

Does Christian Humanism Make Sense in Economics?

Introduction

Although I initially had reservations about the title suggested by the editors for this paper, I decided to accept it since it has grown on me as a convenient summation of the tensions between Christianity and the individualism at the root of modern economics, tensions that make it difficult to reconcile the two through such an ambiguous term as “humanism” – for they do not share a common concept of the “human”. Indeed, it is precisely the difference in their understanding of man that raises the question as to whether it even makes sense to discuss Christianity as humanism in connection with economics, as though the former could be grafted onto the latter while the latter remains what it is. It is this tension that I wish to elaborate upon and make clear over the course of this work.

With all respect to opinions to the contrary, opinions that I recognize are also powerfully developed, I am not particularly fond of the phrase ‘Christian humanism’ - for it can, in some way, be viewed as something of contradiction. In fact, in my opinion, the origin of humanism is connected with an individualist anthropology to which the Christian vision of man cannot be reduced without violence to its essential character. In fact, the partisans of what we may call ‘Christian liberalism’, especially among some North American Catholics, are engaged in the attempt to make this same “humanist” individualism compatible with the radical opening and gift of the other that is in the essence of Christian life. The result, stated with all brevity, is something akin to the following: to try to join a utilitarian and self-interested explanation of human social relations as an autonomously self-regulating and optimal system to the Christian call for works of service to others. I hope that over the course of this paper I can explain with greater clarity the reasons for my reservations over any such project.

In any case, I think that there has been frequent abuse of the term ‘humanism’, and this to the point that the very term has become rather, even utterly, ambiguous. Thus, when it is necessary to use it, there is no remedy but to add several qualifications in order to explain its sense and meaning with regard to the “human.” It is indicative that ‘humanism’ seems to require that ‘Christian’ be added to it as recognition that there is something in its essence that needs such correction or qualification.

On the other hand, neither am I particularly fond of using the expression ‘economy’ without qualification given the contemporary supposition that it refers to a neutral or objective science, valid always and in all places. In my opinion, economy has not always been understood as it has today, nor is the contemporary view the only way of understanding it. From my point of view, there are as many economies as possible human communities, which nevertheless would not prevent us from being able to detect a certain conjunction of understandings that arise

more from common and consistent contemporary practices than from a pure and theoretically a priori body of knowledge.

Today, in contrast, talk of “economics” is essentially the same as referring to so-called ‘neo-classical’ economics, which - for many - has come to constitute the paradigm of economic science par excellence. As we will later see, this focus on neo-classical economics as paradigmatic arises as a consequence of a “humanism” fomented by what is commonly referred in philosophy as “Illustration.” That is to say, by the idea of man painted out of his context, as simply individual, the individual man taken as a strange and timeless being, disentangled from all community and all tradition, with pretensions to being and having sufficient ground for his thought and action in himself alone. In such a conception, human action is viewed as the problem of externally coordinating independent and static, universalized individuals and is studied from the distance of a-historical and supposedly sterilized objectivity – both of these emphases require man to be a capable of being taken as a given datum, constituted autonomously and without reference to the context in which he always already exists.

The development of this work has the following structure: in the first section, I will offer a brief summary of the origin of that “humanism” typical of Modernity. In the second section, I will attempt to demonstrate the intrinsically individualist and atheist dimension entailed in this Modern vision of man. In the third part, which I consider to be the nucleus of my presentation, I will give an exposition of how, from the basic characteristics of this “humanist” individualism, a new and revolutionary vision of the economy emerged – a vision now paradigmatic but still fraught with perhaps fatal ambiguities and difficulties. This vision was, as I see it, implicit in the ‘anthropological inversion’ which drove the humanism of Illustration. In the last part, and by way of conclusion, I give some suggestions as to how, from a Christian conception of man, it might be possible to advance a more realistic and practical view of the economy.

Humanity and humanism

It could be useful, at this point, to distinguish between the human and “humanism.” It is well to recall that in many cases, although not always, nor necessarily, such ‘isms’ can bring with them an excessive simplification of a reality that is much richer and more complex. Thus, while by the first I understand the search for the truly human, by the second I understand a somewhat biased position that attempts to defend an a priori and very reductionist conception of the autonomy of man.

Since the time of Plato it has been evident that it is not so easy to understand man, to grasp where the soul and body coincide, where the individual and the communal, the transcendent and the immanent, the temporal and the eternal. The Christian vision of man makes it still more difficult by positing within man an opening toward unexpected horizons, which confer upon man a dignity hitherto unsuspected by ancient philosophy. With the revelation of the mystery of Christ, God made man and united by so much to all humanity, there remained the necessity of grasping the meaning of this interaction and connection between

divine and human, between grace and nature, that remains hidden both in the life of all men and each one of them individually.

For Aristotle, the properly human was the *logos*, the capacity of man to know and communicate. In this sense, he defined man as the only animal with language at his disposal. From this it followed that man also developed money, or what amounts to the same, that he gives value to things, he humanizes them by situating them as a sensible expression of the ties that unite and maintain a community wherein need is communicated. Thus money – in a sense, as much as law and language – serves as the expression of the social ties created by communal use and common practices of production, exchange and distribution formative of daily communal life. It was thus clear – to Aristotle – that man was properly and radically political and social by nature. This essentially political or social character shows itself in his capacity to develop his character in and through the continual pursuit of the common good, the development of which is both through its constant renewal of shared traditions and its renovation – that is to say, in a word, through its renaissance.

For this reason, whoever tried to live in solitary isolation demonstrated that he believed himself either a god or a beast; that is, to live in isolation suggests that one either believes oneself self-sufficient in capacity for human perfection or always already possessing the fullness thereof, in no need of the benefits for personal human development that derive from the cumulative wisdom and experience of communal tradition and from mutual support of one's fellow men or one believes that no development is possible or necessary and that the brutish life of the barbarian is an adequate expression of human nature. The *logos*, that divine spark that permits man to escape submersion in nature, the radical ambiguity of man's nature as dependent upon tradition and community for his development, was – then – for Aristotle, proper to man, it was that which distinguished him as much from the animals as from the gods.

Although there was much depth in the anthropological insights of Aristotle, it was St. Augustine, a Christian thinker, who would truly illuminate these depths. Not only was this divine spark proper to man as he whose nature stretches out toward and beyond what might otherwise be a static and enclosed cosmos, but man is as capable of receiving grace. Through this gift, it is not so much man that advances solely on his own strength, but rather he receives that advancement toward a divinization through the grace which enhances his natural abilities and – in fact – brings him to himself, a pursuit in which he would otherwise falter, fail and fall short of. Paradoxically, this kind of transcendence of humanity not only divinizes man's spiritual nature in a way, but also gives special importance to the temporal dimension of man and to the human body - this is why the memory and will then appear as so essential in grasping the human *logos*. Memory and will are the temporal insofar as human development *qua* development requires the maintenance of both a past renewed and a projection into the future.

This *logos* was thus articulated in its three basic dimensions: memory, stretching back, in search of the sources and the origin of life; understanding, which attends to the present; and the will, that projects the past and present

toward an end not yet reached. The three dimensions lean on and need each other. Human action is not possible without the understanding that judges and decides. Yet for this it needs memory to bring the past to bear upon the present, otherwise there can be no such thing as understanding, which would be erased at every moment and live in the blissful ignorance and brutish instinct of the beast. The conjunction of past and present, or what is the same, memory and understanding, make it possible for the will to then project into the future the truth it has received and judged and thus to act accordingly.

According to this explanation, it could be said that, for Saint Augustine, tradition is itself proper to man, the reception and submission of a divine gift of development and triumphal achievement is enveloped in human work, a work that each generation receives from the past and hands over to the future, giving unity – in a way – to the actions of all men: a common labor, a common project. Thus there is, through the gift of grace, both the divine and the human within every tradition insofar as what is received is both the creative action of God who is always present, a grace pouring itself out in a maintenance and assistance that is at the same time incorporated into the results of the free action of the men who have preceded us. Within every tradition, then, the divine and human are coincident; there are both what is always good and pure as well as what can be good or bad. Tradition, therefore, is constituted as the dynamic pillar of history in the realization of God's creative plan, counting on the collaboration of free men. This combination of human and divine is beautifully summed up in the famous phrase Augustine: "God who created you without you, will not save you without you."

Implicit in this is the two-fold character of tradition, both reception and renovation. No tradition is possible without community and without authority. It is the preservation of both that sustains the life of a tradition. That which is received and that which is handed on is not something purely individual, but a common good and a common work, increased or diminished by those who have preceded us in the maintenance of the tradition and by we who perpetuate it. Thus understood, an essential element of tradition is language, the communitarian dimension of which is evident, but above all there is also clearly a commitment to living in accordance with the profound sense of one's tradition, for it is the reception of the past that permits the discovery for oneself of that which deserves to be retained and passed on with veneration.

A tradition, then, is not something dead and inert – the stale inheritance of a bygone age – but something that advances at every stage with the articulation given it by the present, which deepens its understanding through reasoning. This deepening permits the discovery of harmony between the gift of inherited vision and the recognition of the sense of rectitude of life of those that came before us. An articulation that is essentially social and common. To live in a tradition is not only to conserve it, but to make possible the invention of that which until then, although present, had remained hidden; in part because it had not yet met the 'opportune time' – the time in which the life of one generation, relating its inheritance to the present, encounters the necessity of elaborating on what they discover through their experience to the broader human experience which they will hand on to their descendants.

This action of integration into the community, the community of an entire tradition wherein one generation relates itself to another as much as one man relates his own experience to his community, is the participation of men in common action and thought both in origin and contribution. It is this participation that nourishes individual life, that opens up the possibility of making a beginning, not from a void but from an inheritance, and the possibility of carrying out one's own proper action in transforming that inheritance, giving expression to one's own peculiar mode of unrepeatable being. It is this integration that makes possible the particular contribution of all to the history of humanity. Only when thus viewed, is it discovered that time forms a whole. Only when thus understood, with a sense of the unity of action of all men, is the proper character of the whole tradition manifest in all its plenitude as the profound gift of liberty. For through tradition, human action is not trapped within the infinite repetition of a monotonously indistinct and undeveloped bestial origin but is offered the opportunity to take up and advance the inheritance he has received, in such a way as to weave his individuality into the tradition, which makes his very distinction possible.

Tradition in this sense, and liberty with it, then, presupposes the recognition of authority, of a mysterious wisdom that orients us, extending from time immemorial, that does not proceed from the will of the present, from men, an 'unwritten law' which gives foundation and sense to human knowledge. This same mysterious and originative wisdom, that for Christians is the Word of God, wants to depend on human liberty and human *logos*, on the possibility and necessity that each man should think for himself and not be limited to passively and physiologically receiving and transmitting, as the animals that are limited to transmitting the same genetic code.

Although it may seem a paradoxical result, yet for a man to think for himself, it is indispensable that he live within a tradition, possessed of a certain venerable authority through which he maintains communion with all other men. As much thinking as speaking are radically communal actions. A tradition maintains and renews itself if each one of its members is capable of judging, for themselves, what he has received. Only once he rejects or accepts the received, for better or worse, can he become aware of the profound significance of the own tradition.

If in each tradition there were no authority that in some way or another transmitted the sacred, the judgment that each man must bring to bear upon the inheritance in its encounter with the world would not be possible. There could be no question of giving new life to that tradition and discovering the sense of one's own life within it. No man can proceed to a judgment of all tradition from outside of all of them, for he always already exists under some type of authority that helps him judge. Without partaking in some tradition, it is impossible to advance the humanity of man – indeed, an absolutely self-referential language, a word outside of *all* indices and meaning, a thought unrelated to *all* human thought, would be absolute madness stripped of all structure, logic and significance, an impossible nothing. Yet even madness generally retains some slender and tenuous thread of connection to the world that it once knew.

All tradition, then, requires a subject to be within a linguistic community and practice that makes communication possible, a human mode of living and thinking. This, of course, in no way implies suppressing the unrepeatable singularity of each individual. Quite the contrary, in fact, it makes such individuality possible and affirms it. Relation, limit and definition belong together with identity. Without tradition and community it would not be possible for each man to make a contribution from his interior in the exercise of the liberty that he has been conceded and whereby he transforms his inheritance. Said another way, person, community and tradition are modes of referring themselves to that which constitutes the essence of the human.

Theism and humanism

Before the profundity and grandeur of Christian anthropology, wherein the divine and the human labor together, coincide and separate, wherein the good is taken together with the mysterious presence of evil in history that Christians refer to as original sin and human failure, it is easy to put excessive emphasis on either of the two dimensions that are articulated within it: the divine or the human.

It is possible that it was toward the end of the Middle-Ages when a tendency toward a pessimistic anthropology arose. Offering a poor interpretation of the mysterious reality of original sin, human dignity was excessively deprecated and doubts were raised about human liberty as a natural reality. Perhaps through a false pietism, late-Scholasticism began to deform the sense of tradition by devoting all their attention and tribute to the external, totalizing and despotic action of God as the singular protagonist in the development of human salvation and history and, in the end, were left with a God that, more than omnipotent, was presented as arbitrary.

It is, then, very probable that humanism emerged in the 15th century as a reaction to this tendency to obscure the important feature of Christian anthropology that is human liberty and to proceed under a very deformed vision of God's totalizing action within history.

We have already had occasion to see how tradition stretches both backward towards the origin as well as forward toward the end of history. For man to be situated outside of this time horizon where his vision could take in the whole in some immediate and intuitive fashion is simply impossible. This makes it very important that a divine authority situated beyond time and history be the base and fundament of tradition - while always united with human authority, with socially practiced wisdom, the gift of tradition guides man as a venerable revelation that is bound to the inexhaustibility of its sacred origin and to the promise of a future depth in understanding that revelation. It is this faith and veneration that allow men to develop for themselves, to pursue the deepening of their inheritance. Without faith, as much human as divine, without some religious attitude that in some way or another makes reference to the mystery of Creation, or at least to the origin of time, tradition is without sense and becomes deformed. In fact, without some faith, again as much human as divine together, tradition tends to dissolve into rootless social convention, a groundless inheritance of

mediated social babble, or it tends to convert itself into a demand for the unmediated and intuitive presence of circumscribable and finished truth.

It is therefore convenient to distinguish between traditions, with a lower case, that have to do with faith and human authority, and the Tradition, in upper case, that has to do with the faith and divine authority. And it is precisely in this interplay of the human with the divine, of the contingent and the necessary, by means of memory, intelligence and will, where human action with divine guidance and aid makes possible the fullness of human life. Stated in Christian terms, tradition and life of man can only be properly conceived and maintained as the joint action of nature and grace, of God and men.

This opening of human life to the mystery of Authority makes tradition something uncontrollable as far as man is concerned, for he can never advance, from inside history, to a perfect dominion over his own life and to a position outside his temporal vision – to a vision that would make the achievement of a finished order of society and a finished, perfected truth, possible. Within the whole tradition there is a continuous tension stretching toward the fullness of being that, just like the horizon, is always displaced with the very same rhythm that one advances toward it. This relation to Being manifests itself, among the many other things, in the continuous and interminable debate over the sense and finality of the tradition, or what is the same, over the life of man.

In the face of this tension between the divine and the human, found within tradition, it is worthwhile to pay attention to two extreme positions: theologism and humanism. While in some respect opposed, these extremities have in common the attempt of resolving the tension of divine and human interaction through a simplistic and hasty reduction of the complexity of the mystery of human action.

Thus understood, theologism, on the one hand, follows the inheritance of a pagan fatalism in attributing all that happens to the direct and immediate will of the divine. It denies the capacity of human intelligence to judge the authority of all tradition and posits, in an inseparable way, the divine overwhelming of the human. There is here a problematic overlapping that in no way can be broken or distinguished and that already makes the profound and full sense of tradition impossible.

For it often happens that, exalted by a misled pietism, thinking to aggrandize divinity, theologism tends to denigrate human dignity. They consider man essentially corrupt, incapable of any natural opening or access to God. They fail to realize that such a depreciation of the creature also depreciates the Creator – for their Creator is incapable of any true creation inseparable from his own action to the very extent that his creation is incapable of action. It is a stillborn creation and an impotent Creator. Thus their anthropological pessimism is inextricably bound to a pessimistic theology.

Those guilty of such theologism view the authority of tradition as exclusively sacred, utterly unmixed with the human. They are thus led to place limits on human liberty in the investigation of any necessary separation between

the human and the divine, a separation that underlies the true authority of the whole tradition: namely, that it is not simply and radically inexplicable and irrational. The practical result is the imposition of an oppressive clerical authoritarianism that does not distinguish between the human and the divine, between the religious and the political, between reason and faith.

While thus destroying the sense and rationality of their own tradition, theologism also, on the other hand, denies the possibility of any diversity of traditions and communities. For when tradition is truly understood, such traditions are not only possible but also necessary and beneficial, offering a wealth of expressions and experiences that contribute to discourse. Yet the radically imposed and groundless tradition of theologism precludes the acceptance of any other contribution. In this way, tradition is disfigured in an ideology, into a “dead tradition” that perishes under the “weight” of an immovable past that impedes its renovation, impedes the orientation to the future that is proper to true tradition.

As indicated, in reaction to such theologism, there emerges an equally radical humanism that assigns the entire force of history to purely human action. This too ends by making any true sense of tradition thoroughly unsustainable. It is a perspective that, while it does not on principle exclude divine action, according to Blondel, it nevertheless considers divine action extrinsic and totally alien to human action. Humanism, then, posits a sphere of ‘purely human action’ that only admits of a purely human authority, totally detached or separated from any divine authority.

The problem is that, as the authority is a type of knowledge, for there to be a purely human authority, this knowledge must be innately rooted or immediately intuited and firmly grounded in each man – for any other knowledge would be a received knowledge that presupposes a tradition and some type of alien authority. That is to say, the authority for each man can only be his own ‘reason’. This suggests the early modern concept of ‘reason’ as rooted in an innate knowledge, separated from the memory and the will, from past and from future, a reason that contemplates reality from an objectivity supposedly outside of the world, that contemplates ‘from nowhere’. It would be from this idea that humanism would ultimately derive the vision of man as an individual, as enclosed within the self, without any potential opening to the world through tradition and community.

In the case of theologism, then, men remain detached, atomized, each in direct dependence on an unknown and terrifying, arbitrary God. In the case of humanism, men are also decoupled in order to depend on the no less unknown and terrifying, arbitrary individual that he is himself, with no guide.

Both theologism and humanism are attitudes that only really make sense within a Christian anthropology, where they structure the problem of the relation between nature and grace, between God and men. Together they frame an eschatological tension that is not as easy to give a solution to, and much less in the field of pure theory, as both postures pretend to do. The Augustinian vision of man as member of two cities, the celestial and terrestrial, is a vision that has confronts this double dimension of the proper authority of all true tradition as something

that resolves itself in the plane of practice, in living fidelity to the profound sense that constitutes it.

Outside of the Christian tradition, both humanism and theologism are not given with equal clarity. Thus when speaking, for example, of Roman-Stoic humanism, we are speaking of a humanism which is, in reality, nothing more than a Renaissance reinterpretation, which is in fact as much or more Christian than it is Roman. For no doubt it is the ideal of an excellent life that the best of Romans professed, yet in no way did the Stoics enter into the discussion of the kind of eschatological tension of which we have been speaking. Their 'humanism' was merely the rise and fall of aristocratic men in harmonious resignation to a closed natural world without even the slightest tension with the divine gift of grace. For the Romans, the divine was absent or at least utterly indifferent and there could be no question of the relation between grace and nature as there was no gift of grace nor could there be any question of nature stretching beyond itself. Nor, for that matter, was there any real question of tradition in the sense of development and deepening of an original gift of wisdom – the cosmos ran its cyclical course and no movement broke the bounds or moved mankind forward.

The genesis of what we refer to as humanism has, then, its ultimate roots in two historical facts that are both essentially Christian: the Renaissance, that developed principally in the south of Europe; and Protestantism, that emerged in the north and center of Europe. In both cases, their essential character is determined by their response to the essentially Christian question of the relation between grace and nature.

The reformers were not protesting against the possible theologistic authoritarianism of Rome, but against the impure humanity that contaminated it. They aspired to a 'purification' of Rome precisely as the corrupt impurity of tradition, rejecting tradition in a theologistic way and arriving at an understanding of tradition and authority that extended equally to the nascent sovereign states of the 15th century. Their aim was to free Christianity of all that was human and fallen, to retain only a divine authority that they believed themselves to encounter directly, without mediation, in Scripture, where they were convinced they would find, in all its purity, the immediate Word of God. In their minds, they had to dismantle all that they judged human contamination to arrive at 'sola scriptura', the only and unalterable Tradition and Authority.

In so doing, they were not aware that writing, like all language, is inseparable from tradition and community, from subjects that make it possible and give it life, subjects originally tied, through tradition, to the community of the first Christians. Along this road, neglecting the communal and traditional character of language even in the writing and selection of Scripture, they did not hesitate to proclaim a novel message, a radically inhuman message: the total separation of grace and liberty.

The position of the Italian Renaissance was much more intricate. They did not deny the theologist thesis that man had been corrupted, but they refused to admit that this corruption affected the capacity of human reason to bring forth

success in the business of the city. The success of human affairs was independent of the Divine and, therefore, of the fullness of human development through grace; it could be achieved through a more moderate, purely human effort. Influenced by a Christian spiritualism of more Platonic origin, they were convinced that these affairs of civic life had nothing to do with the grace and salvation of men. In line with this attitude, they then came to establish a rupture between the realm of “purely human” activities, human “business” and secular affairs, activities that pointed toward purely human ends and the realm of “purely supernatural” activities, activities related with grace and supernatural ends that had nothing to do with human nature. If there were such supernatural realities, they were extrinsic additions to human nature and not developments thereof.

If the business of the city could be brought to completion and effectively run with only the light of reason, this opened the possibility of an absolute liberty detached from grace, the very inverse, though equally inhuman, of the Lutheran view of grace without liberty. For the Renaissance, grace came to be something extrinsic and superfluous for living a fully human life. This was the origin and genesis of the concept of “pure human nature”, a key element in the construction of the individualism of Illustrative humanism.

For a Renaissance man such as Galileo, it was only through mathematical language, the activity proper to human reason, that knowledge of the present possible, an abstract knowledge detached from all tradition. Notwithstanding, as Galileo himself recognized, he was thus inclined toward a Platonic tradition in place of the Scholastic Aristotelian tradition. Certainly, physical reality is outside of tradition, insofar as it lacks time. Yet the theory of physics is itself a tradition and a language; united by a community of practicans that stretches from Archimedes up through Galileo himself. To maintain the contrary is to close reason upon itself and impede the advance of an improved knowledge of this reality.

The Protestants, for their part, with the supreme authority that Luther claimed to find disincarnated and in all purity in ‘sola Scripture’, refused to admit that the Christian faith could not live without the community of lived experience and tradition which transmits the historical experience and content of the encounter with God made flesh. The Renaissance, on the other hand, and for its part, refused to take into account that no human knowledge, from politics to mathematics, is accessible to a human reason simply outside of time. This type of knowledge, too, is only possible mediated through the community of practicans that, with their rights and wrongs, give life to a tradition wherein they articulate divine wisdom together with human wisdom, constructed and transmitted through all as an unfinished intellectual labor that can and must remain open to new horizons.

In both cases, at least in their origins, they were not reacting against the Tradition, which they considered unalterable and true, but against the deformation of Tradition by human traditions. They do not seem to have been aware that both dimensions, divine and human, are essential parts of a whole tradition. Within the whole tradition they live together, both the true and the false, both authority and reason, in a way that all are ambiguously incomplete. Access to this Truth, with a

capital T, is possible only mediated through bounded instantiation or humanization. This, of course, brings the risk of its disfiguration, obscurity and incompleteness, but this is the price that has to be paid for its revelation to limited understanding. It is openness to and acceptance of the gift of such partial glimpses that constitutes and maintains the development of the rational and the free in man.

The development of all tradition, therefore, is fed through rational debate, not simply through closed theoretical systems of doctrines that may close reason off to itself future development, but above all, through practical wisdom, the encounter with and experience of the world that approximates to the true sense and orientation of tradition. In this way, reason is a discourse possessed of a depth that has no end within history. Only from within this ongoing debate does it become apparent that there is an essential paradox to rationality: that a tradition must change in order to remain the same, in order to maintain itself and remain faithful to its origin and destiny, it must deepen itself and ever strive to go beyond itself. No less paradoxical is the fact that a debate can only be rational under the auspices of an authority that places limits on those debates, not in the sense that it impedes or obstructs them, but in the sense that – as the inherited vision – its vision channels them, giving them concrete and determined questions through which it encounters new solutions or confronts the necessity of new ways of addressing problems that cannot be resolved on the basis of existing patterns of thought. It is through these critical encounters that traditions are vivified and sustained.

In all tradition, there is both the human as well as the anti-human, human failing, that which frees together with that which brings alienation and misunderstanding. There is, then, precisely in the very notion of a tradition as development, a principle of disorder that refers to its origin and that principle, in Christian language, is called original sin. It is the very reason why man cannot save himself from sin without the help of grace, without the immersion of God within history through the assumption of a human nature.

Atheistic individualism and humanism

In the effort to be rid of the frustrating impurity of tradition and vaunt themselves beyond original sin and the present human condition, both Protestantism and the Renaissance ended in human authority, whether in the form of a clerical authoritarianism devolving into atomistic democratization of dogma until religion was a merely private affair or by starting out immediately from that premise in the attempt to ground knowledge on the mind as the only source of authority. What they left standing was their basic principle: the individualist conception of man. The conception of the individual, not as someone whose identity can only be defined through his integration into a community and a tradition, through which he is integrated into nature, but an individual who derives his identity from his consciousness alone. In the end, this proved to be a consciousness merely enclosed in an empty interior.

For as such an individual has no relation with the past nor projects himself toward a future, he thinks as though situated in a void. The individual, thus conceived, is converted into a strange a-temporal kind of being, a species of phantasm that floats in the middle of the nothing, and whose only identity has its base in self-consciousness. It is, then, the original and through itself content of this consciousness that is all important.

The difficulty is that individualism will prove to be, in a sense, by definition atheist and a-social, negating the tradition and the community as essential to man, making impossible all real and fundamental relations both between men and, through them, between men and God. This is to say that while, as we have said, all tradition implies faith, as much human as divine, and implies them in an inseparable way, it therefore also implies that without community with men and with God, and without the human development to which they lead and to which man is led through them, it is in fact impossible to speak of any humanity in humanism.

This because the idea of man as individual corresponds to a philosophical project aimed at obtaining self-grounded knowledge. It is a project that only admits the validity of 'clear and distinct' ideas; that is, ideas defined in such a way that they are both so fully known that their content must be exhausted in the gaze that fixes them and so distinctly known that their content can have no origin apart from an absolutely unmediated intuition. Or, what amounts to the same, they must be separated from their original context and culture; they must be universal and abstract, unmixed with the polluting influence of varying and singular experience. In this way both the individual as well as things-perceived become abstract representations in a mind, a mind itself represented as universal and abstract, sufficient in itself, in its anteriority to all community and tradition, to be capable of determining with full precision and exhaustibility that in which all things consist.

Now, the difficulty is that if the human mind cannot advance to these original and origivative ideas by means of tradition and access to nature, then they can only be innate to the mind. In which case, as Descartes argued, the innate ideas are only grounded through trust in the benevolence of God who guarantees that these ideas correspond with a reality that is 'out there' and with which there is otherwise no way of connecting. Thus the autonomous individual mind is incapable of religion that derives from his integration in and access to the world in which he exists, he remains incapable of relating himself to Nature, with men and with God. There is no way of giving a real ground for these relations, they can only be the result of an a priori content of the mind, a belief or worse, a pure fantasy.

When thus placed outside of all tradition and suspended above nature, human action becomes impossible. Human action is something that can no longer be understood on account of the chasm between man and the world, there is no explanation of how the world can induce an individual to act who is, by definition, a passionless and solitary mind. An individualist reason situated outside the vital dynamic of the human cannot in any way explain or give sense to action. As Hume saw very well, this type of reason can only be passively opposed to or slave to passions that move it or cross it with the violence of alien force.

Moreover, for such a disembodied mind, human action can only be contemplated from the outside, from a theoretical and abstract focus. It is not understood from the interior, for the very passions, motives and context, which constitute the life of man are not the life of the mind. The individual and his actions are thereby converted into a mathematical problem of 'optimal decisions', into actions whose motives are posited only on the basis of an external analysis; that is precisely the base and fundament of modern economic theory.

Supposing external and a-temporal consequences, perfectly known a priori, modern economic analysis tries to decide which of these consequences offers the individual greater advantage. The difficulty resides in the fact that, in this schema, there is no life. To be sure, there is abstract logic, but in no way a real human life, and in reality there is nothing for economics to decide that is not already somehow implicit in its a priori suppositions.

As we have already said, there exists no such thing as individualist human action, brought about through an isolated individual; for action supposes a community that projects itself in time, in no way can it be reduced to perfectly foreseeable consequences. In fact, that very precision which is sought is only achieved through reductionist assumptions, the conditions of the model. True human action is that which is integrated in that vital and rational dynamic that we call tradition, with its plethora of motives, rationalities and strategies. For the constitution of a true moral agent, someone that can give a reason for his actions in the face of others, the individual must be part of a community.

The modern economy as an anthropological inversion

In the Aristotelian conception, economy was the activity proper to a community, set within and subordinated to its values – more concretely, it was the activity proper to the family, as its proper name, *oikos*, household, indicates. As such it was oriented toward the achievement of the common good. In this way, property, accumulation, production and distribution, the essence of the economy, were subordinated to the prudence and life of each family. Moreover, with the appearance of cities, the economy did not become detached from community, for it remained linked to political prudence and the common life of the city. This in a way that the exchanges between families were made to conform to 'just prices', that is to say, those that conformed to the common good of all families and the achievement of the good life.

In this sense the city-market was, for Aristotle, a more ample form of having all things in common through exchange; it was, in effect, equitable exchange constituting a type of common use among all the families. This was, for Aristotle, only possible within the community called the city, for in it – and without annulling the autonomy of the economies of the families – is made truly possible the practice the good life, the full exercise of the moral and intellectual virtues that distinguish man, all that is consider properly human. The proper value or price of things is the manifestation of the unity or common good of the city. Without justice, the expression of the life of the city and the form ordained to having the good life in

common, the very life proper to each city as a community, value is not possible, nor are the exchanges through which value is given expression. This explains why, for Aristotle, language and money were both expressions of the common need, in such a way that their proper ordination to the common good vividly expressed the justice and unity of each city.

Modern individualism denies the existence of the community as prior to the individual. Whether this community be the family or the city, modernity insists that each individual can act in isolation, without mediation or formation, as if others neither existed nor influenced their action. This produces what we have called an 'anthropological inversion' in which the individual becomes anterior to all community.

The problem that this poses is how to explain the origin of society. For without a natural community into which he is born, the isolated individual must enter into social relations from a position of anteriority such that those relations take on the character of formal arrangements. This has the aggravating consequence that in the modern sense, one is not truly speaking of a community sharing a life, but of a sort of deliberate a priori "rational" coordination on the plane of virtual action that each individual proposes inside his own mind as the optimal arrangement.

A problem that corresponds to this is the concrete question: how to arrive at a situation where a multitude of isolated individual rationalities, by definition static and closed, can give rise to a static situation as a consequence of 'decisions' that would be compatible between themselves and 'optimal' for all?

Among individuals, in the modern sense, there are only external relations or relations of power. There is no possibility of justice, in the classical sense of a common life as the common good. Yet a type of "justice" must be imposed upon these external relations, so that there may be some semblance of social order – which though lacking similarity to that communal and Aristotelian sense of justice, may nevertheless offer at least the appearance of harmony. This has the aggravating consequence that such a 'species of justice' can only be commutative in the sense of an equilibrium through which no individual diminishes his initial possession. Such equilibrium obscures the original sense of justice, offering only the relative stabilization of mutual isolation as a corrupted form of 'community.'

Absolutely speaking, the aim of commutative justice is only possible in a political community, where it would be possible for men to pursue the development of that virtue proper to their common, vivifying, good life. That which moderns call market exchange and equilibrium are simply not such, they are – rather – simply mechanical equilibriums between forces that fight among themselves, their apparent harmony in "equilibrium" is merely the tension of their firm resolution.

It is very significant that from the 18th century onward, the "just price," which had hitherto made sense only within a community and within a tradition, was transformed into the term 'equilibrium price' – which refers to the fight

between antagonistic forces. To speak of a “just price” is a way of making it clear that its origin resides in the virtues of the men that form the community, while to speak of equilibrium price is to give expression to the fact that there is no possibility of virtues, for there is no common life that forms the aim of the community as the good life; it is to say that all there is, is a result, the result of an external mechanism that attempts to supplant human action.

For Modernity, the economy is the static result of a mechanical process and is externally composed of many isolated individuals that are predisposed by a rational calculus, and are moved by a ‘will to power’, by the incessant desire to increase their possession of the external. All modern economic theory is reduced to demonstrating mathematically that this process can lead to a mechanical equilibrium.

Newton, who had also attempted to explain the order of the universe from the bases of individuals or atoms, had encountered with a similar problem: how to arrive from such isolation to an interaction of predictable form? Or, to put it another way: how is it possible to give a mathematical or rational explanation of the order of the universe on the basis of physical laws? This brought him to posit an external factor mediating the behavior of all of things, a universal gravitational force, whose existence seemed evident to him, but could never be more than a functional hypothesis.

In the construction of modern economic theory, there is a similar hypothesis: the incessant desire of all men to enrich themselves without end, driving them onwards to rational optimization and “stability” between themselves; something that for Aristotle constituted the vice of *pleonexia* and that Nietzsche translated with the significant name of *Mehrundmerwollhaben*.

For Modernity, the economy leaves off being a practical wisdom and transforms itself into a ‘social physics,’ a pure working theory, an abstract knowledge of mechanism. Its objective consists in studying the epistemological conditions under which the mental interaction of some ‘rational’ individuals that are moved by an incessant desire for gain does not generate chaos, but achieves a situation of equilibrium, in which all have the maximum compatible with the conditions of the game.

Yet without community, without tradition, the initial conditions can only be inexplicable, considered “given” or exogenous to the model and unrelated to any true sense of justice. The economy presents itself, then, as an abstract rationality separated from the individual and his good, from the formation of his tastes and preferences in relation to his community, from the particular sense and evaluation which he gives to property and accumulation, to production and, of course, to money.

The nucleus of the modern economy is not constituted by the family, nor by the city. Neither can a market be properly said to exist, for there is merely a conjunction of virtual price assignments, realized in abstraction, in a ‘void’ of real human relations, where all that is important is the resultant assignment. From the

formal point of view, it is treated as a mathematical problem where from a conjunction of 'goods' that are taken as 'given' or 'produced', and from a conjunction of individuals that are also taken as 'given', the attempt is made to determine some correspondence between both conjunctions at a point where there will be equilibrium, in the sense that nobody can continue improving their insatiable desire to have more without reducing the aggregate total of their satiation.

The principle objective of modern economics was political, this also in a new sense: to justify that the interaction of individuals, anterior to itself, that act as if the others do not exist, can surge to mechanical equilibrium and not chaos.

The modern economy, then, is a mechanical and static system, incapable of explaining the genesis of value. Value is presupposed and then determined. On account of this, from the beginning it has encountered the so called 'paradox of value': why does water, which is so useful for human life, have so little value and, on the other hand, gold, which has such low utility for human life, have such great value? It is a paradox that is impossible to resolve from the closed rationality of the modern individual – for value is only possible on the basis of a previous gift of life and nature, an essential element of mystery that is hidden in the tradition and the community and totally absent in modern economics. Instead, quantities valued are simply posited a priori, on the basis of desires without a context, meteoric passion trends set in a vacuum and with little to no attention given to their relation to each other, to the men who are subjects of passion and to the important interplay and transformation of value that occurs within a community over time.

Now is not the time to treat in detail the repeated attempts of modern economics to search for some type of artificial solution for the mediation between individuals, suffice it to say that the search has constituted the history of economic theory for the last two centuries. Only in the last 40 years has there begun to be some recognition, and only among some economists, that such an attempt is not possible on the basis of orthodox assumptions. Some have thus seen what had been argued almost 100 years earlier by some philosophers, giving rise to a new attitude, invading philosophy of science, that is characterized by a morally skeptical or nihilist individualism, a movement that is called 'post-modernity.'

The distinguishing feature of Postmodernity is its skepticism in the face of the possibility of constructing something that substitutes for tradition and community. It is an attitude that has to do with the persistence of an individualist conception of man, that is now treated as compatible with a relaxation of epistemological principle of clarity and distinction as well as the autonomy of the individual – who is now at the mercy of tradition and community, not possessing anything that is proper to himself, he is submerged in history without light or guidance. In this way, Postmodernity has accentuated the problem of its own legitimacy, employing the terminology of Blumenberg.

Among economists, the first that can be viewed as belonging to Postmodernity, are Keynes, under the influence of Wittgenstein, and Schumpeter, under the influence of Weber and Nietzsche. Both, without leaving aside

individualism, opposed the rationalist optimism of those that still trusted blindly in the principle of 'laissez faire' and believed in the harmony of equilibrium. This brought them to an ambiguous attitude with respect to the capacity of 'modern reason' to give rise to a political regime of 'individual liberties' other than the simple myths of the Illustrative Project.

In confrontation with Keynes and Schumpeter is the Neo-modern reaction of economists such as Hayek and Lucas. These have tried, in some way, to reconstitute the old and tired Illustrative Project. In a different way, they have tried to continue pursuing the development and elaboration of a 'rational mediation' that makes it clear to all both the manner in which and the extent to which they are mutually conditioned. At stake in all these novel efforts to rebuild human relations on the basis of atomistic individualism is the individual himself – his isolation, his abstraction, his discursive existence.

How to humanize the economy?

It is, then, necessary to be very precise when it comes to speaking of humanism, for as we have seen, it brings, through its own historical genesis, a germ of individualism and atheism, the advocacy of a system whose stability is predicated upon the exclusion of the necessity of grace and a common good for men; that is, in humanism, the communal character of human life is viewed as something extrinsic to its stability and harmony, it is an addition that is not required by a closed system of equilibrating forces, balanced by the gravitational pull of a single motive. It is a view from which, as recent history has shown, it is not so easy to liberate oneself.

I have the impression, that could be wrong, that on many occasions the expression 'Christian humanism' has come to be an attempt to introduce a certain partial correction, on the part of both confessions, both Catholic and Protestant, a correction that pretends that there is not an essential incompatibility between modern individualism and the supposition of a supernatural end for man. It is a correction that presumes that this latter, a supernatural end for man, can be simply added to the human and understood as simply extrinsic to the completion of human nature and society, which can – on its own – arrive at a stable and fulfilling system. Yet it is only in the person of Christ, in the hypostatic union, that the fullness of man can be brought to completion. In this sense, for me, to humanize and Christianize are the same thing – whereas humanism is to refuse the necessity of Christianity.

I think it urgent and necessary to overcome the tragic and bitter inheritance of the individualistic anthropology of Modernity. For this reason, we must begin by curing the lamentable blindness, induced by centuries of Illustrativism, that impedes a vision of all the dimensions of the real. We cannot go on insisting that only the fomentation of envy and greed can constitute a truly human society.

What is needed is to undo the anthropological inversion that gave place to modern economic theory. To clarify, through well-founded rational arguments, why it is that without tradition and community, there is no way of understanding

human action, and how, in consequence, the individualist inversion makes it very difficult to understand the complexity of economic activity in all its unfinished dynamism. Only through this process of rediscovering the internal dynamic of human action will we recover the double and intrinsic dimension of gift and communality. This implies seeing action from the interior of the agent, for the road that leads to an opening toward others passes through the interior of each agent. At every moment it is even more necessary to develop a new education in action, action oriented toward interiorization, which is only possible on the plane of practice. The indispensable condition for each man's capacity to convert himself into an individual singular and unrepeatable, into someone that has a profound experience of the liberty, is only possible within a tradition and community into which they integrate themselves and through which they articulate themselves.

To bring forward this eminently practical focus, it is necessary that there be true communities, normally small: families and businesses, where human contact between interiors is possible, true communication between men, from which springs the energy and cooperation that makes a viable human society possible.

The unsaid of our postmodern society in crisis is that it is based only upon the loneliness implanted by centuries of theoretical and practical individualism, an isolation that eliminates the possibility of loving and being loved and the true harmony of a common life that flourishes on the basis of such an "exchange."

In this sense, it is highly suggestive that, on the plane of economic activity, it has been precisely through the recent study of that which really happens in the workplace, where the last 40 years have begun to see with some clarity that there are – in fact – many rationalities and many possible rationalities, strategies whereby man can organize his economic life in accordance with something other than a simple and abstract principle of incessant gain. It has become apparent that these rationalities relate to each other and create varying dynamics amongst themselves. Moreover, it is now seen that it is in and through this network of communities that relate themselves continuously, that the abilities, needs and capacities arise that make possible, not only the genesis of value, but also that which is more important: the possibility of a life of full humanity, of service and gift to others in the arena of material requirements.

We have begun to be aware that each business is a different community, with its own tradition and form in that, to each one of its members, it opens the possibility of the development of their own proper and unrepeatable singularity.

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