

The Judeo-Christian Foundation of Human Dignity, Personal Liberty, and the Concept of the Person

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The Impact of Religion on Economics

The great sociologist of economics Max Weber (1864-1920) demonstrated to the scholarly world that religious convictions alter economic systems. Against the Marxists, Weber showed that profound currents, stirring deeply in the human spirit, shake human beings from their bodily torpor in remarkably different ways, with notable effects upon economic systems. Although he is most famous for *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904), Weber examined the interplay of religion and economics in many books on the history of various cultures.¹ Because of the abundance of literature available today on “the clash of civilizations”² and the real-world consequences of different formations of the human spirit through religion and culture, Max Weber’s work may be more influential than ever.

Indeed, Weber’s work suggests an important perspective for approaching the topic of human dignity. Empirical research led Weber to the hypothesis that Christianity (in one of its forms) and, behind Christianity, Judaism shaped human expectations in ways favorable to economic development. Stated in this general way, Weber’s hypothesis has been solidly confirmed by a century of further research, although modified in important ways by other findings. For example, Professor Randall Collins has shown how, from about A.D. 1100 to 1350, the international system of Catholic monasteries produced several important characteristics of a capitalist economy: an explosion of economically useful inventions, the rule of law, a rationalized system of responsibilities, among others.

These [Cistercian] monasteries were the most economically effective units that had ever existed in Europe, and perhaps in the world, before that time. The community of monks typically operated a factory. There would be a complex of mills, usually hydraulically powered, for grinding corn as well as for other purposes. In iron-producing regions, they operated forges with water-powered trip-hammers; after 1250 the Cistercians dominated iron production in central France. Iron was produced for their own use but also for sale. In England, the entire monastic economy was geared toward producing wool for the export market. The Cistercians were the cutting edge of medieval economic growth. They pioneered in machinery because of their continuing concern to find labor-saving devices. Their mills were not only used by the surrounding populace (at a fee) for grinding corn but were widely imitated. The spread of Cistercian monasteries around Europe was probably the catalyst for much other economic development, including imitation of its cutthroat investment practices.³

In my own work, on the conceptual rather than the empirical level, I have attempted to demonstrate that the theological category of *imago Dei* (which affirms that every single human is made in the image of God) implies a specific kind of “calling” or “vocation” that Weber oddly neglects, the vocation to be creative, inventive, and intellectually alert in a practical way, in order “to build up the kingdom of God.”⁴ It is not so much the asceticism of biblical teaching as its call to creativity and inventiveness that accounts for the dynamism of Jewish and Christian civilization, including economic dynamism.

Most economists accept the principle that “ideas have consequences.” Nonetheless, it has been a convention ever since the Enlightenment to regard as less than consequential the immense explosion of theological ideas during the era A.D. 1100-1350, an explosion that erupted in the breakthrough mentioned above. This is a serious practical error. Scores of thousands of men and women entered monasteries and launched highly rationalized and disciplined economic ventures. Moreover, at least five concepts crucial to the theme of human dignity and human liberty were brought to light during that period: the concepts of *person*, *conscience*, *truth*, *liberty*, and *dignity*. Although some shadow of each of these terms can be found in the pre-Christian period, no full understanding of any of them existed that would enable a fashioning of a new practical order, a new civilization, the new “city on the hill” that the medieval *civitas* was taught to emulate. It was the work of the medieval schoolmen that can be credited with developing these crucial tools.

In recognition of this achievement, Nobel laureate Friedrich Hayek (1899-1992), following Lord Acton, called one of these monks, Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274), “the First Whig,” that is, the founder of the party of liberty in human history.⁵ Many commentators have also noted that in *The Divine Comedy*, one of the greatest works of poetry in any language, Alighieri Dante (1265-1321) created both a dramatic rendition of the Thomist vision and a testament to the high importance an entire civilization attached to human liberty. Dante had wholeheartedly accepted the fact that every story in the Bible, Jewish and Christian, gathers its suspense from the free choices that confront every human being. How humans use their liberty determines their destiny; how we use our freedom is the essential human drama. Liberty is the axial point of the universe, the point of its creation. That is the premise of *The Divine Comedy* and the ground of human dignity.

Human Dignity

What, after all, is human dignity? The English word *dignity* is rooted in the Latin *dignus*, “worthy of esteem and honor, due a certain respect, of weighty importance.” In ordinary discourse, we use *dignity* only in reference to human persons. (But, of course, in the Bible it is also used of other special persons or “spiritual substances,” that is, beings capable of insight and choice such as God, angels, and demons). Both Aristotle and Plato held that most humans are by nature slavish and suitable only to be slaves. Most do not have natures worthy of freedom and proper to free men. The Greeks did not use the term *dignity* for all human beings, only the few. By contrast, Christianity insisted that every single human is loved by the Creator, made in His image, and destined for eternal friendship and communion. Following Judaism, Christianity made human dignity a concept of universal application. “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me” (Matt. 25:40). Christianity made it a matter of self-condemnation to use another human as a means to an end. Each human being is to be shown the dignity due to God because each is loved by God as a friend. Each has God as “a father.”

Obviously, many students of economics are neither Christians nor even believers in God. They, therefore, do not hold such things or look at the world in precisely this way. Nonetheless, as a matter of intellectual history, it is of great utility to discover the origin of concepts. Conventionally, intellectual history has been undertaken from the point of view of the Enlightenment, with a certain insouciant dismissal of what went before

(as part of the “darkness,” over against which the “enlightenment” is placed in contrast).⁶ But this is to gloss over too many deeply buried presuppositions and hidden premises. Today, as the Enlightenment recedes ever further back in history and as its own limitations and failures become clearer, the intellectual arrogance of its early generations has dissipated. Its own inadequacies, too, are under judgment.

In particular, the partisans of the Enlightenment have not weathered well the assaults of nihilists, relativists, and post-modernists, especially in the last two decades. Reason, it sometimes seems, is inadequate for its own defense. In Western universities, those who loathe the Enlightenment as an expression of “white male hegemony”—“phallic,” “patriarchal,” from the “right side of the brain,” and “oppressive”—seem to outnumber, or at least to intimidate, those who remain reason’s supporters. Even many supporters of reason today express their commitment to it, not as a self-confident assertion of truth as of yore but as a personal preference; they speak in the language of faith. Partisans of the Enlightenment were successful in pushing aside religious people—which they neatly did by changing the rules to “Religion within the bounds of reason alone.” But they have not been successful in meeting the assault on their other flank from those who do not share any faith in reason at all.

It is both fascinating and frightening in our time to watch the high priests of the Enlightenment being unceremoniously disestablished and mocked; fascinating because so they once treated the earlier establishment; frightening because the twentieth century began with the abandonment of reason (in nazism and socialism) and one does not wish the twenty-first century to repeat the twentieth.

Among the figures of the Enlightenment, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) is probably the one who most clearly spoke to the concept of human dignity. He did so in the light of a categorical imperative that he discerned in the rational being, and he made famous this formulation of the principle of human dignity: “*Act so that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of another, always as an end and never as a means only.*”⁷ This is not, of course, a description of the way in which humans always (or even mostly) treat other human beings. It is, in the Kantian scheme, a prescription, an imperative, a duty. Whereas, in other schemes, it might appear as an aspiration, a good to be pursued, an ideal for which to strive.

Still, it is not difficult, I think, to see in Kant’s formulation a repetition in non-biblical language of the essential teaching of Judaism and Christianity: “*Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself*” (Lev. 19:18). “*And this com-*

mandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also" (1 John 4:21). This interpretation of Kant seems correct for two reasons: First, the ancient philosophers of Greece and Rome, before the contact of those regions with Christianity, did not reach this principle. Second, one must note the quiet but strong culture of German pietism in which Kant grew to maturity.

From the point of view of modern history, of course, it seems absurd to say that humans are not means but only ends. In the twentieth century, more than a hundred million persons in Europe alone died by violence, often in a way they could not have foreseen even in their worst nightmares. In our century, history has been a butcher's bench, and the words *human dignity* have often sounded empty.

From the point of view of modern astronomy, too, it seems absurd to imagine the human being as the center of the drama of creation. The earth is far from being the center of the known universe; not even our solar system seems to be at the center, or even to be a major system among the almost innumerable galaxies (such as we see in the Milky Way) already known to us, not to mention many others whose existence we have reason to suspect.⁸ To many, it seems likely that there are other forms of rational life—beings capable of insight and choice—in other galaxies, although no such creatures have actually been detected. What seems beyond doubt, however, is that the human race is tiny and seems insignificant and highly perishable in the vastness known to modern physics. As a secular friend of mine puts it, the cockroaches or even simple bacteria may be more important in the scheme of things than we—and outlast us. So where does modern science leave human dignity? Regrettably, I must refrain from discussing here the "Anthropic Principle" advanced by some physicists who hypothesize that from the very first "Big Bang," so many fundamental contingencies had to be in place for humans to have emerged, as we in fact have emerged, that a consistent pattern of improbable happenings in favor of human life is apparent.⁹

Liberty and Truth

Jews and Christians explain human dignity by pointing to human liberty. For Christianity and Judaism, human liberty is an absolutely fundamental datum of God's revelation to humanity—or, if you prefer, an absolutely central datum of Jewish and Christian philosophy. It is less central to Islam because key Islamic philosophers of the early Middle Ages, such as Avicenna (980-1037) and Averroes (1126-98), developed concepts

from Aristotle in a way that gave God total initiative and power over the human intellect, and thus, over the human will; they pictured the will of Allah as all-mastering. The essence of their theory was that in human understanding it is not the human subject who understands but, rather, the one Agent Intellect in creation, that of the Almighty.¹⁰ This seemed plausible since we often experience as a surprise and a gift an insight that we have for a long time struggled to attain.

In the thirteenth century, many Christian philosophers and even theologians at the university of Paris and elsewhere first encountered Aristotle through these Arab philosophers (many of the original Greek manuscripts had been lost for centuries) and were swayed by the Arab interpretation. Not Thomas Aquinas. He understood immediately that human liberty was at stake. He was also fortunate to have in his hands, through his teacher Albert the Great of Cologne (Albertus Magnus, 1200-80) fresh Latin translations from the original Greek. The fifteen-year struggle of Thomas against the Averroists—who wanted him driven out of Paris—was a decisive event for Christian humanism and for the cause of liberty in the West.¹¹ It fully earned Thomas the title of “the First Whig,” first given him by Lord Acton and later by Hayek.

Because the teaching of the Gospels is intended for Christians in every sort of culture, political system, and time, Christian philosophers are first of all concerned with an understanding of the *interior* act of liberty, only in the second place with liberty as a political and economic act. Confronted with any proposition—of fact, principle, theory, or faith—humans are responsible for the assent or the dissent they give to it. They are responsible for gathering the evidence necessary to make such judgments wisely, for struggling to understand the necessary materials, and for disposing themselves to judge such evidence soberly, calmly, and dispassionately. When they declare a proposition to be true or false, they assert what is true and real. In so doing, they open themselves to counter-argument and challenge from others, in the light of the evidence, over which no one person has total control. In this way, each person is called to be open to the truth of things, to the whole of reality, and each is subject to criticism from those who may be more penetrating, or less one-sided, than they. When human beings reach a judgment, they reveal a great deal about themselves. They are, in effect, under judgment by reality itself, as mediated by the community of inquirers who seek the truth of things.

Thomas Aquinas further noted that in every human act there are two moments. In the first place, human consciousness is open to everything

around us—to, as the Harvard philosopher William James (1842-1910) called it, the whole “blooming, buzzing confusion” of present sensory impressions, memory, emotion, passion, imagination, concept, idea, and expectation. Human understanding cannot focus on all of these things at the same time, at least not directly. Thus, the first human liberty is the liberty of human understanding to *focus* (like a searchlight in the dark chaos) on one thing rather than another. Aquinas called this the liberty of *specification*.¹² Then, as the human understanding focuses on the many materials relevant to its consent or its dissent, another liberty becomes apparent: the liberty involved in reaching a determination that sufficient evidence is at hand for reaching a judgment, and the decision not to evade the evidence but, rather, to be faithful to it—to go ahead and make the judgment. This last step is not to be taken for granted. Often, we dread the evidence mounting before us or the consequences of what we are about to decide. At such times, we are tempted to take evasive action. Aquinas calls this second moment of liberty, the liberty of *exercise*. Thus, even within the inner realm of the soul there are already two moments of liberty.

In the prison literature of the twentieth century, there are many witnesses to the inner drama of these two internal acts of liberty—in the prison reflections of Mihailo Mihailov and Nathan Scharansky, for example, but also in many others. Even when all other external liberties are taken away, even in prison and under torture, the human mind and will retain the power to perform these two acts of liberty. Those who, when all else is lost, cling to the ideal of truth-seeking retain their liberty of specification. They retain their liberty of exercise by being determined not to be complicit in lies. “Purity of heart is to will one thing,” Soren Kierkegaard (1813-55) wrote. To will to be perfectly faithful to the truth of things is to live by purity of heart and to act as a free man or woman even in the most extreme of circumstances.

To move from this profound concept of internal liberty to a projection of the sort of political, economic, and cultural institutions that make pure human liberty of this sort frequent in human lives is a very long step. It requires many generations of social experimentation. It is not to be imagined that the way to building a city of true liberty is a purely rational, abstract, conceptual achievement. Hayek quite rightly calls this “the fatal conceit.”¹³ That conceit was the chief engine of the murderous ideologies of the twentieth century.

The Concept of Conscience

In conjunction with his defense of the interior ground of human liberty, Aquinas also formulated, for the first time, the concept of conscience. *Conscience* is not a term of the ancient Greeks or Romans. Neither is it, exactly, a biblical concept, although many texts in the Bible show the inner conflicts that gave rise to the need for such a concept: “*And it came to pass afterward, that David’s heart smote him, because he had cut off Saul’s skirt*” (1 Sam. 24:5); “*The spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak*” (Matt. 26:40); and “*For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do*” (Rom. 7:19). After Kant, it has become common for modern people to think of the moral life as a matter of duties to be observed—a kind of obedience. But in earlier Christian ages, the moral life was thought of rather as a way to be walked, a set of paths to follow (with the lives of the saints as pathbreakers), an archetype (Christ) to model one’s life upon, an image of a life to be lived out: “*Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me*” (Mark 8:34).

For Thomas Aquinas, the first practical problem of the moral life is to find out what to do in the unique circumstances in which you, a unique, irrepeatable person, now find yourself. The moral life taxes our capacities for practical knowing. Even when we know the model or ideal we are pursuing, the right thing to do now is not always clear. Besides, we sometimes wish to evade clear knowledge, or we prefer to let passion drive us. Afterward, following an act of passion or evasion, we sometimes see clearly what we ought to have done, and feel the bite of remorse. This bite, too, comes from our faculty of practical knowing. Conscience, then, is the habit of practical knowing by which we discern the right thing to do in immediate circumstances, and by which we blame ourselves when we have turned away from this discernment—that is, failed to use the light within us. By frequent failures to use it, and by deliberate abuse of it, we can dim this light and all but extinguish conscience.¹⁴ We can also deceive it, and some of the stratagems by which we deceive our own consciences are so classic that the great Oxford writer C. S. Lewis (1896-1963) set them forth vividly in *The Screwtape Letters*.¹⁵

The Person

Finally, it is useful to mention that the concept of person also entered Western thought by way of sustained reflection on the Bible. For one thing, a concept was needed to name the special kind of spiritual substance capable of acts of insight and choice, such as the human being is—but not

only the human being, but also God and the angels. Physicists speculate these days about whether in other galaxies there is also personal life capable of insight and choice that is not of the human species. In fact, the Bible describes creatures of that sort—many different genera and species of them—and calls them angels and archangels. The idea of many other living species is not unbiblical.

In another context, the concept of person was also needed to express the dual nature of Jesus Christ, who, according to the Bible, has both a human and a divine nature that remains the same. In other words, what is the principle that unites these two natures? This is the historical genesis of the concept of person. Its utility lies in designating what exactly it is in humans that is the ground of their dignity and the source of their free acts of insight and choice. A person is a substance with a capacity for insight and choice and an independent existence as a locus of responsibility. The fifth-century Christian thinker Boethius (c. 480-524) was the first to codify the definition: A person is a *substantia rationalis subsistens*. This concept of the “person” adds a significant new note to the concept of the “individual.” A cat or a dog may be utterly individual and even manifest (in an extended sense) a distinctive personality. Still, cats are not held responsible for their acts, never have to choose a vocation, or a career—i.e., do not qualify as persons. Human beings are persons, as other individual animals are not. “The problem with animal rights,” a friend of mine once said, “is getting the animals to respect them.”

Acquiring this concept of the person was a crucial step for the modern age, for it led directly to the first declaration of human rights in history, when the Spanish missionaries argued that the Indians encountered in the New World were persons of full human dignity, not some inferior species. The missionaries argued that it was sinful before God and contrary to natural law to offend the dignity of the Indians, as many of their compatriots were obviously doing. They pressed their case at the Spanish Court, urging the monarch to rule accordingly.¹⁶ The suit was argued successfully by theologians of Salamanca, the same school of theologians to whom Joseph Schumpeter (1883-1950) and Friedrich Hayek have given credit for many of the pioneering insights into the distinctive features of economic action, as well.¹⁷

This successful lawsuit helps to explain why outside the United Nations building in New York there stands a statue of one of the greatest of these theologians, the founder of international law, Francesco de Vitoria (1486-1546). The public recognition that oppression of the Indians was sinful,

and the public declaration of their rights, alas, did not prevent terrible abuses. This is another indication of the power of the observation by James Madison (1751-1836) in the United States that mere declarations of rights are not enough. Rights are never sufficiently defended by “parchment barriers,”¹⁸ but only by internalized *habits* and *institutions* that incorporate *checks and balances*.

Conclusion: The New Economics

The civilized world is already beginning to celebrate the imminent arrival of the third millennium after the birth of Christ. Since the crucial civilizing ideas of human dignity, liberty, truth, conscience, and person have been slowly developed over the first two millennia after Christ’s birth, and since their development was given a powerful impulsion by Christ’s teaching, it is perhaps not at all unfitting that we should take note of these contributions at this crucial time.

One of the most important contributions of the New Economics is to have focused attention on the primary importance of human capital. The concept of *human capital*, as Nobel Laureate Gary Becker makes clear, includes personal and social habits, as well as the slowly and experimentally developed social practices and institutions that are decisive for economic development.¹⁹ On the role of social trust and others of these social practices, the recent book by Francis Fukayama and earlier ones by Laurence Harrison are highly instructive.²⁰

A second important contribution of the New Economics is to have focussed on *human action* and the *human subject*—that is, on the human person and human liberty.²¹ A third contribution of the New Economics is to have focused on the central role of *choice*—personal choice and *public choice*—in the dynamics of economic life.²²

It is my hope that on all of these important contributions of the New Economics the present reflections have shed some historical and conceptual light. Helping to ground the New Economics in an accurate representation of human history and culture, and thus to engraft it into larger movements of culture, is the distinctive contribution I hope this essay furthers.

Notes

¹ Cf., for example, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, trans. A. M. Henderson

and T. Parsons (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947); *General Economic History*, trans. F. Knight (New York: Collier-Macmillan, 1961); and his unfinished masterpiece, *Economy and Society*, ed. G. Roth and K. Wittich (New York: Bedminster Press, 1968).

² See Samuel P. Huntington's controversial book, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996) and the lively polemic touched off by Pierre Hassner's review "Morally Objectionable, Politically Dangerous" in *The National Interest* 46 (Winter 1996/97): 63–69, with Huntington's response, "Hassner's Bad Bad Review," 97–102.

³ Randall Collins, *Weberian Sociological Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 52–58. Collins also singles out the Cistercians for other economic innovations:

The Cistercians were innovative in numerous respects. They were the first highly centralized organization, following a deliberate plan of expansion throughout Europe. They also established a new form of hierarchy within their organization, a division between the fully ordained monks and a second class of monastic laborers. The latter took oaths of celibacy, poverty, and obedience, but remained illiterate and were ineligible for advance to full monastic rank. The Cistercians were thus divided into a managerial class and a class of manual laborers, both working under religious incentives and subject to a strong asceticism.

Collins, discussing the Catholic Church's role in promoting the rule of law, continues:

If we concentrate on the Church, however, as the "real" government of medieval Europe, the citizenship elements are much wider. For the organization of the Church itself was permeated by the rights and duties of legal citizenship *in that body itself*. To be sure, these citizenship rights were not uniform throughout its ranks. But almost everywhere there was some degree of participatory rule under law. The Pope himself was chosen by election, initially by the people and clergy of Rome, later by a restricted body of cardinals. Similarly, each monastic order elected its own general, or head, and many instituted safeguards in the form of a council of overseers who watched against abuse and had the power to turn him out of office. At a lower level, cathedral chapters elected their own bishops and monasteries their abbots. There was also a strong conciliar tradition within the body of the Church as a whole, which may have been manipulated by strong autocratic Popes but, nevertheless, represented the tradition of collective responsibility for legislation. Powers of election and appointment shifted over time, with lay people becoming excluded and the powers of the Pope increasing. (50)

The Church also played a part in securing a crucial institutional precondition for the mass market: "security from robbers and military predators."

The Church held the doctrine that it was a sin to kill a fellow Christian in secular battle, and attempted to confine military action to Crusades against foreign enemies and domestic heretics. This ban was not very effective, and sins of violence were usually commuted upon payment of penances. But in the 1000s and 1100s, just as the medieval economy was beginning to develop, there was a widespread movement to establish peace. Certain days of the week and times of the year were declared "God's Truce" in the wars among the nobility. More significantly, bishops took the initiative in organizing "peace associations," whose members swore to abjure private violence and also acted to put down robber barons and brigands. Monks and especially wandering friars took the initiative in ending local vendettas. These efforts were only partially successful, and there is no doubt that the volume of trade was kept down by the unsafe conditions that prevailed. But the peace associations and the friars did pave the way in settling the atmosphere of violence, and their gains were consolidated for a while in the 1200s by the strengthening of major secular states. (56).

⁴ Michael Novak, *The Catholic Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: The Free Press, 1993), 1–14, 222–37; *Business As a Calling* (New York: The Free Press, 1996), 18–40, 117–59;

and *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism* (Lanham, Md.: Madison Books, 1991), 36–48.

⁵ Friedrich A. Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 457, n. 4. Hayek notes: "In some respects Lord Acton was not being altogether paradoxical when he described Thomas Aquinas as the First Whig." Acton defined the Whigs as "defenders of liberty who defended it for the sake of religion," *Selected Writings of Lord Acton*, vol. III, ed. J. Rufus Fears (Indianapolis: LibertyClassics, 1988), 536; Aquinas, he observed, provided "the earliest exposition of the Whig theory of the revolution," *Selected Writings of Lord Acton*, vol. I, ed. J. Rufus Fears (Indianapolis: LibertyClassics, 1985), 34.

⁶ The sociologist Robert A. Nisbet noted that:

When we come to the Enlightenment, especially in France, it is fair to say that amid all the diversities of opinion and value in that complex age, there was one conviction on which all the *philosophes* found unanimity: disdain for revealed or institutionalized religion of any kind....

There were, to be sure, differences among the *philosophes*, but they were united by the conviction that revealed religion is a collection of superstitions supportable only so long as man remains ignorant of the truths vouchsafed by modern science and philosophy. The *philosophes* did not see religion as a force proceeding from the very nature of the soul or, for that matter, from the nature of society. They saw religion solely as a set of intellectual propositions on the universe and on man; and since these were manifestly false propositions, their eventual liquidation could be confidently prophesied (and helped along!) through the propagation of faith in reason.

The Sociological Tradition (New York: Basic Books, 1966), 222–33.

⁷ Immanuel Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. L. W. Beck (New York: Library of Liberal Arts, 1959), 428–29. For Kant, "man, and, in general, every rational being, exists as an end in himself."

⁸ As the physicist Paul Davies underscores:

If we are alone in the universe, if the earth is the only life-bearing planet among countless trillions, then the choice is stark. Either we are the product of a unique supernatural event in a universe of profligate over-provision, or else an accident of mind-numbing improbability and irrelevance.

"Physics and the Mind of God: The Templeton Prize Address," *First Things* (August/September 1995): 35.

⁹ On the "Anthropic Principle," which holds that "it's only a very special universe, a universe in a trillion, you might say, which is capable of having had the amazing fruitful history that has turned a ball of energy into a world containing human life," see John Polkinghorne, "So Finely Tuned a Universe: Of Atoms, Stars, Quanta, and God," *Commonweal*, August 16, 1996, 14.

¹⁰ For selections, see Ralph Lerner and Mushin Mahdi, *Medieval Philosophy: A Sourcebook* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1972).

¹¹ An accessible treatment of this struggle can be found in G. K. Chesterton, *St. Thomas Aquinas: The Dumb Ox* (New York: Image Books, 1956), 66–96. For a more recent treatment, see Ralph McInerney, *Aquinas Against the Averroists: On There Being Only One Intellect* (Purdue: Purdue University Press, 1993).

¹² On the distinction between specification and exercise, see Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1963), Ia2ae, Q.24, a.6.

¹³ See *The Fatal Conceit: The Errors of Socialism*, ed. W. W. Bartley III (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 21, 27, 49, 75, 83. Hayek defines the fatal conceit tersely as "the idea that the ability to acquire skills stems from reason." In fact, Hayek argues, "it is the other way around: our reason is as much the result of an evolutionary selection process as is our morality," 21. Hayek is seeking to undermine what he calls the "constructivist fallacy":

The errors of constructivist rationalism are closely connected with Cartesian dualism, that is, with the conception of an independently existing mind substance which stands outside the cosmos of nature and which

enabled man, endowed with such a mind from the beginning, to design the institutions of society and culture among which he lives.

Law, Legislation and Liberty, vol. I (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), 17.

¹⁴ On the Christian understanding of conscience, see Eric d'Arcy, *Conscience and Its Right to Freedom* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1961). Brian Davies describes Aquinas' teaching on conscience:

First, he says, we start with principles grasped by virtue of *synderesis*. Then we add judgments about what sort of actions we are thinking about on any given occasion. We might, for example, judge that such and such an act is a case of theft. Finally, we draw a conclusion concerning the goodness or badness of the act in question. This drawing of the conclusion is what Aquinas means by 'conscience' (*conscientia*). For him, therefore, conscience consists of applying general principles to the case in hand and with recognition of what kind of action we are dealing with. The work of conscience is to use principles grasped by *synderesis* to determine what is to be done, or whether what we have done is right or wrong.

The Thought of Thomas Aquinas (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 235. For Aquinas, conscience could even tell us to deny Christ, yet still must be respected:

Not only may what is neutral take on the character of good or bad, but good can take on the character of evil, and evil the character of good, and all this because of the way an object is apprehended by the mind. Take an example: to avoid fornicating is good, yet the will is not set on this course save in so far as it is recommended by reason as good. If a mistaken reason presents it as bad, then the will pursues it as wearing the aspect of evil. The act of will, then, will be bad, since it is willing evil, not indeed what is evil in itself, but what is evil by another factor, namely, the reason casting it in that part. Take a similar example: to believe in Christ is good in itself and necessary for salvation; all the same, this does not win the will unless it be recommended by reason. If the reason presents it as bad, then the will reaches to it in that light, not that it really is bad in itself, but because it appears so because of a condition that happens to be attached by the reason apprehending it. That is why Aristotle speaks of a man being directly incontinent when he abandons right reason and being indirectly incontinent when he abandons reason even when it is wrong-headed.

Summa Theologiae, 1a2ae, Q.19, a.5.

¹⁵ New York: Barbour & Co., 1985.

¹⁶ Arguing vigorously to the Spanish Court for the humane treatment of non-Europeans faced with forced conversion, the Spanish missionary Bartolomé de las Casas (1474-1566) wrote:

What love, affection, esteem, reverence, would they have, could they have, for the faith, for Christian religion, so as to convert to it, those who went as they did, who grieved, who raised their eyes, their hands to heaven, who saw themselves, against the law of nature, against all human reason, stripped of their liberty, of their wives and children, of their homeland, of their peace?

"Human Dignity Before Hobbes and Locke: A Condemnation of Abuses Against Natural Law," *Crisis* (May 1994): 38. This text was drawn from Bartolomé de las Casas, *The Only Way*, ed. H. R. Parish, trans. F. P. Sullivan, S.J. (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), 208.

¹⁷ See Joseph Schumpeter, *History of Economic Analysis*, ed. E. B. Schumpeter (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), where the author notes: "The very high level of Spanish sixteenth century economics was due chiefly to the scholastic contributions." 165; Hayek, in turn, observes that the tradition of "liberty under the law"

by the end of the sixteenth century ... had been developed by some of the

Spanish Jesuit philosophers into a system of essentially liberal policy, especially in the economic field, where they anticipated much that was revived only by the Scottish philosophers of the eighteenth century.

New Studies in Philosophy, Economics and the History of Ideas (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 123. See also Douglas A. Irwin, *Against the Tide: An Intellectual History of Free Trade* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 21–25, and Alejandro A. Chafuen, *Christians for Freedom: Late Scholastic Economics* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986).

¹⁸ Evoking the need to respond with institutional protections to the “encroaching nature” of power, which, if unchecked, tends to concentrate into an “overruling influence,” Madison writes in *Federalist #48*:

Will it be sufficient to mark, with precision, the boundaries of these departments in the constitution of the government, and to trust to these parchment barriers against the encroaching spirit of power?

James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and John Jay, *The Federalist Papers*, ed. I. Kramnick (New York: Penguin Books, 1987), 309.

¹⁹ For Becker, consult *Human Capital* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993). There he offers this definition:

I am going to talk about a different kind of capital. Schooling, a computer training course, expenditures on medical care, and lectures on the virtues of punctuality and honesty are capital, too, in the sense that they improve health, raise earnings, or add to a person’s appreciation of literature over much of his or her lifetime. Consequently, it is fully in keeping with the capital concept as traditionally defined to say that expenditures on education, training, medical care, etc., are investments in capital. However, these produce human, not physical or financial, capital because you cannot separate a person from his or her knowledge, skills, health, or values the way it is possible to move financial and physical assets while the owner stays put.

In his 1992 Nobel lecture, Becker picked up the theme again:

Human capital analysis starts with the assumption that individuals decide on their education, training, medical care, and other additions to knowledge and health by weighing the benefits and the costs. Benefits include cultural and other nonmonetary gains along with improvement in earnings and occupations, whereas costs usually depend mainly on the foregone value of the time spent on these investments. The concept of human capital also covers accumulated work and other habits, even including harmful addictions such as smoking and drug use. Human capital in the form of good work habits or addictions to heavy drinking has major positive or negative effects on productivity in both market and nonmarket sectors.

“Nobel Lecture: The Economic Way of Looking at Behavior,” in *The Essence of Becker*, ed. R. Febrero and P. S. Schwartz (Stanford: Hoover Press, 1995), 640.

²⁰ See Francis Fukuyama, *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity* (New York: The Free Press, 1995), as well as Lawrence E. Harrison, *Who Prospers: How Cultural Values Shape Economic and Political Success* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), and *Underdevelopment Is a State of Mind: The Latin American Case* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1985).

²¹ See the great work of Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1949).

²² On public choice, a representative work is James M. Buchanan, *Cost and Choice: An Inquiry in Economic Theory* (Chicago: Markham Publishing, 1969). Michael Beaud and Gilles Dostaler define public choice in a recent survey of economic thought:

As the theory of human capital had done for the choices of the individual in his private life, the theory of public choice uses microeconomic tools to study the behaviour of individuals in administration and in po-

litical life, as citizens and decision makers, and to analyse public finances and public economics. As in the goods market, agents (who may be interest groups) for example, meet in a political market, each trying to maximize their private interests, here with governmental means.

Economic Thought Since Keynes: A History and Dictionary of Major Economists (Aldershot, England: Edward Elgar Publishing, Ltd., 1995), 121.