, as it took his mind away from the drab and meaningless work that he performed day after day. As he explains,

I needed an unmuddled mind because I had been trying to write a poem for two years past. This was very rewarding, in that it helped me not to notice what was being done with my body. Sometimes in a sullen work party with Tommy-gunners barking about me, lines and images crowded in so urgently that I felt myself borne through the air, overleaping the column in my hurry to reach the work site and find a corner to write. At such moments I was both free and happy.<sup>14</sup>

Solzhenitsyn considered himself free when he could use his mind. Writing poetry allowed him to become more fully human in a way that he had not been before. The prison guards could limit his physical freedom by means of force. They could require him to work certain hours, limit his food and sleep, and otherwise control his physical

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 306.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 356.

freedom. But they could not get inside his mind. Once he realized that, he could become truly free.

Poetry was not the only method of maintaining a human life within the labor camps. Some people did this through love affairs with fellow prisoners. As Solzhenitsyn writes,

Plundered of everything that fulfills female life and indeed human life in general – of family, motherhood, the company of friends, familiar and perhaps even interesting work, in some cases perhaps in art or among books, and crushed by fear, hunger, abandonment, and savagery – what else could the women camp inmates turn to except love?<sup>15</sup>

It is clear that people needed something more than the satisfaction of their material needs in order to truly live. Art, beauty, friendship, and meaningful work are all things that elevate us and give us purpose.

It is evident from the writings of Solzhenitsyn that the modern ideology that denies the need for art, beauty, religion, and meaning does not capture the full picture of the human person. Communism was based on this false view of the human person.

In the writings of Whittaker Chambers, one can see that his rejection of communism came about as he turned toward God. It was not economic concerns that turned him away from the Communist party, but the realization that Communism was based on a mindset that was inconsistent with the true nature of the human person. Chambers realized that something was missing in the framework of the Communist Party. He writes,

I knew confusion and despair long before I knew what to do about it. I knew that my faith, long held and devoutly served, was destroyed long before I knew exactly what my error was, or what the right way might be, or even if there were a right way. For my mind and the logic of history had told me that Communism was the only way out for the 20th

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 236.

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century. If Communism were evil, what was left but moral chaos?<sup>16</sup>

Communism had come about in a time that had rejected the moral framework of good and evil. Philosophical existentialism was popular among people who struggled to find meaning. Communism provided an answer because it promised material fulfillment. Without religion, what else did man need than material fulfillment?

Chambers discovered that humanity was more than matter and motion. He discovered that there was something more to life than the progress of history. He writes, “With that thought I had rejected the right of the mind to justify evil in the name of history, reason or progress, because I had asserted that there is something greater than the mind, history or progress. I did not know that this Something is God.”<sup>17</sup> By rejecting the twentieth-century idea that material progress is the ultimate end, Chambers was able to find God.

Chambers’s break with the Communist Party was more than a change in political affiliation. It was a turning point where he rejected everything that Communism was built from. As he writes,

The rags that fell from me were not only Communism. What fell was the whole web of the materialist modern mind – the luminous shroud which it has spun about the spirit of man, paralyzing in the name of rationalism the instinct of his soul for God, denying in the name of knowledge the reality of the soul and its birthright in that mystery on which mere knowledge falters and shatters at every step.<sup>18</sup>

Communism was not simply a political party. It was an ideology that emerged from the intellectual framework of the times that reduced

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<sup>16</sup> Whittaker Chambers, *Witness* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 2014), 53.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

man to his material dimension. In Chambers's rejection of Communism, he rejected not only the political party, but also the materialist framework that this political party was based on. He explains, "If I had rejected only Communism, I would have rejected only one political expression of the modern mind, the most logical because the most brutal in enforcing they myth of man's material perfectibility, the most persuasive because the least hypocritical in announcing its purpose and forcibly removing the obstacles to it."<sup>19</sup>

Chambers understood that the errors of Communism could be traced back to errors in modern philosophy. The modern thinkers believed that man's nature was changeable. Man and society could reach perfection if the leaders simply implemented the correct political structure. Thus Chambers realized that rejecting the political structure was not sufficient. He must also reject the ideas that gave rise to this political structure.

The writings of Solzhenitsyn and Chambers uncover certain errors of modernity. They show through their experiences that Communism was not simply another political structure. Communism came to be out of a philosophical environment that did not properly understand the nature of man. The modern world had reduced man to matter and motion. But the truth is that man is more than these: Man has a soul that longs, not just for progress, but for beauty, goodness, and truth.

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

# Phenomenology, Ordoliberalism, and Human Nature

*Margaret Schubriemen\**

IT IS OFTEN THE CASE that great philosophers are born in times of tremendous upheaval. Thus, the voice of Cicero was revealed to us during the fall of the Roman Republic, and Wittgenstein arose from the trenches of World War I. The diversity of thinkers that came from postwar Germany and Nazi-controlled countries, however, is truly remarkable. Having suffered through nearly forty years of horrific economic depression and war, those opposed to the Nazi regime had witnessed the worst modernity had to offer. Survivors were faced with the tasks of reconstructing an economy that had been reduced to a bartering system and, more importantly, recovering an understanding of the dignity of the human person.

In this essay I relate two schools of thought that emerged in twentieth-century Germany: phenomenology and ordoliberalism. Phenomenology is a philosophical movement originally founded in twentieth-century Germany by Edmund Husserl and his students. In short, it is a critique of modern philosophy's and science's conception of complete objectivity, one that aims at a rigorous investigation of the structures of human experience from a first-person perspective. Ordoliberalism is an economic school of thought, likewise founded in twentieth-century Germany, and is often described as a "third way" that offers an alternative to both laissez-faire capitalism and socialism. It aims at ensuring a competitive market economy within a society that values and promotes the social well-being of its people. Walter Eucken, Franz Böhm, and Wilhelm Röpke are some of the founding members of this school. I argue that ideologically both movements arose as

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responses to the same crisis of modernity, and both seek to restore similar ideas concerning human nature. Furthermore, this view of humanity closely corresponds to the Catholic conception of man. By no means do I wish to conflate the two schools of thought or to argue, as some have, that ordoliberalism is essentially phenomenology applied to economics; rather, I identify a common aim between the two movements. To illustrate the affinities of these two school of thought, I will first look briefly at their historical connections, and then I will examine the problem that each school of thought sees itself as responding to as well as its proposed solutions. Finally, I will draw some connections among phenomenology, ordoliberalism, and Catholic social teaching.

*Is capitalism compatible with Catholicism, and in what way?* My analysis here is relevant to this question. Very broadly, I believe that phenomenology and ordoliberalism are helpful in addressing the tension between Catholicism and modernity – a tension that motivates many questions concerning Catholicism and capitalism, a struggle at the center of the Western Catholic heart. On one hand, many Catholics, especially in America, are deeply committed to free, capitalist markets and democratic societies. On the other hand, many Catholics are nostalgic for a premodern past that more fully embodies our social and moral values, and many are inclined to believe that the height of human understanding and culture occurred somewhere in the medieval period. Moreover, we often feel, rightly or wrongly, that the modern free society we hold so dear is in some way responsible for destroying the old. This tension is highlighted if you consider the work of a thinker such as David Hume. Some may be sympathetic to Hume’s economic views and know him as the forefather of Adam Smith, but many see him as pivotal figure who helped bring about a dark age in the Western philosophical tradition. Responding to this deep tension, phenomenology and ordoliberalism are both attempts to integrate some of the insights of modernity with the rich wealth of thought from the ancient and medieval worlds.



Historically, it is evident that the founders of phenomenology and ordoliberalism influenced each other. I will give here only a brief sketch of their historical development. Both schools of thought emerged at the University of Freiburg in southern Germany during the early to mid-twentieth century. Ordoliberalism is also referred to as the Freiburg school of economic thought. Walter Eucken and Franz Böhm, both professors at Freiburg, developed many of its tenets in the 1930s, which they later published in their economic journal, *ORDO*.<sup>1</sup> Eucken and Böhm both suffered persecution during the Nazi regime: Böhm's ability to teach was revoked in 1938, and Eucken was arrested multiple times.<sup>2</sup> However, the Freiburg school continued to plan for the German postwar economy and had a considerable influence on the economic and social thought of the German resistance.<sup>3</sup> After the war, Eucken, Böhm, Röpke, and many other ordoliberal thinkers played a central role in reconstructing the German economy, developing a system that became known as the German social market economy.<sup>4</sup>

The origin of phenomenology follows a similar historical trajectory. Edmund Husserl and his students formulated and published his ideas at the University of Freiburg until 1933, when he began to suffer persecution because of his Jewish heritage. On April 6<sup>th</sup> that year, he was suspended from his post at Freiburg by the Badisch Ministry of Culture.<sup>5</sup> Still, he continued to write until his death in 1939,

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<sup>1</sup> Heinz Rieter and Matthias Schmolz, "The Ideas of German Ordoliberalism 1938–45: Pointing the Way to a New Economic Order," *The European Journal of the History of Economic Thought* 1, no. 1 (September 1993): 87.

<sup>2</sup> Hans Otto Lenel, "The Life and Work of Franz Böhm," *European Journal of Law and Economics* 3, no. 4 (December 1996): 304.

<sup>3</sup> Rieter and Schmolz, "The Ideas," 87.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> John J. Drummond, *Historical Dictionary of Husserl's Philosophy* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2007), 17.

and his last great work, *Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* was published posthumously that year.<sup>6</sup>

The Husserls and Euckens knew each other well. In an essay on phenomenology and ordoliberalism, Rainer Klump and Manuel Wörsdörfer explore in detail the historical connections between the two families. We know that Edmund Husserl was close friends with Walter Eucken and his father and fellow philosopher Rudolf Eucken, that the families met regularly, and that the Euckens were one of the only families who remained loyal to Husserl during the Nazi crackdown.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, it is evident that Husserl influenced Walter Eucken's thought directly and indirectly through his father Rudolf. Husserl acknowledges the affinity between his and Rudolf Eucken's thought in a piece he wrote to celebrate Rudolf's seventieth birthday. In this short article, Husserl writes that Rudolf Eucken's thought and his phenomenology are the two possible ways of "to discover the primordial life that constitutes in itself the experiential world." Later on he adds that these two paths "must ultimately fuse into an harmonious agreement."<sup>8</sup> While Rudolf, who was not an economist, cannot be considered an ordoliberal, Walter Eucken thought of himself as a follower his father's philosophy.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, Walter Eucken directly cites Husserl and phenomenology in his essay "Was

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<sup>6</sup> "Edmund Husserl," Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, available at <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/husserl/#LifWor>.

<sup>7</sup> Rainer Klump and Manuel Wörsdörfer, "On the affiliation of phenomenology and ordoliberalism: Links between Edmund Husserl, Rudolf and Walter Eucken," *European Journal of the History of Economic Thought* 18, no. 4 (October 2011): 554.

<sup>8</sup> Edmund Husserl, "Phenomenology and Rudolf Eucken," trans. Frederick Elliston and Theodore Plantinga, in *Husserl Shorter Works*, ed. Peter McCormick and Frederick A. Elliston (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 353.

<sup>9</sup> Klump and Wörsdörfer, "On the affiliation," 573.

leistet die national ökonomische Theorie?“, which is considered one of the two foundational documents of ordoliberalism.<sup>10</sup>

It is not as clear to what extent Husserl’s thought influenced the other founders of ordoliberalism, particularly those not affiliated with Freiburg, such as Röpke. It is probable, however, that they were at least aware of each other. Moreover, there is evidence that the link connecting these two schools of thought predates their founding. Husserl’s thought was heavily influenced by his professor Franz Brentano. In fact, Brentano formulated the concept of intentionality, which is a central aspect of Husserl’s phenomenology. Incidentally, Franz Brentano’s brother Lujó Brentano was a renowned German economist who greatly influenced the founders of ordoliberalism.<sup>11</sup> More research would have to be done to investigate the extent, if any, to which the Brentano brothers influenced one another’s thought, but their sibling relationship indicates another possible connection.

Born out of the same historical breaking point, Husserl’s phenomenology and ordoliberalism propose similar critiques of modernity’s view of the human person. As I mentioned above, the phenomenological movement is an attempt to revitalize a comprehensive view of the human person in a world where the opposed extremes of scientific material reductionism and radical dualism are the two dominant views of human nature. On the brink of World War II, Husserl’s *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* was published, based on a series of lectures he had given in Prague.<sup>12</sup> His central thesis in this work is that, despite tremendous advances, European science and in fact all of European civilization was

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 556.

<sup>11</sup> Christian Watrin, “The Principles of the Social Market Economy – Its Origins and Early History,” *Zeitschrift für die gesamte Staatswissenschaft (Journal of Institutional and Theoretical Economics)* 135, no. 3 (1979): 408.

<sup>12</sup> Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*, trans. David Carr (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 3.

in crisis. Modern science had lost sight of its empirical foundations and had attempted to impose an idealized, mathematical account of the world on the whole of human experience.<sup>13</sup> To deny the value of any nonmathematical account of the world was to degrade and diminish the meaning of human experience. The over-mathematization of the material world divided the human person into two parts, the sphere of body and the sphere of soul. This dualism had almost inevitably ushered in the plague of radical skepticism concerning whether the soul could have any real knowledge of the material world from which it was so separated. In so doing the extreme mathematization, which came at the birth of modern science, unintentionally led to the destruction of the epistemological foundations of science and philosophy.

Husserl is quite critical of modernity, and particularly modern science, which may lend itself to a misunderstanding of his argument. He does not oppose modern science. Indeed, his argument is not so much with modern science itself but with certain philosophies it inspired,<sup>14</sup> namely, a dualistic view of the human person and, perhaps worse, the positivist denial of the existence of any truth that cannot be scientifically proved. Husserl does not argue against science, but rather that scientific knowledge cannot claim a monopoly on all human understanding.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, man's attempt to assert his individuality by means of the technological mastery of nature has backfired, and man himself has become what Heidegger calls a "standing-reserve," a resource.<sup>16</sup> Thus, Husserl argued, the project of modern philosophy has been a "struggle for the meaning of man" in a world of positivistic science.<sup>17</sup> In the latter half of *Crisis*, Husserl proposes a solution to this

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 48-49.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 49-50.

<sup>16</sup> Martin Heidegger, *The Question concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Levitt (New York: Garland, 1977), 8.

<sup>17</sup> Husserl, *Crisis*, 14.

problem through what he calls transcendental phenomenology, arguing that the human experience of the world – the life-world – precedes and transcends scientific description. He sees the human person as a free, rational, transcendent being who is by nature embedded in an interconnected web of relationships that make up the world of human experience.<sup>18</sup>

Husserl discredits the modern attempt to view man as an individual abstracted from his culture, time, place, and commitment to his fellow human beings.<sup>19</sup> Through phenomenology he attempts to reconcile a better understanding of the human person with some of the insights of modernity, thus preserving what is valuable in modern science and European civilization. As Robert Sokolowski writes, “[T]he resources provided by phenomenology allow us . . . to transcend the difference between ancients and moderns. They offer a way to pursue philosophy as such, without being forced to be contemporary only at the price of turning away from the ancients.”<sup>20</sup> Phenomenology recognizes the problems of modernity, but its solution is not to attempt to return to a premodern world; rather, it seeks to integrate the insights of modernity with those of the ancient and medieval world. More than Husserl himself did, scholars following him have developed this idea of phenomenology as a revitalization of ancient and medieval philosophy, and this important aspect of phenomenology is especially relevant vis-à-vis Catholic social thought.

Ordoliberalism offers a similar critique of modernity, specifically focusing on modern laissez-faire capitalism. Röpke expresses this criticism well, noting,

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<sup>18</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. Dorion Cairns (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960), 126.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>20</sup> Robert Sokolowski, *Phenomenology of the Human Person* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 273.

Who can fail to see that our civilization is being destroyed by the progressive commercialization of things that are beyond economics, by the obsessive business spirit that confuses ends and means and forgets that man does not live in order to work, but works in order to live, and thus perverts all human values, by the empty bustle and sterile excitement of our time?<sup>21</sup>

Were it not for the express focus on economics, this quotation could be from Husserl's *Crisis* or even Heidegger's "Essay concerning Technology." Both argue that modern man places himself beneath machines and his own work.

Röpke continues by arguing that identifying the errors of modernity is only the beginning. The real work is in reconstruction. Ordoliberalism recognized the vices of unbridled capitalism, arguing that a pure laissez-faire economy results in monopolies and inefficient distribution of resources. Inadequate distribution results in a polarized class society, which destroys the social well-being of the whole community and degrades the dignity of human persons. Yet ordoliberalism is also vividly aware of the terrors of authoritarianism and communism. The solution lies, as Siegfried Karsten summarizes, in recognizing that "the evolution of a functional market economy, as the guarantor of freedom, human dignity, and justice, cannot be left to chance but must be consciously guided."<sup>22</sup> The founders of ordoliberalism contended that a free market economy would not only bring economic success but also create an economy and social order supportive of the social well-being of citizens. The aim of this economic system is the good life in the Aristotelian sense of the term,

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<sup>21</sup> Wilhelm Röpke, *Against the Tide*, trans. Elizabeth Henderson (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1969), 27.

<sup>22</sup> Siegfried G. Karsten, "Eucken's 'Social Market Economy' and Its Test in Post-War West Germany: The Economist as Social Philosopher Developed Ideas that Paralleled Progressive Thought in America," *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 44, no. 2 (1985): 169.

a life that brings about the well-being of the whole person and community. Thus, ordoliberals promoted policies such as the Codetermination Bargains – an agreement between the workers and owners of German steel mills that required a certain percentage of the companies’ advisory boards to be made up of workers.<sup>23</sup>

Insofar as ordoliberals oppose a centrally controlled economy, they, like phenomenologists, are reacting against the over-mathematization of human life. Ordoliberals reject centralized control because they did not believe that the constant fluctuations within the market system can be predicted or controlled by government entities. Moreover, they affirm that there is more to a healthy society than economic efficiency. Phenomenologists rebel against both the idea that human persons and the world in which they live can be completely understood in scientific terms, and the denial that each individual’s experiential knowledge of the world is important for understanding what is true about the human person and the world. The essential thesis that phenomenologists and ordoliberals share is that not all knowledge about human life can be predicted or calculated through scientific means. Knowledge can also be found through direct, immediate, personal experience.

Ordoliberalism connects most clearly with phenomenology in that its response to the crisis of modernity is to restore an understanding of man rooted in ancient and medieval thought. Neither ordoliberals nor phenomenologists seek merely to return to the premodern world; rather, both wish to recover the richness of its thought and to incorporate it into the modern world. That this was the intent of the founders of ordoliberalism was evident from the beginning, whereas in phenomenology, what was implicit in Husserl’s thought becomes more developed in the work of several scholars following him.

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<sup>23</sup> Ewan Mcgaughey, “The Codetermination Bargains: The History of German Corporate and Labour Law,” *Columbia Journal of European Law* 135 (2015): 137.

The ordoliberals, however, expressly sought to develop an economic system in the spirit of Catholic social thought. In particular, they wished to defend the rights of workers and protect private property rights. In an almost exhaustive history of the social market economy, Lothar Roos argues that its founders were specifically responding to the Church's concerns about the rights of workers as expressed in *Rerum novarum* and *Quadragesimo anno*.<sup>24</sup> Manfred Spieker confirms this argument and concludes that the development of the social market economy is inseparable from Catholic social teaching.<sup>25</sup> In particular, Spieker argues that the influence of Catholicism is evidenced in the ordoliberal support of the aforementioned Codetermination Bargains. Spieker writes, "Co-determination is a consequence of the anthropocentric orientation of Catholic social teaching. If the human being is the source, the center, and the purpose of economics, and if labor serves not only the production of goods and services but also the development of the person, then every working human being must have a say in the shaping of his activity."<sup>26</sup>

Eucken's free market beliefs were profoundly influenced by Catholic social teaching, as he himself was unabashedly Christian and maintained that a free market economy should express the inherent dignity of mankind. In fact, the very name he chose, ordoliberalism (*ordo* connoting order or methodological arrangement), was to signal the intention of developing an economic system within the framework of the Catholic intellectual tradition.<sup>27</sup> According to economist

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<sup>24</sup> Lothar Roos, "Catholic Social Doctrines," in *Social Market Economy History, Principles and Implementation – From A to Z*, ed. Rolf H. Hasse, Hermann Schneider, and Klaus Weigelt (Paderborn, Germany: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2008), 101.

<sup>25</sup> Manfred Spieker, "Labor, Property and Co-Determination: Guidelines of the Christian Social Teaching and Experiences in Germany," *National Conference on Catholic Studies* (Minneapolis: St. Thomas Media, 1997), 1.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>27</sup> Konrad Zweig, *The Origins of the German Social Market Economy: The Leading Ideas and Their Intellectual Roots* (London: Adam Smith Institute, 1980), 19.



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Konrad Zweig, “Eucken borrowed the concept of *ordo* from medieval scholastic philosophy. Thomas Aquinas explains that *ordo* co-ordinates in a unique way the Creator and the World. There is only one order which meets the reason and nature of man.”<sup>28</sup> To Eucken, ordoliberalism was not just an economic theory; more important, it was conceived as an economic and social order that was indicative of the natural order of the created world.<sup>29</sup> This idea of an economic order is also expressed in the papal encyclical *Quadragesimo anno*:

[F]ree competition, while justified and certainly useful provided it is kept within certain limits, clearly cannot direct economic life – a truth which the outcome of the application in practice of the tenets of this evil individualistic spirit has more than sufficiently demonstrated. . . . [I]t is most necessary that it be truly effective, that is, establish a juridical and social order which will, as it were, give form and shape to all economic life. Social charity, moreover, ought to be as the soul of this order, an order which public authority ought to be ever ready effectively to protect and defend.<sup>30</sup>

Ordoliberalism places the human person and the human community at the center and then seeks to develop an economic system that fosters human flourishing. This aim parallels *Quadragesimo anno*’s argument that competition, although useful, must be kept within certain bounds and that “social charity” ought to be at the center of the economic and social order.<sup>31</sup> In this regard, there are affinities with Husserl’s argument in *Crisis* that the human person and community both transcend and precede science. Both Eucken and Husserl are intent to resist any attempt to reduce the aims and purposes of human

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> “Walter Eucken,” available at <https://acton.org/pub/religion-liberty/volume-17-number-2/walter-eucken>.

<sup>30</sup> *Quadragesimo anno*, 88.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

persons for the sake of efficiency and progress and to discount the idea that human action can be completely accounted for or predicted in scientific terms.

I have argued here that both ordoliberalism and phenomenology attempt to recover and develop elements of ancient and medieval thought as well as Catholic social teaching. Many scholars accept that the founders of ordoliberalism explicitly relied on Catholic social thought, particularly its teachings on the dignity of the worker and the right of private property. If we consider Husserl's work on its own, however, the connections to Catholic social thought are not as clear. Although a convert to Christianity, Husserl was not a Catholic, and it does not appear that he was directly influenced by Catholic social thought. Even so, I would argue that in many respects his aims coalesce with those of Catholic social teaching. Through phenomenology, Husserl expressly intends to recover an anthropology that accounts for human persons as transcendent incarnate souls.<sup>32</sup> He is committed to the freedom of individual persons but sees them as inherently embedded in an intersubjective community that supports and complements them.<sup>33</sup> In his encyclical *Centesimus annus*, John Paul II, who was himself a phenomenologist, argues for a similar intersubjective view of the human person.

Apart from the family, other intermediate communities exercise primary functions and give life to specific networks of solidarity. These develop as real communities of persons and strengthen the social fabric, preventing society from becoming an anonymous and impersonal mass, as unfortunately often happens today. . . . People lose sight of the fact that life in society has neither the market nor the

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<sup>32</sup> Michael Friedman, "Science, History and Transcendental Subjectivity in Husserl's *Crisis*," in *Science and the Life-World: Essays on Husserl's Crisis of European Sciences*, ed. David Hyder and Hans-Jorg Rheinberger (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), 104.

<sup>33</sup> Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 126.

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State as its final purpose, since life itself has a unique value which the State and the market must serve. Man remains above all a being who seeks the truth and strives to live in that truth, deepening his understanding of it through a dialogue which involves past and future generations.<sup>34</sup>

Like Husserl, John Paul II sees the human person as a transcendent being, a being who seeks truth, who is embedded in an intersubjective community in a particular time and place. Moreover, human persons find truth through their experiences and those of their forefathers. Both Husserl and the pope argue that modernity's radical individualism degrades the importance of each person by tearing them from this community of persons. They seek to revitalize the belief that the state, modern science, and the market are all human projects that are subservient to higher human aims.

Moreover, where Husserl did not connect his work to ancient and medieval philosophy or Catholic thought, his intellectual heirs have done so prolifically. Dietrich von Hildebrand and Edith Stein were both students of his, and many Catholic philosophers have been influenced by phenomenology.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, Robert Sokolowski has shown how seamlessly Husserl's thought merges with ancient philosophy, particularly the thought of Aristotle.<sup>36</sup>

Phenomenology and ordoliberalism have immense relevance for Catholics living in the contemporary world. The founders of these movements were profoundly aware of the vices of modernity, whether it be the potential for the unchecked advance of science and technology or the materialistic values associated with some forms of capitalism. In fact, Röpke, although Protestant, once wrote that he considered the Reformation and what it led to as one of the greatest

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<sup>34</sup> *Centesimus annus*, 49.

<sup>35</sup> Thomas D. Williams and Jan Olof Bengtsson, "Personalism," Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, available at <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/personalism/>.

<sup>36</sup> Sokolowski, *Human Person*, 273.

calamities in the history of the world.<sup>37</sup> Still, their critique of modernity is not destructive but constructive. They offer a way of responding to modernity that seeks to recognize what modernity gets right and to unite that with those aspects of premodern thought that have since been undermined.

Ordoliberals in postwar Germany sought to develop an efficient and humane economy that was concrete and practicable, not just an ideal. Phenomenology offers a way for contemporary philosophers to enter into conversation with the ancient and medieval world. The Catholic response to the problems of modernity should never be a simplistic nostalgia for a long-lost golden age. Instead, we would do well to study the models bequeathed to us by the founders of ordoliberalism and phenomenology, and to carry on in our present circumstances, inspired by their creative and constructive spirit.

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<sup>37</sup> Samuel Gregg, *Wilhelm Röpke's Political Economy* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, 2010), 93.

# An Exploration of the Social Integration of the Whole Person: Small Communities

*Catherine Swope\**

**A**RISTOTLE AND MANY WHO FOLLOWED in his philosophic footsteps understood the fundamental truth that man is, by nature, social. We are made, not for isolation, but to live with others. As Aristotle writes, “[t]he city-state is a natural growth, and . . . man is by nature a political animal.”<sup>1</sup> Community has always been at the very center of human life, and it is the very context that allows persons to improve and even perfect themselves through the help of others.

Community is essential for human flourishing. As such, it is worth investigating the principles of a good community. Is community something that is adequately defined by factors such as physical territory and proximity, size, or duty? When does life together become truly common or shared?

In his 1981 encyclical *Familiaris consortio*, Pope St. John Paul II explores the fundamental bonds of community that exist in the family. Indeed, the first task of the family, he notes, is to “form a community of persons.”<sup>2</sup> This community is animated and tied together by love itself, or the ability to “will the good”<sup>3</sup> for another member. He refers to the family as a “civilization of love”: in its smallest form, the “city” exists within the family. The pope explains that the family is crucial for supplying our spiritual and moral needs and is the source of true

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<sup>1</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. H. Rackham, 1.1.1253a2-3.

<sup>2</sup> *Familiaris consortio*, 6.

<sup>3</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I-II, q. 26, a. 4.

culture that humanizes us. He speaks of the family as the “first and vital cell” of society – where members are loved and known, and deeply integrated into the whole social context. John Paul continues, “[T]he love that animates the interpersonal relationships of different members of the family constitutes the interior strength that shapes and animates the family communion and community.”<sup>4</sup> At this simplest level of human community, family members are loved and integrated into the whole through their mutual bonds. Reflecting on the model of the family, we can see that *relationships* are precisely the building blocks of any community.

In the last 200 years in particular, modern man has become increasingly “disintegrated,” both in himself and from his fellow men. By “disintegration” we mean the loss of an ability to consciously relate one’s deep beliefs or desires with one’s daily actions and choices. The loss of personal and communal integration can be referred to as “alienation,” and the best and most practical strategy for restoring personal and communal integration lies in fostering small, localized communities and economies. Communion in these settings requires that people first share a common vision or motivation, and that vision must also be directly connected to each person’s life – their actions, work, folk, and place. For example, a man might join a religious community of monks because he wishes to devote his life to serving God and those around him. In order for the monastery to run smoothly, each monk must truly believe and practice his vision by way of participation in daily prayer, upkeep of the church, and maintenance of the property. He may also support himself and his fellow monks by working at a craft or selling something that he produces at the monastery. The community of monks together connects their common vision of a “life of service” to their daily lives through their actions and work in the daily life of the monastery. Only in integration

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<sup>4</sup> *Familiaris consortio*, 9.

of common vision with daily life does true integration occur in community.

We may begin exploring the issue of community and integration by first analyzing the “alienation” of man from both a spiritual and a material perspective. In his work *The Quest for Community*, Robert Nisbet defines alienation as “the state of mind that can find a social order remote, incomprehensible, or fraudulent; beyond real hope or desire; inviting apathy, boredom, or even hostility. The individual not only does not feel a part of the social order; he has lost interest in being a part of it.”<sup>5</sup> Nisbet suggests that this alienated mental state is due to being disconnected from one’s spiritual and familial roots, from one’s physical place and nature itself, and from one’s private property.<sup>6</sup> Thus isolated, man becomes mentally unhealthy and lonely. He may have relationships with others, but they are neither “close nor significant.”<sup>7</sup> Wilhelm Röpke also speaks of alienation in his work “The Economic Necessity of Freedom.” Röpke observed and reflected on how in their experience of the trenches of the First World War, men’s lack of personal freedom to determine and pursue their own ends gave rise to a “spiritual (degradation) that worked to the total debasement of human dignity.”<sup>8</sup> Both Röpke and Nisbet noticed patterns of loss in common human experience as leading to alienation. While a war trench is an extreme example of alienation, it demonstrates that people require balance in their private and public lives in order to feel both free and secure. This balance can be achieved only by working daily toward explicit, tangible ends that are consciously known and desired. For example, a member of community may set for himself the goal of writing a book. The individual knows that writing the book will benefit

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<sup>5</sup> Robert Nisbet, *The Quest for Community* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1952), xi.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, x-xi.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, xii.

<sup>8</sup> Wilhelm Röpke, “The Economic Necessity of Freedom,” *Modern Age*, no. 3 (Summer 1959): 230.

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not only him (financially or spiritually), but also those who read it. Motivated by a desire to do good both for himself and for his community, the individual may then establish a daily schedule for himself that includes time blocked off to write and edit his work. He may also schedule time to meet with experts in his field in order to determine the material that will be most beneficial to his future readers. In his personal freedom, the individual has integrated his own desires, beliefs, and intentions with his daily life and wider community. In alienation, as opposed to integration, man suffers not only physically but also spiritually. In the aforementioned example, the individual could have chosen to write something insignificant, or he could have chosen not to write at all. In this sort of choice, the individual misses out on an opportunity for spiritual fulfillment or growth, or experiences less of it. The example of a man planning out a meaningful piece of writing is connected to the spiritual in the same way that physical land might connect to a man's spiritual family history.

To better demonstrate this idea, we can look to Nisbet, who articulates the dimensions of spiritual alienation with this example of family land. He shows that alienation from one's private property results in spiritual debasement, and spiritual alienation from one's ancestors or religion might in turn result in one's physical disconnection from living and working on the family plot of land. For example, if a man leaves home at the age of eighteen to pursue a different kind of life than his father had as a farmer, he first chooses a spiritual separation through the new lifestyle he desires. He then physically separates himself from his family's land. However, if the same man would have chosen to become a farmer, there is a much better chance he would have a spiritual connection with both his family and the land itself by staying and working it as his ancestors did. We can see that the physical and the spiritual factors of integration and alienation are deeply connected here.

Karl Marx also commented on the alienation of modern man, but he did so from an exclusively material perspective and in a very



generalized way. Marx noted that man becomes alienated from his own labor if he senses that he is being used only as a means of production. This experience of the laborer, Marx comments, “alienates his spiritual nature, his human essence, from his own body and likewise from nature outside him.”<sup>9</sup> Marx extends this idea of alienated labor to include any person whose work is commissioned by private wealth or “capital,” and he maintains that capitalism in any form entails using labor in such a way that spiritual debasement necessarily results.

Marx views man in exclusively material terms, however, and his analysis takes no account of the spiritual dimensions of human nature. Thus, his solution to this perceived alienation is a purely material one. Marx assumes that in removing the private means of production (or man’s ability to make a living by what he owns himself), man’s meaningful connection with others will be restored. But his sense of the human person is woefully inadequate. He also notes the alienation of man from his neighbors, but again attributes this alienation directly to materialism and the oppression of the poor by the bourgeois class, assuming that the only solution is a collective mass movement of men that seeks to eliminate private wealth and private property completely.

In reality and contrary to Marx’s view, humans foster spiritual connection to their work and to one another by combining and balancing the private and public spheres, on the one hand, and the spiritual and the material, on the other. Marx partially addresses the problem of alienation, but he does not account for the whole person, who is both material and spiritual as well as social and individual. Marx’s exclusively material approach to alienation thus falls short and contributes to further isolation and alienation. Unfortunately the Marxist reductionist view of human nature and emphasis on the collective, as opposed to individual free agency, have infiltrated our modern situation insofar as many believe that the state is the primary

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<sup>9</sup> Karl Marx, “Alienated Labor,” in *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1965), 289.

source of community, the entity that gives individuals their sense of belonging and fulfillment.

The centralized state is at the heart of the modern nation. Imposing organization from the top down, the state has fostered a poor imitation of true community. Under the direction and regulatory power of the centralized state, smaller, localized forms of community have suffered insofar as the state has assumed their traditional roles and functions. Nisbet notes, “[T]he whole tendency of modern political development has been to enhance the role of the political State as a direct relationship among individuals, and to bring both its power and services ever more intimately into the lives of human beings.”<sup>10</sup> As opposed to devotion to family or small community, the modern citizen is encouraged to support the state and the nation. We pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States, but there is too often a lack of allegiance toward one’s own kin or spouse. Social welfare programs give rise to a situation in which the state is heavily relied upon for support of those who cannot support themselves, almost indicating that the state owes its kind of “personal” devotion to the poor. Nisbet also comments that the growing influence of the state leads to the “decline in functional and psychological significance” of personal relationships among individuals that were typically promoted through the activities of small, local institutions such as the family, neighborhood clubs and other organizations, as well as churches.<sup>11</sup> Instead, people look to large-scale organizations to supply the security and intimacy that smaller institutions used to provide through personal relationships. These institutions formerly mediated between individuals and the larger world of the polity. Though the state may be capable of meeting the material needs that smaller institutions once supplied, it simply cannot meet people’s spiritual needs, which means that individuals are left isolated and alienated.

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<sup>10</sup> Nisbet, *Community*, 49.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

Historically, the roots of statism can be traced back to philosophical attempts to disconnect people from smaller communities by way of the vague notion of “state” as its own entity. For example, Jean-Jacques Rousseau writes, “[A] particular resolution may be advantageous to the small community, but pernicious to the greater.”<sup>12</sup> The state must have a separate kind of general will so as to avoid conflict with smaller communities. Indeed, for Rousseau, the body politic seeks to maintain social unity by enforcement of laws that foster this “common will.” In his articulation of modern mass society and economy Röpke writes,

The welfare and existence of millions of people depend upon the orderly functioning of this huge mechanism, but with their mass passions, mass claims, and mass opinions, these same people are undermining the conditions of order, certainty, and sober reason, without which the greatest technical and organizational progress is of no avail.<sup>13</sup>

The common way of life or a common vision of man must be first held in some way on an individual level, or have some connection to man himself and the ideas and values that he holds to be true about reality. Then and only then can the state operate well, with small communities building the solid foundation of the whole of the state itself. There cannot be a massive common will, and so the state that lacks unity in vision must compensate with intense planning and externally imposed administration. But central planning in governmental and economic matters is in tension with certain aspects of human nature. Human freedom and dignity require the consent of individuals and their active participation in the society of which they are members, two things that large-scale, top-down social or economic

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<sup>12</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, “A Discourse on Political Economy,” in *The Social Contract and Discourses*, available at <https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/rousseau-the-social-contract-and-discourses>.

<sup>13</sup> Röpke, “The Economic Necessity of Freedom,” 45.

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planning does not leave space for. Röpke maintains that the free market economy can thrive only under the protection of a so-called bourgeois system; that is, a system based on “a particular way of life and set of values.”<sup>14</sup> He states that within this system

certain fundamentals are respected and color the whole network of social relationships: individual effort and responsibility, absolute norms and values, independence based on ownership, prudence and daring, calculating and saving, responsibility for planning one’s own life, proper coherence with the community.<sup>15</sup>

In particular, people should be given, and expected to take up, the responsibility to plan their own lives. A state-planned economy is not truly free, and even if the ideal of widespread financial or material prosperity were achieved within such a setting, the spiritual nature of man remains unattended to, which means that authentic human fulfillment and a sense of social or communal belonging are lacking. Röpke’s “economic humanism” recognizes the need for the exercise of authority, but that authority should come first and foremost from within – so as to respect the independent and rational wills of consenting individuals. Even at local levels, there is a danger that excessive planning and centralization of power may leave individuals disconnected from their community, or forestalled from forming true communities in the first place. As Nisbet notes, public housing projects, schools run by boards of administrators, and commercial businesses are examples of such local settings where centralized power can run roughshod over individual human lives and aspirations. In any situation in which individuals do not participate in the governance of their institutions and communities, alienation can occur.

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<sup>14</sup> Wilhelm Röpke, *A Humane Economy: The Social Framework of the Free Market* (Wilmington: ISI Books, 1960), 98.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

So what are the positive principles of true community? In what kind of context can both our material and spiritual nature flourish? The best and most practical approach to reintegrating individuals with themselves and their neighbors is through small and localized social and economic institutions. Communities and individuals thrive when personal relationships are healthy, when individuals are directly involved in and responsible for problem-solving, and when members of a community share a significant and uniting vision. In serving their communities directly and personally, people are connected and perfected. As Röpke suggests, “community, fraternity, charity – they are all possible only in the small, easily comprehended circles that are the original patterns of human society. The village community, the community of small and medium-sized towns, etc.”<sup>16</sup>

In smaller communities, people more easily form personal relationships with one another, which gives rise to a greater sense of personal responsibility through love and familiarity, just as in a family. Röpke also suggests that people find the highest satisfaction when living in harmony with nature and supporting themselves under a system of private property.

Nisbet also speaks of small communities: “[F]amily, religious association, and local community – these, the conservatives insisted, cannot be regarded as the external products of man’s thought and behavior; they are the indispensable supports of belief and conduct.”<sup>17</sup> While human beings may be able to thrive in a large-scale communal settings like crowded metropolitan areas, in order to do so they must maintain their sense of vital purpose, unity, and responsibility in relation to their work, life, and fellow men. So authentic communities are possible on the large scale, but the important and foundational fact remains that smaller, more intimate circles of relationships must first be formed to counteract the disorder and anonymity that are otherwise pervasive in large human contexts. Smaller “subcommunities” foster

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 234.

<sup>17</sup> Nisbet, *Community*, 25.

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these values most readily and can take shape in many forms. An important principle of Catholic social teaching is the idea of subsidiarity, and like every principle of Catholic social teaching, it requires the virtue of prudence. Subsidiarity is explained in the *Catechism* as follows:

a community of a higher order should not interfere in the internal life of a community of a lower order, depriving the latter of its functions, but rather should support it in case of need and help to co-ordinate its activity with the activities of the rest of society, always with a view to the common good.<sup>7</sup>

Certainly, there are cases in which it is entirely appropriate for that support of the state to be exercised, but a community still must always maintain its own inner life or spiritual vitality, which emerges only in the direct, personal relationships among individuals. That vitality is essential for any community. Spiritual vitality does not necessarily require a religious context; instead, the term refers to an inner bond between persons, which is fortified by the love that comes from being truly known and loved by those around us. The exercise of authority by the state or other higher entities may be necessary and good, but that authority should always be exercised in tandem with the efforts of smaller-scale public and private institutions. For example, the state might pass a law that particular codes must be followed for building housing developments. This might be a good law, but smaller communities and local officials must agree with the codes before they will be motivated to enforce them. These local officials will agree only if there is proper communication with the state officials, and if the codes make sense for the good of that particular small community. Bonds of human solidarity must always be fostered, not just within families, but also among the wider inner workings of society. As Nisbet notes,

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community is the product of people working together on problems, of autonomous and collective fulfillment of internal objectives, and of the experience of living under codes of authority which have been set in large degree by the persons involved.<sup>18</sup>

Again, persons should be involved in significant ways. Just coming together is not sufficient to create the important inner vitality and connection among the members of a community; more importantly, they must be involved and integrated in significant common activities. What this involvement and integration entail in practice may vary from community to community, but “significance” implies some spiritual, as opposed to merely practical, dimension. Man does not choose to participate in his community out of mere duty. It is natural and necessary for man truly to desire to participate because he has found personal value or spiritual meaning *in* that participation. Individuals need to be known and involved in their common life, and their motivation to be involved in material action requires a meaning or spiritual vision for acting as a part of the group.

Röpke states, “The malady from which our civilization suffers lies in the individual soul and is only to be overcome within the individual soul.”<sup>19</sup> True integration, which means a connection of man’s daily actions with his wider system of beliefs and desires, allows man once again to be a part of the whole of social order – because his society means something to him personally and is indeed good for his nature. The personal integration of each individual happens best in small communities that foster genuine interpersonal relationships.

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, xvi.

<sup>19</sup> Röpke, *Humane Economy*, 236.





# Cooperators with Evil: Questioning the Morality of Mutual Fund Investments

*Joseph St. Pierre\**

**G**OOD IS TO BE DONE *and pursued, and evil ought to be avoided.*<sup>1</sup> This statement forms the most basic foundation of the natural law, which each and every man is compelled to obey in all aspects of his life. For Catholics, the command to do good and avoid evil is often easily seen, for example, as fulfilled by abiding by the Ten Commandments. However, as humanity develops, especially technologically, discerning what is good and what is evil becomes more and more difficult. Thankfully, the Church has remained a steadfast guide, particularly with her social teachings of the past 120 years. Nevertheless, with the rapid development of the global economy, it has become increasingly difficult to discern the morality of certain economic actions. This essay concerns the morality of one particular action, namely, the act of investing in mutual funds. I posit that while mutual fund investors are cooperating with evil indirectly, there are reasons that make investing in this way moral and acceptable.

For Catholics, the act of investing is rooted in the Old Testament, when Joseph was an advisor to Pharaoh. After Joseph interprets a dream and realizes that a famine is coming, he leads the country to invest in food and store it for when the famine strikes. In the New Testament, Christ offers a parable that involves investing, namely, the parable of the talents. A rich man goes on a long journey and leaves his property in the hands of his three servants. He gives five talents to

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<sup>1</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I-II, q. 94, a. 2.

his best servant, two talents to the next, and one talent to the last servant. Upon the rich man's return, he found that his two better servants had invested their talents and received a 100 percent return. The rich man praises the first two servants, but when he turns to the last servant, he finds that the servant took the one talent and buried it in the ground, thus earning nothing for his master. Needless to say, the rich man was not pleased with the last servant, telling him, "[You] ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest."<sup>2</sup> Thus we see that investing is an activity, grounded in Sacred Scripture, through which we can become cocreators with God and fulfill our call to be stewards of creation.<sup>3</sup>

Beyond this theological significance, it is also important to realize the important effect that investing has on the growth of an economy. Investing enables individuals to have ownership in companies and thus also ownership of the surplus of wealth that those companies produce. Investors also provide capital to companies, thereby promoting more effective growth and producing a greater surplus of wealth.

What about the morality of investing in mutual funds? While investing can be an honorable pursuit, one does not always engage in it without moral qualms. The growth of the financial industry has given rise to questions regarding the morality of investing in funds that have holdings in companies that produce immoral products. Unsurprisingly, Catholics are exhorted by the USCCB to avoid investing directly in companies involved in immoral industries such as pornography, abortion, and contraception.<sup>4</sup> While it is fairly simple for one to research individual companies and avoid investing directly in any problematic ones, how is one supposed to proceed with more complicated investments such as mutual funds?

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<sup>2</sup> Matthew 25:27.

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 1:26-30.

<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.usccb.org/about/financial-reporting/socially-responsible-investment-guidelines.cfm>.

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A mutual fund is an investment program funded by shareholders that trades in diversified holdings and is professionally managed. In most cases, it is safe to assume that fund managers do not go out of their way to avoid investing in firms involved in industries that are immoral; rather, the first and perhaps only priority of a fund manager is to maximize returns for investors. This situation, however, is potentially problematic for Catholics and others who wish to avoid investing in companies associated with immoral products or services.

In 2016, an estimated 94 million individual investors owned mutual funds;<sup>5</sup> their popularity is widespread, but the moral questions surrounding mutual funds have not been adequately handled. The main concern for Catholic investors is that they may be cooperating with evil when buying funds. May Catholics morally invest in mutual funds that have holdings in immoral industries? In order to analyze this question, it is necessary first to have some structure for judging the morality of an act.

In *Veritatis splendor*, St. John Paul II reaffirmed that there is an objective moral order and that we are commanded to avoid participation in intrinsically evil acts such as murder, pornography, abortion, and the use of contraception, to name a few.<sup>6</sup> However, if an act is not self-evidently wrong, how do we determine whether it is moral? The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* distinguishes three things for determining the morality of a human act: the object of the act, the intention, and the circumstances of the action. The object chosen “is the matter of a human act,”<sup>7</sup> namely, what exactly the act entails. If a doctor performs an abortion, the object of that act is the killing of the child and its removal from the mother’s body. The intention is the “end” or purpose pursued in the action.<sup>8</sup> The third component, the set of circumstances surrounding the act, is described as follows: “The

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<sup>5</sup> [https://www.ici.org/viewpoints/view\\_17\\_household\\_fund\\_investing](https://www.ici.org/viewpoints/view_17_household_fund_investing).

<sup>6</sup> *Veritatis splendor*, 80.

<sup>7</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1751.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 1752.

*circumstances*, including the consequences, are secondary elements of a moral act. They contribute to increasing or diminishing the moral goodness or evil of human acts. . . . They can also diminish or increase the agent's responsibility."<sup>9</sup>

The moral goodness of any act requires all three things: "the goodness of its object, of its end, and of its circumstances together."<sup>10</sup> When using these factors to consider the morality of investing, most Catholic investors have a hard time determining the circumstances surrounding the act. More particularly, this includes the circumstances of potentially cooperating with the immoral actions of other agents, such as investing in a mutual fund that has holdings in a pharmaceutical company that produces abortifacients. In order judge these circumstances, we may find helpful some distinctions first laid down by St. Alphonsus Liguori in the eighteenth century.

With respect to the issue of cooperating with evil, a primary distinction must be made. This first distinction is whether the cooperation is formal or material. St. Alphonsus Liguori makes this distinction in his *Theologia moralis*: "That [cooperation] is formal which concurs in the bad will of the other, and it cannot be without sin; that [cooperation] is material which concurs only in the bad action of the other, apart from the cooperator's intention."<sup>11</sup> On one side of this distinction, we have formal cooperation with evil. St. Alphonsus makes the intention of the cooperator the key point of distinction. If the cooperator shares the intention of the evildoer, then it is unquestionably a case of formal cooperation. An example of this would be an assisting nurse who actually wants the woman in her clinic to get an abortion. The nurse shares in the intention of the evil act. Such formal cooperation is never permissible and is indeed sinful.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 1754.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 1760.

<sup>11</sup> St. Alphonsus Liguori, *Theologia moralis*, I, II, tract. III, cap. 2, dub. V, art. III, n. 63.

On the other side of the distinction, material cooperation occurs if a person contributes to an evil act but without the evil intention. An example would be an assisting nurse who does not want the woman in her clinic to get an abortion but still contributes to the procedure in some way.

Material cooperation can be further qualified insofar as the act of the cooperator can either be immediate or mediate. Immediate material cooperation entails an act that directly supports something evil that is done. In the case of a nurse, again, an example would be one who does not want an abortion to happen but contributes to it by means of some action that immediately aids in its execution, such as handing the doctor the instruments needed to proceed. Acts of immediate material cooperation are to be avoided and are considered sinful.

Mediate material cooperation, on the other hand, entails some indirect act supporting the evil action. Here an example would be a nurse who does not want an abortion to happen and who does not immediately assist in its execution, but who nonetheless preps the patient before the procedure or assists in some other way after the abortion has been completed.

To determine whether an act of mediate material cooperation is evil, a final distinction must be made. This distinction is whether the mediate material cooperation was remote or proximate. This distinction refers to the “closeness” of the cooperator to the evil act. Proximate mediate material cooperation would be, say, the nurse administering some sort of care to the patient in preparation for the abortion, such as taking her vitals. An example of remote mediate material cooperation, on the other hand, is the nurse providing the paperwork necessary to admit the patient to the hospital. Clearly, the former is closer to the act of abortion than the latter.

To summarize, formal and immediate material cooperation are always wrong. In some cases, mediate material cooperation is licit, as St. Alphonsus explains: “But the latter [material cooperation] is licit when the action is good or indifferent in itself; and when one has a

reason for doing it that is both just and proportioned to the gravity of the other's sin and to the closeness of the assistance which is [thereby] given to the carrying out of that sin."<sup>12</sup> In cases of remote mediate material cooperation that are moral, we need to keep in mind two requirements: (1) The act of the cooperator must be in itself good or indifferent. "If acts are intrinsically evil, a good intention or particular circumstances can diminish their evil, but they cannot remove it."<sup>13</sup> (2) The act of cooperation must have a good obtained that is proportional to the evil act.

Let us now apply these principles to our consideration of mutual funds. Quite likely, most mutual funds entail cooperation with evil in some way, such as holdings in a pharmaceutical company that produces immoral products. What would count as formal cooperation with evil in an investment? If an individual knew that a mutual fund invested in companies that produced abortifacients, and if this individual also desired abortifacients to be distributed in order to promote abortion, then that would be a case of formal cooperation and would therefore be a sinful act. Catholics are bound to avoid such formal cooperation.

But are there instances of licit material cooperation in the investment of that same mutual fund used in the example? One would have to ask, first: Does that investment entail immediate or mediate material cooperation? The invested money, because it does not directly share in the explicit act of producing abortifacients, does not count as immediate material cooperation. Thus that particular example of investing would be classed as mediate material cooperation. The next question would then be: Is that investment a proximate or remote form of mediate material cooperation? There are multiple layers of agents between the individual investor and the pharmaceutical company producing abortifacients. With each extra actor (for example, a broker,

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, I, II, tract. III, cap. 2, dub. V, art. III, n. 63.

<sup>13</sup> *Veratatis splendor*, 81.

a firm, and so on), the cooperation becomes more remote. Considering the remoteness between an investor and the pharmaceutical company, it seems more likely that such an investment would be a case of remote mediate material cooperation. However, before concluding that such an investment may have grounds to be licit, it must then undergo a “check” to make sure it fulfills the two requirements needed for its moral authenticity.

Is the act of investing money in a company, in itself, morally good or indifferent? If we recall the parable from the Gospel, we can conclude that such an act is good. Secondly, is the good obtained by investing proportionate to the evil that comes from it? What good will the Catholic individual obtain by investing? Since investing in mutual funds is concerned with money, and since money is a means to satisfying a diverse array of desires, the resulting decisions can vary significantly among Catholics. The most proximate goods that an investor would obtain would include the material resources for supporting one’s family, providing a good education for one’s children, making it possible for one’s children to be cared for by their mother instead of requiring her to work outside the home to supplement family income, and any other condition that would promote the good of the individual investor and his or her family. There are also remote goods that the investor would be responsible for, such as helping to provide jobs for individuals at the companies he is vested in and providing stability for companies producing morally good products. I would posit that these goods, especially the proximate goods that support the family, are proportionate to the remote evil accomplished by investing in mutual funds that involve problematic industries.

Are there grounds for Catholics to avoid investing in mutual funds? If we have certain knowledge that a fund has holdings in a problematic company, should that knowledge compel us to avoid that fund? How can we know for sure that there are morally compromised companies in the fund’s holdings? The pharmaceutical industry alone produces over \$1 trillion in revenue, and so the probability is high that

the typical mutual fund (for example, a fund from American Funds, Vanguard, Fidelity, and so on) involves one of those companies. What should a Catholic do?

Investors are not limited to selecting mutual funds from Vanguard, Fidelity, or American Funds. There are Catholic alternatives that intentionally avoid compromising industries. Among these are the Ave Maria Funds, Epiphany FFV, and Aquinas Funds. Would choosing from these be the surest way to avoid cooperating with evil in the investment world?

Every individual has a moral responsibility to avoid evil as much as possible, and so it would seem necessary to take deliberate action to avoid evil and not swim in morally ambiguous water. Even if there is uncertainty as to whether an investment will contribute financially to immoral products, is it not better to err on the side of caution? Our faith must be given primacy over our material prosperity. “A theory that makes profit the exclusive norm and ultimate end of economic activity is morally unacceptable.”<sup>14</sup> Therefore, it seems logical that if an individual has certain knowledge or reasonable cause to believe that a particular fund has holdings in a morally compromised company, then that individual is bound to avoid that fund altogether.

It is true that man should avoid evil as much as possible. At the same time, one rightly desires to increase the material prosperity of one’s family, but it is evident that this pursuit, unless carefully undertaken, may entail cooperation with evil, although it would most likely be remote mediate material cooperation. What should the responsible Catholic investor do? Before answering this question, it is important to consider two things.

First, it is nearly impossible to avoid any cooperation with evil. The bank where a person holds my savings account loans money to fund immoral procedures and products. When we purchase goods from a grocery store, we are supporting an establishment that sells

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<sup>14</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2424.



*Joseph St. Pierre*

contraceptives. Our economy is so complex that it is highly likely that we are cooperating with evil in many more ways than we realize. We must strive for the ideal, but we also must recognize that the perfect society will be realized only in the next world, in the eternal life. Christ himself gave us this insight when he gave us the Our Father. “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” When we pray this powerful prayer, we are asking God to give us the eternal kingdom where society is perfectly just. We are not presently in this perfect state, for we are striving on earth to imitate the perfection of justice that resides in heaven. Thus our duty and primary concern when it comes to investments is that our day-to-day involvement must never be formal cooperation with evil and that our cooperation should be as remote as possible.

Second, it is important to realize that it is beyond our human ken to analyze completely the circumstances of an act. As St. John Paul II says in *Veritatis splendor*: “Moreover, everyone recognizes the difficulty, or rather the impossibility, of evaluating all the good and evil consequences and effects . . . of one’s own acts: an exhaustive rational calculation is not possible.”<sup>15</sup> John Paul II recognized the difficulty of determining the circumstances surrounding particular actions. Even among the more popular Catholic funds, while they do not invest in companies that violate human dignity by promoting abortion, euthanasia, and contraception, many still invest in other morally compromised industries. For an example, Ave Maria Funds studiously avoids the abortion industry but invests in multinational weapons manufacturing companies such as United Technologies and General Dynamics. We should ask, to what extent have these two global defense contractors contributed to the loss of life in unjust conflicts? This example demonstrates how it is quite often impossible to calculate precisely where an investment in one fund is the clear choice over another.

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<sup>15</sup> *Veritatis splendor*, 77.

We must remember the words of John Paul II in *Centesimus annus*: “[T]he decision to invest in one place rather than another, in one productive sector rather than another, is always *a moral and cultural choice*.”<sup>16</sup> Bearing this in mind, it is essential that we, as investors, never prioritize a rate of return over the salvation of our souls. We must do our best to avoid evil as much as possible, and therefore we must strive to become as knowledgeable as possible about the mutual funds we invest in. It will be difficult to read through the prospectus of each fund and then examine each company within each fund to determine whether it is associated with immoral products or services, but the key is that we are *striving* to cooperate with evil as little as possible. Since an exact rational calculation is impossible, as investors we must exercise prudence and do what we can to minimize our cooperation with evil. St. Faustina says in her diary: “We should often pray to the Holy Spirit for this grace of prudence. Prudence consists in discretion, rational reflection and courageous resolution. The final decision is always up to us. We must decide.”<sup>17</sup>

It is encouraging to see that socially responsible funds have become more and more popular, even among larger and more successful funds. In many cases, investors can specifically select certain industries to avoid. Thus investors have more opportunities to act in accordance with their consciences and to exercise prudence. These ways of avoiding specific immoral industries while investing in mutual funds are not yet widely available, but the financial industry is moving toward expanding them for individual investors. Just recently, Edward Jones, the largest brokerage firm in the U.S., made a wide array of Catholic mutual funds available to its investors. While Catholic mutual funds are not a fool-proof solution for moral investing, giving investors greater ability to act in accordance with their consciences is a step in the right direction. As more firms follow Edward Jones’s

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<sup>16</sup> *Centesimus annus*, 36.

<sup>17</sup> St. Faustina, *Diary 1106*, available at [http://www.piercedhearts.org/theology\\_heart/wisdom\\_heart/faustina\\_prayer\\_merciful.htm](http://www.piercedhearts.org/theology_heart/wisdom_heart/faustina_prayer_merciful.htm).

initiative, people must seek to become more educated about their investments in order to avoid cooperation with evil as much as possible.

Furthermore, as the financial industry grows in size and complexity, the responsibility of brokers and fund managers grows in proportion. The average individual will never be able to track down all the information necessary to navigate the maze of available investment products. Thus there is a need for morally responsible leaders within the broker and fund management industries to serve morally conscious investors. People whose vocation lies in the investment world should strive to live out their faith and have an impact on the individuals they encounter as well as on the industry in which they make their living.

Even so, ultimately all decisions come down to individual investors. Provided that individuals are informing their consciences correctly and as much as possible, then if they are seeking to avoid cooperating with evil as much as possible, and if the goals and objectives of their investments promote the well-being and life of individuals and families, then it is licit to invest in mutual funds that are involved in companies that produce immoral products. The act of the cooperating investor, being morally good or at least indifferent, can effectively accomplish a good that is proportionate to the evil with which he is a remote mediate material cooperator.



# Organ Markets: Economic Benefits and Moral Questions from a Catholic Social Teaching Perspective

*Justin Callais\**

**O**RGAN-SELLING IS AN ISSUE that raises economic and moral questions – questions that, quite frankly, cannot be answered with certainty. However, this paper aims to address the economic benefits of free organ markets, discuss organ-selling’s moral issues with special consideration of the differences between renewable and nonrenewable organs, and consider this problem from the viewpoint of Catholic social teaching. Economists with free-market leanings tend to agree that shortages in organ markets are due to legal barriers; however, laws are not the only issue at hand when dealing with this question. Morally, there are some who see organ-selling as exploitation of the poor, and many find the practice to be contrary to the dignity of human persons.

## *Historical Background*

This issue first gained major traction in the United States in 1983, when a Virginia physician, H. Barry Jacobs, recognized a shortage in transplants and decided to act in an entrepreneurial way.<sup>1</sup> He started an organization that purchased organs for \$10,000 and then “flipped”

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Sullivan, “Buying of Kidneys of Poor Attacked,” *The New York Times* (September 24, 1983), available at <http://www.nytimes.com/1983/09/24/us/buying-of-kidneys-of-poor-attacked.html>.

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those organs to those who needed them and had the means to purchase them. Dr. Jacobs typically received a \$2000 to \$5000 commission per organ, otherwise known as a “finder’s fee.”

Then-Representative Al Gore and Senator Orrin Hatch cosponsored a bipartisan bill, the National Organ Transplant Act of 1984, that banned the sale of human organs.<sup>2</sup> This law also set in place the current system for organ transplants and donations. Generally speaking, a patient visits a doctor who will refer him or her to a transplant center. There, patients are evaluated, and their records are placed in a database that coordinates with organ procurement organizations (OPOs) that have regional bases around the country. Ideally, a patient will find a donor within the local region who will be a match, but if not, OPOs attempt to find matches in other nearby regions.<sup>3</sup>

Today, Iran is the only country in which an organ can be sold. Such transactions are done through the government, which offers sellers roughly the equivalent \$1000 and insurance for the year following surgery.

*Economics of Organ-selling*

The American system of organ transactions is outdated and ineffective. There are over 120,000 people currently on the waitlist for organs, and twenty-two of whom will die each day while waiting. Over 100,000 of these people are in need of kidneys. According to the National Kidney Foundation, on average a patient waits for a kidney

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<sup>2</sup> Laura Meckler, “Kidney Shortage Inspires a Radical Idea: Organ Sales,” *The Wall Street Journal* (November 13, 2007), available at <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB119490273908090431>.

<sup>3</sup> Ray Hainer, “Did Steve Jobs’ Money Buy Him a Faster Liver Transplant?” available at <http://www.cnn.com/2009/HEALTH/06/24/liver.transplant.priority.lists/index.html?iref=24hours>.

for around five years.<sup>4</sup> Every year in the United States, on average we are adding over 50,000 people to the waitlist, while finding matches for only 23,000.<sup>5</sup>

One major argument against market sales of so-called nonrenewable organs (kidneys, livers, and so on) is that only rich people would receive organs, and only poor people would be the ones selling them. While this point is worth considering, it is even more important to note that these things are already happening under the current system. For example, richer people tend to have better insurance that can cover the cost of a transplant, which can run anywhere from \$500,000 to \$750,000.<sup>6</sup> Also, wealthier patients can afford to travel and be tested at different locations, giving them access to OPOs around the country, which in turn raises their chances of receiving organs. So while it may be true that a free market would advantage rich people seeking organs, it is also true that they are already advantaged now.

Moreover, a counterargument: A free market approach could allow poor people to lift themselves out of poverty – for they will now have something to sell. Many express concerns that poor people will sell their organs recklessly.<sup>7</sup> People in desperate poverty often make irrational decisions, many claim. However, a reasonable compromise would be to permit the sale of organs post-death. That way people are not being “exploited” while alive, but post-death organ sales would

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<sup>4</sup> National Kidney Foundation, “Organ Donation and Transplantation Statistics,” available at <https://www.kidney.org/news/newsroom/factsheets/Organ-Donation-and-Transplantation-Stats>.

<sup>5</sup> American Transplant Foundation, “Facts and Myths,” available at <http://www.americantransplantfoundation.org/about-transplant/facts-and-myths/>.

<sup>6</sup> FlyMedi Guide, “How Much Does a Liver Transplant Cost?” available at <http://www.flymedi.com/guide/how-much-does-a-liver-transplant-cost/>.

<sup>7</sup> Claire Andre and Manuel Velasquez, “Kidneys for Sale,” *Issues in Ethics* 1, no. 2 (1988).

also help alleviate the shortage problem and also allow poor people to pass down money to spouses or children.

I would add that it is likely fair to assume that people will still donate organs, even if they have the option to sell. We see people today donate items that they could instead use or sell, so why would they not do the same with organs? According to Giving USA, between 2015 and 2016, “giving to health organizations is estimated to have increased by 5.7 percent to \$33.14 billion.”<sup>8</sup> Americans care about charity, and the U.S. is one of the most charitable countries in the world.<sup>9</sup> This culture of giving to our fellow citizen extends beyond monetary donations to include volunteering and giving of one’s time and talents. For these reasons I think it is safe to believe that U.S. citizens will also donate organs, even if they have the option to sell.

Many find buying and selling of human organs to be reprehensible. But if we extend the logic, then would it not also be reprehensible for the doctors, insurance companies, hospitals, and nurses to receive money for performing transplant surgeries? Economist Walter Williams highlights the hypocrisy in this scenario.<sup>10</sup> It makes logical sense for society to call upon all parties involved to provide transplant procedures pro-bono, if we reject the legitimacy of organ-selling.

Another argument against the legalization of kidney sales is that it would cause an increase in murders for the sake of harvesting organs. In fact, the exact opposite would happen; the incentives for such “body snatching” would decrease, not increase. When the reward for an act is reduced, people will see less of it, not more of it. A black

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<sup>8</sup> Giving USA, “Total Charitable Donations Rise to New High of \$390.05 Billion,” available at <https://givingusa.org/giving-usa-2017-total-charitable-donations-rise-to-new-high-of-390-05-billion/>.

<sup>9</sup> Charities Aid Foundation, “CAF World Giving Index 2017,” available at <https://www.cafonline.org/about-us/publications/2017-publications/caf-world-giving-index-2017>.

<sup>10</sup> Walter Williams, “Because There’s No Free Market in Organs,” available at <https://www.lewrockwell.com/2013/06/walter-e-williams/because-theres-no-free-market-inorgans/>.



market does exist for organs, as it does for basically every illegal product. Black markets are more expensive and more dangerous. The black-market price for kidneys are estimated to be \$160,000, or 35 to 70 times more expensive than they are in Iran.<sup>11</sup> With the legalization of organ-selling, prices would drop, meaning there would be less incentive to murder for the sake of harvesting organs.

In the United States, people must sign up to be organ donors, which causes a barrier to entry for many. There are many reasons why people don't sign up, including ignorance of the need to sign up or how to sign up, laziness, and in extreme (and unfounded) cases, a fear that medical personnel interested in harvesting your organs might not try to save you if you sustain life-threatening injuries. Many look to Spain as a good model of how to handle donation program enrollment. In Spain, citizens are automatically opted in to an organ donation program. They are allowed to opt out; however, few do so.<sup>12</sup> As a result, Spain has one of the highest organ donation rates in the world.<sup>13</sup> While the Spanish system is better, in my opinion, than the U.S. system, it is not without its concerns. Libertarian paternalism is the idea that there are ways to affect individual behavior without restricting personal choice and freedom.<sup>14</sup> Thaler and Sunstein point out that paternalism coming from the state can alter one's behavior without

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<sup>11</sup> Edecio Martinez, "Black Market Kidneys, \$160,000 a Pop," available at <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/black-market-kidneys-160000-a-pop/>.

<sup>12</sup> Mario Rizzo and Douglas Glen Whitman, "The Camel's Nose is in the Tent: Rules, Theories and Slippery Slopes," *UCLA Law Review* 51, no. 2 (2003): 539-92.

<sup>13</sup> Marcia Clark and William Travis Clark, "Selling Your Organs: Should It Be Legal? Do You Own Yourself?" *Forbes Magazine*, available at <http://www.forbes.com/sites/marciac Clark/2013/06/13/selling-your-organs-should-it-be-legal-do-you-own-yourself/#74a2b2d395db>.

<sup>14</sup> Cass Sunstein and Richard Thaler, "Libertarian Paternalism Is Not an Oxymoron," available at [http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=405940](http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=405940).

truly changing economic incentives.<sup>15</sup> Automatically enrolling people as organ donors is indeed nudging, or gently pushing someone to act in a certain way, on part of the Spanish government, and Salazar points out the dangers with nudging and how it is effective only in the short-term.<sup>16</sup>

Renewable organs such as blood and plasma should also be mentioned. These are organs that can be regenerated, so there are loose limits on how much one can give. I believe that there is an even stronger argument here to open up markets for these organs, since there is no substantial scarcity within one's body that limits how much of these goods a person could sell. Ideally, markets for these goods would settle on a price for blood, for example, that would be somewhere around the cost of the distribution and extraction of blood, and the amount given to the "provider" of blood to be extremely small.

### *Moral Questions from a Catholic Social Teaching Perspective*

Obviously, there are serious issues associated with the selling of body parts, especially from the perspective of Catholic teaching. We must consider these moral and ethical issues, such as the sanctity of the human body, the idea that there is no self-ownership, and the vision of the human person as a vessel to do the Lord's work. Bramstedt, for example, raises a question: "[P]ayment for organs equates to price tags for them, and who gets to put a price of life?"<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Cass Sunstein and Richard Thaler, *Nudge: Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth, and Happiness* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

<sup>16</sup> Alberto Salazar, "Libertarian Paternalism and the Danger of Nudging Consumers," *King's College London Law Journal*, available at <https://ssrn.com/abstract=1973397> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1973397>.

<sup>17</sup> Katrina Bramstedt, "Buying and Selling Organs Would Create an Economic Class War," *The New York Times* (August 21, 2014), available at <http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2014/08/21/how-much-for-a-kidney/buying-and-selling-organs-would-create-an-economic-class-war>.

Since we are made in God's image and likeness and our body is a temple, we should not defile our temple for profit. Theologians claim that since the body is a gift from God, it does not belong to us and we cannot sell it.<sup>18</sup> John Haas, president of the National Catholic Bioethics Center, called the act of selling organs for transplant immoral and unacceptable, claiming that "the notion of selling your organs reflects a false anthropology."<sup>19</sup> While these arguments raise worthy points to consider, it is unfortunate that they do not provide solutions to organ shortages and the associated ever increasing human deaths.

Unlike Haas, I believe that one can make a case for organ sales being licit from a Catholic perspective. I would argue that selling an organ is not inherently evil and thus immoral, but that the circumstances of any such acts are determinative. Consider the analogy of sexual acts. The sexual act itself is not immoral, but some of the ways it can be engaged in are. In essence, circumstances matter. Similarly, organ-selling may be practiced in immoral ways (such as "stealing" organs or reckless purchasing/selling), but it may also be practiced in moral ways, such as to provide a needed organ to someone who is willing and able to purchase it. As with sex, we need to judge the morality of organ-selling on a case-by-case basis, considering specific circumstances and not flatly labeling all organ-selling as unjust.

Is there any greater violation of the sanctity of the human body than unnecessary death? If we knew we could save someone's life, shouldn't we pursue all the means necessary to save that person? The Church teaches that every human life is sacred; should we not conclude, then, that we are obligated to prevent unnecessary death whenever and however it is possible to do so?

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<sup>18</sup> Art Caplan, "Why Selling Kidneys Still Won't Work," available at <http://www.nbcnews.com/health/opinion-why-selling-kidneys-still-wontwork-8C11459943>.

<sup>19</sup> John Haas, "Catholic Teaching regarding the Legitimacy of Neurological Criteria for the Determination of Death," *National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly* 11, no. 2 (2011): 279-99.

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Some have claimed that organ-selling is no different from selling your body sexually. We should disregard these arguments, as organ-selling is clearly quite different from exploiting your body sexually for money. In organ sales, the act of selling, in my view, does not degrade one as a person. I especially see this as true in the case of post-death organ sales, in which proceeds go to third parties such as one's family or charitable organizations. Once the soul leaves the body, should it matter what happens to the body after? I am not saying it doesn't matter what happens to the physical body once dead, but at the cost of saving thousands of lives, the option to sell organs post-death should be at least be seriously considered.

Even if the case against selling nonrenewable organs is stronger, I believe that Catholic teaching can accommodate the selling of renewable organs like blood. In the same way that you are giving of yourself when working (particularly in St. John Paul II's notion that work itself is a vocation and virtue), you are giving of yourself when selling or giving blood. Receiving monetary compensation does not alter the nature of what you are doing. Work can be regenerated; your working today does not (in the short term) affect your ability to work tomorrow. One can draw an analogy with blood-selling.

I would be remiss to conclude this section without mentioning the serious moral implications of legalizing organ markets, renewable and nonrenewable alike. There are clear exploitative situations that such markets can give rise to. People can certainly be taken advantage of. However, I do not think it is wise to thwart an entire legalization process just because some people might abuse certain laws.

*Conclusion*

Organ-selling will always be a controversial topic. Even those who can understand the economic basis for its legalization may have trouble finding ways to accept it from a moral point of view. Those who oppose it should try to understand that there are moral justifications

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for organ-selling as well. For one, an argument can be made that all parties involved in organ transplants should be compensated, not just hospitals and medical personnel.

I am not arguing here that the Church ought to accept and promote organ-selling outright. Rather, my goal is to make the case that this idea needs to be given more consideration among theologians and the Church. At the very least, a world in which organs are sold in open markets is one in which many more lives will be saved.



# Excessive Consumerism, Modern-Day Advertising, and Human Choice

*Nicholas J. Vance\**

*Consumerism is, quite precisely, the consuming of life by the things consumed.  
It is living in a manner that is measured by having rather than being.*

Fr. Richard John Neuhaus

**R**ON MARSHALL, the founder and CEO of Red Crow Marketing Inc., decided to attempt a personal experiment in September of 2015 to document how many advertisements he saw in a day. He describes his normal, workday routine of waking up, showering, and eating breakfast, all the while tallying the brand names and advertisements he saw in the process. Marshall was planning to count for the rest of the day but found it too exhausting and decided to resign his experiment after 487 advertisement exposures before even finishing his cereal.<sup>1</sup>

In 2007, *The New York Times* estimated that the average American sees about 5,000 advertisements per day.<sup>2</sup> In 2017, estimates for advertisement exposure were up to 10,000 daily per person.<sup>3</sup> While this

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<sup>1</sup> Ron Marshall, “How Many Ads Do You See in One Day?” available at <https://www.redcrowmarketing.com/2015/09/10/many-ads-see-one-day>.

<sup>2</sup> Louise Story, “Anywhere the Eye Can See, It’s Likely to See an Ad,” available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/15/business/media/15everywhere.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Joshua Saxon, “Why Your Customers’ Attention is the Scarcest Resource in 2017,” available at <https://www.ama.org/partners/content/Pages/why-customers-attention-scarcest-resources-2017.aspx>.

number significantly varies across individuals (depending on media consumption, age, employment, and other demographic factors),<sup>4</sup> the point still stands: modern-day advertising is more and more pervasive. Companies spend more and more on advertising each year (last year, American companies spent over \$206 billion on advertising),<sup>5</sup> and new advances in technology and the evolving “internet of things” would allow companies to put advertisements right on your refrigerator.<sup>6</sup>

In response to the ever increasing number of advertisements present in the world, in this essay I will distinguish and argue against the use of excessively consumeristic advertisements, as well as advertisements that target consumers’ subconscious emotional responses. These are two serious abuses of the “freedom” afforded to advertisers that ultimately limit human choice. I seek to propose new approaches to advertising that are grounded in truth and human dignity.

### *Advertising and Excessive Consumerism*

To begin, it is important to recall that at the heart of all advertising is a product: a good or service that a company wants consumers to purchase. Sales-oriented advertising is the only kind of advertising; even in branding and high-concept advertising, the advertiser’s goal is to move the product. As increasingly disproportionate amounts of money in the United States are being spent on discretionary or

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<sup>4</sup> Bryce Sanders, “Do we really see 4,000 ads a day?” available at <https://www.bizjournals.com/bizjournals/how-to/marketing/2017/09/do-we-really-see-4-000-ads-a-day.html>.

<sup>5</sup> Statista, “U.S. advertising spending 2015-2021 | Statista,” available at <https://www.statista.com/statistics/272314/advertising-spending-in-the-us/>.

<sup>6</sup> NBC, “Ads on Your Fridge? Google Says It Could Happen,” available at <https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/innovation/ads-your-fridge-google-says-it-could-happen-n111091>.



nonessential products each year,<sup>7</sup> Western culture has begun to show evidence of an increasingly consumeristic attitude, and more and more advertising is required to move the ever growing array of products. One could perhaps argue that advertisements are helpful in that they force companies to compete with others in their respective markets, thus lowering prices and hopefully improving quality for consumers, and that advertisements help educate consumers about available products. Even so, the sheer number and the tone of advertisements today come at a high cost. Ads beget more ads, and perhaps also more wasteful spending: higher rates of consumerism require more and more advertisements for people even to notice products, and it is a fact that Americans are spending more and more money on nonessential products. And this spending is not unproblematic: George Monbiot of *The Guardian* summarizes the extensive research: “[P]eople who watch a lot of advertisements appear to save less, spend more and use more of their time to meet their rising material aspirations. All three outcomes can have terrible impacts on family life.”<sup>8</sup> A vicious feedback loop arises: the consumeristic culture demands more advertising, and an increase in advertising encourages a consumeristic culture.

Here an objection may arise: Should advertisers be responsible for the effects of the advertisements they create? Indeed, one could argue that advertisers and advertisements simply reflect the society out of which they come, as they only play to the desires of people to be given whatever they want. The Church acknowledges but takes a firm stand against this argument: “No doubt advertising, like the media of social communications in general, does act as a mirror. But, also like media in general, it is a mirror that helps shape the reality it reflects, and

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<sup>7</sup> Katie Shaw, “2018 Outlook: Consumer Discretionary – Fidelity,” available at <https://www.fidelity.com/viewpoints/investing-ideas/2018-outlook-discretionary>.

<sup>8</sup> George Monbiot, “Advertising is a poison that demeans even love – and we’re hooked on it,” available at <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/oct/24/advertising-poison-hooked>.

*Consumerism, Advertising, and Choice*

sometimes it presents a distorted image of reality.”<sup>9</sup> The position is even stronger regarding advertisers who would promote a culture of consumerism: “[Promotion of consumerism] is a serious abuse, an affront to human dignity and the common good when it occurs in affluent societies. . . . [A]dvertising that reduces human progress to acquiring material goods and cultivating a lavish lifestyle expresses a false, destructive vision of the human person harmful to individuals and society alike.”<sup>10</sup> Further, the Church decries the work of advertisers who would essentially create markets for products and services that are unnecessary: “If a direct appeal is made to [the customer’s] instincts – while ignoring in various ways the reality of the person as intelligent and free – then consumer attitudes and lifestyles can be created which are objectively improper and often damaging to his physical and spiritual health.”<sup>11</sup> Advertisers have the power to shape society in certain ways, and it is not the case that they simply mirror the culture in which they exist. There is culpability for the creation of a heavily consumeristic culture that promotes a false view of human nature and detracts from the common good, and that culpability falls on advertisers just as it does on any other institution with widespread cultural influence.

*Advertising and Emotional Manipulation*

While many people have seemingly been desensitized by and perhaps even learned to ignore the daily bombardment of advertisements,<sup>12</sup> a deeper problem associated with modern-day

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<sup>9</sup> Pontifical Council for Social Communications, “Ethics in Advertising,” 3, available at [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/pccs/documents/rc\\_pc\\_pccs\\_doc\\_22021997\\_ethics-in-ad\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/pccs/documents/rc_pc_pccs_doc_22021997_ethics-in-ad_en.html).

<sup>10</sup> “Ethics in Advertising,” 10.

<sup>11</sup> *Centesimus annus*, 36.

<sup>12</sup> Marketing Charts, “Who’s Ignoring Which Ads?” available at <https://www.marketingcharts.com/demographics-and-audiences/men->

advertising is that advertisers target their messages not just at the level of our conscious experience. Robert Heath of the University of Bath, in his extensive research on advertising theory, explains that “the emotive content of advertising enables it to break almost all the rules which we believe govern our own susceptibility to [advertisements].” He further explains that “we believe that ignoring advertisements stops them [from working on us], oblivious of the fact that emotive content requires no attention at all in order to be effectively processed. . . . [W]e believe that our brand choices are logical, and driven by our rational thinking, whereas the greatest driver of brand decisions is actually our emotional predisposition.”<sup>13</sup> Emotion-driven purchasing happens because, he explains, emotive processing occurs in the limbic system, an area of the brain that functions on a subconscious level and causes the consumer to be “emotionally seduced” by the product without ever consciously engaging with the advertisement. He cites a case analysis of the rebranding of a failing communications network named Cellnet, which went from being the lowest-earning communications network in its market to the highest in just four years. Cellnet achieved this turnaround by means of an aggressive, high-concept advertising campaign that used very specific imagery (and no mention of the good or service provided) to give consumers the impression that the brand is “calm and serene, the antithesis to clutter and chaos, a contrast to the often frenetic world around mobile phones.” New products are not needed to boost company performance if companies can rebrand the emotions associated with them and their existing products.

Why is this approach to modern-day advertising – targeting consumers’ subconscious with emotive content – problematic? Recall that at the heart of all advertising is a product: a good or service that a company wants consumers to purchase. When advertisers link emotive

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demographics-and-audiences-39757.

<sup>13</sup> Robert Heath, “How advertisers seduce our subconscious,” available at <https://theconversation.com/how-advertisers-seduce-our-subconscious-60578>. All other references to Robert Heath’s work are from this article.

content with a product, a subconscious association occurs. For example, create some negative emotion and then supply a product that can alleviate it (such as the wildly successful “Hungry? Grab a Snickers” campaign).<sup>14</sup> Or play off the natural enjoyment of positive emotions and associate a product with those (such as the Coca-Cola “Choose Happiness” campaign).<sup>15</sup> Consumers begin subconsciously to associate emotions and experiences with particular products, which in turn greatly affects how they make their purchases. Research psychologists have found from fMRI scans that far and away the most powerful neurological forces driving consumers’ choices are the emotions associated with brands.<sup>16</sup> Advertisements engage the limbic system on a subconscious level, getting consumers to feel certain ways about certain products, and when it comes time for consumers to make purchasing decisions, this “emotional branding” is the loudest voice in their heads, even before they have the chance to weigh their options rationally. This advertising strategy thus compromises consumers’ freedom to choose among available options when making purchasing decisions.

But here another objection may arise: Should companies not be allowed to reach consumers in whatever manner they choose? After all, in a world of increased connectivity and market competition, advertisers already have their work cut out for them in order to increase customer engagement amid so much other sharing of

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<sup>14</sup> James Miller, “Case study: How fame made Snickers’ ‘You’re not you when you’re hungry’ campaign a success,” available at [www.campaignlive.com/article/case-study-fame-made-snickers-youre-not-when-youre-hungry-campaign-success/1413554](http://www.campaignlive.com/article/case-study-fame-made-snickers-youre-not-when-youre-hungry-campaign-success/1413554).

<sup>15</sup> Gabriel Beltrone, “Coca-Cola Demands You Choose Happiness in This Gritty Anthem Ad for Europe,” available at <https://www.adweek.com/creativity/coca-cola-demands-you-choose-happiness-gritty-anthem-ad-europe-164557/>.

<sup>16</sup> Peter Murray, “How Emotions Influence What We Buy,” available at <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/inside-the-consumer-mind/201302/how-emotions-influence-what-we-buy>.

information. Advertisers' jobs have become increasingly difficult as they must produce content that will stand out in the cluttered sea of advertisements (even if it means printing advertisements on eggshells, as CBS has chosen to do<sup>17</sup>). Given the circumstances, is it not a stroke of genius for advertisers to employ this tactic?

Speaking about advertising in his message for World Communications Day in 1981, Pope St. John Paul II stated: “[A] psychological suggestion – apparently harmless – can, when skillfully handled with the tools of persuasion, make a man a target and endanger his freedom.”<sup>18</sup> Even in 1981, John Paul recognized the manipulative power that advertisers can have, and he reiterated this point in *Centesimus annus* ten years later: “[Mankind’s freedom] can be hindered as a result of manipulation by the means of mass communication, which impose fashions and trends of opinion through carefully orchestrated repetition, without it being possible to subject to critical scrutiny the premises on which these fashions and trends are based.”<sup>19</sup> Emotional manipulation on the part of advertisers and others with access to the means of mass communication subverts man’s freedom by inhibiting his ability to make rational consumer decisions. It cultivates subconscious emotional attachment to certain products that the consumer might not otherwise desire to purchase, even products that do not properly respect human dignity or serve the common good.

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<sup>17</sup> Caitlin Johnson, “Cutting Through Advertising Clutter,” available at <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/cutting-through-advertising-clutter/>.

<sup>18</sup> Pope St. John Paul II, “Social Communications in the Service of Responsible Human Freedom,” 2, available at [https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/communications/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_mes\\_10051981\\_world-communications-day.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/communications/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_10051981_world-communications-day.html).

<sup>19</sup> *Centesimus annus*, 41.

*The Way Forward*

A question then arises: How should consumers combat excessively consumeristic forms of advertising and encourage good forms of advertising in their place? In the United States there are minimal legal restrictions or regulations concerning advertising: advertisements cannot be intentionally deceiving or cause public harm, but there has been very little litigation in this area.<sup>20</sup> If federal and state legislatures were to step in to heavily regulate the industry, they would not only raise red flags for potential violations of First Amendment rights, but such a task would require more and more bureaucracy to keep up with the ever evolving landscape of technology used in advertising. Thus, while people ought to be encouraged to continue to bring unethical advertisers to justice through the legal system, government regulation of advertising is not necessarily the answer.

The burden of solving this problem should be borne by business leaders and advertisers, as well as consumers themselves. Business leaders should sincerely consider the value of the goods or services they provide and whether their firms truly respect human dignity and promote the common good. Advertisers should also think about the same questions. Even if they are promoting products that are good and useful, advertisers still have the responsibility not to cause harm by the methods they employ. In its document on advertising the Pontifical Council for Social Communications offers a clear statement: “The media of social communications have two options, and only two. Either they help human persons to grow in their understanding and practice of what is true and good, or they are destructive forces in conflict with human wellbeing. That is entirely true of advertising.”<sup>21</sup> Not only must goods and services help human persons to grow in their understanding and practice of what is true and good, but also the

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<sup>20</sup> AdAge, “Government Regulation,” available at <http://adage.com/article/adage-encyclopedia/government-regulation/98679/>.

<sup>21</sup> “Ethics in Advertising,” 14.

methods advertisers use to present and deliver products to consumers must help in the same way. So, for example, advertisers should not feed an excessively consumeristic culture by pushing nonessential products as “must haves,” and they should avoid invading consumers’ privacy with obnoxious or intrusive advertising as well as do away with methods of subconscious emotional manipulation.

Granted, it is incredibly difficult for business leaders and advertisers to avoid these troubling practices, especially when the consumers they are trying to reach are already under a constant barrage of advertisements that use subconscious emotional manipulation to promote harmful and unnecessary products (thereby contributing to excessive consumeristic attitudes). However, the fact that something is difficult does not mean a duty to do it can be disregarded. John Paul II offers encouragement: “To remind the communicators that their employment demands from them love, justice, truth, as well as freedom – this is the duty of my pastoral ministry. Truth must never be distorted, justice neglected, love forgotten, if one is to observe ethical standards.”<sup>22</sup> Advertising is by no means inherently evil. In fact, the Council states: “[A]dvertising can be a useful tool for sustaining honest and ethically responsible competition that contributes to economic growth in the service of authentic human development.”<sup>23</sup> Business leaders and advertisers should use advertising well and be confident that, if they are providing goods and service that respect human dignity and contribute to the common good, in the end, “truth will out,”<sup>24</sup> as companies that pursue higher ideals and ethical conduct perform better than those that do not.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> “Social Communications in the Service of Responsible Human Freedom,” 3.

<sup>23</sup> “Ethics in Advertising,” 5.

<sup>24</sup> William Shakespeare, “The Merchant of Venice,” 2:2, available at <http://www.folgerdigitaltexts.org/html/MV.html#line-2.2.0>.

<sup>25</sup> Erica Byrne, “A Clear Correlation – Ethical Companies Outperform,” available at <https://insights.ethisphere.com/wp-content/uploads/Q4-2016-A-Clear-Correlation-Salmon-Byrne.pdf>.

A duty also falls on consumers to resist being manipulated by advertisements. In an increasingly connected world, one cannot extract oneself from the world of advertising; it is far too pervasive and many advertisements are specifically crafted to reach consumers in a subconscious way. However, consumers can take measures to minimize both advertisement exposure and the influence of advertising in their lives. One simple strategy is to limit personal media consumption: not running the television or radio as the background noise, not habitually browsing the internet as a time-filler, and even taking a “tech sabbath” or weekly “day of rest” from media.<sup>26</sup> Another strategy is to make a habit of researching products rigorously before making purchases. While the large majority of Americans, over 81 percent, do extensive research before making large purchases,<sup>27</sup> the same is not true for smaller purchases.<sup>28</sup> But thorough research will often prompt consumers to ask more detailed questions and weigh the pros and cons of products before they buy, which counterbalances the influences of brand-recognition and emotional manipulation.<sup>29</sup> Thus, if consumers begin to research in advance of making smaller purchases like athletic shoes, the “magic” of emotional manipulation may fade, and they may even question whether they really need certain products. By limiting exposure to advertisements and researching products before purchasing them, consumers can begin to combat consumeristic attitudes and emotional manipulation.

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<sup>26</sup> The so-called tech sabbath originates from Brett McKay, “On the Seventh Day, We Unplug: How and Why to Take a Tech Sabbath,” available at <https://www.artofmanliness.com/articles/tech-sabbath/>.

<sup>26</sup> Kimberlee Morrison, “81% of Shoppers Conduct Online Research Before Buying,” available at <https://www.adweek.com/digital/81-shoppers-conduct-online-research-making-purchase-infographic/>.

<sup>28</sup> Aimee Pichii, “The American habit of impulse buying,” available at <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/the-american-habit-of-impulse-buying/>.

<sup>29</sup> David Court, “The consumer decision journey,” available at <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/marketing-and-sales/our-insights/the-consumer-decision-journey>.



*Nicholas J. Vance*

*Conclusion*

I distinctly remember a conversation with a homeless man several years ago, during which he pulled out a cell phone far newer than my own (I was a university student at the time). When I nonchalantly asked the man why he had a new smartphone but could not afford a place to stay, he responded by saying that he bought it because “it looks cool.” He had seen advertisements for the phone and decided to purchase it. A man with next to no discretionary income chose to spend what he had on a very nonessential item, anecdotally showing how much a consumeristic attitude pervades the culture.

Contemporary culture has become incredibly consumeristic under the influence of skillful advertisers who promote this attitude and use emotional manipulation to move their products. As such, advertisers not only unjustly take advantage of the fact that their industry is lightly regulated but also compromise human choice by unduly affecting consumer decisions at the subconscious level. Business leaders and advertisers should resolve to do better, with advertising that respects human dignity and promotes the common good. For their part, consumers should make efforts both to limit their exposure to advertisements and to research products before making purchases in order to dampen the effects of emotional manipulation. These are among the crucial steps that need to be taken to develop a “free market” in the truest sense of the term, one that is hospitable to integral human development and promotion of the common good.



“*Et in Arcadia Ego*”:  
Röpke’s Humane Economy Achieved  
through the Catholic Imagination

*Kacey Reeves\**

THE END OF WORLD WAR II brought with it the first traces of hope that liberal economists experienced in years. Socialism had begun to cede to the market economy after almost extinguishing it during the war – as seen in Belgium, for example, which returned to the free market in 1946; in Italy, which abandoned communism and price controls under the guidance of Luigi Einaudi in 1947; and even in Germany, which traded inflationary collectivism for constrained monetary policy in 1948. In other words, the “socialist myth” had begun to unravel at long last.<sup>1</sup>

Despite this economic turnaround, society still found itself trapped under the same weights of secularization and thoughtless industry that imprisoned it during the war. Wilhelm Röpke, a German economist with roots in the Austrian School, addresses this urgent problem in his 1958 book, *The Humane Economy*. Society, he claims, was still under attack by a “desperate disease” that demanded a “desperate cure of decentralization and deproletarianization” that the free market alone could not provide.<sup>2</sup> While other supporters of the market economy turned a blind eye, Röpke feared that capitalism would accomplish the same thing socialism had threatened to do: transform small towns and

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<sup>1</sup> Wilhelm Röpke, *Humane Economy: The Social Framework for the Free Market* (Boston: Henry Regnery Company, 1960), 23.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

communities into seas of rootless individuals who no longer found place or meaning in the circumstances of their lives.

This transformation occurred as the exponential growth of industrial cities ate away at the countryside, resulting in what Röpke termed “mass” and “concentration.”<sup>3</sup> Mass and concentration, which rear their heads when communities “exceed the human scale,” efface the dignity of the individual by promoting collective thought over traditional values.<sup>4</sup> When a society grows large, it tends to place more faith in “institutions, programs, and projects” than in individual actors, which is a fatal mistake. The emphasis on the collective traps its members into a kind of groupthink that stifles introspection and innovation. This largely arises out of the fear of not blending in. After all, a crowded city on a busy weekday demands “constant adjustment, accommodation, self-control, conscious and practiced responses, and almost military uniformity” just for people to get to work on time without hassle or added difficulty.<sup>5</sup> All of this combines to send people down a path of conformity that drowns out individual voices and silences any sort of religion besides that of politics or consumption. However, compared with socialism, which blatantly prioritizes society over the individual, mass and concentration are more dangerous because they masquerade under the guise of freedom: the freedom to pursue wealth over family, the freedom to ignore civic duty, the freedom to value ends over means, and so on, until they give way to collectivism.

The effacement of the individual in the market economy was Röpke’s primary concern. Driven by his Christian faith, which asserts each man is uniquely created in the image of God, Röpke knew he could not side with other liberal economists who cited the free market as the answer to all social problems. As he explains:

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 40.

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The market economy, price mechanism, and competition are fine, but they are not enough. . . . Market economy is one thing in a society where atomization, mass, proletarianization, and concentration rule; it is quite another in a society approaching anything like the “natural order” which I have described.<sup>6</sup>

This “natural order” prioritizes community, responsibility, and respect for human nature over relentless pursuit of economic goods like profit, market share, and material possessions. In other words, it recognizes that the “vital things” of life extend “beyond supply and demand and the world of property” to “give meaning, dignity, and inner richness to life.”<sup>7</sup> Therefore, if society is not rooted in a worldview that affirms the dignity of man and elevates virtue, the market economy will succeed only in fueling a downward spiral into mass and concentration.

Thus comes the question: how does a society obtain this “natural order” so that a market economy might function correctly within it? Röpke points to the desecularization of society as the primary answer. In *The Humane Economy*, he claims that “the ultimate source of our civilization’s disease is the spiritual and religious crisis which has overtaken all of us.”<sup>8</sup> He reasons that as Christian faith naturally affirms the dignity and value of the individual actor, it would lay the groundwork for a society that could stand against collectivist values. However, in the mid-twentieth century there was one main obstacle to reestablishing Christianity as an influential force in society: mass and concentration had predisposed the majority of persons to reject any sort of religion – especially one so heavily dependent on introspection and personal faith. Thus, the pressing question for Röpke changes from “How does society reach the natural order?” to “How could one possibly convince society to restore respect for a religious perspective it had already dismissed as antiquated?”

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 8.

Evelyn Waugh, a British writer and contemporary of Röpke, recognizes and addresses the same social problems in his novels. While he did not use Röpke's terms "mass" and "concentration," Waugh investigates their associated effects of proletarianization, charm, and unchecked pride through his characters based in modern-day England. In the novel *Brideshead Revisited*, Waugh presents Hooper, a witless platoon commander, and Rex Mottram, an egotistical social climber – both of whom function less as individuals than as products of collective groupthink – to comment on what happens in a society that undervalues introspection and responsibility. Charles Ryder, the novel's protagonist, sums up this sentiment when he recognizes that Hooper serves more as a caricature of his time than as an authentic individual:

Hooper became a symbol to me of Young England, so that whenever I read some public utterance proclaiming what Youth demanded in the Future and what the World owed to Youth, I would test these general statements by substituting "Hooper" and seeing if they seemed as plausible . . . "Hooper Rallies", "Hooper Hostels," "International Hooper Cooperation," and "Religion of Hooper."<sup>9</sup>

Waugh understood that while society needed to return to its spiritual roots, the process would not be as simple as building a few more churches. Instead, desecularization depends on changing the way in which man relates to and understands religion – that is, changing man's attitude to the world itself. In *Brideshead Revisited*, Waugh focuses on the capacity of art to shock man out of the status quo and to shepherd him from the shallow milieu of popular culture into the realm of creative, humble, and nuanced thought. Whether it be the superb architecture of Brideshead Castle or masterful paintings of William Hunt, art in

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<sup>9</sup> Evelyn Waugh, *Brideshead Revisited* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 2012), 10.

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*Brideshead Revisited* allows man to pause, rejoice, and carry on with a greater sense of curiosity and compassion.

While Waugh left this phenomenon unnamed, Andrew Greeley has spoken of the “Catholic imagination” and Edmund Burke and Russell Kirk of the “moral imagination.”<sup>10</sup> The Catholic imagination bestows one the gift of seeing how “everything in creation, from the exploding cosmos to the whirling, dancing, and utterly mysterious quantum particles, discloses something about God, and in so doing, brings God among us.”<sup>11</sup> Similarly, Kirk explains that the moral imagination, employed by poets like Virgil and Dante, “aspires to the apprehending of the right order in the soul and right order in the commonwealth” by tearing down societal conventions in attempts to uncover truth.<sup>12</sup> These forms of imagination mean man approaches the world with humility, not presumption, as he is in a constant state of learning, correction, and surprise. A man who possesses imagination does not suffer from boredom, but finds joy in his daily routine and recognizes the unique spark that both he and his fellowmen possess in their respective souls.

Moreover, imagination lays the foundation for a successful humane economy by rejecting collectivism and encouraging humility and care within the community. To demonstrate how the properties of imagination might lift man from collectivism, Waugh contrasts apathetic Hooper and greedy Rex Mottram – token representatives of a poorly ordered market economy – with Charles Ryder, the protagonist who shed vices similar to theirs during his gradual conversion to Catholicism.

Hooper, Charles Ryder’s platoon commander, exemplifies what Röpke would describe as a typical member of the proletariat. Although he appears only in the preface and prologue, his presence has a

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<sup>10</sup> Andrew Greeley, *The Catholic Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 1.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>12</sup> Russell Kirk, “The Moral Imagination,” *Literature and Belief* 1 (1981): 38.

lingering effect on Ryder – who becomes uneasy with Hooper's need for authority and guidance to complete even the simplest of tasks. Opinionless and apathetic, Hooper moves only at Charles's urging and speaks only to echo popular sentiments of his time. The world in which Hooper operates is drab and predictable, just like his closed mind:

Hooper had no illusions about the Army – or rather no special illusions distinguishable from the general enveloping fog from which he observed the universe. He had come to it reluctantly, under compulsion, after he had made every feeble effort in his power to obtain deferment. Hooper was no romantic. . . . The history they taught him had few battles in it, but, instead, a profusion of detail about humane legislation and recent industrial change.<sup>13</sup>

While just a young man starting out in his career, Hooper's lack of spirit, joy, and self-direction indicate that part of him is already dead. When Charles reads a biography that Lady Marchmain wrote to honor her fallen brothers, he laments that these “high-spirited” war heroes died only to “make a world for Hooper,” who had no gumption to create a life for himself.<sup>14</sup>

These shortcomings, however, are not due to flaws inherent in Hooper but instead to an environment that pushed him to embrace a pragmatist worldview. His education, which took place in wartime England, was more concerned with worldly issues of military strategy and scientific facts than with transcendent moral or aesthetic values. In other words, Hooper had no grasp of Kirk's moral imagination, a deficiency that left him blinded to his larger context in time and space and permitted him to consider only the immediate business of the present. Thus, he had no understanding of the ideals he was fighting for: freedom, honor, and tradition; and he was content to go through the motions as long as he received dinner on time and did not have to

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<sup>13</sup> Waugh, *Brideshead Revisited*, 9.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.



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exert himself too much. C. S. Lewis discusses a similar phenomenon in *The Abolition of Man*, which criticizes modern educators for valuing “reason” over truth. Lewis decries the fact that values such as “beauty” and “honor” had been discounted as subjective emotional responses and thus received no respect in modern society.<sup>15</sup> This trend, he explains, would accomplish nothing more than reduce man’s capacity for great action or thought.

Waugh asserts that man has the ability to cure himself of this apathy by engaging with things that transcend modern thought and remind him of his distinctive human nature. Charles Ryder did not follow the herd but instead made a life for himself as an artist before joining the war. At the beginning of the novel, however, Charles was in fact quite like Hooper. Raised under the influence of a distant father who himself had no appreciation of the transcendent, Charles’s attitude toward life was wholly apathetic. He expected he would study history, earn his degree, and enter politics or some sort of business, not because he dreamed of doing so but because he did not have the capacity to dream of anything else. That is, until he met Lord Sebastian Flyte, who replaced his world of black and white with trips to botanical gardens and spontaneous outings to the countryside. Sebastian’s fixation on beauty, however, was not gratuitous but instead something that allowed him to comprehend the deeper dimensions of truth and meaning in human experience. This approach to reality, although quite foreign to Charles, was instinctual for Sebastian, who, despite efforts to distance himself from his Catholic faith, never succeeded in abandoning a worldview that celebrated the many instances of beauty – usually in the form of sacred art or incense or a flickering candle – as an “alleluia” to God, the ultimate form of truth.

While Charles initially regarded the faith with contempt and distrust, he slowly and perhaps unwittingly developed a Catholic imagination under the influence of Sebastian. Still, he interpreted

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<sup>15</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: HarperOne, 1974), 18.

beauty not as God's revelation but as some indication of an unnamable "inspiration" that transcended all he had ever known.<sup>16</sup> Waugh goes to great lengths to underscore the fact that Charles's newfound appreciation of reality was something more than a refined aesthetic sense. For example, after meeting Sebastian, Charles undertook the task of redecorating his rooms and discarded everything he now considered banal (Van Gogh's *Sunflowers* was one of the first things to go), and he added a new centerpiece to his kitchen table: a human skull on a bed of roses with the inscription "Et in Arcadia Ego" on its forehead. This inscription refers to Nicolas Poussin's 1638 painting that bears these words as its title and depicts three shepherds standing around a tomb so entranced by a shadow that fell upon the structure that one lifted up his finger to trace it. This moment, according to the history of Pliny, was when mankind first discovered painting. The painting suggests that while death is all-pervasive, art still has the power to challenge death and suggest reasons for hope in the face of darkness. With this small detail, Waugh implies Charles experienced a conversion that permanently altered the way he perceived the world around him, and Charles's example shows how imagination is capable of standing against the sway of the secular world.

Waugh homes in on another cause of the deterioration of a free society that Röpke also identifies: unbridled arrogance fueled by lack of responsibility and respect for the community or, in a word, individualism. As tradition, culture, and religion vanish, individuals have nowhere to put their faith but in themselves – a phenomenon that only aggravates the sense of isolation. As Röpke writes,

[Enmassment] detaches the individual from his natural social fabric and leaves him to his own resources. . . . Mass society is simply a sand-heap of individuals who are more dependent than ever, less sharply defined and more depersonalized than ever, and at the same time more

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<sup>16</sup> Waugh, *Brideshead Revisited*, 260.

*Kacey Reeves*

isolated, uprooted, abandoned, and socially disintegrated than ever.<sup>17</sup>

Waugh created the character of Rex Mottram, suitor of Julia Flyte, to embody this attitude. Rex, an ambitious businessman who moved from Canada to England to get his foot in the door of Parliament, is far more driven than Hooper but lacks interior depth. His only motivation seems to be the pursuit money, power, and glory – no matter the means required to obtain it.

As Rex went through the process of converting to Catholicism in order to marry Julia, he simply regurgitated everything the priest told him, without intellectual curiosity or indeed any real faith with respect to the claims he was parroting. In hindsight, Julia grew disgusted as his shallowness became more obvious:

[Rex] simply wasn't all there. He wasn't a complete human being at all. He was a tiny bit of one, unnaturally developed; something in a bottle, an organ kept alive in a laboratory. I thought he was a sort of primitive savage, but he was something absolutely modern and up-to-date that only this ghastly age could produce. A tiny bit of man pretending he was the whole.<sup>18</sup>

Like Hooper, Rex lived in a small world that did not extend beyond his business transactions or political strategies, as he pridefully assumed that he could control everything around him. Philosopher Josef Pieper explains that this sort of arrogance causes man to detach from the whole of society and lose the capacity to wonder:

A man [like this] accepts his environment defined as it is by the immediate needs of life, so completely and finally, that things happening cannot any longer become transparent; the great, wide, not to say deep, world which is at first sight

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<sup>17</sup> Röpke, *The Humane Economy*, 71.

<sup>18</sup> Waugh, *Brideshead Revisited*, 230.

*Röpke's Humane Economy and the Catholic Imagination*

invisible, the world of essences and universals, is not even suspected; nothing wonderful ever happens in this world, and wonder itself is unknown or lost.<sup>19</sup>

The only cure, Pieper writes, is to reestablish and emphasize the role of leisure in society. Leisure, which consists of all those activities that we engage in and value as ends in themselves and not as means to further ends, makes it possible for us to see beyond the utilitarian needs of the working world and to consider the universe as a whole. Leisure makes it possible for light to be shed on the mysteries of everyday life and humbles individuals as we begin to grasp how much we do not know.

One scene in *Brideshead Revisited*, in which Charles and Rex share a meal together, suggests how imagination and leisure might serve to combat the problems of individualism and arrogance:

The sole was so simple and unobtrusive that Rex failed to notice it. We ate to the music of the press – the crunch of the bones, the drip of blood and marrow, the tap of the spoon basting the thin slices of breast. . . . I rejoiced in the Burgundy. It seemed a reminder that the world was an older and better place than Rex knew, that mankind in its long passion had learned another wisdom than his.<sup>20</sup>

Waugh did not write this scene to suggest that Charles's palate was more sophisticated than Rex's, but to highlight how curiosity and openness drastically change how one perceives the world around them. While Rex dismissed the food the minute he walked into the tiny restaurant and deemed it beneath his cosmopolitan tastes, Charles used all five senses to "rejoice" and delight in the mastery of the chefs. While Rex remained fixated on the drama surrounding his engagement to

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<sup>19</sup> Josef Pieper, *Leisure, The Basis of Culture* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2009), 112.

<sup>20</sup> Waugh, *Brideshead Revisited*, 200-01.

Julia, Charles took the time to pause and appreciate the new experiences surrounding him. The result: Charles left the dinner feeling refreshed and contented, while Rex left still in a cloud of his own problems.

This backdrop provided by Hooper and Rex demonstrates the crucial need for humility and an appreciation of beauty to prevent men from becoming caricatures of themselves. If the vices of apathy and greed are not restrained, the market economy dovetails into mass and concentration, which degrade the individual and oppress his freedom. The key to a successful free market economy, then, is creating an environment conducive to the so-called Catholic or moral imagination. Imagination is not a human institution like the Red Cross that can swoop in to rescue a society facing disaster. Instead, it has to be cultivated in individuals, one by one, through experiences with art, the countryside, solitude, or other activities of leisure, as in the example of Charles's own "conversion."

The need for imagination also reawakens the argument for classical education, as Kirk would maintain that putting students in contact with great authors like Dante would help reawaken minds.<sup>21</sup> Once a society is properly ordered, it can support what Röpke described as a "humane economy"—a market that recognizes the laws of economics but does not worship them, and instead values above all the holistic (material and spiritual) well-being of individual persons and the pursuit of permanent things.

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<sup>21</sup> Kirk, "The Moral Imagination," 38.



# Created to Work: Private Ownership and Human Nature

*Tristan J. Smith\**

SINCE THE BEGINNING OF HISTORY, the dilemma of private ownership has beset the minds of philosophers, ethicists, statesmen, merchants, and laborers, prompting many to consider just principles of distribution and to examine the relationship between labor and capital. Seeking to resolve any discrepancy between what men earn and what men deserve, leading thinkers have sought to build societies committed to justice and conducive to human flourishing, maximizing the fruits of labor for the common good of all. A glance at most political systems of antiquity and modernity reveals rampant inequality across the strata of society as well as among individual persons. Vices of avarice, materialism, and the unchecked desire for power exacerbate the tension already felt between employers and wage earners. Political leaders succumb to motives of self-gain, abandoning their commitment to protect the interests of those whom they govern. Intensified by the acquisitive instinct of the human spirit, private ownership fuels this conflict and raises the question of the just distribution of property in society. To establish a prosperous community and to secure the happiness of man, leaders must clarify the purpose of ownership in society, identifying the intersection between private interest and the common good.

The question of private ownership impacts all of society, and the civic response of a nation or community through measures such as taxation, trade regulation, and other means of controlling or manipulating ownership has tangible effects on the global marketplace.

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While the debate has taken shape in the last two centuries in response to the development of communism and socialism, it is an age-old controversy with historical context going back to classical philosophy. Plato, the father of Western philosophy, advocated for the ideal of common property, believing that it would unify the city and lead its guardians to act as a single corporate body rather than under the influence of private pleasure or pain.<sup>1</sup> Outlining the model living conditions for the best class of citizens, the philosopher attests, “First, none of them should possess any private property beyond what is wholly necessary,” and he continues by detailing conditions in which the guardians share common households, storerooms, meals, wives, and even children.<sup>2</sup> Although Plato’s idea is a far cry from Marxism because it requires common property only for the ruling class, he nevertheless esteems common property as an ideal and views private property as appropriate to an inferior class of citizens. In response, his student Aristotle adopts a much different approach. Trusting that ownership promotes virtue among citizens, Plato’s successor favors the retention of private property and describes how it boosts both productivity and moral goodness. Aristotle states, “When everyone has his own separate sphere of interest, there will not be the same ground for quarrels; and the amount of interest will increase, because each man will feel that he is applying himself to what is his own.”<sup>3</sup> Although Plato and Aristotle diverge in their treatment of ownership, they adopt disparate views for the sake of the same end, namely, the harmonization of the *polis*. Striving to build a virtuous society oriented toward human flourishing, they treat property as an instrument for fulfilling the common good of mankind.

Like Aristotle, Catholic social doctrine supports private ownership, but the latter values both labor and property as more than the means for contributing to the harmonization of society. Grounding its

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<sup>1</sup> Plato, *Republic* 462b-d.

<sup>2</sup> Plato, *Republic* 416d.

<sup>3</sup> Aristotle, *Politics* 2.1263a.



teaching in the *imago Dei* of the human person, the magisterium decrees that private ownership is an inalienable right, imprinted on the soul by nature, that grants man the authority to subdue the earth and exercise dominion over it. In his encyclical *Rerum novarum* Leo XIII writes, “It is the soul which is made after the image and likeness of God; it is in the soul that the sovereignty resides in virtue whereof man is commanded to rule the creatures below him and to use all the earth and the ocean for his profit and advantage.”<sup>4</sup> Thus, private ownership of property not only contributes to the good of society but also upholds the dignity of the human person by affirming the right of each to possess things as the acting subject who performs work.

Work exists for the sake of man, enabling him to fully realize his humanity through the free, conscious, and rational acts whereby he exercises dominion over the earth. The human person, acting as subject, is the foundation of his work, conferring value upon the labor in which he engages. Imprinted in human nature at the time of creation, man’s sovereignty over work grants real equality of all persons, even when the objective value of work fluctuates according to the capacity of the worker and the type of work performed. Although the objective value of work influences remuneration, all workers have equal dignity regardless of their wealth or poverty on account of work’s subjective dimension. Proclaiming the “Gospel of work” in the encyclical *Laborem exercens*, St. John Paul II declares, “The basis for determining the value of human work is not primarily the kind of work being done but the fact that the one who is doing it is a person.”<sup>5</sup> In diametrical contrast to the idea of the worker as subject, Marx exposes the proletariat as a unit of the political economy who exists for the sake of abstract labor, bereft of ownership, capital, and rent. He laments the debasement of the rational foundation that characterizes human action, stating, “Political economy can therefore advance the proposition that the proletariat, the same as any horse,

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<sup>4</sup> *Rerum novarum*, 40.

<sup>5</sup> *Laborem exercens*, 6.

must get as much as will enable him to work. It does not consider him when he is not working, as a human being.”<sup>6</sup> The reduction of man to a condition of abstract labor ignores the human capacity for reason that both distinguishes man from the other animals and grants him the right to possess property and dominate the earth. Whereas instinct alone dictates animal behavior, reason governs the action of men, according the status of subject and conferring the ability to bring about change on earth through the product of work. Identifying reason as the distinctively human element of the person, John Paul II distinguishes man from brute by recognizing man’s capacity to freely direct his action through conscious decision-making. Bearing the image and likeness of God by nature, man is unable to surrender his soul to servitude, but instead dominates the earth through his vocation to work, enjoying freedom through his right to act consciously.

In primitive society, private ownership of property enables man to exercise dominion over the earth by allowing him to cultivate the soil he owns, changing it into something fruitful through the labor he exerts. By tilling the land and mixing his labor with it, he impresses his personality upon it and assimilates it to himself, transforming its condition completely from what it was before his contribution. The product of labor is part of the man who engaged in the creative activity of work and bears the imprint of his personhood. Separating the part from the whole by denying man ownership violates nature, just as separating mother from child disrupts the natural order. Leo XIII affirms the unity of the person and the product of labor when he declares, “That which has thus altered and improved the land becomes so truly part of itself as to be in great measure indistinguishable and inseparable from it.”<sup>7</sup> The unitive principle of ownership extends beyond the agrarian community, impacting all material goods produced by men. All who engage in labor derive sustenance from the

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<sup>6</sup> Karl Marx, “Wages of Labor,” in *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, ed. and trans. Martin Milligan (Mineola: Dover Publications, Inc., 2007), 29.

<sup>7</sup> *Rerum novarum*, 10.

land, whether they cultivate the soil themselves or produce goods that they exchange for the fruits of the earth. Human productivity joins man with the land and grants him dominion over the products of his labor, giving rise to the right to remuneration when man enters into association with others through an agreement to trade the work of his hands for some other good. Stemming from the unitive principle of the ownership of private property, the right to remuneration and to receive a just wage presupposes the freedom of man over his work.

By demonstrating that labor confers man's personality upon the product of his work, the natural law entails the right to obtain private property through remunerative labor and safeguards both the right of ownership and man's power of disposal of property according to free will. In addition, divine law corroborates the testament of nature, implicitly sanctioning private ownership in the Decalogue. The ordinance prohibiting covetousness intends to curb avarice for the sake of protecting private ownership, restricting materialistic and carnal desires to promote the common good of the children of Israel. Unlike the counsel of Plato, God did not instruct Moses to teach the Israelites to share their wives in common or to erect a common storeroom, but rather sought to promote a harmonious human existence by protecting ownership rights. Neither private property nor free competition in an economy implies an unchecked acquisitive spirit, nor does it sanction greed, materialism, or widespread inequality that subverts the dignity of the poor by ignoring the freedom of the human spirit to work, create, and enjoy the effects of the labor spent. The prevalence of moral degeneracy in society depends on the counterbalance of virtue and self-restraint, not on the existence of private ownership of property, which itself implies neither avarice nor profligacy.

By nature, the human person has the right to own private property, and while the dignity of the person implies the right to consciously exercise free will to determine the best use of one's property, the subject does not have the right to do whatever he pleases with his

belongings. Though his choice is free, man has an obligation to live virtuously, realizing his divine likeness by invoking charity through acts such as providing for the indigent. Invoking the teaching of Genesis to explicate the universal destination of goods, the Church reminds us that that the earth is the common inheritance of mankind.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, persons have no right to hoard wealth, but instead must use the property they own to promote the good of humanity and to avoid evil. Although man's vocation of dominion does not determine parameters for the distribution of property, he must organize his industry so that the earth supports the needs of all and so that his private possessions contribute to the common good of mankind.

Acknowledging that private property is necessary for the maintenance of human life, St. Thomas Aquinas advises, "Man should not consider his material possessions as his own, but as common to all, so as to share them without hesitation when others are in need."<sup>9</sup> In the absence of private ownership, what occasion exists for generosity? Private ownership provides the opportunity to build a culture of virtue founded on the duty of Christian charity, culminating in bonds of friendship, harmony, and tranquility in society. Aristotle's defense of ownership on the grounds of the advantage conferred by private interest anticipates this Thomistic principle. Aristotle writes, "And on such a scheme too, moral goodness will ensure that the property of each is made to serve the use of all, in the spirit of the proverb which says 'Friends' goods are goods in common.'"<sup>10</sup> Recognizing the desire for the good of the other as the most perfect form of friendship, Aristotle distances his view of ownership from motives of utility and pleasure, demonstrating how the retention of private property can generate virtue in society.

When the state violates private ownerships rights, it not only diminishes productivity by corroding the incentives of private interest,

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<sup>8</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2402-04.

<sup>9</sup> *Rerum novarum*, 22.

<sup>10</sup> Aristotle, *Politics* 2.1263a.

but also yields a culture defined by mechanization, sterility, and a lack of brotherly love. The idealization of work as the highest human good directly contradicts the conclusion of Leo XIII: “[I]t is easier to understand that the true worth and nobility of man lie in his moral qualities, that is, in virtue.”<sup>11</sup> While the communist desire to eliminate the abuse of labor is fitting, its disregard for virtue results in moral degeneracy and the erosion of private ownership. Though it fails to achieve its goals, communism seeks to perfect humanity, and most other civil theories that eliminate or constrain private ownership arise out of similar desires to reduce inequality and minimize injustice. For the sake of the indigent, Marx and his successors endeavor to reassign private possessions as the common property of all, taking advantage of the poor man’s envy of the rich to advance their policy. They fail to grasp that unequal fortunes result from natural discrepancies in the commitment of individual men to labor. Their effort to secure the common good by establishing equality of conditions has the practical result of reducing all to a state of wretchedness.

To achieve the communist and socialist ideal of a community of goods in the postlapsarian world, it is necessary to integrate commitment to virtue with a respect for the natural rights of the human person, affirming charity as a free choice and duty that benefits all. Making the dissemination of the earth’s goods compulsory not only cuts against the inclination to act virtuously but also fosters the illusion that a human system can overcome man’s natural tendencies to sin and can bring to all a life free of pain and hardship. In addition to deterring virtue, a system seeking equality denies the authority of human reason to seek out what is best for man. Leo XIII states, “Socialists . . . strike at the interests of every wage-earner, since they would deprive him of the liberty of disposing of his wages, and thereby of all hope and possibility of increasing his resources and of bettering his condition in life.”<sup>12</sup> Reducing society’s conception of work to the objective

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<sup>11</sup> *Rerum novarum*, 24.

<sup>12</sup> *Rerum novarum*, 5.

dimension of the value of produced goods, socialism ignores the worker as unique subject, no longer permitting him to receive compensation commensurate with the work he performs. When a man's share of property, common or private, is disproportionate to his capacity as a worker, his dignity is violated, and ironically a deeper inequality necessarily results.

Rooted in human nature and originating from the soul's charge to exercise dominion over the earth through work, private ownership enables the laborer to escape servility and to participate in work as a free and autonomous subject. To alleviate the suffering of the indigent and the oppressed, a free society must respect private property and promote virtue, particularly charity, in order to strengthen bonds of brotherly love and to rouse man to his duty of stewardship of the common inheritance of mankind. When a man neglects his duty to contribute his private possessions to the common good and instead uses them selfishly, society may prod or even punish him, but his property rights must be respected. By upholding the dignity of the human person and by drawing attention to the subjective dimension of work, the right of private ownership orients society toward virtue and promotes a harmonious and peaceful existence.

# Material Acquisition and Eternal Gift: Locke, Plato, Pope St. John Paul II and the Human Person

*Isaac C. Owen\**

**W**HAT DOES IT MEAN to be fully human? This question has intrigued great thinkers ever since man became conscious of his unique ability to think. It is a fundamental question and has caused sleepless nights during which minds have wrestled with it for hours. Classical thinkers like Plato maintain that using one's *reason* is what it means to be truly human. Other empiricist philosophers such as John Locke have said that using one's *freedom* is what distinguishes us. Yet a third school of thought, personalism, holds that one is not truly a man until he *gives* – gives of himself to others and, more importantly, gives of himself to God. This personalist perspective was fully developed in the Catholic context by Pope St. John Paul II the Great.

In this paper I will explore the thought Locke, Plato, and John Paul II. I will first focus on Locke and mention several issues that Catholic readers should consider before accepting his philosophy. Here I do not intend to dismiss Locke, his philosophical importance, or the impact he may have had on the American Founding. Rather, I am suggesting that the reader think more deeply about Locke from a Catholic perspective, which requires that we fulfill our Christian duty to follow Christ first and foremost instead of the things of this world. Next I will focus on Plato, as a foil of sorts for Locke. Finally, I will turn to the thought of John Paul II and reflect on how he weaves aspects of both Lockean and Platonic thought into a cohesive whole.

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I will first sketch Locke's theory of the person, and how his philosophy limits man by focusing merely on our material nature in his *Letter Concerning Toleration* and *Second Treatise of Government*. Then I will explore Plato's dialogue *Phaedrus* to show how Plato offers reason as man's defining feature, as distinct from Locke's materialism. Finally I will consider John Paul II's *Love and Responsibility* and encyclical *Gratissimam sane*, in order to develop his idea of personalism and show how it emphasizes the human act of giving.

In his *Letter Concerning Toleration* Locke states succinctly: "I esteem that toleration to be the chief characteristic mark of the true church."<sup>1</sup> In his view, then, to tolerate others is the primary function of the church, not to teach and promote truth, goodness, and beauty in the world. Instead, the state assumes responsibility for interpreting truth, goodness, and beauty, and it does so to serve its own purposes, and even toleration itself, if taken to its furthest extent, can promote mediocrity and be an affront to truth, beauty, and goodness. Under this framework, churches are denuded and individuals lose the very places where they may seek and worship the divine. According to Locke, the proper concerns of citizens and the state are material, not spiritual. As he writes,

[t]he commonwealth seems to me to be a society of men constituted only for the procuring, preserving, and advancing their own civil interests. Civil interests I call life, liberty, health, and indolency of body; and the possession of outward things, such as money, lands, houses, furniture, and the like.<sup>2</sup>

Transcendence will begin slowly to erode from the heart of man, just as a river eats away at its bank, causing devastating floods. The crush of the workaday world, in pursuit of material goods, has begun, for the

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<sup>1</sup> John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration* (1689; New York: Random House, 1962), 115.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.



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state focuses only on the “civil interests” and the church only on toleration and not on truth, beauty, and goodness.

The acquisition of material goods is what absolute freedom seeks. Locke posits in the *Second Treatise on Government*:

We must consider what state men are naturally in, and that is a state of perfect freedom to order their actions and dispose of their possessions and persons (i.e. bodily selves) as they think fit, within the bounds of the law of nature, without asking leave, or depending upon the will of any other man.<sup>3</sup>

Thus man is granted the freedom to do whatever he wants as long as it does not violate what Locke calls the law of nature, and the rights of life, liberty, and property possessed by others. It may seem that Locke is delimiting boundaries according to some form of natural law or creating a system of morals to curb man’s absolute freedom, but political philosopher Leo Strauss has suggested otherwise. In his work *Natural Right and History*, Strauss echoes Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, and the Catholic Church’s teaching that natural law must be discernable by “natural reason.” Natural reason is what “obliges man as man.”<sup>4</sup> It is therefore identical with the law of nature because we see the reason reflected in nature, for both nature and man have been created by the same benign Creator. The most fundamental law of nature is that man must do good and avoid evil; according to Strauss, Locke may say he retains this relationship between natural law and natural reason, but he is either purposely misleading his readers or just being lazy, and probably the former. Strauss writes, “[Locke] says that reason cannot demonstrate that there is another life.” And he continues, “Only through revelation do we know of the sanctions of

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<sup>3</sup> John Locke, *Second Treatise on Government* (1689; Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1980), 2.

<sup>4</sup> Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1953), 203.

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the law of nature or of ‘the only true touchstone of moral rectitude.’ Natural reason is therefore unable to know the law of nature as a law. This would mean that there does not exist a law of nature in the strict sense.”<sup>5</sup> Locke himself confirms this skepticism in his work *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*:

It is an established opinion amongst some men, that there are in the understanding certain innate principles; some primary notions . . . characters, as it were, stamped upon the mind of man, which the soul receives in its very first being; and brings into the world with it. It would be sufficient to convince unprejudiced readers of the falseness of this supposition, if I should only shew (as I hope I shall in the following parts of this discourse) how men, barely by the use of their natural faculties, may attain to all the knowledge they have, without the help of any innate impressions; and may arrive at certainty, without any such original notions or principles.<sup>6</sup>

For Locke, man is born into a state of complete freedom and does not have any restrictions on his ability to do whatever he desires, specifically to pursue material goods to his heart’s content, following what Plato would call the appetites. Thus, absolute freedom from limits and an emphasis on satisfaction through material goods form the basis for Lockean liberalism. This reductive view of the person reappears in later manifestations of modern liberalism, including crony capitalism and socialism.

Now, for the classical writers, the acquisition of material goods was not considered a bad thing in itself. Plato himself says that one of the three parts of the human soul is the appetite for material and bodily satisfactions, the other two being *nous* or reason, and *thumos* or spiritedness. In his dialogue the *Phaedrus*, Plato describes these three

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 203-04.

<sup>6</sup> John Locke, *The Works of John Locke in Nine Volumes* (London: Rivington, 1824 12th ed.), vol. 1, available at <http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/761>.

aspects of the soul in his famous Myth of the Charioteer. “Let the figure be composite – a pair of winged horses and a charioteer. . . . The human charioteer drives his in a pair; and one of them is noble and of noble breed, and the other is ignoble and of ignoble breed; and the driving of them of necessity gives a great deal of trouble to him.”<sup>7</sup> The Charioteer represents reason, which attempts to guide its team to the “vision of love,” which is represented in the classical triad of transcendentals: truth, goodness, and beauty. The noble horse “is upright and cleanly made; he has a lofty neck and an aquiline nose; his color is white, and his eyes dark; he is a lover of honor and modesty and temperance, and the follower of true glory; he needs no touch of the whip, but is guided by word and admonition only.”<sup>8</sup> This noble steed represents the spiritedness or *thumos* within man, of which the classic example is the hero Achilles, whose honor is slighted when the girl Brises is taken from him by Agamemnon. This affront causes his *thumos* to swell, and he refuses to fight because of the injustice done to him.

The other horse is “a crooked lumbering animal, put together anyhow; he has a short thick neck; he is flat-faced and of a dark color, with grey eyes and blood-red complexion; the mate of insolence and pride, shag-eared and deaf, hardly yielding to whip and spur.”<sup>9</sup> This horse represents the appetites of lust, greed, pride, and gluttony, which are focused on material things. But this horse can be tamed by the Charioteer, who

[w]ith a still more violent wrench drags the bit out of the teeth of the wild steed and covers his abusive tongue and-jaws with blood, and forces his legs and haunches to the ground and punishes him sorely. And when this has happened several times and the villain has ceased from his wanton way, he is tamed and humbled, and follows the will

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<sup>7</sup> Plato, *Phaedrus*, available at <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/phaedrus.html>.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

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of the charioteer, and when he sees the beautiful one he is ready to die of fear. And from that time forward the soul of the lover follows the beloved in modesty and holy fear.<sup>10</sup>

While Plato's language may be forceful and violent, it does serve a purpose: to warn us of the dangers associated with the material appetites, including the desire for excessive material acquisition. What Plato is telling us is that the human appetite to possess things is strong, unruly, and difficult to master, and it can, if we let it, lead us to focus on merely material things rather than on developing our minds and moral character. Yet without this horse, the true "vision of love" can never be reached, because the chariot of human nature cannot be pulled by the noble steed alone. Thus, it is necessary and good that this horse desires these things; still, it must be ordered by the reason and the spirit. But even the great thinker Plato misses part of the fullness of the "vision of love," because he distains the truth, goodness, beauty, and the reality of the material world in favor of the world of forms. One can see this distaste in Raphael's classic work the *School of Athens*. The figures of Plato and Aristotle stand in a stylized ancient temple surrounded by the most famous thinkers of the past. Plato points up with his finger into the heavens, attempting to leave the world of mere matter, but Aristotle at his side urges with a firm outstretched hand and attempts to remind Plato of the physical earth that man calls his home in this life.

Locke underscores this idea that Plato almost misses, namely, that it is fitting and just for man to have and to own material possessions. In section 6 of *Rerum novarum*, for example, Leo XIII articulates the same truth: "For, every man has by nature the right to possess property as his own."<sup>11</sup> Ownership of property, he maintains, is one of the key

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> *A Reader in Catholic Social Teaching: From Syllabus Errorum to Deus Caritas Est*, ed. Peter Kwasniewski (Providence, RI: Cluny Media, LLC., 2017), 94.

distinctions between human beings and brute animals because it shows that man has and can use his reason.

And on this very account – that man alone among the animal creation is endowed with reason – it must be within his right to possess things not merely for temporary and momentary use, as other living things do, but to have and to hold them in stable and permanent possession; he must have not only things that perish in the use, but those also which, though they have been reduced into use, continue for further use in after time.<sup>12</sup>

Locke's error, however, lies in focusing exclusively on material goods, just as Plato's lies in focusing too much attention on the world of the forms. But if material and immaterial ideas are not used correctly, so that they orient persons to God, they drag us down, causing us to focus solely on our own selfish ends, be they material or immaterial. And thus, transcendence is crushed under the weight of the desire for material goods or a haughty and arrogant false intellect.

When a sense of transcendence is lost, how can it be regained? Are we doomed to live forever in a materially prosperous and intellectually pretentious world that has no regard for truth, beauty, and goodness? John Paul II's personalism offers a direct response to these questions. The pope takes what is true and worthy in liberalism, and what is true and worthy in Plato's thought, and places these ideas in the context of the transcendence and love that the Catholic Church offers. Then-Cardinal Karol Wojtyła wrote in his prepapal work *Love and Responsibility*:

[The personalistic] norm, in its negative aspect, states that the person is the kind of good which does not admit of use and cannot be treated as an object of use and as such the means to an end. In its positive form the personalistic norm

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid. (*Rerum novarum*, 6.)

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confirms this: the person is a good towards which the only proper and adequate attitude is love.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, the person is something not to be used or mistreated, but rather to be loved. This beautiful passage from *Love and Responsibility* states that the person should be loved, but it does not clarify why the person should be loved or what it means to love. In the encyclical *Gratissimam sane*, however, John Paul II expounds these issues more fully.

Man, says Wojtyła, is the only creature that God has willed and created for its own sake. He quotes *Gaudium et spes*: “Man is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself,” and further, man “cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of self.”<sup>14</sup> John Paul II, in this characteristic outpouring of his philosophy of love, exclaims that this phenomenon “is the magnificent paradox of human existence: an existence called to serve the truth in love.”<sup>15</sup> But what does the great Polish theologian mean by love? He offers the following: “To love means to give and to receive something which can be neither bought nor sold, but only given freely and mutually.”<sup>16</sup> To love, then, is to act toward another for his or her own sake without consideration for self, in the imitation of God’s selfless gift of the creation of humanity. By loving in this way, we restore a sense of transcendence, insofar as we grasp a higher dimension of reality outside the narrow circle of ourselves. Moreover, one’s proper relationship to others is also saved because the right philosophy has been restored, and we can be reoriented to love others in both material and immaterial ways. Ultimately, what John Paul II is arguing is that when we love another person and give that love to him or her freely, we discover a kind of transcendence within the one we love and within ourselves.

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<sup>13</sup> Karol Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility* (1960; San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 41.

<sup>14</sup> *A Reader in Catholic Social Teaching*, 426.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* (*Gratissimam sane*, 11.)

While the rights of life, liberty, and property and the freedom to pursue and protect these rights are all good and true, they cannot be fully expressed according to man's capacity to love, which transcends all of man's other capacities. Absolute freedom is not the ultimate good or highest activity of man; rather, our ultimate good and highest activity is to love, and the highest object of our love is to love others through God. Regarding our freedom, the mentality we ought to have is expressed by John Paul II when he writes, "Limitation of one's freedom might seem to be something negative and unpleasant, but love makes it a positive, joyful and creative thing. Freedom exists for the sake of love."<sup>17</sup> The supreme example of this freedom is when the Son of God, Jesus Christ, freely offered himself up on the cross because of the love that he had, and continues to have, for mankind.

With the realization that we must love other persons for their own sake, body and soul, we see that Locke's and Plato's views of the person each offer us only one side of the picture. We realize that the liberalist view that emphasizes freedom can be detrimental to our relationships with other persons as well as our relationship to God, while the Platonic view that privileges reason can lead us to an unwarranted attitude that dismisses the body as evil. But by acknowledging and emulating in our own way God's selfless gift, we can regain our center: Love.

As the Holy Thursday offertory antiphon tells us, "Ubi Caritas est Vera, Deus ibi est," which roughly translated means, "Where Love is, truth is, there God is." By giving the gift of love to others, John Paul II taught, we may fully understand the human person and how we might best respect and promote human flourishing, both on earth and ultimately in heaven: "The human body includes right from the beginning . . . the capacity of expressing love, that love in which the

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<sup>17</sup> Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 135.

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person becomes a gift – and by means of this gift – fulfills the meaning of his being and existence.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> John Paul II, *The Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan* (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 1997), 63.



# An Unsuspected Friendship: Labor, Leisure, and the Acting Person

*Emily Dalsky\**

**I**N HIS BOOK *THE ACTING PERSON*, Karol Wojtyła discusses how performing an action can bring about personal fulfillment. In relation to work, moreover, action has the ability of promoting self-realization, as Wojtyła later explains in his encyclical *Laborem exercens*. Twentieth-century philosopher Josef Pieper, in his book *Leisure: The Basis of Culture*, offers another perspective: man cannot obtain his actualization without partaking in leisure. And so it may appear at first glance that Wojtyła and Pieper stand at odds with one another. According to Wojtyła and Pieper, respectively, labor and leisure are essential to personal fulfillment. Can these views be reconciled or in some way harmoniously understood? I explore this question within the contours of this paper.

## *Self-Actualization and Fulfillment*

Karol Wojtyła asserts in *The Acting Person* the “crucial significance of fulfillment in an action”<sup>1</sup> whereby the person and the action are not “two separate and self-sufficient entities”<sup>2</sup> but are “a single, deeply cohesive reality.”<sup>3</sup> According to Wojtyła, a person “is the subject of both existence and acting,”<sup>4</sup> and the fulfillment of an action

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<sup>1</sup> Karol Wojtyła, *The Acting Person* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, Inc., 1969), 149.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

“corresponds to self-determination.”<sup>5</sup> When a person performs an action, “we see the person as the subject and the agent while the action itself appears as a consequence of the efficacy of the agent.”<sup>6</sup> Simply, Wojtyła describes action as “the effect of the person’s efficacy”<sup>7</sup> that proceeds from his or her existence, that is, the action derives from the person who is acting.

A man is the subject of his action, and his action aims both outward and beyond itself and, in the mode of self-determination, inward: action “reaches and penetrates into the subject, into the ego, which is its primary and principal object.”<sup>8</sup> For this reason, Wojtyła emphasizes the relation of persons and their actions rather than the effects our actions have on the outside world, although these are not mutually exclusive or unrelated.

Human actions once performed do not vanish without a trace: they leave their moral value, which constitutes an objective reality intrinsic to the person, and thus a reality also profoundly subjective.<sup>9</sup>

Morality, Wojtyła argues, is concretized only through our performance of actions, and “it shows also an ontological status, namely, an existential reality, the reality of fulfillment in an action that is appropriate solely to the person.”<sup>10</sup> Every act a man performs shapes him morally as a person, and the value of that action – for good or bad – permeates human society. Wojtyła further describes this cohesive element, that is, morality, between a man and his performing an action: “As an existential reality morality is always strictly connected with man as a person. Its vital roots grow out of the person. Indeed, it has no

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 150-51.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

existence apart from man's performance of actions and his fulfillment through actions."<sup>11</sup>

Any action has no agent other than the one acting, and one's conscience is what Wojtyła describes as the linchpin of self-fulfillment, for conscience informs and is the source of action. He writes: "An analysis of conscience also reveals the strict connection between transcendence and fulfillment. . . . In fulfilling an action, I fulfill myself in it if the action is 'good,' which means in accord with my conscience. By acting in this way, I myself become good and am good as a human being."<sup>12</sup>

Since we have been endowed with an intellect that can discern what is good and true, we may become either good or bad, which means we may or may not reach our self-actualization. According to Wojtyła, self-actualization or fulfillment is the "person's transcendence in the doing of an action";<sup>13</sup> it is "associated with self-governance."<sup>14</sup> This transcendence is what Wojtyła understands as freedom, as dominion over oneself, to do freely what one ought – to choose the good. If one's conscience is formed well, then one's action may bring a kind of personal fulfillment. Fulfillment, Wojtyła insists, is reached only through our good actions, while nonfulfillment derives from bad actions informed by moral evil. He states, "[T]rue fulfillment of the person is accomplished by the positive moral virtuality of the action and not by the mere performance of the action itself."<sup>15</sup> Even though the person may be acting, if the action is morally evil, it will inevitably lead to nonfulfillment, the deliberate negation of what is good and true, which thus inhibits self-actualization.

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 234-35.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

*Wojtyła's Philosophy of Work*

From his writings on action, Wojtyła establishes a framework to understand labor in his encyclical *Laborem exercens*, in which he develops the important theme of work. He writes: “[W]ork means any activity by man, whether manual or intellectual, whatever its nature or circumstances.”<sup>16</sup> Hence, the general category of action naturally includes the activities of work, and work is an essential part of what it means to be human. Wojtyła describes work and man’s relation to it much the same as man’s relation to action:

Man has to subdue the earth and dominate it, because 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. *As a person, man is therefore the subject of work.* As a person he works, he performs various actions belonging to the work process; independently of their objective content, these actions must all serve to realize his humanity, to fulfill the calling to be a person that is his by reason of his very humanity.<sup>17</sup>

By contrast, Marxist ideology understands man as a creation of work or even the material from work, an understanding that puts man at the service of work and thereby a meaningless product of it. In *Sign of Contradiction*, Wojtyła remarks that: “Present day philosophy, Marxist especially . . . puts *praxis* before ‘theory’ and deduces all its explanation of reality – especially the reality of man – from that *praxis*, that is to say from the work by which man ‘created himself’ within nature.”<sup>18</sup> Here Wojtyła comments on Marx’s ideology of work, which is undergirded by a false materialist anthropology. Wojtyła advocates a

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<sup>16</sup> *Laborem exercens*, 2.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>18</sup> Karol Wojtyła, *Sign of Contradiction* (New York: St. Paul Publications, 1979), 139.

Catholic philosophy of work that stems from a very different anthropological premise, namely, that “man cannot be reduced to matter alone.”<sup>19</sup> Work, Wojtyła describes, is an activity, a *praxis*, of man as the acting person.<sup>20</sup> Wojtyła further emphasizes the intrinsic moral worth that work possesses: “All human work, and all that it produces in any field of endeavor, shapes the human personality; but it does so not because of the objective worth of what it produces but because of its own moral worth – a distinctly human and personal element in all man’s activities, man’s *praxis*.”<sup>21</sup>

The acts we do in our work have value, according to Wojtyła, because it is *we* who are doing them. Wojtyła writes: “[T]he basis for determining the value of human work is not primarily the kind of work being done but the fact that the one who is doing it is a person.”<sup>22</sup> By virtue of being human persons created in the image of God, we possess and transfer immense dignity through our actions and particularly our labor. However, this truth about our dignity does not mean that *all* work promotes human flourishing. Wojtyła affirms that human work, from the objective point of view, should be ranked or qualified.<sup>23</sup> While we achieve and affirm our dignity through work, our work must be informed by morally good actions in order to bring about our fulfillment.

### *Pieper’s Philosophy of Leisure and Deproletarianization*

Leisure, Pieper says, is the basis of culture, and it is something people have gravely distorted through their efforts and attitudes toward work. Leisure is “an attitude of non-activity, of inward calm, of

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> *Laborem exercens*, 9.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

silence,”<sup>24</sup> an ability to let things go and ultimately to accept or receive reality. Pieper adds that leisure is not itself nonactivity, but a disposition similar to that of “the tranquil silence of lovers.”<sup>25</sup>

Leisure, it must be clearly understood, is a mental and spiritual attitude – it is not simply the result of external factors, it is not the inevitable result of spare time, a holiday, a weekend or a vacation . . . for leisure is a receptive attitude of mind, a contemplative attitude, and it is not only the occasion but also the capacity for steeping oneself in the whole of creation.<sup>26</sup>

To be at leisure first requires consciousness, not idleness, to receive. Pieper gives the example of allowing our minds to rest contemplatively on “a rose in bud, a child at play, a divine mystery,”<sup>27</sup> where we become truly rested and restored “as though by a dreamless sleep.”<sup>28</sup> Secondly, Pieper also considers leisure as the opportunity to engage with things that bring us life, such as a walk through the woods, creating music, praying in the silence of a chapel, exercising, reading a great book, or being with loved ones. The prerequisite for such leisure is the ability to be at peace with oneself and the world, to let things happen as they come, and to be at home in silence. Silence, Pieper explains, is the cornerstone of leisure that allows us to apprehend reality: “[O]nly the silent hear and those who do not remain silent do not hear.”<sup>29</sup> Ultimately, Pieper notes, leisure is about *receiving* life as a gift, not about achieving life through things such as the esteem of others, monetary success, or relationships.

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<sup>24</sup> Josef Pieper, *Leisure: The Basis of Culture* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1952), 43.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 43-44.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 47-48.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

When work becomes an activity of sheer effort and social functionality or service, it stifles that surge of life that emerges from contemplation, which leisure promotes. Leisure may be associated with our “down time” and our rest, but it is proper to understand that it is an end in itself, and never a means. It is something we engage in not for the sake of work, notwithstanding the fact that it may bring new vigor to our work.

What we may call a “workaholic” culture is what Pieper refers to as “proletarianism,” in which people are “fettered to the process of work.”<sup>30</sup> Pieper proposes three potential sources of this problem. The first is lack of property, as many in the modern world own nothing but their power to work, a point that Pius XI commented on in his encyclical *Quadragesimo anno*. The second is that some people are “entirely subject to economic forces”<sup>31</sup> or held by the orders of others. This phenomenon can be observed in a totalitarian state where, whether the individual possesses property or not, he can be tied to work through coercion. The third cause, Pieper claims, is the inner impoverishment of individuals whose lives are filled with work and who, Pieper remarks, “can no longer act significantly outside [their] work, and perhaps can no longer even conceive of such a thing.”<sup>32</sup> Pieper notes that these three problems are not mutually exclusive. In particular, Pieper notes that the last two “mutually attract one another and in doing so intensify each other.”<sup>33</sup> States committed to “total work” draw in the spiritually impoverished, those who can envision no mode of self-fulfillment other than by total service and “thereby achieve the illusion of a life fulfilled.”<sup>34</sup>

As Pieper details the crisis of proletarianism, he also emphasizes the need to return to our true selves through what may be called

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

deproletarianization. Pieper explains deproletarianization as widening and refining one's perspective on life, beyond the 9-to-5 rhythm of the workaday world and "the confines of merely servile work."<sup>35</sup> In doing so we develop an understanding of the proper role and value of work. Pieper decries the popular idea whereby "the process of production itself is understood and proclaimed as the activity that gives meaning to human existence."<sup>36</sup> To counter such a distorted view of work as that which promotes human flourishing, Pieper offers three suggestions. The first is to offer wage-earners the opportunity to save as well as to acquire property. The second is to make efforts to limit the power of the state. Finally, the third is to overcome the inner impoverishment of individuals by encouraging people to give of themselves fully to others.<sup>37</sup> As proletarianism demonstrates, people suffer greatly when their work is compartmentalized and prioritized to the exclusion of the other important dimensions of their lives. Pieper would urge the commitment to leisure, the wellspring of authentic rest, so that we may be at peace and not compelled to grasp – and then receive reality as it is.

*"Actus Personae": The Vessel of Reconciliation*

There appears to be a stark contrast between Wojtyła's and Pieper's views concerning what constitutes human fulfillment: work versus leisure. How can it be that leisure is the basis of culture, as Pieper asserts, *and* work is essential for self-actualization, as Wojtyła maintains? The answer to this question first lies in a closer analysis of action. Both work and leisure are necessary for one's actualization *because both stem from the action of the individual*. Wojtyła explains, "I fulfill myself through good; evil brings me non-fulfillment. . . . [S]elf-fulfillment is actualized in the act by its moral value, that is, through

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 59.



good which occurs only in the act as such (*per modum actus*).<sup>38</sup> The good action, invested in both work *and* leisure, will be the means by which we fully become ourselves. Work and leisure do not have to function as exclusively as they are posited. In fact, they cannot; both are needed for the fulfillment of the human person, based in our good actions, which have a moral impact *within* the acting person.

As both work and leisure are necessary for self-fulfillment, they must interact successively—and continuously. Dr. Michael Naughton of the University of St. Thomas has extensively explored the relationship between work and leisure and has concluded: “[I]f we don’t get leisure right, we will not get work right; if we don’t get the Sabbath right, we won’t get Monday right; if we don’t get the culture right, we won’t get the economy or politics right.”<sup>39</sup> At the crux of it, Naughton explains that “what we *receive* is what we *give*.”<sup>40</sup> Essentially, Naughton’s thought is that leisure – partaking in true rest – is the precise ground for what and how we give in our work: “What enables us to give authentically, in a way in which we do not exhaust ourselves, in ways that we don’t give ourselves too cheaply, in a way that we ‘find ourselves,’ is premised on how we receive.”<sup>41</sup> Without the lifeblood of leisure acting as the basis of culture, work becomes frenetic and compulsive, misconstrued and fruitless. Interestingly, Pieper’s book was originally published in 1948, during Germany’s post-World War II reconstruction. At such a time of rebuilding, it may have seemed inappropriate to publish a book on leisure. However, Pieper deeply understood that without an attitude of repose, of contemplation of the

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<sup>38</sup> Karol Wojtyła, “The Person: Subject and Community,” 287.

<sup>39</sup> Michael Naughton, “Josef Pieper’s *Leisure the Basis of Culture: An Integration of the Contemplative and Active Life*,” available at <https://www.stthomas.edu/media/catholicstudies/center/ryan/curriculumdevelopment/theologicaethics/NaughtonTeachingNote.pdf>, 18.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

good, true, and beautiful, without receptivity to reality, there would be no culture from which to build. The same holds true today.

As we act for the sake of moral goodness stemming from a deep place of contemplation, we bring about greater self-realization and help to develop those around us. This point is expressed in the Second Vatican Council document *Gaudium et spes*:

Just as human activity proceeds from man, so it is ordered towards man. For when a man works he not only alters things and society, he develops himself as well. He learns much, he cultivates his resources, he goes outside of himself and beyond himself. Rightly understood, this kind of growth is of greater value than any external riches which can be garnered. . . . Hence, the norm of human activity is this: that in accord with the divine plan and will, it should harmonize with the genuine good of the human race and allow people as individuals and as members of society to pursue their total vocation and fulfill it.<sup>42</sup>

Similarly, the deproletarianization that Pieper advocates cannot be attained merely by means of living wages, ethical politics and government, or even providing opportunities for leisure. Some deeper effort is required in this pursuit of leisure: “It [leisure] can only be fruitful if the man himself is capable of leisure.”<sup>43</sup> It is not enough to be given space and time for leisure, man must apply himself to leisure, to occupy or, we might even say, to work his leisure. This occupation of leisure finds its origin in action. As when we work, we need to be deliberate about applying ourselves dutifully to leisure.

As mentioned above, first and most importantly we need silence to settle our busied selves. This silence includes a willful consent to accept reality: to look at oneself and the world honestly, to engage receptivity and accept grace. Leisure may also include participating in

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<sup>42</sup> *Gaudium et spes*, 1053.

<sup>43</sup> Pieper, *Leisure*, 63.

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activities that usher forth new life in oneself, such as reading, painting, or spending time with others. It is vital to remember that leisure cannot be instrumentalized to obtain health or emotional security, or even to rescue a withering culture. Why? Because authentic leisure is the celebration of God's goodness "and cannot be realized until it takes place for its own sake."<sup>44</sup> Leisure naturally finds in itself an antidote to *acedia*, the deadly sin of restlessness, indifference, and despair – as it affirms cheerfully not only one's own existence but also the whole of reality and indeed God himself. From this posture of leisure, this posture of receptivity, can we submit ourselves helpfully and healthily to work; from receiving can we give, because we know *who* we are giving – and for what end. This harmonious interplay of work and leisure, stemming from man's actions that are informed by the good, permits a true sense of rest and peace in God, who is Rest and Peace Itself.

*Conclusion*

As Karol Wojtyła describes in *The Acting Person* and his other writings concerning action and labor, our actions, when informed by the good, fulfill us and advance human society through our work. In *Leisure: The Basis of Culture*, Josef Pieper explains that we become ourselves by deliberately occupying our leisure and contemplatively beholding reality as it is given to us. This self-actualization can occur so long as leisure precedes work; leisure must indeed be the basis of activity so that from our peace we can pour out fruitfully in self-gift through our work. As such, we are able to leave our meaningful mark on creation. We are not Marxist cogs in the machine, but indeed persons capable of changing the world for good or for bad. When the typical work day has suddenly shifted from 9-to-5 to 24/7, leisure must be respected and reclaimed if ever we are to realize our personhood through our work. We are, through our actions tied to the very fiber

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

of our personhood, able to fulfill ourselves through our work *and* our leisure, so long as we understand their friendship and apply ourselves accordingly.