

# ON TRIVIALIZING THE LIVES OF “ORDINARY PEOPLE” IN LIBERAL SOCIETIES

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“[A]ction is more dramatic, precisely *because of* the natural love of God and the good lying at the heart of freedom.”



Professor Francesca Murphy, in a recent article, makes an odd case for drama in the economic lives of “ordinary people” in liberal societies—by emphasizing how little is actually going on in their lives.<sup>1</sup> Her essay misconstrues the beginning, the middle, and the end of human action, and in the process ignores what are among the most significant debates in Catholic fundamental theology at and since the Second Vatican Council. The essay also backs into a theological version of Adam Smith’s “invisible hand” argument. While Smith thought blindness to larger human ends in market activity—in favor of self-interested gain—would lead merely to overall greater profit, Murphy believes such blind market activity “foreshadows, in a natural way, the super-

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1. Francesca Murphy, “Is Liberalism a Heresy? Why Liberalism and a Market Economy Are Based on Christianity,” *First Things* 264 (June/July 2016): 39–45.

natural exchange of gifts—my very self to God, and my self in union with him in return” (42).

Taking the occasion of Murphy’s argument, my intention in this article is to address, in light of the Catholic tradition, key assumptions regarding the nature of freedom and human action as conceived in liberal (economic) order.

Professor Murphy begins her discussion by insisting that we should “act in and through the givens of our historical moment” (39). Of course no responsible Christian thinker would deny this. But how is this to be understood in relation to economic life in modern liberal societies?

Murphy affirms a peculiar genius in liberalism’s approach to market exchanges. The first component of her argument is primarily descriptive. “Buying and selling,” she says, are “a driving force and expressive feature of modern societies, because the clever play of concealment and exposure through language and gesture it entails fits our social, dramatic natures like a glove” (40). “Human nature is expressed in [the] serious play of exchange—the brinksmanship of negotiation, the uncertainties of market conditions—which liberal philosophies capture in their emphasis on freedom and its drama” (40). Indeed, this serious play for Murphy ascends to lofty heights: “[T]he deepest truth of our market economy and its drama of exchange is not *getting* but *giving*. The movement of ‘making an offer’ in the marketplace foreshadows, in a natural way, the supernatural exchange of gifts” (42). What is the nature of this giving that lays the groundwork for supernatural union? Murphy answers: “The market economy involves an exchange of goods in which both parties benefit. The seller trades his goods for what *he* really wants, payment, and the buyer hands over his money for what *he* really wants, the goods. Because they obtain what they desire, both buyer and seller gain more than they give” (40).

In a word, says Murphy, “only liberal societies fully affirm this process of discovery,” a discovery that “cannot be made until every last free choice is on the table and in full view of all, which is why human nature is dramatic” (44). “[O]nly liberal societies recognize that we need to risk ourselves in ventures of our own choosing. . . . It’s in the vulnerable give-and-take of the marketplace that reality most often pierces our self-protective fantasies and convenient deceptions” (44).

Second, Murphy criticizes philosophies that in her view lead to the denial of the liberal genius as she has described it: those, namely, in which “the play of exchange is inflated into a metaphysical drama rather than a human one” (40). She finds such views especially among German philosophers like Kant, Hegel, and Nietzsche. But she also ascribes similar tendencies to what she terms “the *Communio* school of theology” (43).

Murphy’s argument, then, is driven by a concern that reading metaphysics into market activity will rob that activity of the real drama that obtains in the market as understood on its own terms. Striking in this regard, however, is that Murphy herself appeals to a definite metaphysics of human nature in defense of liberal freedom. Her description and claims regarding the genius of liberal economics, in other words, as well as regarding the drama operating in the liberal market, presuppose the soundness of her own (implied) metaphysics of human action. We begin, therefore, by looking at this metaphysics.

Murphy acknowledges that “[n]atural law may be able to tell us what cannot be in accord with human nature,” but she says that “it cannot reveal to us what most fully accords with our nature, the specific way in which each of us is brought into fellowship with God” (44). Blondel led thinkers like de Lubac “toward a rediscovery of history, and thus of human subjectivity. The human subject is a free actor, and the ends or goals of freedom, the human goods at which it rightly aims, are not simply *objective goods*, out there for us to take hold of in cognition” (44). “Our striving for the good . . . is not based on a pure, un-tinctured grasp of ‘the good’” (44). “We are called to act in the full light of knowledge of the natural law, and of Mother Church’s teachings, of course. But we must also figure out what it is God wants us to do in each *next step*. It is this deep, existential inscrutability of persons, and the enigma of right choices, which we see reflected in a liberal society, one that makes space for both political and economic freedom” (44).

According to Murphy, “the *Communio* school” holds the view “that liberal modernity betrays a basic pattern required for human flourishing.” According to this pattern, “we know something about the truth of human nature as a given, and . . . this knowledge must take precedence over freedom. A chap sees the

target, the good, a sitting duck at which human nature aims and fires" (44). The problem, she says, recalling Blondel, is that though "[a] given human nature exists, and it is in and through this human nature that human freedom acts," still "humanity is constituted through an ongoing series of actions" (44). Blondel (and de Lubac), Murphy argues, "would deny that we can see 'human nature' ahead of us" (44). "How could we have advance, conceptual knowledge about how each of us, as individual persons, is called to live? Can we see the very last scene of the drama? Von Balthasar would say no" (44). Murphy says that the "Christian liberal, following Blondel, does not deny truth when he gives free action priority over truth. . . . He knows that he must run toward [the good] to know it" (45). Finally, Murphy places her argument regarding modern freedom and drama in a christological context: Blondel, de Lubac, and Balthasar "followed through on the deepest intuitions of modernity in order not so much to capture them for Christ as to show that Christ was already present as their fulfillment" (43). That is, the "making of offers" in the market foreshadows supernatural love by virtue of the fact that Christ is already present in the process of fulfilling such activity.

Such statements of course contain much that is true. Relative to Murphy's defense of liberalism vis-à-vis the Catholic tradition, however, they amount to massive question-begging. Her argument ignores what is arguably the central question of twentieth-century Catholic (fundamental) theology: that concerning the sense in which God—and the good and the true—are present in the origins of man's conscious activity. Ignoring the debates surrounding this question, Murphy settles for remarkably reductive formulations of the possible responses to it. She presents two alternatives: either knowledge takes priority over action, in which case we have advance conceptual knowledge of how each of our individual lives is to be lived; or action takes precedence over truth, in which case "[w]e know the good . . . as it becomes factored into our personalities through our choices" (44). The problem is that thinkers like de Lubac and Balthasar—and other representatives of the ancient-classical Christian tradition like Joseph Ratzinger and Karol Wojtyła—reject such exclusive alternatives. Indeed, such rejection goes to the heart of their life-work, which insists on an

awareness of God (goodness, truth) lying at the origins of the free-intelligent human act.<sup>2</sup>

The pertinent question regarding the dramatic character of human action, then, in light of the Catholic tradition represented by Blondel, de Lubac, Balthasar, and others, concerns *the sense in which* the good (ultimate truth, God) are known by and present to every human being, such that we can reasonably affirm that every human life is truly dramatic, from its first to its final act. This is the question that Murphy's article raises but begs.

Murphy's argument turns on a distinct reading of how the *givens of nature* inform human action, relative to "the *givens of our historical moment*" (39, emphasis added). The position she defends regarding the relation between these "givens," however, eviscerates the realism embedded in the heart of the Catholic tradition as articulated by these men. According to this tradition, rightly understood, the human act is dramatic *because* of the presence of ultimate truth and goodness and God at the heart of that act. This presence, which already-initially indwells the human act from its beginning, is ever yet to be more fully deepened over time.

The human act is essentially dramatic, in other words, because it harbors *an ineliminable tension* that is due above all to man's relation to God. This relation is *first established in man by God* in the act of creation, even as it *involves man's own creative participation* from the first moment of his existence. The problem is that Murphy, in her (rightful) concern to avoid an a priori knowledge that would preempt dramatic realization of the good in history, ends up evacuating the good in which man participates from his beginning of the "substance" ("thickness") necessary for generating authentic human drama in the first place.

The Church says that "the whole of man's being is a . . . search for God."<sup>3</sup> The truth of this statement demands that God

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2. The question concerning the sense of a primitive awareness of God at the heart of the human act, and of the priority of God implied in that act, reaches to the core reasons for these theologians' decision to found *Communio*. (Wojtyła was responsible for beginning the Polish edition of *Communio* when still archbishop of Kraków.) This question also goes to the heart of the differences between two journals—*Concilium* and *Communio*—that were founded to assist in interpreting the Council.

3. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (hereafter cited as CSDC), 109.

(ultimate goodness and truth) be both *present enough* in the origins of human consciousness to precipitate a search, and *absent enough* that the search is, and ever remains throughout the course of life, truly a search. Murphy is unable to account for the drama implied in this search; she excludes from consideration, a priori, the distinct alternative that alone affirms the simultaneous presence and absence of God necessary to give the search its dramatic tension.<sup>4</sup> This distinct ("third") alternative, however, represents the authentic Catholic tradition, as found in the very authors Murphy cites in her a priori exclusion of just such an alternative. As we will see, the polemical intention of her argument, expressed in this reductive exclusion, backs her into a veritable parody of the drama that *actually does* operate in liberal market activity. There is in fact much *more* drama going on at every stage—and thus within "each next step"—of market activity than Murphy seems able to recognize.

Our purpose in this article is to clarify what the tradition affirms regarding the nature and dramatic character of the

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4. It is important to understand that the dramatic tension indicated here is due *most basically*, not to the fact of man's finitude or his present earthly existence, but to the fact that he is constituted relationally. Human action, in other words, is dramatic first of all because human reality is a matter of love, of a relation between the self and an other. Such a relation demands a simultaneous presence or nearness or immanence, as well as absence or distance or transcendence, of each relative to the other. It is this abiding presence/immanence simultaneous with distance/transcendence that alone accounts for an act that is *essentially* characterized by the dramatic. Thus the drama of the human act does not come to a halt even in the eschaton when the creature is face-to-face with God, because this direct and wholly realized union with God itself continues to bear the implication of the "ever-moreness" of the Divine Other's infinite unbounded—ever gratuitous and unanticipatable—personal love. St. Augustine uses the term "insatiable satisfaction" (*insatiabilis satietas*) to express this "ever-moreness": in seeing the Face that surpasses all desire, "We will be insatiably satisfied, without growing weary. We will always be hungering and always being filled" (Augustine, *Sermon* 170.9). Cf. also *Sermon* 125.11; *De Trinitate* 15.2.2: "If he who is sought can be found, why was it said *Seek his face evermore* (Ps 105:4)? Perhaps because he should still be sought even when found? For this is how we ought to seek incomprehensible things." For a pertinent reflection on this theme, see my "Time in Eternity, Eternity in Time: On the Contemplative-Active Life," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 18, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 53–68, on Balthasar and T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*.

All of the above is related to the fact that the free human act is not merely a means to the realization of the end or the Good, but itself participates in the Good; and thus freedom, rather than ceasing once it attains the good, is magnified, becoming ever-more intensely free.

free-intelligent human act. The structure of our argument in response to Professor Murphy is in fact quite simple—but basic: “ordinary people” in liberal societies are human, and they remain human even when working, or buying and selling, in a liberal economy, even in America. The questions guiding us are these: what does it mean to be human, that is, what is by nature implied in human consciousness in each of its acts, regarding our primitive knowledge of God, and goodness and truth? What does the answer to this question yield in terms of the (essentially) dramatic character of human action? Finally, what follows in terms of rightly conceived human action in the market? Our presentation unfolds in five parts: (1) an overview of the ancient-classical Christian tradition regarding the beginning and end of human action; (2) in this light, a look at two key twentieth-century pre- and post-conciliar debates; (3) a consideration of “each *next step*,” or the “middle,” or unique historical character, of human action; (4) a reflection on Pope St. John Paul II’s “theology of integral human liberation”<sup>5</sup> in light of the issues raised by Murphy; and finally (5) a summary regarding the drama of human action as it concerns entering the “givens of our historical moment” and liberal “exceptionalism.”

## 1. THE BEGINNING AND THE END OF HUMAN ACTION

What is it that we “know” and desire in our primitive acts of consciousness, and what is the end of this knowledge and desire? Augustine famously affirms that “God is more interior than my inmost self and higher than my highest self.”<sup>6</sup> According to

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5. Cf. John Paul II, *Centesimus annus*, 26.

6. “*Deus interior intimo meo et superior summo meo*” (Augustine, *Confessions* 3.6.11; cited in Henri de Lubac, *The Discovery of God* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans/Ressourcement, 1996], 94). Cf. the similar text of St. Bernard of Clairvaux: “I went into the higher part of myself, and higher still I found the Kingdom of the Word. Impelled by curiosity to explore still further, I descended deep into myself, and yet I found him deeper still. I looked outside, and met him far beyond everything exterior to me. I looked within: he is more inward than I myself.—And I recognized the truth of what I had read, that we live and move and have our being in him” (*Sermones in Cantica*, 74 [*Patrologia Latina* 183:1141], cited in *The Discovery of God*, 97). De Lubac’s book is a treasury of texts from the tradition expressing various aspects of this ever-present implicit affirmation of God.

Maximus the Confessor, the will participates in man's natural motion toward God as origin and end, and has goodness written into its being.<sup>7</sup> Aquinas says that "all cognitive beings know God implicitly [*implicite*] in whatever they know,"<sup>8</sup> that we seek God in every end or good that we seek,<sup>9</sup> and that, "in desiring to be," we "implicitly desire a likeness to God and God himself."<sup>10</sup>

Turning to more recent authors: Blondel states that every man "bears . . . in his actions" the solution to the problem of human destiny; each act contains in germ "*all the exigencies of life, all the hidden fullness of his works.*"<sup>11</sup> Blondel speaks of a "primordial will" that operates in every particular act of the will. This corresponds to a distinction within the will between a willing

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7. Cf. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy: The Universe According to Maximus the Confessor* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press/*Communio*, 2003), 143–51. Balthasar summarizes Maximus's thought as follows: "[human] nature is nothing else than organized motion. . . . Nature is a capacity, a plan (*λόγος*), a field and a system of motion. . . . Since this natural motion . . . is directed toward a goal, and since that goal cannot be anything else than God, its origin, the underlying orientation of this nature must have goodness written into its being; [and] intelligence can only have the task of translating this naturally ingrained goodness into a goodness that is consciously acquired. . . . The natural motion of an intellectual being is . . . itself in some way intellectual, while even the freest act can only be realized within the retaining walls of natural motion" (*Cosmic Liturgy*, 146–47).

8. Thomas Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 22, a. 2 ad 1.

9. *De veritate*, q. 22, a. 2: "[B]ecause God is the last end, he is sought in every end, just as, because he is the first efficient cause, he acts in every agent. But this is what tending to God implicitly means."

10. *De veritate*, q. 22, a. 2 ad 2. Cf. also *Summa theologiae* (hereafter cited as *ST*) I, q. 6, a. 1 ad 2; I, q. 44, a. 4 ad 3. Regarding the relation between Augustine and Aquinas, Balthasar comments: "For all the important differences which divide Thomas Aquinas and Augustine on particular issues they nevertheless both agree as to the two foundations of theology. In the first place, for both the dynamism of the cognitive spirit is determined by its innermost disposition to press on to the vision of God. . . . And, secondly, they both see God's active deed of self-revelation as the bestowal of the innermost light of Being: faith endows the mind with a new light (*lumen fidei*)" (*Seeing the Form*, vol. 1, *The Glory of the Lord* [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982], 148–49). Further on in the same work, Balthasar states that the "philosophic act (which every person, however implicitly, makes) now confronts in the depth of Being the still deeper depth of the divine light" (158). I will return below to the question of the supernatural indicated here.

11. Maurice Blondel, *Action (1893)* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 3 (emphasis added).



that is necessary (*la volonté voulante*: the willing will, or the will-as-willing) and a willing that is free (*la volonté voulue*: the willed will, or the will-as-willed). The point of human life is to exercise our freedom in specific acts (*la volonté voulue*) in a way that measures up ever-more adequately to all that is implicitly affirmed in the primordial will (*la volonté voulante*).<sup>12</sup> De Lubac says that there is a sense in which, when I come to know God “properly” for the

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12. Murphy draws an analogy between Blondel’s (and, following him, de Lubac’s and Balthasar’s) notion of freedom, on the one hand, which she identifies as liberal-modern, and the (economic) freedom of American liberals, on the other. The key to this analogy, according to Murphy, is their common affirmation of the dramatic character of action: “Following Blondel, [de Lubac] interpreted the notion of persons as *exchangers* as meaning that persons are *gifters*. The two thinkers thus maintained the dramatic character of liberal idealism, but instead of seeing exchange as fulfilled in mastery and domination, they saw exchange flourishing most fully in gift. One of de Lubac’s students, Hans Urs von Balthasar, interpreted the economy of salvation, and even the inner life of the Trinity itself, in these dramatic categories” (Murphy, “Is Liberalism a Heresy?,” 41). According to Murphy, in other words, liberals such as Adam Smith are right, as far as they go, regarding market activity and exchanges; we need only nudge them further down the road so that they come to see that the individual self’s gain-seeking, in truth, opens into gift-giving—of a sort that finally images the Trinitarian God himself.

Now, Murphy is of course right that liberals—like human beings in all times and places—desire God; and that their acts of freedom—like those of all human beings—“always [aim] at achieving a true good” (41). Her claim of a community of understanding among these authors, however, fails to take note of what are, *prima facie*, their fundamental differences. Liberal thinkers, however much they cannot but tend toward the good in everything they do, nevertheless *abstract* from this inclination in the market, in favor of what is understood to be a freedom of choice exercised simply in terms of the logic of the liberal market. For thinkers like Blondel (de Lubac, Balthasar), on the contrary, following the ancient Christian tradition, the human being’s order in and toward the good and God, which reaches into the natural foundations of freedom, needs (in some principled way) to be integrated into each of freedom’s acts—including inside the market. To employ the terms of Blondel, in every one of our actions, including our market exchanges, our “willed will” needs to reflect ever-more adequately what is implied in our “willing will.” What liberals mean by freedom, however, even at its “idealistic” best, indicates no proper awareness and takes no principled account of what Blondel understands to be a free act fraught by nature with the implication of “totality,” that is, of the good that opens up finally to the revelation of the Trinitarian God.

The fuller grounds for, and the sense of, these judgments will be developed in what follows. For a helpful analytical study of Blondel’s *L’Action*, see James M. Somerville, *Total Commitment: Blondel’s L’Action* (Washington, DC: Corpus Books, 1968). For a study of Blondel’s work and life more generally, see Oliva Blanchette, *Maurice Blondel: A Philosophical Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans/Ressourcement, 2010).

first time, I *recognize him*. "We do not know God '*simpliciter*' with our first knowledge," as St. Thomas says, "which is purely 'natural' and implicit." Knowing God *implicitly*, however, means that in a certain sense God is *already known*: "that is why, when the moment comes, it is permissible to speak of 'recognizing' him."<sup>13</sup> Cardinal Ratzinger, citing the monastic rule of St. Basil, affirms that "[t]he love of God is not . . . imposed on us from outside, but . . . is a constitutive element of our rational being."<sup>14</sup> Referring to what he calls the "ontological level" of conscience, the cardinal speaks of "a kind of *primal remembrance of the good and the true* . . . [that] is bestowed on us."<sup>15</sup> "This *anamnesis of the Creator*, which is *identical with the foundations of our existence*, is the reason that *mission* is both *possible* and *justified*."<sup>16</sup> Ratzinger, again in the name of Basil, insists that "the love of God, which takes on specific form in the commandments, is not imposed on us from outside. Rather, it is infused into us a priori. 'A basic understanding of the good is imprinted on us,' says Augustine."<sup>17</sup> Finally, there are the words of Pope St. John Paul II: "When he heeds the deepest yearnings of the heart, every man must make his own the words expressed by Saint Augustine: 'You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.'"<sup>18</sup> "The whole of man's life is a quest and a search for God. This relation-

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13. De Lubac, *The Discovery of God*, 76; cf. *ST I*, q. 2, a. 1 ad 1. Citing Dionysius and St. Bernard along with St. Augustine, de Lubac states that "God is not merely the principle and the term, at the beginning and at the end." Rather, as "the Good of every good, the Life of all living things, the Being of all beings, he is also at the heart of all things. . . . In him we live and move and have our being" (*The Discovery of God*, 64).

14. Joseph Ratzinger, *Values in a Time of Upheaval* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006), 91.

15. *Ibid.*, 92.

16. *Ibid.* "Mission is justified when those it addresses encounter the word of the Gospel and recognize that *this* is what they were waiting for. This is what Paul means when he says that the Gentiles 'are a law to themselves'—not in the sense of the modern liberalistic idea of autonomy, . . . but in the much deeper sense that nothing belongs to me *less* than my own self, and that my ego is the place where I must transcend myself most profoundly, the place where I am touched by my ultimate origin and goal" (*ibid.*, 92–93).

17. *Ibid.*, 93.

18. John Paul II, *Evangelium vitae*, 35.

ship can be ignored or even forgotten or dismissed, but it can never be eliminated.”<sup>19</sup>

Despite differences of accent, these representative texts from the tradition make a common twofold affirmation: God—and the true and the good founded in God—are present in human consciousness by nature, and hence in its origins, even as the unmediated fullness of this presence—*which remains ever-dramatic*—comes only in the eschaton. My restlessness along the way is due to the fact that the awareness of God I am experiencing remains implicit, because mediated through other creatures; and my experience or awareness of God so far remains radically incomplete. But even in the eschaton, when I directly encounter, face-to-face, the infinite wholeness of love—God—whom I have always been seeking, such an encounter will continue to bear *the implication of* “ever-more-ness” characteristic of a love from another that is gratuitous.

The givens of nature as conceived in the tradition represented by these authors, then, include an original sense of God that is mediated through the existence, truth, and goodness of things. This sense, which is basic and ineliminable, inspires and shapes every human act.

The words of T. S. Eliot that bookend the second poem of his *Four Quartets* express the paradoxical nature of human action as implied by the authors cited: “In my beginning is my end”; “In my end is my beginning.”<sup>20</sup> As Eliot says in *Little Gidding*:

We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.<sup>21</sup>

The dramatic character of human action involves just this paradox of a knowledge of God that always arrives where we started and knows the place for the first time.<sup>22</sup>

19. CSDC, 109. See also, in connection with the discussion here, Luigi Giussani, *The Religious Sense* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1997), esp. 45–58.

20. T. S. Eliot, “East Coker,” in *Four Quartets* (New York: Harcourt, 1971), 23, 32.

21. Eliot, “Little Gidding,” in *Four Quartets*, 59.

22. Again, such a paradox remains—without a temporally successive character—also in the eschaton. On the Christian understanding, neither does

In sum, then: no act of freedom—even when exercised in the liberal market—remains neutral with respect to God and what is ultimately true and good. Put positively, every act of freedom, in every area of life, is informed at the most fundamental level by some sense (implicit or explicit) of God, and of ultimate truth and goodness. This sense can be blunted or deeply distorted or misconstrued, but it can never be eliminated. Willy-nilly, it shapes the manner and the content of each of our actions.

## 2. RECENT DISCUSSIONS REGARDING FREEDOM

I mentioned at the outset that Professor Murphy does not take note of several significant discussions since the Council that bear on the substance of her argument. Dominican Father Servais Pinckaers, for example, distinguishes the authentic Thomist understanding of freedom from the prevalent modern understanding, naming the former "freedom for excellence" (*liberté de qualité*), and the latter "freedom of indifference."<sup>23</sup>

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knowing the other (presence) imply a simple grasp or "possession" of the other, nor does the "distance" of the other (*qua* other) imply an unknowing that consists in simple ignorance. On the contrary, rightly conceived knowledge of the other opens of its very nature as knowledge into the positive goodness of "absence"—of recognition of the other as genuinely free, and so far *irreducible in his otherness*, and of a knowledge that thus bears the implication of "evermore-ness." Cf. the suggestive comments of St. Gregory the Great on the final verse of the Song of Songs: "So Holy Church, having declared the death and resurrection and ascension of our Lord, cries out to him . . . 'Flee, my beloved, flee' (Song 8:14), as if to say: 'You who made yourself comprehensible in the flesh, exceed in your divinity the comprehension of our minds, and remain in yourself incomprehensible for us'" (*Moralia in Job*, 17.27.39).

23. See Servais Pinckaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1995). Pinckaers defines "freedom for excellence" as "[t]he power to act freely with excellence and perfection. (The choice of evil is a lack of freedom.) Freedom resides in reason and will together" (375). With Ockham, however, freedom was separated from "reason," "natural inclinations," and "all external factors," and came to mean "essentially the power to choose between contraries, independently of all other causes except freedom, or the will itself—whence the term *freedom of indifference*" (242). "According to Ockham, the will is purely indeterminate in the placing of its first act," and "can be determined by nothing—neither by an external object nor on the basis of an habitual determination" (242–43). "The free act springs forth instantaneously from a decision that has no other cause than the power of self-determination enjoyed by the will" (243). "The choice

According to Aquinas, says Pinckaers, natural inclinations toward truth and the good and a desire for happiness founded in God lie at the source of human spontaneity, building into our act of willing “a primitive élan and attraction that carries us toward the good and empowers us to choose” (402). Such inclinations form the “essential core of freedom” (332), giving shape to freedom in its original *self*-determination.

The decisive point of contrast between the modern view and that of Aquinas, according to Pinckaers, thus lies in the former’s “breach between freedom and the natural inclinations” (332). In the modern understanding, these inclinations are “uprooted from the will’s depths” and “no longer [form] part of the essence of freedom” (333). Freedom, rather, becomes structurally indifferent to such naturally given ends. The finality or end of action becomes “circumstantial, qualifying [freedom] from the outside” (337). Freedom is “identified with the will, as the origin of willing and acting, as a power of self-determination” (332). It is essentially the spontaneous power to choose, a power that is thus first “moving” rather than “moved.” What is chosen becomes simply the *object* of the self’s act, which latter remains self-centered, lacking original ordering by and toward the good and God. Such a view of freedom likewise implies an autonomy that rejects “all dependence” (339), and forces a primitive choice between my freedom and the freedom of others. The freedom of others is viewed first “negatively,” as a potential limit upon one’s own freedom, “since freedom [is] self-affirmation in the face of all others” (350–51). On such a reading, freedom bears no inner exigence for the order afforded by virtue. Increase and decrease in virtue is now a matter, not of interior growth, but of the reduction or extension of exterior limitations (337). In summary, the will is “no longer defined as an attraction toward the good, exercised in love and desire, as in St. Thomas and the Fathers” (332).<sup>24</sup>

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between good and evil is essential to freedom. . . . Freedom resides in the will alone” (375).

24. D. C. Schindler’s “Freedom Beyond Our Choosing: Augustine on the Will and Its Objects” (*Communio: International Catholic Review* 29, no. 4 [Winter, 2002]: 618–53) provides a helpful further development with respect to the issues discussed by Pinckaers. In particular, Schindler clarifies the sense in which there is a direct relation within the act of the will between spontaneity

Two features of the modern freedom of indifference criticized by Pinckaers are especially pertinent to Murphy's argument. First, for the moderns the movement of freedom in the first instance is abstracted from any naturally given goodness of the world or its Creator. Freedom's deepest élan no longer involves love of goodness and God, or inclination toward such natural ends. Second, this (consequent) freedom of indifference, as structurally neutral toward God and the good, is an act so far un-formed by another. Freedom is no longer originally "determined" by, or by nature responsive to, the truth and goodness of things as created by God, and so remains logically centered in the self, a matter first of self-assertion.

Professor Murphy's argument is convincing only if we already have assumed some form of the freedom of indifference criticized by Pinckaers. Only on the basis of such an assumption are we able to abstract cleanly from presuppositions regarding truth, goodness, and God as we exercise freedom in any particular area of life. Only the idea that freedom is primitively empty of—and thus neutral toward—God would logically permit us to make specific choices (in our market activity, for example) without implying some sort of knowledge or love regarding God that ever-affects the interior order of that activity.

A freedom that would, *in its specifically economic activity and ends*, claim neutrality with respect to the truth and goodness of man in his relation to God, however, contradicts the understanding of freedom implied in Aquinas as well as the other authors of the Catholic tradition cited above. For each of these

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and being "determined" by what is other, such that the will's "consent" to the good (*con-sentire*: "to perceive with another") is a "co-act" which weaves together two agents (human freedom and the good) into a unity. The main point, for our purposes, is that the initiating act of freedom is itself *responsive* to the initiative of the good, and not only an empty exercise of choice that makes something good. That is, I am receptive in my spontaneity, even as I am spontaneous in my receptivity. It is important for the present context to take note of the ways in which, according to Schindler, Augustine and Aristotle/Aquinas agree regarding this central claim (see, e.g., 624, 631, and 645). Cf. also *ST I*, q. 9, a. 6, c. and ad 3; and *De veritate*, q. 22, a. 1, regarding the sense in which God moves the will (the will is *moved by* another), even as the will by nature always moves from within (the will *tends toward* the other). All of this implies, again, that there is a direct and not indifferent or inverse relation between the intensity and depth of the self's act of freedom, on the one hand, and the self's ever-deeper embrace of and participation in the good, on the other.

thinkers, the love of man's natural ends—the “transcendental” truth, goodness, and beauty of creatures in themselves, before God—(implicitly) forms freedom at its source, and so far shapes from inside all of freedom's specific activities and objects, including the nature of work and productivity, buying and selling, profit and wealth.

In a word, there exists no neutral market freedom. Liberal market freedom in Murphy's sense in fact involves a falsely abstract view of freedom—which itself implies a false view of the nature of man and the world as created by God. It is this abstract view of freedom that robs human action of its depths and essential drama.

The problem indicated here is intensified in light of Murphy's suggestion that market exchange “foreshadows” the supernatural exchange of gifts.” She describes this “foreshadowing” in terms of a search for one's own gain that unintentionally results in others' gain. Seeking one's own gain becomes “invisible” a kind of giving, in the sense that buyers and sellers each gain more than they intend in their self-interested seeking. The difficulty is that Murphy's view of freedom, insofar as it implies some form of freedom of indifference, remains logically self- (or subject-) centered, as well as neutral toward God and goodness and truth. In moving to the supernatural, Murphy leaves unresolved the question of what the supernatural adds to, or how it affects, this self-centered natural freedom. She glides over the question of how freedom (as conceived in her argument) “changes” and becomes truly generous by virtue of the God-initiated “supernatural exchange of gifts.”<sup>25</sup>

Given Murphy's understanding of human freedom, in other words, the dilemma is this: on the one hand, insofar as freedom by nature *truly foreshadows* the supernatural, it can do so only *qua* self-centered; on the other hand, insofar as the supernatural *really introduces a new order of generosity*, it can do so only

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25. The point here is not to suggest that the move from the natural to the supernatural is a move simply from self-centered to other-centered freedom. On the contrary, the act of freedom, already at the natural level, is self-centered only as ordered to and by the other; and in this context the move from the natural to the supernatural involves a radically deeper sense of *both* self- and other-centeredness. It is sin that introduces the “privative” order that fractures the original created unity between self- and other-centered love.

in a purely adventitious way. Again: insofar as there is *continuity* between natural freedom and supernaturally graced freedom, the latter must so far consist, for Murphy, in a more elevated form (or ambiguously conceived extension) of centeredness in the self (which is still reductively understood because not sufficiently qualified from the outset by the generous presence of the other); and insofar as there is *discontinuity* between natural and supernatural freedom, the generosity introduced by God's gratuitous (graced) presence can only so far be arbitrary, without reasonable "exigence" in natural freedom itself.<sup>26</sup>

In contrast, the Thomistic tradition, by virtue of its affirmation of freedom's natural (implicit) awareness and love of goodness, truth, and God, reorients from the outset the (subjective) self-centeredness or -assertiveness and (objective) neutrality characteristic of liberal freedom of indifference. Self-determining action, according to a right understanding of this tradition, involves of its essence anterior ordering by and toward these ends. The various authors in the Catholic tradition cited above all affirm this in their distinct ways.

Balthasar develops this point in an especially sustained way, via a theological metaphysics centered in beauty (glory) and the mother-child relation.<sup>27</sup> Our experience of beauty genuinely fulfills us through drawing us ecstatically out of ourselves.<sup>28</sup> The

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26. Murphy's argument would have been helped here if she had taken more account of the twentieth-century debate regarding nature and the supernatural, as represented in particular by Karl Rahner, on the one hand, and Hans Urs von Balthasar, on the other. Theologian Marc Ouellet provides a helpful summary of the differences between these thinkers: see his "Paradox and/or Supernatural Existential," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 18, no. 2 (Summer 1991): 259–80. But see also footnote 31 below.

27. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Realm of Metaphysics in the Modern Age*, vol. 5, *The Glory of the Lord* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 613–34.

28. Gerald Phelan provides an account of beauty in the context of St. Thomas that is helpful here: "The Concept of Beauty in St. Thomas Aquinas," in *G. B. Phelan: Selected Papers* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1967), 155–80. Affirming, with Thomas, the nature of beauty as the unity of truth and goodness, Phelan shows how beauty indicates a primacy of the contemplative that at once intrinsically attracts us and draws us forth. The implication, for the present context, is that the primacy of contemplation itself deepens the original meaning of action: we go out of ourselves by opening to the other as other (and vice-versa). The ever-deepening presence of the other ever-enriches the self's own action. Here, again, we see how the act of



child at birth experiences reality through being embraced within the joy of its mother. That is, the child's "'I' awakens in the experience of a 'Thou': in its mother's smile through which it learns that it is contained, affirmed, and loved in a relationship which is incomprehensively encompassing, already actual, sheltering and nourishing."<sup>29</sup> Balthasar thus argues that the human being experiences *his own intrinsic worth* from the beginning through *the goodness and generosity of the other* (most basically, of God). He thus affirms a "paradox" whereby the human being, in his original created nature, participates in a generous love initiated by God, whose fullness he can nonetheless neither completely grasp nor produce. This love is always surprising ("dramatic"), because it involves of its nature the gratuitous giving of the other. What the creature naturally experiences in his depths, and thereby continues by nature to "expect," is a generous love before which he can only, *eo ipso*, be "wonder-fully" patient rather than grasping.

Balthasar, like Murphy, thus affirms a *unity* (within distinctness), already at the level of nature, between self- and other-centered freedom; but, unlike Murphy, he does so while affirming, within this unity, the primacy of the other.<sup>30</sup> This love that discovers itself within the surprising appearance of the other provides a natural hint of (although it can never properly anticipate)

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freedom ever-involves—and is thus ever-more fully realized through—unity with its object (the good, beauty).

29. Balthasar, *The Realm of Metaphysics in the Modern Age*, 616. Balthasar states further: "The communication of Being lies . . . simply enclosed in the child's wonder at reality with the first opening of its eyes: in the fact that it is *permitted* to be in the midst of what exists. This condition of being permitted cannot be surpassed by any additional insight into the laws and necessities of the world" (*ibid.*, 633).

30. The risk in using terminology like that of "self-centered love" and "other-centered love" is that it inevitably inclines us to think of a one and an other whose separateness as two is understood simply to precede their unity. The point, however, is that their original distinction as two occurs only-always *inside the community they share as creatures of the one God*. The notion of being as gift, understood primitively in terms of what is *created ex nihilo*, implies that at the most primitive level being's centeredness in itself is at the same time, and more basically, a centeredness in God: what God *gives to me is my own participation in giving*. What is crucial to see, then, is that self- and other-centeredness are at root indissoluble, within a primacy of God as creator *ex nihilo* (which entails in turn a primacy of the objectively given other that bears implicitly the effective presence of God).

the infinitely different love of God that appears in Jesus Christ. The surprising love of God revealed in Christ is radically discontinuous with respect to this love that already by nature involves the surprise of the other, but it is not purely adventitious. On the contrary, a freedom that originally discovers itself as *given* remains "reasonably" open to further unexpected gratuity. The crucial point, then, is that this paradoxical continuity-within-(ever-greater)-discontinuity operates *not only* in the relation *between* the natural and supernatural orders, but *already within the natural order itself*—in infinitely different ways, of course!<sup>31</sup> Mur-

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31. Here is where Ouellet's otherwise helpful article seems to me ambiguous in a crucial sense. Ouellet appears to take inadequate account of the way in which the paradox of love operates already within the natural order itself. After all, the child at birth encounters love only-already from within the surprise of the mother's enfolding-initiating love: the child *affirms himself* from the beginning only as unexpected *gift-from-another*. For Balthasar, in other words, the natural order of human reality itself is characterized by a *unity* of self- and other-centeredness within an (implied) affirmation of the primacy of the other as gratuitous initiator of my reality as gift. The nature of love as such, then, is revealed—from within the self's original natural *self-affirmation*—to be ordered from and toward the surprising (hence ever-unexpected) revelation of the other; and to be so far essentially a matter of generosity, of generous giving and receiving.

Ouellet criticizes Rahner on the grounds that Rahner understands the love revealed in Jesus Christ merely to make explicit what is already implied in the transcendental experience of all men—which is to say, in each person's transcendental *anticipation* of Christ's love. The problem here, however, from the point of view of Balthasar's theology and metaphysics, lies in Rahner's failure to understand that anticipation itself is initiated by and flows forth from the surprising gift of another—at the level of both nature and the supernatural (in infinitely different ways). In a word, Ouellet's criticism of Rahner vis-à-vis Balthasar focuses simply on the surprise of gift-giving love revealed to man in Jesus Christ. For Balthasar, however, it is crucial to see also that the human being, by virtue of his *very nature as given* (as created *ex nihilo*)—a givenness-as-gift that is communicated at birth through the joyful embrace of the mother—is ordered in his deepest depths from and toward the "surprise" of gift-giving and receiving. Recognition that this is so is important not simply to secure the integrity of God's ever-surprising revelation of love in Jesus Christ—though of course that too!—but also to see that the human being, who is *by nature* an unexpected gift from another, is thereby shown to be ordered already by nature to making a gift of his own self in return.

Needless to say, these remarks leave much to be clarified. My concern is merely to point out that, for Balthasar, the question of the relation between nature and the supernatural is rightly resolved only by coming to terms simultaneously with the meaning of man as created in and for love, in the radical sense of being intended already *by nature* for the total gift of love, which Balthasar takes to be "perfectly" realized in a vow or state of life (marriage

phy, in contrast, affords us reasonable warrant for affirming only *continuity* between natural and supernatural love, and does so in terms of a (confused and unwitting) primacy in nature of self-centered love and objectively indifferent freedom.

Professor Murphy, in a word, remains hoisted on both (unacceptable) sides of a central question evoked by her critical argument. On the one hand, seeking one's own gain in the marketplace seems willy-nilly to put one on the road to supernatural love, but Murphy gives no reasonable indication of any transformation that might be necessary with respect to one's self-interested activity. On the other hand, insofar as she implies that supernatural love *does* truly transcend self-interested activity (through the generous presence of the other), this love can only—given her starting point—be adventitious and arbitrary. Both these alternatives presuppose an indifferent and (wrongly) self-centered natural freedom, and both stand in deep tension with the views of the authors of the Catholic tradition cited above.

### 3. EACH NEXT STEP

Professor Murphy unequivocally affirms the natural law. We must, she says, act “in the full light of knowledge of the natural law, and of Mother Church's teachings.” But she also insists that we face the inscrutability and enigma of figuring out “what it is God wants us to do in each *next step*” (44). How are we to understand the historical uniqueness of each action?

Murphy is right that every moral act bears a subjective character and involves contingent historical factors. But she does not provide the terms in which we are to navigate the link between the universal natural law and the ever-singular historical circumstances. Although we cannot simply deduce concrete moral judgments from the universal principles given by nature, these natural principles and moral judgments remain intrinsically related. As indicated earlier, Ratzinger says “that the love of

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or consecrated virginity). This natural order toward a total gift of self “pre-figures” God's covenant with man in Jesus Christ. What this implies for the nature of human freedom carries fundamental significance for the question of freedom as conceived in liberal societies.

God . . . takes specific form in the commandments."<sup>32</sup> Pinckaers says that, for St. Thomas, "natural law was the expression, in the form of precepts, of our natural inclinations, which were guided by our natural inclinations . . . to goodness and truth."<sup>33</sup> The Church's *Compendium of the Social Teaching of the Church* states that

*The exercise of freedom implies a reference to a natural moral law, of a universal character. . . . The natural law "is nothing other than the light of intellect infused within us by God. . . . This light or this law has been given by God to creation." . . . In its principal precepts, the divine and natural law is presented in the Decalogue and indicates the primary and essential norms regulating moral life.*<sup>34</sup>

Thus, with respect to Murphy's argument, it is crucial to see that man's universal inclinations toward goodness and God operate *at the heart of every free-moral act*. Grasping these natural inclinations in their distinctly moral necessity *as precepts* involves a judgment that is not deducible from, even as it is intrinsically bound to, such inclinations.<sup>35</sup> The inclinations together with the precepts are sufficiently present in the human act such that everyone experiences an exigent love for goodness, truth, and God ever more fully in each of his acts. Thanks to the light infused within us, whereby "we know what must be done and

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32. Ratzinger, *Values in a Time of Upheaval*, 93.

33. Pinckaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, 404–05. Cf. *ST I–II*, q. 94, a. 2: "The order of the precepts of the natural law follows the order of the natural inclinations of our being."

34. CSDC, 140 (citing Aquinas, *In decem praeceptis*, 1).

35. Catholic natural law, rightly understood, is neither "naturalist" nor "non-naturalist": that is, neither identical to nor separable from man's natural inclinations. Such readings of Thomistic moral theory overlook the difference between Aquinas's view of nature and modernity's view, or they fail to see, with Aquinas, the unity of human intelligence within its distinctly speculative and practical operations. According to Aquinas, the intellect is a single power ordered respectively to truth that is to be known and truth that is to be done or made, a single power that acts in distinctly speculative and practical ways: "The speculative intellect . . . directs what it apprehends, not to operation, but to the consideration of truth; while the practical intellect is that which directs what it apprehends to operation" (*ST I*, q. 79, a. 11). Again, "the practical intellect knows truth, just as the speculative, but it directs the known truth to operation" (*ST I*, q. 79, a. 11 ad 2).

what must be avoided,” this law is “universal.” “Its central focus is the act of aspiring and submitting to God, the source and judge of everything that is good, and also of seeing others as equal to oneself.”<sup>36</sup> In a word, although singular moral judgments cannot be deduced from our natural inclinations, no moral act is ever independent of these inclinations.

We must, however, give more precision to the principles indicated here: how do we negotiate the intrinsic relation between the universal inclinations and natural law on the one hand, and singular moral judgments on the other? For Aquinas, the virtue of prudence (*prudentia*) relates universals and singulars, grasping the universal in its singular historical circumstances.<sup>37</sup> Prudence involves both appetite (will) and cognition: it is a moral virtue insofar as its object is “things to be done well,” and an intellectual virtue insofar as it considers these things under the formality of “right reason.”<sup>38</sup> Prudence itself does not appoint the end of the moral virtues, but rather regulates the means to these ends.<sup>39</sup> For this reason prudence must presuppose the content of the moral virtues even as it orders each virtuous act to its end.<sup>40</sup> Because of this, prudence was often called in the ancient tradition the *auriga virtutum* (the “charioteer” or “driver” of the virtues).

Prudence is informed at root by *synderesis*, the intellectual habit by which we know the first principles of the practical order, and which thus contains an infallible grasp of right and wrong. At the same time, prudence itself is not guaranteed by the natural necessity of these first principles. On the contrary,

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36. CSDC, 140. Cf. *Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation*, 27: “By his free action, man must tend toward the supreme good through lesser goods which conform to the exigencies of his nature and his divine vocation.”

37. *ST* II–II, q. 47, a. 3.

38. *ST* II–II, q. 47, a. 5. Cf. *ST* I, q. 79, a. 12: “The object of the practical intellect is good directed to the operation and under the aspect of truth.”

39. *ST* II–II, q. 47, a. 6 (and ad 3).

40. As Josef Pieper puts it, “Only one who previously and simultaneously *loves* and *wants* to be good can be prudent; but only the one who is previously prudent can *do* good” (“Prudence,” in *Four Cardinal Virtues* [Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966], 3–40, at 34).

it involves fallible knowledge and the free decision of the will.<sup>41</sup> Finally, prudence intends the "highest cause" that is "the common end of all human life," and the prudent person is thus one who reasons well "with respect to right conduct as a whole."<sup>42</sup> Following Augustine, Aquinas describes prudence, in a word, as "love discerning aright that which helps from that which hinders us in tending to God."<sup>43</sup>

Assisted by Pieper's reflections on the classical meaning of prudence, I suggest four points that are especially pertinent to Murphy's argument. First of all, prudent human action is ever-bound to man's natural inclinations and to objective reality. Human (moral) action is never wholly spontaneous with respect to these inclinations or the objective truth of things.<sup>44</sup> Second, the exercise of prudence in its fullness demands the moral virtues, even as prudence directs the acts of these vir-

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41. Pieper states: "The primordial conscience is the naturally and necessarily correct disposition of the practical reason, insofar as it passes judgment about the end and goal of human action. Prudence is the proper disposition of the practical reason insofar as it knows what is to be done concretely in the matter of ways and means. Prudence is not guaranteed by natural necessity as the primordial conscience is; it is the fruit of fallible knowledge and of the free decision of the will" ("Reality and the Good," in *Living the Truth* [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989], 107–79, at 163).

42. *ST II–II*, q. 47, a. 2 ad 1.

43. *ST II–II*, q. 47, a. 1 ad 1.

44. Cf. the following texts from Pieper: there is a "secret bond connecting the primordial conscience with objective reality" ("Reality and the Good," 162). "As the 'right disposition' of practical reason, prudence looks two ways. . . . It is cognitive and deciding. Perceptively it is turned toward reality, 'imperatively' toward volition and action" ("Prudence," 11–12). "The meaning of the virtue of prudence . . . is primarily this: that not only the end of human action but also the means for its realization shall be in keeping with the truth of real things" (*ibid.*, 20). "Certainly prudence is the standard of volition and action; but the standard of prudence, on the other hand, is the *ipsa res*, the 'thing itself,' the objective reality of being" (*ibid.*, 9). "The attitude of 'silent' contemplation of reality: this is the key prerequisite for the perfection of prudence as cognition" (*ibid.*, 14). "[T]he virtue of prudence resides in this: that the objective cognition of reality shall determine action; that the truth of real things shall become determinative" (*ibid.*, 15). "[E]ducation to prudence means: to objective estimation of the concrete situation of concrete activity, and to the ability to transform this cognition of reality into concrete decision" (*ibid.*, 31). In sum, the natural law essentially "demands that man must place himself under the obligation of the sentence, 'Become what you are'" ("Reality and the Good," 161–62).

tues to their ends. Prudence, properly conceived, thus differs radically from the contemporary understanding that would detach prudence from its essential relation to objective reality and the good. Prudence in the contemporary sense tends rather to indicate compromise and abstraction from what is intrinsically good, in contrast to a virtue that is bound indissolubly to the other cardinal virtues—justice, courage, and temperance—and indeed to all the moral virtues.<sup>45</sup> Third, human action, rightly understood, is bound to a desire for the good, and for the origin and end that is God.<sup>46</sup> Prudence, through the virtue of religion or sanctity, directs the acts of all the virtues to God.<sup>47</sup> As Pieper states:

Even supreme supernatural prudence . . . can have only the following aim: to make the more deeply felt truth of the reality of God and world the measure for will and action. Man can have no other standard and signpost than things as they are and the truth which makes manifest things as

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45. Cf. Aquinas on the distinction between genuine prudence, and prudence that is only apparent (shrewdness, for example): *ST II-II*, q. 47, a. 13. Pieper says that “desire for the good in general” and prudence presuppose each other, and thus that the “virtue of prudence presumes real seeking of the goal of man, the *intentio finis*” (“Prudence,” 33). This implies not only the voice of conscience (“synderesis”) but also the response of the will affirming “the good as the aim of all of one’s actions,” and thus “nothing less than the fundamental attitude of the just, brave, and temperate man—that is to say, of the good man” (*ibid.*).

46. Pieper states that the “original desire for the good takes its energy from the ever-pulsating momentum of that Origin in which man, in answering the creative call of God, flew across the abyss which parts nothingness from existence” (*ibid.*, 34).

47. The virtue of religion, according to Aquinas, is “the chief of the moral virtues” and “excels among the *moral* virtues” because “its actions are directly and immediately ordered to the honor of God” (*ST II-II*, q. 81, a. 6 [emphasis added]). Religion “denotes properly a relation to God. For it is he to whom we ought to be bound as to our unfailing principle; to whom also our choice should be resolutely directed as to our final end” (*ST II-II*, q. 81, a. 1). We should note that Aquinas says the virtue of religion is the same as sanctity (*ST II-II*, q. 81, a. 8), differing “not essentially [or really] but logically” (*ST II-II*, q. 81, a. 8 ad 3). Sanctity takes the name of religion “according as it gives God due service pertaining specially to the Divine worship . . . ; while it is called sanctity according as man refers to God not only [the sacrifices offered in worship] but also the works of the other virtues, or according as man by means of certain good works disposes himself to the worship of God” (*ST II-II*, q. 81, a. 8).

they are; and there can be no higher standard than the God who is and his truth.<sup>48</sup>

Finally, though moral necessity and universality characterize prudence, this moral necessity is never properly a matter of (rationalist, mechanical) deduction from universal speculative truths or first principles. At the same time, the ever-singular contingent circumstances that call for the exercise of prudence never eliminate man's objective link with reality and his natural inclinations.<sup>49</sup>

In a word, according to the classical tradition, prudence is

the mold and mother of all virtues, the circumspect and resolute shaping power of our minds which transforms knowledge of reality into realization of the good. . . . Prudence means the studied seriousness and, as it were, the filter of deliberation, and at the same time the brave boldness to make final decisions.<sup>50</sup>

The comprehensive point of these comments as they pertain to Murphy's argument is that the exigence for prudence in its integrated meaning operates within all human action, including at the heart of freedom as exercised in the liberal market. On Murphy's contrasting reading, human economic action remains a gain-seeking act focused exclusively on the specific logic of market negotiation—a logic from which a prudence informed by the virtues and love for the good and God has, *eo ipso*, been bracketed. Murphy thus leaves man's natural inclinations and universal moral precepts suspended above history, even as

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48. Pieper, "Prudence," 40.

49. Pieper distinguishes prudence from "moralism," on the one hand, which would separate moral action "from its roots in the cognition of reality and from the living existences of living human beings," and from the "deductivist" assumption, on the other hand, that we "achieve the good by slavishly and literally following certain prescriptions which have been blindly and arbitrarily set forth" (*ibid.*, 24). "The ethical deeds of man are not more or less fixed manual techniques. . . . The human self, which grows toward perfection by accomplishing the good, is a 'work' that surpasses all preconceived blueprints based upon man's own calculations. Ethical growth takes place in the course of our replies, appropriate to each given case, to the reality outside us which is not made by ourselves" (*ibid.*, 29–30).

50. *Ibid.*, 22.



she then makes spontaneity the reductive distinguishing feature of the drama of human action. She drains action of any intrinsic universality or moral necessity, as a condition of saving its singular historical character. The unintended but inevitable consequence is that she reads the dramatic novelty of “each next step” in the moral agent’s life as akin to a throw of the dice.

In summary, Murphy seems to assume throughout the course of her argument that if awareness or knowledge of something is not explicit or fully conscious, it is not present in a way that significantly influences us. But we do not have to be explicitly conscious of natural (ultimate) ends—the good, God—at each moment in order for them to influence us. As St. Thomas states,

One need not always be thinking of the last end whenever one desires or does something: but the virtue [or power] of the first intention, which was in respect of the last end, remains in every desire directed to any object whatever, even though one’s thoughts be not actually directed to the last end. Thus while walking along the road one need not be thinking of the end at every step.<sup>51</sup>

Contrary to Murphy, Aquinas’s view implies that freedom is more deeply engaged, and action is more dramatic, precisely *because of* the natural love of God and the good lying at the heart of freedom (even when it is not explicitly recognized). In a word, the key to dramatic action is not simply spontaneity—though of course it essentially includes spontaneity—but a spontaneity naturally fraught with love of another (God, reality in its intrinsic truth, goodness, and beauty).

#### 4. THE CHURCH’S “AUTHENTIC THEOLOGY OF INTEGRAL HUMAN LIBERATION”

Professor Murphy takes inadequate account of the natural inclinations and universal moral precepts present at the core of human action, and it is therefore unsurprising that her argument makes no mention of the “liberation theology” developed by the

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51. *ST I-II*, q. 1, a. 6 ad 3.

Church over the past half century (beginning with Paul VI and emphasized especially in the pontificates of St. John Paul II and Benedict XVI). The term “integral” is central to this teaching. It refers to the wholeness of the person, implying integrated reference above all to God, and to the “transcendental” truth and goodness of things as symbolic of God’s creative presence.

John Paul II speaks in *Dominum et vivificantem* of what one could call the “objective dimension” of sin.<sup>52</sup> Rooted in personal acts, sin is “subjective”;<sup>53</sup> but it also bears an (often unconscious) philosophy or vision of reality. “Objective sin,” then, indicates an *intellectual or cognitive disorder with respect to reality before God*. It concerns “external” institutional structures, not as such, but *qua informed by a false understanding* of man and the world in their relation to God.<sup>54</sup>

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52. Cf. John Paul II, *Dominum et vivificantem*, 56: “[T]he resistance to the Holy Spirit which Saint Paul emphasizes in the *interior and subjective dimension* as tension, struggle and rebellion taking place in the human heart finds in every period of history and especially in the modern era its external dimension [*rationem exteriorem*], which takes concrete form as the content of culture and civilization, *as a philosophical system, an ideology, a programme* for action and for the shaping of human behavior” (emphasis original). See also John Paul II, *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, 35–40, where the pope refers to “structures of sin.”

53. John Paul II, *Reconciliatio et paenitentia*, 16. This does not mean that everyone who participates in an objectively disordered institution thereby sins in the personal or “subjective” sense that would *ipso facto* render him personally culpable by virtue of such participation. It means rather—and the distinction is of basic importance—that the objective disorder of the institution nonetheless has its origin in subjective sin on someone’s part, reaching of course all the way back to man’s “original” sin. Indeed, objective institutional disorder, like all evil, is “privative.” Nature remains present even within objectively disordered institutions, albeit in skewed form, and this is what indicates the dynamic need for liberation. John Paul’s emphasis on “objective sin,” then, in no way implies attenuation of the essentially volitional (moral) character of sin. Rather, he means simply to draw out the fact that subjective or personal sin also bears an objective–cognitive dimension—an important point commonly overlooked in the modern (liberal) period.

54. *Centesimus annus* says that “at the heart of every culture lies the attitude man takes to the greatest mystery: the mystery of God” (24). Cf. the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2244: “Every institution is inspired, at least implicitly, by a vision of man and his destiny, from which it derives the point of reference for its judgment, its hierarchy of values, its line of conduct.” The denial that every human institution is informed at its core by some (tacit) view with respect to God and ultimate truth and goodness is characteristic of liberal institutions—indeed, is indicative of their claim to be “exceptional” relative to traditional institutions. Such a denial, however, as we indicate below, consistent with

Objective sin, as John Paul II conceives it, thus indicates, in the present context, a failure to retrieve the ancient Christian view of human freedom as a natural love of God involving (implicit) cognitive awareness of the Good. Authentic freedom is replaced with modernity's originally indifferent freedom of choice.

A liberal society resting on a freedom construed as simple freedom of choice resists a liberation that calls for the integration of order and freedom in John Paul II's sense. First of all, while not denying outright the existence of God or the intrinsic truth and goodness of creation, America's liberal society "officially" abstracts from these in the ordering of its public institutions. The ends of the liberal economy (wealth or profit, comfortable self-preservation, labor efficiency and productivity, etc.) are assumed to have their specific integrity in abstraction from, and as neutral toward, the ends that form freedom in its primitive constitution *as* freedom. These naturally constitutive ends as a result become *optional* ends which, as such, may or may not be added, but in any case are not understood to shape interiorly, or *integrate*, the specific objects of the economy as liberalism conceives these. This entails two corollary claims.

On the one hand, if and when some persons do choose to enrich the meaning of their market activity by adding these (further) ends, such enrichment takes place—given the logic of liberalism—only *privately* and by way of the *addition* of the (private, hidden) *moral intentions* of individual economic agents. No longer are the virtues and the person's natural desire for and love of God and the intrinsic truth, goodness, and beauty of creation relevant to the original *ordering* of the liberal market and its hallmark freedom—which is assumed to be an initially indifferent (and so far *self-interested*) freedom of choice.<sup>55</sup>

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our earlier discussion, presupposes a definite idea of freedom as indifference, which itself carries an implicit (inadequate) understanding of being in its createdness and as God as Creator.

55. We should perhaps emphasize once again that the argument here in no way diminishes the importance of freedom in its voluntary character. This character remains essential to freedom—it is integral to man's reality on into the eschaton, where it is (ever-more) fully realized, not eliminated! The point is simply that freedom must not—and indeed finally cannot—be detached from its deepest nature as love, and thus from the ends or goods that inform it by nature. Ever-fuller realization of this love and these ends in fact signals, not the elimination of freedom's voluntariness, but rather the latter's (paradoxical)

On the other hand, insofar as questions regarding the *order* of market freedom *are* considered in liberal societies, such questions can only (logically) take the form of pondering the extent of the external (governmental) control that is necessary to protect one individual or private group's exercise of freedom from obstructing another's. The ordering of economic freedom in liberal societies, in other words, is approached solely in terms of a political power conceived "coercively" in relation to competing exercises of free choice. What liberal societies do not—and as a matter of "official"—public principle cannot—take into account is the *interior order* of the market's specific activities and ends as these (implicitly) concern man's ultimate good. Liberal societies of their inner logic do not, and cannot, consider how the very nature of wealth, labor, and economic freedom would be differently structured if placed in the light of freedom's constitutive—ultimate ends, and formed in the virtues directing us to such ends.<sup>56</sup>

Liberal institutions, in a word, offer a paradigm of modernity's freedom of indifference as described by Pinckaers, viewing human action in the market as a simple freedom of choice relative to which any interior ordering is understood voluntaristically, in terms of private moral-religious intentions, even as any "official" public ordering is then reduced to various kinds of external constraint.<sup>57</sup>

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ever-greater intensity. Indeed, only if freedom were an essentially empty act of choosing—and thus a mere means to the realization of the Good—would realization of the Good bring a halt to freedom's voluntariness. What the eschaton brings, rather, is the paradox of "insatiable satiety": of being able *only* to love *freely*—or being able *freely* to love *only*—the "ever-more" abundant Infinite Good for which we were made.

56. Thus in liberal societies the meaning of wealth, for example, in its obvious sense as material sufficiency and abundance, is abstracted from the richness that comes from the realization of the community with God and truth and goodness that orders man from his beginning. Genuine liberation from poverty, rightly understood in this light, is realized only through the simultaneous re-vitalization of the natural communities (religious, familial, political) without which man remains at his deepest level poor. Resolution of questions regarding the nature of wealth, in other words, demands ever-fuller recognition and realization of the true meaning of human existence, of our nature and destiny as creatures.

57. This is not to say, of course, that liberal thinkers simply deny the importance of virtue and the good. The point is merely that James Madison—to take

In light of the foregoing, we may say in sum that the liberal economy's ends or goods, as reflected in the meaning assigned profit and work and market exchanges, indicate *fragments* of an economy rightly conceived in terms of the naturally given order of things. Liberalism *wrongly abstracts* market freedom from the integrated whole of the person as created for God and intrinsic truth and goodness; and this abstract freedom, lacking due order to these, is consequently evil in the classical sense of *privatio boni*. The proper response to liberalism, therefore, is one neither of simple rejection, on the one hand, nor of mere addition, on the other. Insofar as the liberal economy contains truth and goodness—which it does, because, however deeply disordered, human nature is never entirely destroyed—it is to be affirmed. And insofar as this truth is fragmented—which it is, because it is “privatively” (dis)ordered—such affirmation must involve an intrinsic re-ordering of freedom: a dynamic process that entails *entering into* while *re-forming* freedom in and toward its “integral” meaning as conceived in light of the natural order and ends of man as created by God.

The re-ordering indicated here thus reaches to the root natural meaning of (market) freedom, even as it preserves this natural meaning in an ever deeper and more integrated way. The natural meaning of freedom is preserved through our entering ever-more fully into the depths of man's naturally given ends and inclinations, even as this entry implies transforming whatever “privative” ordering of these has been introduced by sin (in its objective and not only subjective sense). It is this integrative transformation that is indicated in John Paul II's integral liberation.<sup>58</sup>

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a classic example—while emphasizing the importance for political society of formation in virtue, nonetheless insisted that a properly ordered government was to treat virtue and claims in the name of virtue as “factional interests” (cf. *Federalist* 10 and 51). For Madison, in other words, education or formation toward virtue was the responsibility of non-governmental institutions like family and church. In this Madison differs from Aquinas, who considered the good to be the primary concern of government. Government, for Aquinas, is aimed at the true common good, and thus remains more basically “pedagogical” than “coercive” in nature, even as “coerciveness” retains an essential (if ever-subordinate) juridical-political function.

58. We can see here the importance of the notion of evil as “privative” (dis)order. This term protects the abiding integrity of nature or natural order

What, then, does such a transforming integration require concretely with respect to the liberal market? Most basically: all that man is ordered to by nature needs to be integrated as far as possible, via the virtue of prudence, rightly conceived, into the form and content of all our market activities. This involves an ever-deeper integration into the communities in and toward which we are ordered by nature: relation with God,<sup>59</sup> the family, the polis,<sup>60</sup> and all worldly creatures.<sup>61</sup> It implies affirming the intrinsic truth, goodness, and beauty of things in their givenness as created. It implies living the Ten Commandments and the Beatitudes. It implies the ordering of freedom by the virtues: justice, courage, and temperance, for example. It implies, in light of all of the above, recognition of the subordinate—if not insignificant—goods of wealth, honor, fame or glory, power, bodily health, and pleasure.<sup>62</sup>

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while enabling us at the same time to recognize the *deeply interior effect* of sin. Privation is the absence of an order that is due, and such an absence, accordingly, yields a (possibly deeply) disordered nature which nonetheless remains nature, albeit now in a distorted (even profoundly distorted) way. Evil as privation, in other words, protects us from construing sin as a surface—or superficial—matter, on the one hand, and from confusing even a deep distortion of nature with the simple elimination of nature, on the other.

Though there remains much to be clarified here, this indicates at least what is required by the Catholic (Thomistic) tradition in the matter. It indicates why integrative transformation is a needed concept when dealing with “sinful structures/institutions,” and why moralistic intentions or external (political) control of themselves do not suffice. What these latter both miss is that institutional structures are at root matters of meaning in relation to God and what is ultimately good and true. Indeed, in this connection we can see why social-political revolutions in the usual sense tend to be, not *too* radical but rather not radical *enough*: they embrace a change that is precipitous and therefore, *eo ipso*, too *violent*, because they attempt to *coerce* into being what can only come, finally and most properly, from within, via a transformation in our understanding of man and his ultimate destiny. (Note that this does not preclude revolution altogether, granting the Church’s recognition in principle of just wars.)

59. As Aquinas says: “All that man is, can, and has, must be referred to God” (*ST I–II*, q. 21, a. 4 ad 3).

60. Cf. *ST I–II*, q. 94, a. 2.

61. See the pertinent discussion regarding Benedict XVI’s *Caritas in veritate* and Francis’s *Laudato Si’* in my “Habits of Presence and the Generosity of Creation: Ecology in Light of Integral Human Development,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 42, no. 4 (Winter 2015): 574–93.

62. On this subordination, see *ST I–II*, q. 3, aa. 1–8.

Once again, the integration sought with respect to all this must be guided by a rightly conceived prudence. Here, however, it is crucial to see that the dynamic for such integration needs to penetrate the “how” and the “what” of everything involved in market activity. Such integrative transformation signals, not a disregard of the specific ends of liberal economic activity, but rather an “exigence” for ever fuller integration of these, always and everywhere, into the (theological, ontological) goods that qualify man most deeply as a creature of God.

It is here that we can see why the language of “heresy,” which Murphy thinks harsh when applied to liberalism,<sup>63</sup> has a proper, even indispensable, place: not in order to accuse people of persistent, conscious bad will, or to deny them their societal rights, but to draw attention to the vision of reality that operates (implicitly) in the depths of the human act, forming that act from within and evoking its essential drama.<sup>64</sup> The drama of freedom

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63. Murphy says that critics such as myself label liberals “voluntarist heretics” because of our failure to “see that real freedom always aims at achieving a true good” (44). “Real freedom,” such critics insist, “is not just doing anything you want, but choosing rightly and well, choosing what fulfills our human nature as given in and through our human bodies” (44). Murphy cites my statement that liberalism disjoins the act of choice “from an anterior order providing objective metaphysical content,” thus treating freedom “as a purely formal-instrumental and thus indifferent act” (44). The problem, as we have indicated, is that Murphy’s comments here beg the *quaestio disputandum*. To say that freedom “always aims at achieving a true good” is to leave unanswered the question of *the sense in which* this directedness toward the true good is *built into* freedom, such that it forms the very “core of freedom,” as Pinckaers says. Even Adam Smith had a human nature, of course, and so he had the same *natural* love for God and *natural* inclination toward the good as did John Paul II, for example. Unfortunately, Smith did not *know* this fact, or he ignored it; in any case, he did not take account of these deep and subtle (often implicit and hidden) natural loves operating at the core of each act of freedom, including his own, in developing his approach to the market economy. That is, he proposed a (market) economy that rests on abstraction from the larger and deeper natural loves and goods that the tradition understood to order freedom always-already in its inmost depths, favoring instead (at least for purposes of economic order) a self-interested freedom objectively indifferent to the world, except as potentially available for profitable use. It is just this abstracted form of freedom as conceived in liberalism that I mean to criticize. (Recall that, according to Pinckaers, a hallmark feature of modernity’s freedom of indifference is the ability to choose between good and evil, and not necessarily or by nature to incline toward the good.)

64. It is worthwhile to recall here the teaching of the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, which states that the estrangement indicated in

engaged in the market is never *most basically* about wealth and security in the conventional (physical or quantitative) sense, or about how best to use this wealth—even though all of this is centrally involved in our market activities. The drama of market life, rather, concerns first—even if not always in a fully conscious way—the *very nature* of wealth and security and the like, as these relate to the meaning of human existence and of God and ultimate joy and happiness.

The primary purpose of the language of “heresy” in this context, then, or of “sin” in John Paul II’s “objective” or “structural” sense, is *to clarify the (ontological and theological) depth implicit in human activity,*<sup>65</sup> *and thereby to make known the seriousness of the drama carried in human action, also inside the market.* This certainly does not mean that one needs to think through all the answers to these deeper questions before entering the market, or buying or selling this or that! It means simply that each of our market activities bears the implication of this ontological depth; and that the dramatic restlessness inside each activity and within the patterns of such activity is always fraught with an (implicit) awareness of and desire for God and ultimate truth and goodness. Our entry into the drama of the market, as it involves specific economic goods like wealth or profit, productivity and security and comfort, thus demands coming to terms concomitantly and at a deeper level with the restlessness for God and truth and human community that lies at the heart of each of these specific economic goods, so as to give these latter their deepest and most properly integrated meaning *as economic.* In a word, the language of “heresy,” as conceived in light of John Paul II’s “integral human liberation,” reminds us of the truly radical—not merely moralistic but ontological

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original sin lies at the heart “*of all the evil situations that afflict the social relations between people, of all the situations in economic and political life that attack the dignity of the person, that assail justice and solidarity*” (CSDC, 27, emphasis added). This estrangement involves “breaking the relation of communion with God” and “causes a rupture in the internal unity of the human person, in the relations of communion between man and woman and of the harmonious relations between mankind and other creatures.” The point here is that genuine social liberation must go to *the root meaning of reality as related to God.*

65. A depth of reality, that is, which engages not only our will but the entire *order of our being* before God.



and theological—depth of the drama that ever engages human freedom, also within the market.<sup>66</sup>

Professor Murphy's articulation of how best to approach liberalism is highly instructive in light of the above. In the conclusion to her essay, she poses a summary question: "Do we encourage liberalism to remember its birth in a market economy that drew ordinary people into habits of free action for the sake of satisfying desires, or do we anathematize it for self-caricature as a Gnostic-capitalist heresy?" (45). Such a formulation is extraordinary in its question-begging character. It excludes a priori the alternative implied in the ancient Christian understanding of freedom as recapitulated in the authors cited at the outset. Thus, as indicated above, Murphy, in accord with the modern view, understands market freedom to be occupied with activities, such as buying and selling, that are not (yet) moved by any initial desire for or awareness of God or "transcendental" truth and

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66. Gnosticism, for example, conceives the world to exist without the marks of creation and to be empty of intrinsic goodness. God plays no part in the world, and the latter thus becomes a field apt for instrumentalizing control, or exploitation. (Semi-)Pelagianism affirms a precipitous power on the part of creatures in relation to the generous-creative power of God. It emphasizes a human creativity that is not by nature—hence not interiorly—responsive to the world as a gift that is always first given by another. Nominalism drains creaturely being of its inherent ordering in and toward community—with God above all, but also with all creatures in their given truth and goodness. Nominalism, in other words, construes relations to God and others most basically as contracts initiated (voluntaristically) by originally separate individuals. Each of these "heresies" identifies in its own way the objective disorder in creatures' relations to God and one another characteristic of liberal market freedom. All of them make clear that market freedom is never empty of theological-ontological order, and that it is freedom in the "integrated" sense indicated by this order that alone reveals the true drama involved in human action.

As noted above, Murphy claims that "[o]nly liberal societies fully affirm [the] process of discovery" and "recognize that we need to risk ourselves in ventures of our own choosing" (44). But in fact it is the *given depth of reality before God* within which human freedom is always exercised that alone discloses the seriousness of our choices and the extent of risk involved in making them. Furthermore, one truly discovers oneself only insofar as one enters (ever-increasingly) into this depth. Engagement in "ventures of our own choosing" remains essentially undramatic if it does not penetrate this depth. Indeed, the frenetic activity characteristic of any society ordered around (structurally indifferent) freedom of choice signals precisely the *absence*—rather than presence—of genuine drama. Liberal societies in this sense are singularly undramatic, and tend rather of their inner logic to block genuine self-discovery. On this last point, cf. footnote 68.

goodness. The "market economy that [draws] ordinary people into habits of free action for the sake of satisfying desires" (45), in other words, does not include among these desires man's implicit but ever-present natural love of God and of what is ultimately true and good.

Having thus first abstracted economic desires from this more basic and comprehensive natural love, Murphy is logically able to incorporate the latter only as an adventitious arrival with respect to such (economic) desires, rather than as their *intrinsic fulfillment*. On the other hand, and for the same reason, when she encounters criticisms of liberal market freedom such as my own, she reads—and logically can only read—such criticisms as anathemas tossed down at liberal freedom from outside. But this misses the heart of what we have proposed in the name of the Christian tradition: that natural love of God (and of ultimate truth and goodness) operates *immanently* in our conscious acts, calling us *from within our inmost depths* to the *infinitely transcendent God*. The crucial point, in other words, is that this call from and toward God signals what *we ourselves* (even the liberals among us) want and love *most of all*. Murphy's statement of alternative approaches indicates no awareness of this "third" possibility that lies at the heart of the Christian tradition rightly understood: that God is more interior to us than we are to ourselves, and higher than our highest selves. On the contrary, having begun with an empty freedom that seeks only its own gain, Murphy finds any criticism rooted in an appeal to an a priori presence in our desires of a transcendent good (God) to be "violent"—a harsh judgment dropped in from outside.

Regarding Murphy's own response to liberalism, then: on the one hand, her formulation of alternative positions permits no principled criticism of the *internal order* of liberal freedom. This is so, once again, because she understands liberal market freedom in its specific activities and ends to be originally vacant of man's larger and deeper natural ends. On the other hand, insofar as Murphy *does* offer criticism with respect to liberal economic order, she does so—and can logically only do so—in terms of an external governmental power that exercises excessive control over that economy. Indeed, insofar as Murphy appears to permit the language of "heresy" (Gnosticism, for example) in connection with liberalism, she applies it not to the capitalist market *or-*

*der itself*, but to the *government that is exercising too much control* relative to the (indifferent) freedom characteristic of market order.<sup>67</sup>

Murphy's approach to market freedom, in a word, is consistent with what Pinckaers notes in his description of modernity's freedom of indifference. On the one hand, she raises no questions regarding the *interior order or nature* of liberal market freedom. On the other hand, insofar as she does raise a question regarding this freedom, she does so only in terms of external constraint: in terms of a government power that prematurely forecloses (from the outside) the dynamic of a freedom conceived as an essentially voluntary exercise of choice that is neutral toward (ultimate) truth and goodness.

Finally, we should point out that Murphy's decision *not* to criticize the internal order of liberal freedom misses the fact that it is of the very nature of liberal freedom—as a freedom that bears no order save the will to exercise (self-interested) choice—to *expand without limit*,<sup>68</sup> and that it is just such an ever-more

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67. Cf. Murphy, "Is Liberalism a Heresy?," 40. Pertinently here, Karl Polanyi's classic work, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), shows the profound dialectical relationship between the order of the modern free market economy, on the one hand, and the development of the modern bureaucratic state, on the other.

68. In this connection, Murphy seems oblivious to the emptiness at the heart of the modern market economy: the conflux of artificially stimulated desire for what we do not really want (or need), of sophistic advertising that plays on the disjunction between image and reality, of the increasingly non-personal nature of exchange (which is at once recognized and parodied in the "personalization" of shopping via the ever-increasing speed of technically-conceived service). There is also the economic logic that recommends expanding business as far as possible, for the sake of ever-greater profit (vs. recognizing the goodness and necessity of an ordered limit, after the manner of Aristotle and Aquinas). More generally, Murphy's enthusiastic embrace of liberal freedom indicates no awareness of how "the digital superdistribution system has become the foundation of our economy and wealth" (Kevin Kelly, *The Inevitable: Understanding the 12 Technological Forces That Will Shape Our Future* [New York: Viking, 2016], 62). Kelly says we have moved from an economy of "solid goods to flows of intangibles, like copies," which are capable of "immaterial [dematerialized, decentralized] arrangement and design" (62). This, for Kelly, is "a dream come true for our insatiable human appetite" (63). And "[a]t the heart of this new regime of constant flux is ever tinier specks of computation" (63). What the priority of "screens" over "books" teaches us, Kelly asserts, is that thinking is "utilitarian," not "contemplative" (104).

Is there anything here that liberalism is prepared to address—or that Murphy would urge it to address—as a matter of the *interior order* of thought and

expansive freedom which invites of its inner dynamic, however dialectically, the ever-more extensive technical-political management that alone can keep one citizen’s exercise of freedom (which is in principle limitless) from becoming intrusive with respect to another’s. In a word, the tendency in liberal societies for government control to expand, in response to what is judged to be an excessive (ever-more libertarian) expansion of freedom, unfolds from the inner logic of liberal freedom itself.<sup>69</sup>

For the reasons given, Professor Murphy’s insistence upon acting “in and through the givens” of our time reads in the end more like an invitation to surf the experiences of the culture—adding some moral-religious intentionality while remaining on the lookout for precipitous controlling action on the part of the state.

##### 5. ENTERING THE “GIVENS OF OUR HISTORICAL MOMENT”

We conclude by situating the foregoing argument, and what it means to enter into history, in a christological light. In the Pro-

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action? Does digitized “wholeness” yield genuinely integrated thought and action? Is the capacity to move along surfaces, even at the speed of light, synonymous with improved thinking? Where in all of this instrumentalized movement of (“instantaneous”) time do we discover an authentic eternity? And without discovery of an authentic eternity in time, what becomes of the dramatic character of human action?

69. Murphy’s argument thus operates entirely within the ambit of right-wing vs. left-wing liberalism. Assuming a common understanding of freedom as the simple freedom to choose, these two liberalisms differ mostly in terms of how much external control is to be exerted over the “private” exercise of such freedom. Thus we see in modern societies a constant struggle between various forms of libertarianism, on the one hand, and state socialism, on the other. This means not that the differences—or flaws—in these two kinds of societies are symmetrical, but only that their different flaws, even when extremely significant, presuppose what are at root dialectically different versions of a common worldview, one determined most basically (even if unconsciously) by a *false abstraction* from being as created and God as Creator (and Redeemer). Thus it is not surprising that both right-wing and left-wing liberal Catholics have been critical of the Church’s recent “integral human liberation.” Both fail to see that the key to this liberation is a distinctive, non-liberal theological anthropology. Cf. in this connection my “Beyond the Binary Logic of Market-Plus-State: A Sane Social Order for the Global Liberal Age,” in *The Beauty of God’s House: Essays in Honor of Stratford Caldecott*, ed. Francesca Aran Murphy (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2014), 149–88.

logue to the gospel of St. John we find three principles that are essential for the issues raised. First, the Prologue says that the Son of God took flesh in man, assuming man's very nature, and that he did so as the Word of God's love. He gave witness in the flesh to *the whole breadth and depth* (the *logos*) of human being and acting in relation to God.

Second, Christ was nonetheless rejected—not, however, because he did something negative or wrongly critical; not because he acted *imprudently*. On the contrary, he was rejected because he revealed in each of his acts the (natural *and* supernatural) fullness of the love to which every human being is in his innermost reality called.<sup>70</sup> Christ acted with *the utmost prudence*,

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70. Cf. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Moment of Christian Witness* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994). Joseph Ratzinger's discussion of Socrates is also helpful in this context. Ratzinger notes that "Plato goes so far as to write: 'the just man in this world will be scourged, racked, fettered, will have his eyes burned out, and at last, after all manner of suffering, will be crucified' [*The Republic*, 361e–362a]" (*Introduction to Christianity* [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004], 292). Ratzinger's point is that man by nature is meant to live justly, and that "martyrdom," or suffering unto death, is a risk that threatens him already at the level of natural (and not only of supernatural) existence. Liberal societies typically take themselves to be in principle immune from such profoundly serious concerns, by virtue of their formal-legal insistence that all citizens are equally entitled to participate in liberalism's public (economic, scientific, and political) institutions. This assumption of immunity from the risk of suffering, however, presupposes that the free-intelligent human act is objectively neutral with respect to man's natural love of truth and goodness and ultimately God, at least for purposes of participating in public institutional order. As we have seen, however, such a neutral view of the human act is not no view, but merely one that hides its own understanding of truth, goodness, and God, and finally of the whole order of being *qua* created.

The suggestion here is not—for reasons developed throughout the course of this article—that Christians should not participate in the work of liberal institutions. On the contrary, Christians *should* participate in liberal societies, as they are meant to participate in human societies in all times and places. The suggestion is simply that they should participate in liberal societies on the basis of the same principles whereby they participate in any other society, and *with the expectation of similar results*.

My argument, then, is not that liberal societies present no "exception" relative to pre-modern societies. On the contrary, liberal societies build their public-social order on a freedom meant to include all citizens equally, rather than on an explicit claim of truth that would exclude some citizens *de jure*. This principled intention of equal freedom is no small achievement. The problem is that liberalism takes its hallmark freedom to be empty of any specific content of truth regarding human destiny and God. Liberal societies, accordingly, take their "exceptionalism" to consist in a *lack* of any official "orthodoxy." The relevant point, however, is that this (putative) lack of orthodoxy is but a tacit

rightly understood as the virtue that takes its primary premises from objective reality and the final end of man, which is the love of God, even as it responds fully to the singular-subjective conditions of each person and situation.<sup>71</sup>

Third, the end of life sought by the incarnate Word was not "success" (wealth, fame, power) but love, which includes within itself, while transforming, the customary "worldly" meaning of "success." This did not imply disdain for everyday work, sufficient material possessions, and the like. On the contrary, Christ embraced such things, entering into them while informing them with God-centered gratitude. He sought to restore everything to what it was meant to be *in itself, as created*. Given the sin that has deeply skewed (not destroyed) this original order of creation, however, Christ's efforts to liberate the dynamic for gratitude inscribed in the heart of every creature led to his suffering crucifixion and death, and through these to resurrected life.

Human beings, therefore, called from their beginning to "re-create" life in all its integrity as made in the image of God revealed in Christ, should expect to pass through such suffering on the way to resurrected eternal life. Again, this emphatically does not mean that they should avoid participating in society. On the contrary, after the manner of Christ, they should enter society in all of its created natural goodness, in a way that does not aim for success in the conventional sense (for a wealth, fame, or power that remains unintegrated into love for God and others, and the intrinsic truth and goodness of things).

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or unannounced orthodoxy, one that takes the form of an "openness" that is *implicitly* full of definite claims regarding the nature of man before God. What is most "exceptional" about liberal societies, in other words, is their paradoxical affirmation of an "openness" (to all views of freedom) that is *hiddenly "closed"* (to all but the view that freedom is by nature indifferent to the good and God). Such an affirmation remains fraught with risks for those who question this liberal sense of "openness" by exposing its hidden claims regarding truth. This seems to me the burden of Ratzinger's reference to the words of Plato, and also of what is signaled in John Paul II's reference to the (potential) inversion of democracy into totalitarianism (*Evangelium vitae*, 20). Cf. also Alexis de Tocqueville's striking discussion of America's peculiar "tyranny of the majority" (*Democracy in America*, vol. 1, pt. 2, ch. 7).

71. As pointed out earlier, for Aquinas it is the saint who best fulfills the meaning of prudence.

The burden of my argument, then, is that liberal institutional order as it concerns market freedom is not “exceptional” in the sense commonly claimed today.<sup>72</sup> The hallmark feature of this order is its view that freedom, as a primitively empty act of choice, remains by nature (logically) neutral with respect to the spectrum of different ideas regarding God and (ultimate) truth and goodness.<sup>73</sup> It is on this (supposed) public

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72. It seems to me helpful here to distinguish the liberal reading of modernity from the meaning of modernity more generally. Such a distinction, of course, raises questions that cannot be adequately dealt with here. Suffice it to say that while modernity introduces the importance of human subjectivity, it does not in principle, or at its best, signify rejection of objectivity (the objective primacy of God in the orders of creation and redemption). The liberal reading of modernity, on the other hand, builds neutrality or indifference into the original structure of modern subjectivity. If the ancient-classical world emphasized the objective transcendence of God’s order of truth and goodness in a way that remained open to, but did not develop in a thematic, integrated way, personal-human subjectivity; and if liberal modernity for its part emphasizes a subjectivity that is indifferent to the objectively given order of (ultimate) truth and goodness; then a rightly-conceived modernity (or “post-modernity”) must have as its goal a newly integrated objective order (rooted in the primacy of God) that is *eo ipso* inclusive of a newly integrated human subjectivity. The teaching of John Paul II seems to me to point in just this direction.

The Second Vatican Council’s document on religious freedom, *Dignitatis humanae* (*DH*), is perhaps best read as a first formal effort by the Church to enter into the problematic of modernity and liberalism, in terms of freedom in its explicitly religious and political context. The Declaration affirms as a matter of principle a rightly-conceived modernity, even as it implies a refusal of the liberal reading of modernity that would rest the right to religious freedom on a freedom conceived as a subjective choice abstracted from the person’s natural love and responsibility before God. *DH* affirmed the person’s (subjective) right to freedom as well as his (objective) duty to truth and to God. Needless to say, this interpretation requires further clarification—and *DH* in any case did not develop (and was not properly meant to develop) a complete theoretical statement in this matter. I mean only to point out here that the Council’s teaching regarding religious freedom did not signal any straightforward embrace of liberal institutional order, even as it did clearly affirm (while integrating in light of man’s natural love of God) modernity’s awareness of the importance of human subjectivity. On all of this, cf. my “Freedom, Truth, and Human Dignity: An Interpretation of *Dignitatis Humanae* on the Right to Religious Freedom,” in *Freedom, Truth, and Human Dignity: The Second Vatican Council’s Declaration on Religious Freedom*, ed. David L. Schindler and Nicholas J. Healy Jr. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Press, 2015), 39–209.

73. On the question of political neutrality, cf. Douglas Farrow, *Desiring a Better Country: Forays in Political Theology* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2015), esp. ch. 5, “Catholics and the Neutral State.”

neutrality that liberal society rests its claim that it alone among human cultures in history is able, in principle, to afford all persons and religions equal participation in public (economic, political, academic) life, despite divergent understandings of (ultimate) reality, truth, and goodness. The problem is that this putatively neutral freedom of liberalism is not neutral; on the contrary, it expresses the quite definite idea of freedom that turns freedom’s naturally given ends into mere options—in a way that, as we have shown, changes the nature of both the act *and* the ends of freedom as these are conceived in the ancient-classical Christian tradition.

The summary burden of my argument, then, is that the prudence of Christ and the saints must function as the *auriga virtutum* (the “charioteer” of the virtues) also in the historical moment presented by the “exceptional” (economic) order of liberalism.



“Ordinary people” in America’s liberal society, like “ordinary people” of all times and places, seek in their deepest depths what is true and good and beautiful, and the God who is the first and ultimate cause of these. The criticisms that need to be raised regarding our society are best directed at the liberal academic and cultural elites of both right and left who train these “ordinary people” to overlook what is most profound and pervasive in every human act, thereby hindering their ability to understand rightly the restlessness that propels their dramatic search for meaning in all areas of their lives, including the market.\* □

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