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Abstract	<p>The aim of this chapter is to reflect and provide a tentative answer to the question posited in the title. The first section provides a brief summary of the origin of that “humanism” typical of Modernity. The second section attempts to demonstrate the intrinsically individualistic and atheistic dimension entailed in this Modernist vision of man. In the third part, which can be considered the nucleus of this chapter, we present an exposition of how, from the basic characteristics of this “humanistic” 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 can be seen as an “anthropological inversion” which drove the humanism of the Enlightenment. The last part, and by way of conclusion, provides 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.</p>	
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**Chapter 6** 1  
**Does Christian Humanism Make Sense** 2  
**in Economics?** 3

**Miguel A. Martínez-Echevarria** 4

**Abstract** The aim of this chapter is to reflect and provide a tentative answer to the question posed in the title. The first section provides a brief summary of the origin of that “humanism” typical of Modernity. The second section attempts to demonstrate the intrinsically individualistic and atheistic dimension entailed in this Modernist vision of man. In the third part, which can be considered the nucleus of this chapter, we present an exposition of how, from the basic characteristics of this “humanistic” 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 can be seen as an “anthropological inversion” which drove the humanism of the Enlightenment. The last part, and by way of conclusion, provides 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.

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Though initially I had reservations, I decided to accept the title suggested by the editors 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 paper.

With all due respect to opinions to the contrary, opinions that I recognize have been powerfully developed as well, I am not particularly fond of the phrase “Christian humanism” – for it can, in a way, be viewed as something of contradiction.

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32 In fact, in my opinion, the origin of humanism is connected with an individualist  
33 anthropology to which the Christian vision of man cannot be reduced without vio-  
34 lence to its essential character. The partisans of what we may call “Christian liberal-  
35 ism”, especially among some North American Catholics, are engaged in precisely  
36 such an attempt: to make this “humanist” individualism compatible with the radi-  
37 cally social character of openness toward and gift of the other that is an essential  
38 element of Christian life. The result, stated with all brevity, is something akin to the  
39 following: an attempt to join a utilitarian and self-interested explanation of human  
40 social relations as an autonomously self-regulating and optimal system to the  
41 Christian call for works of service to others wherein the justice and morality of  
42 human behavior is a critical condition for the achievement of a truly functioning  
43 economy that serves the community. I hope that over the course of this paper I can  
44 explain with greater clarity the reasons for my reservations concerning any such  
45 project.

46 In any case, I think that there has been frequent abuse of the term “humanism”  
47 and this to the point that the very term has become rather, even utterly, ambiguous.  
48 Thus, when it is necessary to use it, there is no remedy but to add several qualifica-  
49 tions in order to explain its sense and meaning with regard to the “human.” It is quite  
50 indicative that “humanism” seems to require that “Christian” be added to it in rec-  
51 ognition that there is something in its essence that needs such correction, qualifica-  
52 tion or explanation.

53 On the other hand, neither am I particularly fond of using the expression “econ-  
54 omy” without qualification given the contemporary supposition that it refers to a  
55 truly neutral or objective science, valid always and in all places, studying a set of  
56 abstractly isolatable and universalized but very determinate behavioral rules and  
57 their cumulative consequences as though they were far more than regularities of a  
58 certain time and place and people. Economy has not always been understood as it  
59 has today and neither is the contemporary view the only way of understanding it.  
60 From my point of view, there are as many economies as possible human communi-  
61 ties, which nevertheless do not prevent us from being able to detect a certain con-  
62 junction of understandings that arise more from common and consistent  
63 contemporary practices than from a pure and theoretically a priori body of  
64 knowledge.

65 Today, in contrast, talk of “economics” is essentially the same as referring to so-  
66 called “neo-classical” economics, which – for many – has come to constitute the  
67 paradigm of economic science par excellence. As we will see, this focus on neo-  
68 classical economics as paradigmatic arises as a consequence of a “humanism” fos-  
69 tered by what is commonly referred to in philosophy as “Enlightenment.” That is to  
70 say, by the idea of man painted out of his context, as simply individual, the indi-  
71 vidual man taken as a strange and timeless being, disentangled from all community  
72 and all tradition, with pretensions to being and having sufficient ground for his  
73 thought and action in himself alone – without a world and without a social world  
74 that offers him the perspectives and practices through which he engages in the  
75 world. In such an idealized 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, however, require man to be capable of being taken as a given datum, constituted autonomously and without reference to the context in which he always already exists or the motives that actually constitute his behavior. Meanwhile, both of these emphases betray their own supposed abstraction and objectivity by insisting on a singularly determinate economic motive and “rationality” that is quite contrary to human experience.

The development of this work has the following structure. In the first section, I will offer a brief summary of the origin of the particular “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 Enlightenment. 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 is useful, at the outset, 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, viewed from a Christian perspective as essentially a limited indetermination that is constitutive of its very openness to and potential for variation as well as for completion – ultimately through the gift of self-gift, by the second I understand a somewhat biased position that attempts to defend an a priori and reductionist conception of man as autonomously given and invariant.

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 them individually.

116 For Aristotle, the properly human was the *logos*, the capacity of man to know and  
117 communicate. In this sense, he defined man as the only animal with language at his  
118 disposal (*Politics* 1252b 10). From this it followed that man also developed money,  
119 or what amounts to the same, that he gives value to things, he humanizes them by  
120 situating them as a sensible expression of the ties that unite and maintain a com-  
121 munity wherein need is communicated. Thus money in a sense – as much as law and  
122 language – serves as the expression of social ties created by communal use and  
123 common practices of production, exchange and distribution formative of daily com-  
124 munal life. It was thus clear – to Aristotle – that man was properly and radically  
125 political and social by nature (*Politics* 1253a 9). This essentially political or social  
126 character shows itself in his capacity to develop his character in and through the  
127 continual pursuit of the common good, the development of which *is* both through its  
128 constant renewal of shared traditions and its renovation – that is to say, in a word,  
129 through its renaissance.

130 For this reason, whoever tried to live in solitary isolation demonstrated that he  
131 believed himself either a god or a beast. That is, to live in isolation suggests that one  
132 either believes oneself to be self-sufficient in capacity for human perfection or that  
133 one always already possesses the fullness thereof. In other words, either one believes  
134 society is of no use to one's own human development or one believes that no devel-  
135 opment is possible or necessary and that the brutish life of the barbarian is an ade-  
136 quate expression of human nature. The *logos*, that divine spark that permits man to  
137 escape submersion in nature, the radical ambiguity of man's nature as dependent  
138 upon tradition and community for his development, was – then – for Aristotle,  
139 proper to man, it was that which distinguished him as much from the animals as  
140 from the gods.

141 Although there was much depth in the anthropological insights of Aristotle, it  
142 was St. Augustine, a Christian thinker, who would truly illuminate these depths. As  
143 Levering (2013) points out not only was this divine spark proper to man as the crea-  
144 ture whose nature stretches out beyond what might otherwise be a static and  
145 enclosed cosmos wherein he merely and infrequently approximated to earthly  
146 human perfection, but man *is* as capable of receiving grace. Through this gift, it is  
147 not so much man that advances solely on his own strength toward the apotheosis of  
148 the merely human as that man receives advancement toward a true divinization and  
149 unexpected completion through the grace which enhances his natural abilities and –  
150 in fact – brings him to himself, a pursuit in which he would otherwise falter and fail.  
151 Paradoxically, this kind of transcendence of humanity not only divinizes man's  
152 spiritual nature in a way, but also gives special importance to the temporal dimen-  
153 sion of man – this is why the memory and will then appear as so essential in grasp-  
154 ing the human *logos*. Memory and will are the temporal insofar as human  
155 development *qua* development requires the maintenance of both a past renewed and  
156 a projection into the future.

157 This *logos* was thus articulated in its three basic dimensions: memory, stretching  
158 back, in search of the sources and the origin of life; understanding, which attends to  
159 the present; and the will, that projects the past and present toward an end not yet  
160 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 161  
memory to bring the past to bear upon the present, otherwise there can be no such 162  
thing as human understanding or human desire, which would otherwise be erased at 163  
every moment and live in the blissful ignorance and brutish instinct of the beast, 164  
determined with respect to particular objects. Not unlike the human hand's eminent 165  
versatility on account its indeterminate utility compared to animal organs devoted to 166  
very unique purposes, the human mind and human desire *are* precisely as partially 167  
indeterminate plasticity insofar as their natural objects are universal abstractions, 168  
truth in general and the good in general, that await judgments to specify this truth 169  
and this good in accordance with experience and education. The conjunction of past 170  
and present, or what is the same, memory and understanding, make it possible for 171  
the will to then project into the future the truth it has received and judged and the 172  
good it has recollected as a good and thus to act accordingly. If men choose that 173  
which seems "good" or "best" on account of an abstract principle drawn to good- 174  
ness in general on the basis of truth-judgment similarly related to men's innate 175  
submission to what is apparently true to them, this is truly an abstract rule of behav- 176  
ior and is only determined in and through a prior judgment of experience, training 177  
or education. Men's "rationality" is constituted by tradition by its very nature inas- 178  
much as it relies upon the "known" and "desired" in every new encounter with the 179  
knowable and desirable. Nor can these be said to have been given to him simply by 180  
personal experience independent of his historical and social context – his tradition 181  
and his action, then, are more than his own. His rationality is determined only 182  
through this inter-relatedness with his past and his communal character. 183

According to this explanation, it could be said that, for Saint Augustine, tradition 184  
is itself proper to man, throughout history the reception and submission of a divine 185  
gift of development and triumphal achievement is enveloped in human work. It is a 186  
work that each generation receives from the past and hands over to the future, giving 187  
unity – in a way – to the actions of all men: a common labor, a common project. 188  
Thus there is, through the gift of grace, both the divine and the human within every 189  
tradition insofar as what is received is both the creative action of God who is always 190  
present, a grace pouring itself out in a maintenance and assistance that is at the same 191  
time incorporated into the results of the free action of the men who have preceded 192  
us and responded to that grace. Within every tradition, then, the divine and human 193  
are coincident – and not necessarily in the sense of a simple linear historical pro- 194  
gression familiar to the modern mind, for therein are both what is always good and 195  
pure as well as what can be good or bad. Tradition, therefore, is constituted as the 196  
dynamic pillar of history in the realization of God's creative plan, counting on the 197  
collaboration of free men. This combination of human and divine is beautifully 198  
summed up in the famous phrase Augustine: "God who created you without you, 199  
will not save you without you." 200

Implicit in this is the two-fold character of tradition, both reception and renova- 201  
tion. No tradition is possible without community and without authority. It is the 202  
preservation of both that sustains the life of a tradition. That which is received and 203  
that which is handed on is not something purely individual, but a common good and 204  
a common work, increased or diminished by those who have preceded us in the 205

206 maintenance of the tradition and by we who perpetuate it. Thus understood, an  
207 essential element of tradition is language, the communitarian dimension of which is  
208 evident, but above all there is also a requisite commitment to living in accordance  
209 with the profound sense of one's tradition, for it is the reception of the past that  
210 permits the discovery for oneself of that which deserves to be retained and passed  
211 on with veneration.

212 A tradition, then, is not something dead and inert – the stale and externally inher-  
213 itance of a bygone age – but something that advances at every stage with the articu-  
214 lation given it by the present, which deepen its understanding through reasoning.  
215 This deepening permits the discovery of harmony between the gift of inherited  
216 vision and the recognition of the sense of rectitude of life of those that came before  
217 us. An articulation that is essentially social and common. To live in a tradition is not  
218 only to conserve it, but to make possible the invention of that which until then,  
219 although present, had remained hidden; in part because it had not yet met the  
220 “opportune time” – the time in which the life of one generation, relating its inher-  
221 itance to the present, encounters the necessity of elaborating on what they discover  
222 through their experience by relating it to the broader human experience which they  
223 have received and will hand on to their descendants.

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

240 Tradition in this sense, and liberty with it, then, presupposes the recognition of  
241 authority, of a prior wisdom that orients us, extending from time immemorial, that  
242 does not proceed from the will of the present, from men, an “unwritten law” which  
243 gives foundation and sense to human knowledge. This same mysterious and origina-  
244 tive wisdom, that for Christians is the Creative and Salvific Word of God, wants to  
245 depend on human liberty and human *logos*, on the possibility and necessity that  
246 each man should think for himself and not be limited to passively and physiologi-  
247 cally receiving and transmitting, as the animals that are limited to transmitting the  
248 same genetic code. Man's nature was liberated from the mindless submission and  
249 repetition of the bestial for the sake of going beyond the closed world of natural  
250 potential in order to become himself most truly – but this is both the possibility and  
251 necessity of tradition.



It may seem a paradoxical result that for a man to think for himself, it is indispensable that he live within a tradition, that he be possessed of a certain venerable authority through which he maintains communion with all other men. Yet thinking, just as much as speaking a language, is a radically communal action. A tradition makes possible the content with which a man engages, and through his activity maintains itself and is renovated only 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 his own tradition (Pieper 2000).

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 an inheritance in his encounter with the world would be impossible. 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, if human nature is universal and indeterminate potency for determination with respect to truth and goodness, that nature is in not so much individualized as person a priori as it is the ontological condition for the possibility of such individuality, its history and tradition make possible and affirms its singular identity. 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.

## **Theistic and Atheistic Perspectives** 286

### ***Theism and Humanism*** 287

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



293 It was toward the end of the Middle-Ages that a tendency toward a more pessimistic  
294 anthropology arose (Gillespie 2008; Gregory 2012; Taylor 2007). Offering a poor  
295 interpretation of the reality of original sin no longer understood as related to the  
296 optimistic receptivity of an failing but possible human response to divine grace,  
297 human dignity was excessively divided from its capacity for grace and viewed in  
298 isolation as though its truest glory was to work alone and not in its capacity for  
299 cooperation, first praised for its independent capacity, then deprecated to the extreme  
300 for its persistent and consistent corruption – doubts were sown about human liberty  
301 as a natural reality. Through a false pietism that gave all honors to a randomized  
302 grace, late-Scholasticism began to deform the sense of tradition by devoting all their  
303 attention and tribute to the external, totalizing and despotic action of God as the  
304 singular protagonist in the development of human salvation and history and, in the  
305 end, were left with a God that, more than omnipotent, was presented as arbitrary.

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

310 We have already had occasion to see how tradition stretches both backward  
311 towards the origin of authority as well as forward toward the end of history. For man  
312 to be situated outside of this time horizon, where his vision could take in the whole  
313 in some immediate and intuitive fashion, is simply impossible. This makes it very  
314 important that a divine authority situated beyond time and history be the base and  
315 fundament of tradition. For while thus always united with human authority, with  
316 socially practiced wisdom, tradition guides man as a venerable revelation that is  
317 bound to the inexhaustibility of its sacred origin and to the promise of a future depth  
318 in understanding that revelation. It is this faith and veneration that allow men to  
319 develop for themselves, to pursue the deepening of their inheritance. Without faith,  
320 as much human as divine, without some religious attitude that in some way or  
321 another makes reference to the mystery of Creation, or at least to the origin of time,  
322 tradition loses its sense and becomes deformed. In fact, without some faith, again as  
323 much in the human as in the divine together, tradition tends to dissolve into rootless  
324 social convention or into a call for its abolition in favor of direct and unmediated  
325 access to truth. In the case of the former, tradition becomes nothing more than an  
326 ancient imposition, the groundless inheritance of mediated social babble; in the case  
327 of the latter, it tends to convert itself into a demand for the intuitive presence of  
328 circumscribable and finished truth unmediated by tradition and with a body of per-  
329 manently defined limits that exclude all other experience and intention.

330 It is therefore convenient to distinguish between traditions, that have to do with  
331 faith and human authority, and the Tradition, that has to do with the faith and divine  
332 authority. And it is precisely in this interplay of the human with the divine, of the  
333 contingent and the necessary, by means of memory, intelligence and will, where  
334 human action with divine guidance and aid makes possible the fullness of human  
335 life. Stated in Christian terms, tradition and life of man can only be properly con-  
336 ceived 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 possible the achievement of a finished order of society and a finished, perfected Truth. To men belong truths, not in the sense of the untrue, but in the sense that they are always limited to some degree – and some far more than others. Within the whole tradition there is a continuous tension stretching toward the fullness of being that, like the horizon, is always displaced with the very same rhythm that one advances toward it. This relation to Being manifests itself, among many other ways, 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 united within tradition, it is important to attend to two extreme positions: theologism and humanism. While in some respect opposed, these extremities both attempt to resolve the complexity of divine and human inter-relation in acting together through a simplistic and hasty reduction of the complexity of the mystery of human action on one side or the other.

Thus understood, theologism, on the one hand, attributes all that happens to the direct and immediate intervention of the Divine will. 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 as joint action or cooperation impossible. Human will and human understanding are, for theologism, mere apparent conduits of Divinity. For it often happens that, exalted by a misled pietism, thinking to aggrandize divinity, such 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 thereby proclaimed 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.

For those guilty of theologism, the authority of tradition is understood as exclusively sacred, utterly unmixed with the human. They are thus led to place limits on human liberty in the investigation of any necessary distinction between the human and the divine, a distinction that underlies the true authority of the whole tradition: namely, that it is not simply and radically the inexplicable and irrational action of an unknown God. That is to say, the practical result of theologism 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, and which is prohibitive of any inquiry into the arbitrary demands of God.

While thus destroying the sense and rationality of their own tradition, theologism also denies the possibility of any diversity of traditions and communities. For when tradition is truly understood, such a diversity of traditions is not only possible but

381 also necessary and beneficial, offering a wealth of expressions and experiences that  
382 contribute to discourse. Yet the radically imposed and groundless tradition of the-  
383 ologism precludes the acceptance of any other contribution. In this way, tradition is  
384 disfigured and becomes ideology, made into a “dead tradition” that perishes under  
385 the “weight” of an immovable past and impedes its renovation by suffocating the  
386 orientation toward future development that is proper to true tradition.

387 As indicated, in reaction to such theologism, there emerges an equally radical  
388 humanism that assigns the entire force of history to purely human action. This too  
389 ends by making any true sense of tradition thoroughly unsustainable. It is a perspec-  
390 tive that, while it does not necessarily exclude divine action, according to Blondel  
391 (1997), it nevertheless considers divine action extrinsic and essentially alien to  
392 human action. Humanism, then, posits a sphere of “purely human action” that only  
393 admits of human authority, totally detached or separated from any divine authority.  
394 Divine action, if admitted, comes only as an intervention that violently imposes  
395 itself on natural agency or randomly alters its initial conditions and inexplicably  
396 adds to its outcomes. Such Divine action is inexplicable from the point of view of  
397 the natural and strictly human. Thus, for humanism, only the human and the purely  
398 natural make any rational sense. Moreover, no such Divine action or revelation is  
399 relevant for the normal course of human affairs and human knowledge is, and must  
400 be, based purely upon its own resources.

401 The problem is that, as authority is a type of knowledge, for there to be a purely  
402 human authority, this knowledge must either be innately rooted or immediately intu-  
403 ited and firmly grounded in each man – for any other knowledge would be a received  
404 knowledge that presupposes a tradition and thus some type of alien authority. That  
405 is to say, the authority for each man can only be his own “reason” and method and  
406 the authority of tradition is thus found to be, ultimately, rootless and imaginary. This  
407 suggests the early modern concept of “reason” as rooted in an innate knowledge,  
408 separated from the memory and the will, from all past and all future, a reason that  
409 contemplates reality from an objectivity supposedly outside of the world, that con-  
410 templates “from nowhere”. It would be from this idea that humanism would ulti-  
411 mately derive its vision of man as an individual, as enclosed within the self, without  
412 any potential opening to the world through tradition and community as formative of  
413 his human action, as independent of that world and possessed of an a priori “ratio-  
414 nality” through which he manipulates and dominates nature and his own destiny –  
415 but does so without reasons derived from a world to which he no longer belongs.

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

420 Both theologism and humanism are attitudes that only really make sense within  
421 a Christian anthropology, where they structure the problem of the relation between  
422 nature and grace, between God and men. Together they frame an eschatological ten-  
423 sion that is not as easy as both extremes pretend. In fact, on the level of pure theory,  
424 where a fundamental and continuous relation between two co-operating powers is

difficult to imagine in abstraction, the difficulty is the constant danger whereby 425  
extremity of abstract distinction becomes absolute separation in practice. The 426  
Augustinian vision of man as member of two cities, the celestial and terrestrial, is a 427  
vision that confronts this double dimension of the proper authority of all true human 428  
action and human tradition as something that resolves itself really only in the plane 429  
of practice since in abstraction it is only the possibility of co-operation that is pos- 430  
ited while in reality it is only living fidelity to the profound sense of cooperation that 431  
constitutes it. 432

Outside of the Christian tradition, both humanism and theologism are not so eas- 433  
ily distinguished with equal clarity. Thus when speaking, for example, of Roman- 434  
Stoic humanism, we are speaking of a humanism which is, in reality, nothing more 435  
than a Renaissance reinterpretation and which is in fact as much or more Christian 436  
than it is Roman. For no doubt, while the best of the Romans professed the ideal of 437  
an excellent life, yet in no way did the Stoics enter into the discussion of the kind of 438  
eschatological tension of which we have been speaking. This because their God or 439  
gods were no more capable of a truly pervasive Providence than Plato's demiurge or 440  
Aristotle's unmoved mover; their gods neither created nor ever truly controlled the 441  
cosmos and the fates of men. For the ancients, then, the principle of history was not 442  
free human response but simply an ineradicable chaos present in the cosmos that 443  
gave rise to tragic fatalism and the worship of fortune. Their "humanism" was 444  
merely the rise and fall of aristocratic men in harmonious resignation to a closed 445  
natural world without even the slightest tension with the divine gift of grace. For the 446  
Romans, the divine was absent or at least utterly indifferent and there could be no 447  
question of the relation between grace and nature as there was no gift of grace. Nor 448  
could there be any question of nature stretching beyond itself into anything like 449  
historical advance. Nor, for that matter, was there any real question of tradition in 450  
the sense of development and deepening of an original gift of wisdom – the cosmos 451  
ran its cyclical course and no movement broke the circular bounds or moved man- 452  
kind forward, the future was the return of the origin on a purely temporal level of 453  
infinite repetition. 454

The genesis of what we refer to as humanism has, then, its ultimate roots in two 455  
historical facts that are both essentially Christian: the Renaissance that developed 456  
principally in the south of Europe; and Protestantism, that emerged in the north and 457  
center of Europe. In both cases, their essential character is determined by their 458  
response to the essentially Christian question of the relation between grace and 459  
nature. Or, more precisely, both are characterized by their positing an increasing 460  
unrelated-ness between grace and nature. This insofar as even within the bounds of 461  
adherence to the medieval axiom, "graces does not destroy but perfects nature," the 462  
relationship between the two can admit of greater or lesser degrees of essential co- 463  
operation and, in the end, their cooperation may not be essential to the natural in any 464  
sense other than a passive potential for an otherwise inhuman action. If the 465  
Renaissance proclaimed the activity of man, the Reformation proclaimed the pas- 466  
sivity of man – this to the point, ultimately, of breaking the medieval axiom so that 467  
Divine action does violence to nature. 468

469 Yet this was obviously not the initial intent. The first reformers were not secular  
470 agents protesting against the theologistic authoritarianism of Rome so much as reli-  
471 gious men striving against the impure humanity that had contaminated Rome. They  
472 aspired to a “purification” of Rome precisely as the corrupt impurity of tradition,  
473 rejecting tradition in a theologistic way and arriving at an understanding of tradition  
474 and authority that ultimately extended itself to influence the nascent sovereign states  
475 of the fifteenth century as they sought to uproot and discard long-standing customs  
476 and traditions en route to a purified and standardized nation-state. Their aim was to  
477 free Christianity of all that was human and fallen, to retain only a divine authority  
478 that they believed themselves to encounter directly, without mediation, in Scripture,  
479 where they were convinced they would find, in all its purity, the immediate Word of  
480 God. In their minds, they had to dismantle all that they judged to be human contami-  
481 nation in order to arrive, ultimately, and very much after the failure of successive  
482 reform efforts, at the principle of “sola scriptura”, the only and unalterable Tradition  
483 and Authority.

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

491 The position of the Italian Renaissance was much more intricate. They did not  
492 deny the theologist thesis that man had been corrupted with respect to moral good-  
493 ness and virtue, but they refused to admit that this corruption affected the capacity  
494 of human reason to achieve success in the secular affairs of the city. The success or  
495 failure of such strictly human affairs was independent of the Divine and, therefore,  
496 of the fullness of human development through grace; it could be achieved through a  
497 more moderate, purely human effort. Influenced by a Christian spiritualism of more  
498 Platonic origin, they were convinced that the affairs of civic life had nothing to do  
499 with the grace and salvation of men. In line with this attitude, they then came to  
500 establish a rupture between the realm of “purely human” activities, human “busi-  
501 ness” and secular administrative affairs, activities that pointed toward purely human  
502 ends and the realm of “purely supernatural” activities, activities related to grace and  
503 supernatural ends that had nothing to do with human nature’s immediate and natural  
504 ends. This is not to fully repudiate the possibility of co-operating grace and nature,  
505 but it is to move that co-operation to the margins of their interaction. If there were  
506 such supernatural realities, they were more akin to extrinsic additions to human  
507 nature and not constantly interacting and conjoined developments thereof.

508 If the business of the city could be brought to completion and effectively run with  
509 nothing but the light of reason, this opened the possibility of an absolute liberty  
510 detached from grace, the very inverse, though equally inhuman, of the Lutheran  
511 view of grace without liberty. For the Renaissance, grace came to be something  
512 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 enlightened humanism. 513  
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For a Renaissance man such as Galileo, it was only through mathematical language, conceived as the activity most proper to human reason, the analysis of the intuited and pure mathematical language of reality, that knowledge of the present was possible, an abstract knowledge detached from all tradition (Gilson 2004). 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 or its time is its own and is distinct from that of any human tradition. Yet theoretical physics is itself a tradition and a language rather than a direct and immediate confrontation with physical reality, its knowledge is not detached from reality but united to it through a community of practitioners in a physical theory that stretches from Archimedes up through Galileo himself. To mistake the advance of this tradition with a sudden confrontation with physical reality in its absolute and own-most purity is to maintain that reason is closed upon itself, independent of tradition and community and has either suddenly discovered its innate possession of abstract theoretical knowledge or encountered its power of intuition of the same in such a way that human knowledge vaunts itself beyond reasoning into possession of a direct and finished truth about physical reality. Either way, such a mistake is to thereby impede the advance of an improved knowledge of this reality. 515  
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Thus, while the Protestants, for their part, with the supreme authority that Luther claimed to find disincarnated and in all purity in “sola Scripture”, insisted that the Christian faith could 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, for its part, refused to take into account that no human knowledge, from politics to mathematics, is accessible to human reason simply outside of time. All human knowledge is only possible mediated through tradition as through a community of practitioners who, rightly and wrongly, give life to a tradition wherein they articulate the fruition of human wisdom’s engagement with divine wisdom’s inexhaustible presence as the former is constructed and transmitted through all and to all as an unfinished intellectual labor that can and must remain open to new horizons. 534  
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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 extreme incompleteness, but this is the price that has to be paid for its revelation to limited understanding and human liberty. 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. 546  
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557 The development of all tradition, therefore, is fed through rational debate, not  
558 simply through theoretical systems of doctrines that may close themselves off to  
559 each other and cut off reason to its own future development. However, above all,  
560 tradition is developed through practical wisdom, the encounter with and experience  
561 of the world that approximates to the true sense and orientation of tradition. In this  
562 way, reason is a discourse possessed of a depth that has no end within history. Only  
563 from within this ongoing debate does it become apparent that there is an essential  
564 paradox to rationality: that a tradition must change in order to remain the same.  
565 In order to maintain itself and remain faithful to its origin and destiny, a tradition  
566 must deepen itself and ever strive to go beyond itself. No less paradoxical is the fact  
567 that a debate can only be rational under the auspices of an authority that places lim-  
568 its on those debates, not in the sense that it impedes or obstructs them, but in the  
569 sense that – as the inherited vision or grounds for alternative visions – its vision  
570 channels them, giving rise to the concrete and determinate questions through which  
571 it encounters new solutions or confronts the necessity of new ways of addressing  
572 problems that cannot be resolved on the basis of existing patterns of thought. It is  
573 through these critical encounters that traditions are vivified and sustained.

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

### 581 *Atheistic Individualism and Humanism*

582 In the effort to be rid of the frustrating impurity of tradition, and its corruption, and  
583 to vaunt themselves beyond original sin and the present human condition, both  
584 Protestantism and the Renaissance ended in human authority. This was true whether  
585 that authority took the form of clerical authoritarianism devolving into atomistic  
586 democratization of dogma until religion was a merely private affair or whether by  
587 starting out immediately from the premise of the purely human they pursued the  
588 attempt to ground knowledge on the mind as the only source of authority. What they  
589 left standing was their basic principle: the individualist conception of man. That is,  
590 the conception of the individual, not as someone whose identity can only be defined  
591 through his integration into a community and a tradition, through which he is inte-  
592 grated into nature, but as an individual who derives his identity from his conscious-  
593 ness alone.

594 In the end, this proved to be a consciousness merely enclosed in an empty inte-  
595 rior. For as such an individual has no relation with the past nor projects himself  
596 toward a future, he thinks as though situated in a void. The individual, thus conce-  
597 ceived, is converted into a strange a-temporal 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 becomes all important. Yet, as we shall see, this content is and was found to be elusive.

The difficulty is that individualism proves to be, 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 in human as divine authority, 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 and any knowledge that can be truly understood as given except that which is merely taken as given – convenient assumptions.

In order to grasp this impossibility, we need only look at the idea of man as individual and the corresponding philosophical project aimed at obtaining self-grounded knowledge. It is a project that only admits the beginning on the basis of 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 of that which is thus known as distinct. Or, what amounts to the same, they must be separable 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 mind as well as things-perceived become abstract representations in a mind. The mind itself is represented as universal and abstract, sufficient in itself for knowledge and completely distinct from body in its anteriority to all community and tradition. Mind is conceived as capable of determining with full precision and exhaustible determination that in which all things consist. Here there is no rational encounter with the world that intervenes between the abstract and universal as it processes toward determinate and concrete – only the suddenness of pure unmediated intuition or the internal and purely logical development of innate ideas can attempt to save such a mind from the emptiness of its own abstraction.

Now, the difficulty is that if the human mind cannot advance to these original and originative 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 integration in and access to the world in which he exists. The individual remains incapable of relating himself to Nature, with men and with God. There is no way of giving a real ground for these relations and 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

643 understood – for on account of the chasm between a man devoid of content and the  
644 world which he cannot reach, there is no explanation of how the world can induce  
645 an individual to act who is, by definition, a passionless and solitary mind. An indi-  
646 vidualist reason situated outside the vital dynamic of the human cannot in any way  
647 explain or give sense to action. As Hume saw very well, this type of reason can only  
648 be passively opposed to or slave to passions that move it or cross it with the violence  
649 of alien force.

650 Moreover, for such a disembodied mind, human action can only be contemplated  
651 from the outside, from a theoretical and abstract focus. It is not understood from the  
652 interior, for the very passions, motives and contextual relations which constitute the  
653 life of man are not the life of the disembodied mind. The mind has, supposedly, a  
654 rationality all its own. It is a rationality that is somehow prior to, distinct from and  
655 unchanging in its relation to the various ends which men evidently pursue. Intentions,  
656 therefore, are not from the mind's rationality, which now only serves those impen-  
657 etrable intentions merely as a form of calculation. Motives, then, are obscurely vio-  
658 lent in their relation to the mind and can only be known a posteriori on the basis of  
659 revealed preferences and generalized only on the basis of patterns of exterior action.  
660 That is, with no motive originating within him as a human being in connection with  
661 the use of his reason, and no interior psychological introspection permissible since  
662 motives are a priori and opaque, the individual and his rationality are thereby con-  
663 verted into a mathematical problem of "optimal decisions" in relation to curiously  
664 impenetrable and intransigent motive sets. This is precisely the base and fundament  
665 of modern economic theory: an individual with a set of pre-determined utility pref-  
666 erences and no rationality but maximization in relation to that utility; that is, there  
667 are no real rational human motives but merely a cold rationality, dependent only on  
668 the quality of his information for the achievement of his particular state of satiety.

669 Thereafter, supposing external and a-temporal consequences of these same  
670 actions perfectly known a priori through logic, modern economic analysis tries to  
671 decide which of these consequences offers the individual greater advantage. The  
672 difficulty resides in the fact that, in this schema, there is no human life. To be sure,  
673 there is abstract logic, but not any real human life and therefore no real basis for  
674 deciding human advantage. In fact, there is nothing here for economics to decide  
675 that is not already somehow implicit in its suppositions.

676 For as we have already said, there is no such thing as individualist human action,  
677 action autonomously brought about through an isolated individual without any  
678 mediation; for action presupposes a community that projects itself in time, with  
679 values and reasons, and it cannot be reduced to perfectly foreseeable consequences  
680 on the basis of an abstract logic that, precisely as such, does not and cannot take into  
681 account the variety of concrete ends and strategies that a community entails. In fact,  
682 the very precision which is sought by economics is only achieved through reduction-  
683 ist assumptions, the conditions of the model. True human action is that which is  
684 integrated into that vital and rational dynamic that we call tradition, with its plethora  
685 of motives, rationalities and strategies united within the limits and identity of com-  
686 mon practice. These limits constitute the ground for relative stability and expecta-  
687 tion, and cannot be determined or foreseen on the basis of an a priori deductive logic

unless human action is reduced by supposition to a homogenous mass of persons 688  
 single-minded in their maximizing agency and in possession of a homogenous 689  
 quantity of qualitatively identical information. In its effort to obtain purity, econom- 690  
 ics has posited a conception of human agency that is, in fact, no agency at all, but 691  
 merely a passivity in the face of its own prior determination to maximization in 692  
 connection with given information. The constitution of a true moral agent, however, 693  
 is possible only where someone can give a reason for his actions in the face of oth- 694  
 ers. For this, the individual must be part of a community. 695

Without tradition, without community, without authority, there is no possibility 696  
 for virtue. There is only the chaotic exercise of predetermined paths without sense 697  
 or finality. In short, there is only violence. This is something that Thomas Hobbes 698  
 clearly saw in his account of the radical individualism of his “state of nature.” For 699  
 Hobbes, the only thing that can bring order to the chaos of the war of all against all 700  
 is the imposition of an extreme “authority.” Such authority, however, is nothing but 701  
 the extreme violence of the “super-individual”, with a monopoly on an impressive 702  
 coercive force, the very origin of the modern State and the conception of a power 703  
 without authority or tradition. 704

**The Modern Economy as an Anthropological Inversion** 705

In the Aristotelian conception (*Politics* Book 1), economy was the activity proper to 706  
 a community, set within and subordinated to its values – more concretely, it was the 707  
 activity proper to the family, as its proper name, *oikos*, household, indicates. As 708  
 such it was oriented toward the achievement of the common good. In this way, prop- 709  
 erty, accumulation, production and distribution, the essence of the economy, were 710  
 subordinated to the prudence and life of each family. Moreover, with the appearance 711  
 of cities, the economy did not become detached from community, for it remained 712  
 linked to political prudence and the common life of the city. This in a way that the 713  
 exchanges between families were made to conform to “just prices”, that is to say, 714  
 those prices that conformed to the true common good of all families and the achieve- 715  
 ment of the good life. 716

In this sense the city-market was, for Aristotle (*Politics* 1253a 14), a more ample 717  
 form of having all things in common through exchange; it was, in theory, simple 718  
 equitable exchange constituting a type of common use among all the families. This 719  
 was, for Aristotle, only possible within the community called the city. For only in 720  
 the city – and without annulling the autonomy of the economies of the families – is 721  
 it possible to practice the good life; that is, it is only possible to exercise the full 722  
 extent of the moral and intellectual virtues within a broader community wherein 723  
 men may participate in civic life. The proper value or price of things is the manifes- 724  
 tation of the unified pursuit of the common good of the city wherein prices express 725  
 the true needs of society with respect to ordered living. Without such general jus- 726  
 tice, general rectitude, the expression of the life of the city and the form of society 727  
 ordained to having the good life in common, true value is not possible, nor are the 728

729 exchanges through which value is properly expressed possible without some basic  
730 level of community. This explains why, for Aristotle, language and money were  
731 both expressions of the common need, in such a way that their proper ordination to  
732 the common good vividly expressed the justice and unity of each city. Tradition,  
733 authority, value, justice, all these are communal determinations that are prior to and  
734 constitutive of human action on the individual level. Only on the basis of that prior  
735 determination is anything like need, justice, price and exchange value conceivable.

736 Modern individualism, on the other hand, denies the existence of the community  
737 as prior to the individual. Whether this community is the family or the city, moder-  
738 nity insists that each individual can and does act in isolation, without mediation or  
739 formation, as if others neither existed nor influenced their action. This produces  
740 what we have called an “anthropological inversion” in which the individual becomes  
741 anterior to all community rather than the reverse.

742 The problem that this poses is how to explain the origin of society. For without a  
743 natural community into which he is born, the isolated individual must enter into  
744 social relations from a position of anteriority such that those relations take on the  
745 character of purely formal arrangements. This has the aggravating consequence that  
746 in the modern sense, one is not truly speaking of a community sharing a life, but of  
747 a sort of deliberate a priori “rational” coordination on the plane of virtual action  
748 such that each individual proposes to himself, inside his mind, the optimal arrange-  
749 ment but no unity is truly found there. Thus a problem that corresponds to this is the  
750 concrete question: how can a situation where a multitude of isolated individual  
751 rationalities, by definition seeking to maximize their satisfaction but nevertheless  
752 closed off from each other, give rise to a static situation as a simple consequence of  
753 “decisions” that would somehow be compatible between themselves and “optimal”  
754 for all?

755 Among individuals, in the modern sense, there are only external relations or rela-  
756 tions of power. There is no possibility of justice, in the classical sense of a common  
757 life as the common good. Yet a type of “justice” must be imposed upon these exter-  
758 nal relations, so that there may be some semblance of social order – which though  
759 lacking similarity to that communal and Aristotelian sense of justice, may neverthe-  
760 less offer at least the appearance of harmony. This has the aggravating consequence  
761 that such a “species of justice” can only be commutative in the sense of an equilib-  
762 rium through which no individual diminishes his initial possession. Such equilib-  
763 rium obscures and neglects the original sense of justice, offering instead only a  
764 relative stabilization of mutual isolation as a corrupted form of “community.” This  
765 is the “optimal” for “society” based on the “anthropological inversion.”

766 For, absolutely speaking, the aim of commutative justice is only possible in a  
767 political community, where it would be possible for men to pursue the development  
768 of that virtue proper to their common, vivifying, good life. That which moderns call  
769 market exchange and equilibrium are simply not such, they are instead simply  
770 mechanical equilibriums between forces that fight amongst themselves, their appar-  
771 ent harmony in “equilibrium” is merely the tension of their firm resolution to further  
772 maximize whenever possible.

It is very significant that from the eighteenth century onward, the concept of 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 – just at the same time that the notion of the common good transformed into the word “common-wealth.” 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, in their justice or rectitude, while to speak of equilibrium price is to give expression to the fact that there is no real possibility of virtue. For there is no common life that forms the aim of the community as the good life and men might as well live in isolation with regard to their virtue since all they are is automated information processors set together to form a 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 on the basis of individuals or atoms, had encountered a similar problem: how to move 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. It’s objective consists in studying the epistemological conditions under which the mental interaction of “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, or 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,

817 where all that is important is the resultant assignation. From the formal point of  
818 view, it is treated as a mathematical problem where, from a conjunction of “goods”  
819 that are taken as “given” or “produced”, and from a conjunction of individuals that  
820 are also taken as “given”, the attempt is made to determine some correspondence  
821 between both conjunctions at a point where there will be equilibrium, in the sense  
822 that nobody can continue improving their insatiable desire to have more without  
823 reducing the aggregate total of their satiation.

824 The principle objective of modern economics was political, this also in a new  
825 sense: to justify a “society” wherein the interaction of individuals who act as if the  
826 others do not exist, can give rise, not merely to mechanical equilibrium and not  
827 chaos, but to a constrained optimal society.

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

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

850 The distinguishing feature of Postmodernity is its skepticism in the face of the  
851 possibility of constructing something that substitutes for what appears to them as  
852 otherwise empty traditions and façade communities. It is an attitude that has every-  
853 thing to do with the persistence of an individualist conception of man. That indi-  
854 vidualism is now treated as compatible with a relaxation of epistemological principle  
855 of clarity and distinction as well as a relaxation of the autonomy of the individual –  
856 who instead of being independent of tradition is now utterly at the mercy of tradition  
857 and community, not possessing anything that is proper to himself. Instead of  
858 commanding history, he is submerged in it without light or guidance. In this way,  
859 Postmodernity has accentuated the problem of its own legitimacy, employing the  
860 terminology of Blumenberg (1983).

861 Among economists, the first that belong to Postmodernity, are Keynes, under the  
862 influence of Wittgenstein, and Schumpeter, under the influence of Weber and



Nietzsche (Coates 1996). 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 Enlightenment Project.

In confrontation with Keynes and Schumpeter there is the Neo-modern reaction of economists such as Hayek and Lucas. These have tried, in some way, to reconstitute the old and tired Enlightenment Project. In a different way, they have tried to continue pursuing the development and elaboration of a new means of “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?** 877

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. It brings 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, an 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 to humanism, on the part of both confessions, both Catholic and Protestant. It is 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 Enlightenment 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



905 without tradition and community, there is no way of understanding human action,  
906 and how, in consequence, the individualist inversion makes it very difficult to under-  
907 stand the complexity of economic activity in all its unfinished dynamism. Only  
908 through this process of rediscovering the internal dynamic of human action will we  
909 recover the double and intrinsic dimension of gift and communality. This implies  
910 seeing action from the interior of the agent, for the road that leads to an opening  
911 toward others passes through the interior of each agent. At every moment it is even  
912 more necessary to develop a new education in action, action oriented toward interi-  
913 orization, which is only possible on the plane of practice. The indispensable condi-  
914 tion for each man's capacity to convert himself into an individual singular and  
915 unrepeatable, into someone that has a profound experience of the liberty, is only  
916 possible within a tradition and community into which they integrate themselves and  
917 through which they articulate themselves.

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

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

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

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

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