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Democracy, Humane Economics, and a Culture of Enterprise*

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The current global economic crisis has once again raised the prospect that free-enterprise economics is a deeply flawed system unable to support a robust democratic citizenship. In agreement with the argument that robust citizenship necessitates certain economic preconditions, this article offers a defense of the importance of a culture of enterprise for the support of democratic citizenship. Such a relationship presupposes a humane economics grounded on a rich anthropology of the human person and human goods as well as a relationship among this anthropology, enterprise, and the entrepreneur.

Robust citizenship is the lifeblood of any democratic community. The practice of such citizenship requires the existence *inter alia* of certain economic preconditions that provide the needed wealth foundations for its existence. Effective citizenship, as Przeworski (1995) argues, requires certain "economic prerequisites" such as a "modicum of material security, education, and access to information" (35). The literature addressing the importance of education and access to information for democratic citizenship is vast (e.g., Glaeser, Ponzetto, and Shleifer 2007; Chapman and Hunt 2006; Héritier 2003; Rizvi 2003; Englund 2000; Murdock and Golding 1989). The economic preconditions of a robust democratic citizenship have received much attention. Some scholars have suggested that free-market economies best provide the needed moral, political, and wealth foundations not only for a robust citizenship but also for human flourishing (e.g., Röpke 1998, Beetham 1993, Hayek 1988, Friedman 1962). Others have vigorously proposed that free-market economies not only facilitate catastrophic conditions but also perpetuate inequalities and political apathy and, therefore, that the needed

correctives are the virtues of some type of state intervention (e.g., Epstein 1996, MacPherson 1973, Tawney 1964). While the debate regarding which economic arrangement best facilitates a thriving political life and humanity is certainly not new (and perhaps to some is akin to the proverbial "beating a dead horse"), it is by no means trivial or untimely in our current era. As Blaug and Schwarzmantel (2000) argue, "democracy is faced with deep problems in both theory and practice" given the "complexity of modern politics and the increasing globalization of the market" (2). If democracies are not merely to survive but to thrive, then a robust citizenship is needed that allows participants to fulfill their human capacities in the quest and realization of the common good. The question that must be considered is whether a free-enterprise economy is still best suited for this important task.

As has already been suggested, much scholarship exists both praising and bemoaning the role of free-enterprise economics in advancing effective citizenship. Given the empirical realities of the failed state-controlled economies of communist regimes in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (along with their destruction of human life), there is a lack of intellectual and moral weight to arguments that suggest that state intervention and planning of economic and civic life is in any way virtuous or even desirable. Yet, it must be noted, that the current global financial crisis has led many to suggest that the end of free-enterprise economics is near and that arguments supporting the latter also lack any moral weight (Somers 2008, Stiglitz 2008, Faiola 2008. See also Kovel 2007 and Gibson-Graham 2006). Critics from both the left and the right have suggested with renewed vigor that enterprise economies are deeply inhumane, fostering a culture of selfishness, oppression, and narcissism that leaves nothing untouched. For those on the religious or secular left, the answer is simply to think of novel ways in which to use state power to foster equality and human development. While these proposals are unique given the current context, there is ultimately nothing new in these schemes.

Those on the right have advanced a number of different options. Some scholars have provided vigorous defenses of traditional free-market economics as supportive of or in harmony with a Christian anthropology (e.g., Novak 1982). These scholars or *harmony theorists* see no inherent contradiction between free-market economic principles and Christian theological commitments. Others have maintained strong reservations against free-market economies and have advanced alternative economic arrangements based on explicitly Christian theological frameworks that are nonsocialist in nature and at odds with traditional free-market assumptions (e.g., Waalkes 2008, Cavanaugh 2003, Walker 2003). Such scholars or *incongruity theorists* consider free-market economics and Christianity to be mutually exclusive. Both of these approaches ultimately seek to justify

economic arrangements on theological grounds in order to provide a synthesis between deeply held religious commitments and worldly practices.[1] While these approaches are important in their own right, they suffer from two serious weaknesses. Both ignore the predominant secular pluralism that characterizes contemporary democratic arrangements—an entrenched pluralism that devalues religious foundationalism. Such pluralism leaves religiously based arguments for economic arrangements as unrealistic at best and trivial at worst. Second, both positions do not grapple seriously with the argument of the left that suggests that free-market arrangements are immoral and inhumane. Harmony theorists presuppose the congruity between free-market capitalism and Christian theology and then seek to elaborate on the positive ramifications of this supposed congruity. Incongruity theorists are unwilling to provide internal theoretical solutions to the problems of free-market economics, opting instead for external critiques and resolutions. Rather than addressing free-market economics on its own terms, incongruity theorists patch a new piece of cloth to an old garment hoping that the former will hold and the latter will not tear any further.

This article considers the importance of free-market economic arrangements in providing some of the needed foundations for robust democratic citizenship. In particular, focus is given to what constitutes a humane economy and how this relates to the often-overlooked yet essential roles of enterprise and entrepreneurship in fostering and advancing some of the needed foundations for the pursuit of the democratic common good. Thus, this article is divided into three areas of concern. The first advances a theory of humane economics grounded on a robust moral anthropology. It is argued that a human economics must be rooted in the nature of human beings and thus is both limited and dynamic. Thereafter, attention is given to the importance of enterprise and to some of the key characteristics of a culture that nurtures a humane creativity and entrepreneurship. Lastly, consideration is given to the role of the entrepreneur in a humane economic system. As is shown, entrepreneurs are essential for economic development, yet they are theoretically homeless and often *persona non grata*. The arguments advanced herein do not suggest that the free-enterprise system is flawless. The free-market system is flawed because its creators themselves are flawed. It does, however, seek to alleviate such flaws and their effects through internal considerations rather than external mechanisms of control or supervision.

What Is Humane Economics?

At its core, economics is about human action. It involves the human activity of producing, distributing, and consuming goods and services. This is not an amoral activity or a brute fact of human life. Economic activity is teleological in nature. Human beings produce goods and services for certain reasons. Entrepreneurs venture into the unknown to acquire particular goals. The very act of choosing a specific end for one's economic activity while rejecting other ends characterizes economic behavior as being fundamentally moral in nature. Human beings choose ends due to an intrinsic desire for wellbeing. They rank and prefer some ends in lieu of others based on some moral criteria of what is good. Herein one discovers that human beings cannot but be moral, that they find themselves in a universe that situates one and all within a moral nexus, and that they have the freedom and agency to select how they participate within this universe. Human existence is on all sides a moral existence. Consequently, economic activity is itself a moral art.

It would be a great mistake to conceive of economic activity as moral, yet carried out by morally autonomous actors. Human beings live within a communal reality rooted in certain natural facts that circumscribe human existence. How every community utilizes these natural facts provides the content of mores, traditions, art, and values—in essence, the stuff of culture. No community can deny the reality of these natural facts. Perhaps the most basic of these, one on which every community is built, is that of human insufficiency. To put it differently, every human being needs other human beings. To deny this natural fact of human existence, so Aristotle teaches, is to confirm that one is either a beast or a god.[2] Human life occurs within a context of human needs, and it is the natural duty of human beings to assist each other in the fulfillment of these.

Insufficiency is endemic to the human condition. Some of the most essential aspects of human life cannot be realized without the community and contributions of others. Procreation, knowledge and education, virtue, wealth, scientific progress, and religion, just to name a few, require cooperation. Here the contributions of classical natural-law ethics are important. Human beings are moral creatures naturally inclined to pursue goodness, self-preservation, family life, intellectual and moral education, knowledge of God, and love of God and of one's neighbor. The moral vision of classical natural-law ethics is that of a community of people that is responsible for and desires the moral, intellectual, and material flourishing of all—selves and *others*. It is a community of interdependent needy people and not just a community of independent, self-authenticating, atomized "unencumbered" selves.[3] Perhaps the chief tenet of natural law is human insufficiency.

Economic activity is perhaps the best-known mechanism through which every community attempts to remedy much of human insufficiency. As Aristotle understood it, economics, or the art of household management, is aimed at satisfying everyday needs. In the *Politics*, Aristotle argued that the level of need satisfaction depended on the number of households within a community. Communities composed of a few households or just a household alone could only meet simple everyday needs (i.e., survival). Other more complex communities composed of many households (i.e., villages) could meet more needs and thus provide for a higher standard of living than mere survival. A community composed of several villages (i.e., polis) could provide the highest standard of living or that which Aristotle termed "living well"—a life of virtue buttressed by sufficiency.[4] Aristotle's account of economics suggests the essential role that it plays in human fulfillment. Economics is to facilitate human flourishing both through its goods and services as well as through the space it provides for moral development and realization.

It is crucial to understand that Aristotle's concept of economics is qualitatively different from its modern counterpart. While economics encompassed the most essential human relationships as well as property acquisition, its primary purpose was to provide for moral capital. Property, a type of wealth, was important but only as a means for living and living well. As Aristotle argued, "Since property is part of the household, the science of property acquisition is also a part of household management (for we can neither live nor live well without the necessities)."[5] Aristotle's economic thought is rooted within an appreciation of the nature and potential of human beings—one that considers some of the goods of human action as noneconomic in nature, thereby placing natural boundaries on economic practice. The dilemma of Aristotle's time, one that still plagues the contemporary scene, is the unnatural use of economics. This was illustrated in the raw pursuit of unlimited wealth acquisition. As Aristotle suggests, the end of this type of acquisition had no limits—it was the continual gain and possession of money. Aristotle's discussion of this all too common anomaly is related to his observations regarding the moral nature of humans.[6] For Aristotle, the unending pursuit of profit betrayed a deep confusion of what it meant to live well. Wealth seekers were preoccupied with living, not living well. Their insatiable appetite for life led to an insatiable appetite for that which sustained it. This moral shortcoming even afflicted those who did understand that living well involved more than just physical gratification. Human beings enslaved to this insatiable appetite, so Aristotle argues, will try anything to acquire wealth, even employing all of their natural powers and virtues in unnatural ways to obtain it.

The exposition just given is not meant to deny the value and importance of profit, wealth, and free-market economic arrangements.[7] There is absolutely no doubt that free-market economics has provided material prosperity for large segments of the world and has raised the standard and quality of life for many human beings.[8] At the same time, however, one would be at pains to deny that modern economic theory and practice reject the communal and moral dimensions of human beings as important guides for economic consumption and production. Contemporary economic theory and practice continue to advance the view of the unattached individual who is concerned only for his or her expansion.[9] Established on this dangerous anthropology, modern economics has also nurtured the perilous tendency of the commodification of all that exists—a propensity to make all human goods and wants *economic goods and wants*.[10]

"The commodification of everything" or what Jürgen Habermas has termed "the colonization of the lifeworld" is the rapid and seemingly unending transition from a market economy to a market society.[11] In such a scenario, "the market and its categories of thought … dominate ever more areas of our lives," areas such as "our most intimate relationships … [and] … our understanding of what it means to be human."[12] As David Loy (2000) has suggested, the present economic system has been given a religious dimension because it is used as a means of spiritual fulfillment. Contemporary economic practice seems to promise a type of "salvation" or "another way to solve our unhappiness" through the allurement that acquisition will bring about happiness.

Such critiques alert one to the other quintessential danger of contemporary economic theory and practice—the destruction of human identity. The market emphasizes an ethic of consumption where human identity is equated with being a consumer, where human agency is conceptualized as economic volition, and where human fulfillment is characterized as the acquisition of goods and wealth. The pleasure of acquisition is such a strong force that human beings themselves have become its object. The human self has increasingly fallen prey to the ethic of consumerism whereby it is considered a commodity. As some have suggested, market system categories are now used as means through which to understand and communicate the human self and human identity.[13] The self thus becomes a marketable object whose identity must be consciously branded and reinvented to ensure satisfaction of market demands. This makes humanity nothing more than a cheap and meaningless commodity.

Here, once again, it is important to note the contributions of classical natural-law ethics. As mentioned earlier, natural law advances a number of goods for human action—community, family life, education, love, knowledge of God, and so forth. These goods of human action are hierarchical in nature and require

economic as well as noneconomic and nonmaterial fulfillment. This suggests the existence of natural limits to economic activity as well as an antidote to the modern tendency toward the commodification of life. Likewise, the natural hierarchy of human goods presents the opportunity and privilege of a holistic human existence where human beings can pursue their full humanity through a life of material, social, and moral goods.

Empathy and a Culture of Enterprise

If, as suggested earlier, democracies are not merely to survive but to thrive, a robust democratic citizenship is needed that allows participants to fulfill their human capacities in the quest and realization of the common good. Such robust democratic citizenship can only occur within the context of a humane enterprise economy. Such an economy cannot exist, much less thrive, without a supportive culture. Thus, one must inquire as to what type of culture can sustain such economic arrangements. Michael Novak uses the term *moral ecology* to encompass "the sum of all those conditions … that teach us the habits necessary for human flourishing and support us in their practice" (Novak 2004, 31). Novak interchangeably uses the terms *moral ecology* and *culture* to address the climate of a person's socialization that places an indelible print on his or her moral development. If it is the case that a humane economics is rooted within a robust anthropology that identifies and categorizes the goods requisite for human fulfillment, then aspects of the requisite moral ecology must be intimately related to such anthropology as well. Furthermore, such a culture could provide direction and purpose to the practices of enterprise and entrepreneurship—vital aspects of an inventive economy that facilitates moral capital.[14]

Novak is particularly helpful in providing a point of departure in this discussion. In *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism* (1982) and particularly in *The Universal Hunger for Liberty* (2004), he attempts to craft aspects of a moral ecology that would support human flourishing and facilitate what he terms a "global ecology of amity" (Novak 2004, 35). In doing this, Novak advances an anthropology that would provide the most basic requirements for such a culture. This anthropology is based on what Novak sees as four cardinal virtues or hinge virtues—cultural humility, truth, human dignity, and solidarity.[15] For Novak, all of these virtues have universal appeal and are ultimately founded on universal friendship and communion, but this is not mere human fellowship. As Novak argues, this moral ecology or "Caritapolis" is the "City of Communion," the "participation in the love of God that the Christian gospel announces … not solely [the] City of human communion, one human with another, but of humans also with God;

love shared among all" (Novak 2004, 45). Novak considers divine love as the ultimate foundation for a culture that could support human well-being. Thus, the virtues of cultural humility, truth, dignity, and solidarity are ultimately expressions of divine *caritas*.

There is something deeply invigorating and humane regarding the call to reposition culture within the nexus of divine *caritas*. Yet, there is something deeply problematic as well. Its association with the Christian faith that, on the one hand provides it with its strength, may also lead to its ultimate rejection. Accepting the call to divine *caritas* is made possible through faith. If this is so, then it appears that only the faithful have the potential of fully actualizing Christian love. Only the faithful can be the true lovers of the world. This leads to the suggestion that a humane economics and the sound moral ecology on which it is built are most fully within the purview of Christians alone.[16]

The dilemma one faces in these types of discussion is ultimately one of foundations. Novak cautiously advances a Christian foundation to his cultural and economic program, one that requires a faith in the Christian gospel. This basic requirement may ultimately undo the acceptance of this program in a world where religious faith is increasingly seen as the cause of sociopolitical destabilization. Is there another foundation that could bring about the type of culture that could support a humane economics while at the same time being grounded upon a foundation that is authentically Christian, yet does not require faith for one to participate and function therein? Here, it is advantageous to consider the notions of empathy and self-awareness as elaborated in the works of Simone Weil and within Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1982).

As suggested earlier, one of the most basic facts of human existence is that of insufficiency. Human beings are born needy and wanting. To be human is to be incomplete, to suffer natural destitution, and to be incessantly subject to the vicissitudes of fortune. Likewise, to be human is to also have the expectation that our needs be fulfilled. All of these may be easily forgotten in prosperous societies, but they are incontrovertible facts of the human condition. The full moral impact of our condition can only be gained through a diligent process of self-awareness. As Simone Weil reminds us in *Gravity and Grace* (1979), "We have to try to cure our faults by attention and not by will" (169). Weil vigorously defends the importance of being aware of the human condition as a precondition for personal and social moral growth. Yet, Weil contends, too often human beings either forget or deceive themselves. As she writes:

> We are well aware that the good which we possess at present, in the form of wealth, power, consideration, friends, the love of those we love, the well-being of those we love, and so on, is not sufficient; yet we believe that on the day

> when we get a little more we shall be satisfied. We believe this because we lie to ourselves. If we really reflect for a moment we know it is false. Or again, if we are suffering illness, poverty, or misfortune, we think we shall be satisfied on the day when it ceases. But there too, we know it is false; so soon as one has got used to not suffering one wants something else. (Weil 1968, 148)

Self-awareness calls human beings to consider their lowly estate and contextualizes their desires for satisfaction. Furthermore, as Weil reminds us, self-awareness leads to an empathic understanding of others: "At the bottom of the heart of every human being, from earliest infancy until the tomb, there is something that goes on indomitably expecting, in the teeth of all experience of crimes committed, suffered, and witnessed, that good and not evil will be done to him. It is this above all that is sacred in every human being" (Weil 2000, 51).

For Weil, doing good unto others requires a deep and abiding interest in the other. As she tells us, "no man can say … "You do not interest me" … to another without committing a cruelty and offending against justice" (Weil, 50). Empathy is necessary for humane human relationships. While it is predicated on one's insufficiency and natural desire for fulfillment, it is ultimately the result of self-awareness and self-knowledge. Weil hearkens her readers to be aware of their own humanity, to be cognizant of their own cravings for goodness, to be mindful of the other.

In similar fashion, Adam Smith argues that the empathic understanding and treatment of others is based on "conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation" and thus defines empathy as one's "fellow-feeling with any passion whatever" (Smith 1982, 9–10). For Smith, it is through an act of imaginative self-awareness that we enter into the joys and sufferings of others. A lack of such empathy, so Smith argues, is not just "but want of politeness," it is "real and gross inhumanity" (1982, 15). Entering into the sentiments of the suffering exemplifies the virtues of "candid condescension and indulgent humanity" (Smith 1982, 23). In his discussion of the social passions, Smith argues that "generosity, humanity, kindness, compassion, mutual friendship and esteem, all the social and benevolent affections" are "of more importance to happiness than all the little services which could be expected to flow from them" (1982, 38–39). Empathy is perhaps the most fundamental and craved-for currency of human relationships. It is equally felt and desired not only by the "tender and delicate," so Smith assures us, but by the "rudest vulgar of mankind" (Smith 1982, 39). Its offspring, the loving treatment of others, leads Smith to argue that it contributes to "the chief part of human happiness" (Smith 1982, 41).

Both for Smith and for Weil, self-awareness is crucial for one's ability to treat others with empathy. Only when one is aware of one's own human predicament can one then begin on the path toward personal moral development and true social betterment. A misunderstanding of the self leads to disastrous results. It fosters a degenerative forgetfulness of one's own limited nature as well as a dehumanization of the other. As Weil suggests, this lack of self-consciousness births a perverse and enslaving satisfaction rooted in an imaginary erasure of the natural limits placed on all human beings. If one forgets one's limited and insufficient condition, then one becomes blind to the insufficiency of others and indentured to corrupting ambition. In a similar vein, Smith argues that the common cause that corrupts moral sentiments is the blind contempt humans lavish on the needy and the worship given to "proud ambition and ostentatious avidity" (Smith 1982, 61–62). It is this adulation of wealth and riches that not only leads to a callous social life but also results in an empty human heart.

Smith and Weil emphasized the importance of self-knowledge and its resulting empathy as vital prerequisites to a humane society. Both were fully aware of the importance of economic arrangements and practices that supported a humane existence. Yet, both equally condemned a misplaced attention on wealth, acquisition, and power divorced from an empathic understanding of the human condition. It was only an intimate understanding of the self that resulted in humane actions and institutions. Divorced from such an understanding, human beings forget the limits of the human condition and come to believe that human flourishing is the result of the acquisition of temporal wealth because the latter seems to safeguard their natural desire for dignity, worth, and satisfaction.

A Culture of Enterprise and the Entrepreneur

How then do humane economics and a culture of empathy relate to enterprise, entrepreneurship, and a culture of enterprise? First, it is important to qualify these terms. In discussions of enterprise, it is most often the case that the term refers to some type of business venture. The term itself is commonly defined as a generic though risky and challenging undertaking that calls forth a spirit of courage, judgment, and daring on the part of the undertaker. This undertaker is referred to as the entrepreneur—the person who embarks on and undertakes the risky venture.[17] If one qualifies enterprise to the realm of business, then the result is what Michael Novak has called an "enterprise association" (Novak 1997, 36). Such an association: "Consists in providing particular goods or services to the larger human community … [it] springs from the creative act of its founders … [with the] aim … to provide this good or service at a price attractive to potential

customers, in the hope of making a sustainable profit over time. (Novak 1997, 36). Novak further argues that enterprise associations are essential for liberty and a vibrant civil society. This is so because such associations create employment, provide goods and services, generate wealth, and are independent from the state. As such, a business enterprise "is a private social instrument … for the moral and material support of other activities of civil society" (Novak 1997, 37).

What is puzzling about Novak's account of an enterprise association is that there is a deep ambiguity concerning its nature and outcomes. Novak argues that the private character of enterprise associations allow them to provide the material and moral support needed for a vibrant civil society. The dilemma is that both of these aspects of enterprise associations can only be partially traced to some of the characteristics that Novak outlines. The creative and productive nature of enterprise associations does indeed provide for the material goods necessary for the space to pursue moral wellbeing. Perhaps this space is what Novak terms *liberty* and considers as "moral support" for other social activities. This outcome alone, however, is accidental and not essential to the nature of an enterprise association as Novak defines it. As he himself states, citing Michael Oakeshott, an "enterprise association is built to attain quite particular purposes; often purposes that tend to come around again quite continuously, as restaurants are built to feed people day after day. Enterprise associations are focused, purposive, instrumental, and executive: they fix a purpose and execute it" (Novak 1997, 89–90).[18]

On this definition, it appears to be the case that an enterprise association is essentially a wealth-and-commodity producing entity and that liberty and other types of moral support are accidental, not necessary to the results of its operations. On this view, a culture of enterprise and entrepreneurship is really nothing more than a very narrow aspect of human life emphasizing creativity, productivity, and wealth with no direct and necessary connection to human flourishing. The suggestion that liberty both sustains and is advanced by enterprise and entrepreneurship and, furthermore, that such liberty is a precondition for human flourishing may be a debatable question. If human flourishing is ultimately related to affluence, then the values of liberty and enterprise are to be protected and pursued. However, what if it is the case that liberty and affluence could actually contribute more to mediocrity and vulgarity than to excellence and beauty?

A culture of enterprise must be one that not only supports a humane economics but also one that cultivates humanity deep within every member and institution. A humane economics cannot be fostered without humane individuals and humane institutions. One cannot expect a humane economics when enterprise associations are disconnected from the larger moral nexus of human flourishing or when these associations are only accidentally related to a thin and debatable precondition

of human flourishing, namely, liberty. Liberty alone, though important, may not be enough, and the mixture of liberty and democratic capitalism has helped to facilitate a contemporary culture that is prosperous yet profane, liberating yet licentious, and vivacious yet vulgar. This is a mass culture of mediocrity, a culture that according to Leo Strauss "can be appropriated by the meanest capacities without any intellectual and moral effort whatsoever and at a very low monetary price" (Strauss 1959). It is the culture of "specialists without spirit and voluptuaries without heart" (Strauss 1959). This mediocrity is not an economic one. Rather, it is a moral one. This has been and continues to be the default by-product of democratic capitalism and its culture of enterprise. If the ultimate motivation of such a culture and economic arrangement is the harnessing of creativity and productivity through wealth generation, then no other result should be expected.

What then should a culture of enterprise be? What is the proper role of the entrepreneur within such a culture? To support human flourishing through a humane economics, a culture of enterprise must have as its primary moral foundation a holistic account of human insufficiency. It must advance the principle that human beings have *unattainable noneconomic needs* as well as *limited economic needs*. The human need for love, virtue, compassion, justice, and goodness are unbounded and constitute the core of happiness. Human beings always need to love and be loved—to do good, expect good, and be good. Yet, one cannot ever have too much love, too much goodness, or too much compassion. The need for wealth, property, and material goods is attainable and therefore limited. Human beings do not need unlimited amounts of wealth, property, and material goods. It is possible to attain the necessities and still flourish. This suggests a second foundation of a culture of enterprise, namely, that the realization of human flourishing requires both *essential and necessary goods*. Essential goods are those without which it is impossible to flourish given the kinds of beings that humans are. Such goods, for example, are virtue and human relationships. Necessary goods are the basic material articles that support one's ability to pursue the essential goods. Necessary goods are instrumental and are never final ends of action. It is possible for one to pursue *eudaimonia* without the necessary goods, albeit with much difficulty, yet it is impossible to realize *eudaimonia* without the essential goods. Here it is helpful to remember Henry David Thoreau's observation:

> It would be some advantage to live a primitive and frontier life, though in the midst of an outward civilization, if only to learn what are the gross necessaries of life.… By the words, *necessary of life*, I mean whatever, of all that man obtains by his own exertions, has been from the first … so important to human life that few, if any, whether from savageness, or poverty, or philosophy, ever attempt to do without it. The necessaries of life for man …

> may … be distributed under the several heads of Food, Shelter, Clothing, and Fuel; for not till we have secured these are we prepared to entertain the true problems of life with freedom and a prospect of success. (Thoreau 1966, 7–8 [italic original])

Both of these foundational principles would be the initial steps to creating a culture of enterprise that values a humane existence and provides for the needed economic arrangements to support it. It resituates economic theory and practice within a context of limited needs and in doing so assists in the socialization of individuals toward lives of material modesty and balance. Further, it embraces a humane anthropology where human beings are prized for who they are and can become and not solely for how they can be used or what they can acquire. One last aspect of a culture of enterprise needs to be addressed—perhaps the most important of all—the role of the entrepreneur.

As this article began, attention was called to the popular characterization of the entrepreneur as a *persona non grata*.[19] Academically, it has been difficult to define the essence of the entrepreneur and his or her activity. Within the history of economics, the entrepreneurial class has never had a home. Since Cantillon's formal introduction of the term in 1755, economists have been at pains to situate entrepreneurs within explanations of economic arrangements and processes.[20] Theories abound concerning whether or not entrepreneurs are nothing more than skilled workers or producers of capital, whether they are Nietzschean *Übermensch* motivated by the will to conquer, whether they are the preeminent risk takers, whether judgment rather than management characterizes them, or whether or not innovation and experimentation are their mantras.[21] This theoretical homelessness is mirrored by sociopolitical concepts of the entrepreneur as a necessary evil—an individual that a society has to tolerate if only for the needed function he or she performs.[22]

The homelessness of entrepreneurs may be due in part to the fact that the entrepreneurial task is a complicated one. As Metcalfe suggests: "Entrepreneurship is not one-dimensional, the entrepreneur comes in shades of many different kinds, and the wide range of possible entrepreneurial characteristics is hidden until they are expressed in action, so that it is presumptuous to conceive of a simple, unifying approach" (Metcalfe 2006, 59–60).

Entrepreneurs are leaders, innovators, creators, producers, and wealth generators. Every entrepreneur functions within different social and economic milieus that demand different adaptive behaviors. Is there one characteristic or set of characteristics that should be a part of all entrepreneurs, that should embody the very essence of The Entrepreneur?

Here, one can suggest that the entrepreneur should be considered as the empathic wisdom lover and creator, the individual who is aware of the potential and limits of human nature and creates enterprise associations that support this potential and respect these limits. As some scholars have argued (e.g., Metcalfe 2006), the essential feature of enterprise is the introduction of novelty into society, a feature that presupposes creativity. This feature, along with productivity and wealth generation, must be situated within the empathy so ardently defended by Simone Weil and Adam Smith and the love and pursuit of wisdom that so characterizes not only the greatest minds of the ancient world but, even more importantly, the essence of Christianity. As Gumpert (2005) suggests, most of today's entrepreneurs are fueled by creativity and the desire to succeed, yet many lack the wisdom necessary to contemplate and act holistically and discerningly. Only when entrepreneurs become wisdom lovers and wisdom lovers become entrepreneurs[23] can we begin to expect to move away from a culture of enterprise whose chief concern is material prosperity and a rudderless liberty to a culture of enterprise that advances a humane economics and with it positions human beings on the path of human flourishing. This may indeed appear to turn the world upside down, but perhaps it is the other way around. As Shel Silverstein reminds us in his children's poem *Reflection*:

Each time I see the Upside-Down Man
Standing in the water,
I look at him and start to laugh,
Although I shouldn't oughtter.
For maybe in another world
Another time
Another town,
Maybe HE is right side up
And I am upside down.[24]

Perhaps the economic institutions and practices that we have inherited and into which we have been socialized cause us to consider such a call to love wisdom and pursue empathy as upside-down thinking. Maybe, just maybe, it is us who are upside-down and the love and pursuit of wisdom and empathy are right side up.

Notes

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1. It should be noted that this same motivation underlies the efforts of the religious left. Liberation theologians and social gospel advocates also advance arguments of state intervention on behalf of social justice on the basis of some theological vision.

2. See *Politics*, 1253a28–30. The full passage reads as follows: "Anyone who cannot form a community with others, or who does not need to because he is self-sufficient, is no part of a city-state—he is either a beast or a god." Aristotle, *Politics*. Trans. C. D. C. Reeve. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1998).

3. I borrow these lines from G. Moreno-Riaño, "Natural Law and Modern Economic Theory," *Journal of Markets and Morality* 8, no. 2 (Fall 2005): 387–413. On the point of the atomized individual, see C. Taylor, "Atomism," in *Communitarianism and Individualism*, ed. S. Avineri and A. de-Shalit (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 29–50. I borrow the term *unencumbered* from M. Sandel, "The Procedural Republic and the Unencumbered Self," *Political Theory* 12, no. 1 (1985): 81–96.

4. Aristotle, *Politics*, 1252b27–30.

5. Ibid., 1253b22–25.

6. This discussion occurs in Aristotle, *Politics*, 1257b31–1258b7.

7. The following exposition borrows from G. Moreno-Riaño, "Natural Law and Modern Economic Theory," *Journal of Markets and Morality* 8, no. 2 (Fall 2005): 387–413.

8. On this point, see P. Berger, *The Capitalist Revolution: Fifty Propositions about Prosperity, Equality, and Liberty* (New York: Basic Books, 1986). Even theologians and Christian economists agree with the fact that the modern market structure is perhaps the best or most "viable alternative … as an organizing principle for an economic system in a complex society." See R. Blank, "Viewing the Market Economy Through the Lens of Faith," in *Is the Market Moral?* ed. R. M. Blank and W. McGurn (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2004), 12 and J. Schneider, *The Good of Affluence* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

9. As Blank suggests, "the nature of individual decision making [that occurs] within competitive markets [assumes that] both producers and consumers … care only about themselves, not about each other" (Blank 2004, 12). For an excellent exposition of

this same trend as seen through the lens of criminal justice, consider H. Boutellier, "Victimalization and restorative justice: moral backgrounds and political consequences," in *Restorative Justice and the Law*, ed. L. Walgrave (Portland: Willan Publishing, 2002), 19–30. As considered from the lens of downshifting and theories of the simple life, see D. J. Burns, "The Rise and Fall of the Consumer Culture: The Growth of Downshifting as an Alternative Lifestyle," in *Downshifting: A Theoretical and Practical Approach to Living a Simple Life*, ed. F. Gandolfi and H. Cherrier (Hyderabad: Icfai University Press, 2008), 165–85.

10. *The Hedgehog Review*, an influential contemporary journal of culture and ideas, devoted an entire issue to this serious problem. See "The Commodification of Everything," *The Hedgehog Review* 5, no. 2, 2003.

11. For an excellent discussion of this concept see P. Sedgwick, *The Market Economy and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). Also, consider S. White, *The Recent Work of Jürgen Habermas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

12. See "The Commodification of Everything: Editorial Introduction," 5.

13. See, for example, J. E. Davis, "The Commodification of Self," *The Hedgehog Review* 5, no. 2 (Summer 2003): 41–49.

14. I borrow the term *inventive economy* from M. Novak, *The Universal Hunger of Liberty* (New York: Basic Books, 2004).

15. This discussion appears in Novak, *The Universal Hunger for Liberty*, 35–47.

16. It should be noted that Novak does argue that the "unbeliever or believer" should contribute to the effort of crafting a global moral vision. Given the prerequisite of faith, it is difficult to grasp what sort of contributions these would be. See, Novak, *The Universal Hunger for Liberty*, 227–29.

17. The identification of enterprise and entrepreneurship with various accounts of risk-taking (e.g., Cantillon 1964), innovation (Schumpeter 1961) and judgment (e.g., Knight 1971; Casson 2003) is problematic because these characteristics do not provide for a clear distinction of enterprise and entrepreneurship from other mundane, immoral, or illegal activities. See R. Cantillon, *Essai sur la nature du commerce en general* (New York: A. M. Kelley, 1964), M. Casson, *The Entrepreneur: An Economic Theory* (Cheltenham, U.K.: Edward Elgar, 2003), F. H. Knight, *Risk, Uncertainty and Profit* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), and J. A. Schumpeter, *The Theory of Economic Development: An Inquiry into Profits, Capital, Credit, Interest, and the Business Cycle* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961).

18. Metcalfe (2006) defines enterprise as "the activity of introducing new activities, production methods and products into an economy" (59). This seems to stress

creativity and productivity and ignores profitability. Later on, Metcalfe argues that the essential feature of enterprise is the introduction of "novelty into the economic structure at any level" (61). See J. S. Metcalfe, "Entrepreneurship: An Evolutionary Perspective," in *The Oxford Handbook of Entrepreneurship*, ed. M. Casson, B. Yeung, A. Basu, and N. Wadeson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 59–90.

19. Ricketts (2006) suggests that in recent years "Entrepreneurship is … gradually finding a somewhat more formal place in economic theory." Yet, he does admit that this does not in any way suggest "that a general theory of entrepreneurship has become accepted" (p. 55). M. Ricketts, "Theories of Entrepreneurship: Historical Development and Critical Assessment," in *The Oxford Handbook of Entrepreneurship*, ed. M. Casson, B. Yeung, A. Basu, and N. Wadeson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 33–58.

20. Ricketts (2006) provides an excellent overview of this problem.

21. The entrepreneur as Nietzschean *Übermensch* can be compared to Ayn Rand's *Prime* or *Immovable Movers* or Mises' pioneering geniuses or *Heroes*. See A. Rand, *Atlas Shrugged* (New York: Signet, 1997) and L.v. Mises, *Human Action* (Chicago: Contemporary Books, 1966).

22. Sirico (2001) makes this same argument when he writes "on the rare occasion when opinion makers, especially moral leaders, refrain from denouncing the "rapacious appetite" and the "obscene and conspicuous consumption" of these capitalists, about the best that one can expect is that business people be tolerated as a necessary evil." See R. Sirico, *The Entrepreneurial Vocation* (Grand Rapids: The Acton Institute, 2001), 6. Sirico decries the pungent characterizations that typify entrepreneurs in popular culture, literature, politics, and even among religious leaders and laity.

23. I have adapted this sentence from Socrates' well-known pronouncement in book 5 of Plato's *Republic* concerning wisdom and political power.

24. See S. Silverstein, *A Light in the Attic* (New York: HarperCollins, 2000), 29.

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