

Editorial

Economic Personalism

This theme issue of *Markets and Morality* on economic personalism coincides with two significant events in the life of the Center for Economic Personalism. The first event is the gathering of scholars at the Interdisciplinary Congress for the Development of Economic Personalism, August 9-12, 2001, in Grand Rapids, Michigan. The combined reflection of both the speakers and the participants developed the “Statement of Principles for Economic Personalism,” which can be found at the conclusion of the Congress proceedings. The second event is the publication of the *Foundations of Economic Personalism* series by Lexington Books (www.lexingtonbooks.com) in the series *Religion, Politics, and Society in the New Millennium*.

This issue of *Markets and Morality*, the Congress proceedings, and the *Foundations of Economic Personalism* series are united by the belief that Christian theology provides the intellectual resources to build an adequate and relevant anthropology of the person to be employed in economics. If Christian scholars truly desire an economy that is free, humane, and character forming, it is essential that they fully engage the discipline of economics. It was to facilitate such an engagement that the Acton Institute created the Center for Economic Personalism, which has worked steadily since its inception in 1996 to increase scholarly awareness of the concept of economic personalism. The purpose of the Center is to generate scholarship that outlines a path toward a free and humane economy grounded in a Christian anthropology of the person.

So, then, what is economic personalism? From the beginning, scholars associated with the Center have sought to bring ever-increasing clarity to the concept of economic personalism. The result of which has been to understand economic personalism in three divergent but mutually overlapping ways. However, as with any working definition, it is impossible to account for every possible criticism. Therefore, we have chosen to acknowledge this limitation, and, instead, view our definition more as a heuristic device to stimulate further discussion than as a definitive statement of economic personalism. Thus, we offer the following provisional definition of economic personalism. As a *school of thought*, economic personalism is one participant among others in the centuries-old tradition of Christian reflection on the ethical character of socioeconomic life. It is particularly concerned with developing a deeper understanding of the

moral dimension of economic, political, and civil activity. For this reason, it is engaged in promoting a meaningful dialogue between Christian social ethics, the natural-law tradition, and the discipline of economics. On these grounds, economic personalism may also be described as a *method* for thinking through the moral, economic, and political dilemmas posed by the modern world. Finally, as a *philosophical position* (cf. “Statement of Principles”), economic personalism draws from the Christian humanist tradition, and is consequently defined by its desire to help bring about a free and humane economy within a free and virtuous society. It thus functions as a means for bringing the intellectual resources of the Christian moral tradition to the public square.

Using this heuristic device, then, it is possible to isolate a common theme throughout each of our featured articles. In “What Is Economic Personalism? A Phenomenological Analysis,” Gloria **Zúñiga** provides a more complete description of economic personalism as a philosophical position. She holds that economic personalism is an object with three properties: a bearer, an economic content, and a unifying quality called person-mindedness. For her, “economic personalism is economic agency or economic objects connected to human meaning and concern.”

Kevin **Schmiesing** analyzes economic personalism from a historical perspective, showing that it can be understood as “simply another movement within a tradition of thinking much broader and historically richer” than scholars had initially envisioned. In “The Context of Economic Personalism,” economic personalism is presented as an interdisciplinary school of thought, which “aims to provoke integrative thinking among the fields of philosophy, theology, and economics.”

Gabriel **Zanotti**’s objective in “The Finn—Gronbacher Debate” is to provide a hermeneutic analysis of this exchange in an effort to fuse the authors’ “horizons of understanding.”

In “‘Christian’ Economics,” Francis **Woehrling** argues that there is a strong and natural link between the logic of the Christian message and that of the market system. Insofar as Woehrling shows how trinitarian theology provides anthropological supplements to overcome the game-theoretic deficiencies of neoclassical theory, his article can be seen as an example of economic personalist methodology.

In his article on the economic personalism of Luigi Sturzo, Flavio **Felice** insists that the Sicilian priest and founder of the Italian Popular Party developed an intriguing synthesis of classical liberalism, the market economy, and Catholic social thought. Felice contends that Sturzo should be considered among the historical antecedents of economic personalism.

While the term *economic personalism* never appears in Eduardo **Echeverria's** article on the theological foundations of Jacques Maritain's public philosophy, it is clear from his analysis of Maritain's integral humanism that the philosopher embodies the fundamental ideas and spirit of economic personalism. Inasmuch as economic personalism is a means for bringing the Christian moral tradition to the public square, there is a natural connection to Maritain's public philosophy.

Finally, in his article on the concept of transition, Enrico **Colombatto** argues that the traditional approach to transition must be replaced by one that acknowledges, to a much greater extent, the role of the individual over such standard neoclassical inputs as capital formation, trade and labor specialization, and foreign aid. "Since societies are shaped, or at least, influenced by groups of individuals, it seems reasonable to pay special attention to the way in which individual preferences evolve." Colombatto's analysis and criticism of the neoclassical concept of transition may, in fact, portray what Gloria Zúñiga has in mind when she refers to the essence of economic personalism as "a filter of person-mindedness."

In this issue, discerning readers will note that a variety of often contrasting views about the purpose and project of economic personalism are outlined in some depth. We would, therefore, urge those who would like to take issue with any of these points to submit papers as a way of furthering the discussion.

—Stephen J. Grabill