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In line with the objectives of the World Economics Association, this journal seeks to support and advance interdisciplinary research that investigates the potential links between economics and other disciplines as well as contributions that challenge the divide between normative and positive approaches. Contributions from outside the mainstream debates in the history and philosophy of economics are also encouraged. In particular, the journal seeks to promote research that draws on a broad range of cultural and intellectual traditions.

Economic Thought accepts article submissions from scholars working in: the history of economic thought; economic history; methodology of economics; and philosophy of economics – with an emphasis on original and path-breaking research.

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Introduction to volume 11

ECONOMIC THOUGHT History, Philosophy, and Methodology was first launched in 2012, as the new history and philosophy journal of the World Economic Association. Since then, it has published ten volumes in as many years with contributions in the history of economic thought, economic history, methodology of economics and the philosophy of economics. Last year, 2022, marked the ten-year anniversary of the journal but also one of its periods of low activity as the accumulated shock and fatigue of the COVID crisis meant that both submissions and reviews moved at a slower tempo. Nevertheless, in 2023 the journal rebounded with renewed activity, enhanced by the development of two new initiatives that strengthen its function as a community building journal with an open review process, by fostering open discussion between members of the international academic community. These two new initiatives are:

1. The development of an invited leading paper section, and
2. Making the practice of publishing discussions and exchanges on the Open Peer Discussion Forum a permanent, rather than incidental, feature of our publication process.

Both initiatives are aimed at fostering discussion and exchange of ideas, creating a complex layering of meaning that highlights the history, methodology and philosophy that underpins economic theories. We discuss these initiatives in more detail in turn.

The new initiative, on leading each of our two yearly issues with an invited paper, is intended to give space to established academics to develop a topic that will invigorate discussion and add in imaginative ways to the existing literature. *Economic Thought* has always been a forum for contributions that allow for new ways of thinking about the history, methodology and philosophy of economics. With this initiative, we intend to make it a more formal part of our output by inviting prominent academics to develop their thoughts on important theoretical or philosophical questions. In this issue, we are honoured to have a contribution by Jean Cartelier, who is well known for his work on economic and monetary theory, and whose focus here is on the dual character of labour. The article discusses the importance of the ‘dual character of the labour embodied in commodities’ in Marx’s scheme and contends that this dual character is a fundamental and specific property of a commodity society. Cartelier argues that developing the concept of the dual character is a way of pointing to the most fundamental characteristic of commodity production, namely the dual evaluation – private and social – of commodities.

The next article in this issue is by Arturo Hermann and titled “The interpretation of ownership: Insights from original institutional economics, pragmatist social psychology and psychoanalysis.” The article analyses the main interpretations of ownership in original institutional economics (OIE) and how this links with social psychology and psychoanalysis. It considers Thorstein Veblen’s notion of ownership as a relation of possession, and John R. Commons’ distinction between “corporeal” and “intangible” property, before then addressing the psychoanalytic aspects of the

concept of ownership. Hermann concludes that these different but complementary notions of ownership can help illuminate manifold aspects of the human psyche.

This is followed by an article in which Rati Mekvabishvili discusses the concepts of altruism, prosocial behaviour and their importance in interdisciplinary studies of behavioural economics. Mekvabishvili makes the provocative argument that altruism is a hidden and complicated form of selfishness, and that altruism and pro-sociality are therefore not fundamentally different concepts: both being ultimately self-oriented. He compares altruism with Christian love and concludes that they are diverse and indeed contradictory concepts, an awareness of which is, in his opinion, of great importance for promoting human well-being. This article elicited a number of extensive and very interesting responses from reviewers, who engaged in a broad discussion of the topics that the article brought to the fore. This kind of discussion and debate, that combines concept development, narratives on the evolution of thought and philosophical disputation, is an excellent example of the kind of exchange that the journal has been created to foster. The three responses to Mekvabishvili's article by Peter Earl, Gigi Foster and Rafael Galvão de Almeida cover a variety of points that range from the relationship of Christian thought and theology to economics, to the nature of love and its relation to altruism and pro-social behaviour, or indeed concepts such as sympathy and guilt. The reviewers have written fully formed responses that bring into the discussion perspectives from different literatures- from the classic contributions of Herbert Simon to recent models on love by Gigi Foster, to discussions taking place in the journal *Faith & Economics*. The broad range of this discussion is what we hope will be a recurring feature of this journal in the years to come. We hope you find this issue of interest and are looking forward to the next decade of *Economic Thought!*

Steven Methven
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LEADING ARTICLE

About the “Dual Character of Labour”: a Reformulation of Marx’s Commodity Theory

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In a letter to Engels (24 August 1867), Marx says that the best of his book (*Capital*) are (i) the “dual character of the labour embodied in commodities” and (ii) the surplus value theory. Marx’s vindication of first point is the subject of the present article.¹ We contend that the « dual character of the labour embodied in commodities » is a fundamental and specific property of a commodity society. Marx is right when he calls our attention to it.

The “dual character of labour” is the logical consequence of Marx’s definition of a commodity division of labour. It is a way of pointing to the most fundamental characteristic of commodity production, namely the dual evaluation – private and social – of commodity. Marx may be credited for the special emphasis on that specificity. His definition of commodity production makes it very specific, opposed as it is to other types of social division of labour, viz. that of the “primitive Indian community”:

Only the products of mutually independent acts of labour, performed in isolation, can confront each other as commodities. (*Capital*, p. 132)

Starting from that definition Marx derives many typical features of a commodity society. The following quotation seems to be a convenient summing up of Marx’s commodity theory:

There is an antithesis, immanent in the commodity, between use-value and value, between private labour which must simultaneously manifest itself as directly social labour, and a particular concrete kind of labour which simultaneously counts as merely abstract universal labour, between the conversion of things into persons and the conversion of persons into things; the antithetical phases of the metamorphosis of the commodity are the developed forms of motion of this immanent contradiction. These forms therefore imply the possibility of crises. (*Capital*, p. 209)

¹ It is my pleasure to thank Edith Klimovsky who has carefully read a first version of this paper and made many useful critiques and suggestions. The usual disclaimer applies.

We intend to be true to that view even if the path we follow seems to differ from the one commonly attributed to Marx. What prevents one from adopting that common view is that it leaves unsolved a fundamental question: *what is the relation between the “dual character of labour” and the quantitative determination of labour-values?* To our knowledge, neither Marx nor any Marx’s follower have elaborated a quantitative model of labour-values determination relying on that “dual character of labour”.

Marx was very well aware of the nature of the contradiction which is to be solved as the following passage from his *Contribution to a critique of political economy* testimonies:

The point of departure is not the labour of individuals considered as social labour, but on the contrary the particular kinds of labour of private individuals, i.e., labour which proves that it is universal social labour only by the supersession of its original character in the exchange process. Universal social labour is consequently not a ready-made prerequisite but an emerging result. Thus a new difficulty arises: on the one hand, commodities must enter the exchange process as materialized universal labour-time, on the other hand, the labour-time of individuals becomes materialized universal labour-time only as the result of the exchange process. (Marx, *Contribution*, p. 11)

We should start from private heterogeneous quantities of labour and find out how they are transformed through the exchange process into quantities of social homogenous labour.² But, at the same time, we have to admit that commodities enter the exchange process as quantities of social labour as a consequence of locating the value process in production and not in circulation.

Should we conclude that Marx was philosophically right with his “dual character of labour” (unveiling the true nature of commodity production) but economically wrong (unable to derive quantitative labour-values from it)? Not at all! Leaving apart the philosophical aspect of the problem, we maintain that Marx is economically right. A quantitative model can be supplied once realized exchanges and value forms are introduced into the picture. A reformulation of Marx’s commodity theory taking seriously the “dual character of commodities evaluation” (which is also the unity of production and circulation) is proposed thereafter. It relies entirely on that property.

Once admitted that a commodity society is characterized by “mutually independent” and “performed in isolation” activities, any theoretician – whether Marxist or not – has to face the dual aspect of the evaluation of these activities, a private one and a social one (confrontation of commodities in exchange). That duality or contradiction cannot be solved but through the quantitative univocal determination of values. Marx did not succeed.³ Our hypothesis is that he failed because he did not proceed with commodity as he did later with capital. He stopped presentation of his commodity theory in section 1 without providing a complete schema of reproduction contrary to what he did for his theory of capital (later published in Book II). A schema of simple reproduction of a pure exchange economy (without wage-earners and capital) makes

² This explains also why the canonical model widely used in modern Marxist debates – $Av + l = v$ – cannot be accepted as a correct formulation of Marx’s theory of value: it does not exhibit any “dual character of labour”! (see below).

³ In *Capital*’s chapter 7 (The labour process and the valorisation process) of Book 1, Marx contents himself with adding quantities of labour without making explicit the way these quantities are obtained.

explicit how, starting from individual private efforts (or labour) interdependence between producers generates a social evaluation which contradicts the private ones which, however, makes it possible.

We attempt at reformulating and completing the story Marx tells us about the commodity production and circulation keeping in mind the “dual character of commodities evaluation”. Money and payments instead of labour are the stuff that story is made of. Some effects and consequences of this reformulation are presented in a brief conclusion.

*
* *

Our starting point is Marx’s definition of a commodity division of labour. Independent producers know they belong to a society with a commodity division of labour. They are free to decide for themselves and they “perform their activity (labour) in isolation”. These labours are concrete and private but *they are performed in view of the market*. To make the story precise, we have to indicate what these independent producers know and are able to observe.

For the sake of simplicity, let assume that (i) there is a one-to-one relation between producers and commodities (producer h produces commodity h) (ii) each producer knows the different inputs to be used for producing one unit of commodity (a_{hk} is the quantity of commodity h necessary to produce one unit of commodity k) (iii) producer h knows the effort e_h necessary to produce one unit of commodity h but ignores the efforts (labours) of other producers. Private efforts (concrete labours) are not common knowledge; they are not commensurable (no more no less than the different use-values they produce).

Let consider a commodity economy with three independent producers (to keep the story simple). The technique of the economy is:

$$A, E \rightarrow I \leftrightarrow \begin{pmatrix} 0 & a_{12} & a_{13} \\ a_{21} & 0 & a_{23} \\ a_{31} & a_{32} & 0 \end{pmatrix}, \begin{pmatrix} e_1 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & e_2 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & e_3 \end{pmatrix} \rightarrow \begin{pmatrix} 1 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 1 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 1 \end{pmatrix} \quad (1)$$

As a consequence of the heterogeneity of the concrete (private) labours, it is not possible to derive from (1) any numerical solution. A model based on (1) would have a solution consisting of a matrix V of vectors of quantities of heterogeneous labours e_h ’s and not of a vector of scalar labour-values.

In order to get such a vector, we must assume that the e_h ’s are commensurable, either as quantities of energy (Marx’s suggestion in some places) or any physical element observable *prior to any confrontation in the market*. An assumption of this kind is implicit in the canonical model.

Following that heroic assumption, nonsensical in the context of “dual character of labour”, we define $l_h = \frac{e_h}{\sum_h e_h}$ so that $\sum_h e_h = 1$.

As a consequence of that negation of the dual character of labour, we get the canonical system:

$$\begin{pmatrix} 0 & a_{21} & a_{31} \\ a_{12} & 0 & a_{32} \\ a_{13} & a_{23} & 0 \end{pmatrix} \begin{pmatrix} v_1 \\ v_2 \\ v_3 \end{pmatrix} + \begin{pmatrix} l_1 \\ l_2 \\ l_3 \end{pmatrix} = \begin{pmatrix} v_1 \\ v_2 \\ v_3 \end{pmatrix} \rightarrow A'v + l = v \quad (2)$$

with A' being the transpose of A .

System (2) is the one commonly used in modern Marxist literature. Its solution is $v = (I - A')^{-1}l$ if $(I - A')^{-1}$ exists.

Obviously, system (2) is fundamentally untrue to Marx. In system (2) only concrete (private) labours are to be found; they have been transformed into homogenous quantities by virtue of an arbitrary assumption which stands absolutely contradictory to Marx's "dual character of labour embodied in commodities". Here, values have only a technological nature (quantities of energy or time). They do not result from any social determination as "products of mutually independent acts of labour, performed in isolation, confronting each other as commodities".

In order to introduce social (abstract) labour in relation with private (concrete) labours another path has to be explored. It is worth recalling that *private producers perform efforts in view of the market*. They perform a private effort (concrete labour) e_h only because they expect to get a determinate value (social labour) allowing them to get their desired use-values. Although efforts and incentives to perform efforts are private, expectations about market evaluations are expressed in a common language. Marx calls it "price" or "ideal price":

Price is the money-name of the labour objectified in a commodity. Hence the expression of the equivalence of a commodity with the quantity of money whose name is that commodity's price is a tautology (*Capital*, pp. 195-196)

Money, not abstract labour, is the language producers use to think about their actions and communicate with other people.

Producers have expectations about the values (prices) of their inputs. Each producer have private expectations about the value of his/her required inputs (in general, $\hat{v}_h^h \neq \hat{v}_h^{k \neq h}$). Let note l_h^a is the expected net value or income which prompts producer h to perform effort e_h . Private expectations have to be coherent in the sense that

$$l_h^a = \hat{v}_h^h - \sum_k a_{kh} \hat{v}_k^h \quad \forall h \quad (3)$$

According to condition (3) h 's expected net value produced l_h^a must be equal to the expected value of a unit of commodity h brought to the market by producer h , \hat{v}_h^h , minus h 's expected value of inputs $\sum_k a_{kh} \hat{v}_k^h$.

Juxtaposing the expectations of our producers forms system (4):

$$\begin{aligned} \hat{v}_1^1 - a_{21}\hat{v}_2^1 - a_{31}\hat{v}_3^1 &= l_1^a \\ -a_{12}\hat{v}_1^2 + \hat{v}_2^2 - a_{32}\hat{v}_3^2 &= l_2^a \\ -a_{13}\hat{v}_1^3 - a_{23}\hat{v}_2^3 + \hat{v}_3^3 &= l_3^a \end{aligned} \quad (4)$$

Except for the technique, which is common knowledge, system (4) contains only private items. No interdependence between producers is to be observed yet. However, by contrast with the e_h 's unduly transformed into the l 's of system (2), the $\hat{v}_h^h \neq \hat{v}_h^{k \neq h}$ and the l_h^a 's are commensurable.

They are all expressed as (ideal) prices supposed (by Marx) to have a common expression in general equivalent or in money. What prevents system (4) from providing for a quantitative determination of values (social labour) is no longer a problem of commensurability as it was the case with system (2); it is a lack of *interdependence* between producers. *They have not yet confronted their products in the market.*

Suppose now that contrary to system (4) producers have common expectations, viz. $\hat{v}_h^h \neq \hat{v}_h^{k \neq h} = \hat{v}_h$. That assumption creates *de facto* a link between producers. System (4) is thus transformed into the system below:

$$\begin{aligned} \hat{v}_1 - a_{21}\hat{v}_2 - a_{31}\hat{v}_3 &= l_1^a \\ -a_{12}\hat{v}_1 + \hat{v}_2 - a_{32}\hat{v}_3 &= l_2^a \\ -a_{13}\hat{v}_1 - a_{23}\hat{v}_2 + \hat{v}_3 &= l_3^a \end{aligned} \quad (5)$$

We are able now to determine a vector of values $v = (I - A')^{-1}l^a$ if $(I - A')^{-1}$ exists.

Is system (5) a good candidate for becoming the new canonical model of a labour theory of value founded on the "dual character of labour"? The answer is negative. Assumption $\hat{v}_h^h = \hat{v}_h^{k \neq h} = \hat{v}_h$ combined with condition (3) is sufficient to determine the unique value vector \hat{v} such that the economy reproduces itself unchanged period after period. In that sense, \hat{v} may be said to be the *equilibrium solution* (social values or quantities of abstract labour). It does not exhibit any "dual evaluation" of the activities of individual producers; it performs no better and no worse than any standard equilibrium model.

If the "dual character of labour embodied in commodities" is to be taken seriously, system (5) could not be considered as being the last word about values determination. This would amount to playing Hamlet without the Prince:

- Assuming $\hat{v}_h^h = \hat{v}_h^{k \neq h} = \hat{v}_h$ is tantamount to admitting that private expectations are coordinated somewhere *prior to market*, which does not make sense in a commodity division of labour; moreover net expected value l_h^a are private and nothing guarantees the market will confirm them.
- Net expected value l_h^a 's are planned for buying desired use-values, which will put an end to the current round of commodity production; the expectations about the orientation of net values expenses do not show up in system (4) which appears as being both inappropriate and incomplete; it is worth recalling here Marx's formula for the process of exchange: $C - M - C$ (Commodity – Money – Commodity); this process concerns all produced commodities, those acquired by net values included.

We are not yet out of the woods and we shall proceed further. We have still to check whether private expectations are or not realized and how expenses decisions are carried out. As Marx's

developments on value-forms make it clear, money circulation and payments are the tools through which producers acquire inputs and other desired use-values and sell their output.

In order to make these processes going smoothly, let assume that there is an efficient monetary organisation which provides enough means of payment. Given the aim of our presentation it is convenient not to charge us with pure monetary problems (due for example to a scarcity of money or to a bad management of the system). In the same spirit, we assume also that producers always find available inputs independently of their current supply in the market thanks to existing stocks. In brief, *we assume there are no problems for carrying out private decisions other than the “dual character of the labour embodied in commodities”* viz. the unavoidable problem of the dual evaluation inherent in commodity production. The actions of the commodity producers are both “performed in isolation” and in view of the market. They consist in *payments*.

Besides the private efforts (concrete labours) spent privately and non-socially observable, payments (monetary transfers) are objective and are written down into accounts. Marx dresses such accounts (in value or in money) in Book II with the schemes of capital reproduction. It is quite natural to transpose these schemes to a simple commodity economy. This requires only that net value expenses out of the l_h^a 's, absent from system (5), be also made explicit (in Book II these are surplus-value expenditures). Instead of sections 1 and 2, we have producers 1, 2 and 3; expenses of expected net values instead of surplus-value; of course no labour force as a commodity is to be found.

An important point is however in order. Marx presents the schemes of simple reproduction in equilibrium. There are no reason to follow such a presentation. Keeping in mind the two remarks made above, we consider now that expectations about commodities values differ from a producer to another; we have now: $\hat{v}_h^h \neq \hat{v}_h^{k \neq h}$; we take also into account the possible hiatus for any producer (presumably for all of them) between his/her total expected and realized receipts (total expected receipts being equal to total expenses).

We get Table 1 below where elements of system (4) are also reported in order to show the closed relation existing between the presentation above and the payment matrix below: the first line in each cell denotes a payment while the second line informs about the private incentives e_h of each producer which explain the payment (m_{hk} denotes a payment made by producer h to producer k).

Table 1 displays *voluntary* actions from our independent producers, viz. payments which result from free decisions about individual efforts e_h in view of a social outcome l_h^a given expectations \hat{v}_h^k . Expenses m_h are the social manifestation of what Marx named concrete or private labours. Here enters the confrontation of commodity producers who “perform in isolation”. Expenses (rows) of producer h contribute to receipts (columns) of producers $k \neq h$. Total (voluntary) expenses of producer h are m_h while total receipts of producer h – coming from the voluntary expenses of the other producers – are m^h .

Total expenses of producer h , l_h^a , are composed of purchases of inputs ($\sum_k a_{kh} \hat{v}_k^h$) and of expenses out of net expected income ($\sum_k c_{hk} l_h^a = l_h^a$).

Table 1: Carrying out private (voluntary) decisions: payment matrix for a commodity economy

	1	2	3	Total
1	m_{11} $c_{11}l_1^a$	m_{12} $c_{12}l_1^a + a_{21}\hat{v}_2^1$	m_{13} $c_{13}l_1^a + a_{31}\hat{v}_3^1$	m_1 \hat{v}_1^1
2	m_{21} $c_{21}l_2^a + a_{12}\hat{v}_1^2$	m_{22} $c_{22}l_2^a$	m_{23} $c_{23}l_2^a + a_{32}\hat{v}_3^2$	m_2 \hat{v}_2^2
3	m_{31} $c_{31}l_3^a + a_{13}\hat{v}_1^3$	m_{32} $c_{32}l_3^a + a_{23}\hat{v}_2^3$	m_{33} $c_{33}l_3^a$	m_3 \hat{v}_3^3
Total	m^1	m^2	m^3	μ

Total sum of all columns is identical to total sum of all rows: $\sum_h m^h \equiv \sum_h m_h \equiv \mu$. That identity does not apply for individual producers. For each of them, we generally have $m_h \neq m^h$ which is the outer manifestation of the “dual evaluation” inherent in a commodity division of labour (a consequence of decentralisation in the terms of a standard theory). Each independent producer observing his/her account experiences the hiatus between his/her own evaluation and the one the market yields. That hiatus must disappear in order to get a unique and non-equivocal social evaluation of all producers. This outer manifestation of the *salto mortale* has to be resolved; accounts must be squared which means that producers’ balances, either positive or negative, have to be settled. These balances are the observable effects of the contradiction between private and market evaluations (in Marx’s terms between private and social labour).

As Marx put it:

The leap taken by value from the body of the commodity into the body of the gold is the commodity’s *salto mortale*, as I have called it elsewhere [in *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*]. If the leap falls short, it is not the commodity which is defrauded but rather its owner. (*Capital*, pp. 200-201)

Commodity exchange is not for Marx the mere fact of giving a commodity against an equivalent counterpart; it takes him the entire chapter 1 – especially the presentation of the successive value forms – to show how commodity exchange is the consequence of his initial definition of the commodity division of labour.

In other words, the labour of the private individual manifests itself as an element of the total labour of society only through relations which the act of exchange establishes between the products, and, through their mediation, between the producers. To the producers, therefore, the social relations between their private labours appear as what they are, i.e. they do not appear as direct social relations between persons in their work, but rather as material relations between persons and social relations between things (*Capital*, pp. 165-166)

As Marx's developments on value forms convincingly show, the mediation between producers is performed by payments. According to the plan of chapter 1, a commodity division of labour manifests itself by the flows of payment between "mutually independent producers performing private labours in isolation". The *salto mortale* of commodities is as a matter of fact the *salto mortale* of their producers.

What prevents Marx's theory of labour-values from giving a quantitative determination of value magnitudes based of the "dual character of labour embodied in commodities" is a *lack of achievement not a lack of relevance*. The "dual character of labour" appears to be a poor expression for the "dual character of commodities evaluation". The non-commensurability of the two kinds of labour prevents one from univocally determining values. Co-existence of concrete labours and abstract labour in a quantitative model is not the method leading to the solution. In contrast, *once the social manifestation of the "dual character of labour" through a money mediation is clearly recognized, it is quite easy to confront private and social evaluations*; their particular quantitative expressions are perfectly commensurable. It is what Table 1 is about.

But, as noted above, this is not the last word of the story. The *salto mortale* of commodities (and producers) has to be made non-lethal. If not, it would be impossible to evaluate the individual producers: all producers would go bankrupt. Remark that such an issue could not be discarded. *A general crisis without resolution always remains a potential outcome of a commodity division of activities*. The "dual character of the labour" is the poison inherent in Marx's commodity theory and makes the spectre of the crisis haunting commodity societies. It is that poison and that spectre value theoreticians have made so many efforts to conjure making equilibrium situations the only ones conceivable. The exclusivity of equilibrium situations is the most evident symptom of the irrelevance of academic value theories applied to market economies (and of system (5) above).

So far, we are left with the balances to settle. What we know for sure is that the algebraic sum of these balances is zero. This means that a general compensation between individual producers is always possible *in principle* depending only upon some conditions. Interestingly enough, Marx's commodity theory, in our formulation, leaves open *two diametrically opposed issues: either a general crisis – no compensation taking place – or a social evaluation being imposed individual producers very different from the one they had expected – a general compensation allowing them to settle their balances*.

Let us consider the latter issue. What does "to settle a balance" mean? For excess producers it means to find something to purchase for getting rid of the means of payment they get above their voluntary expenses. Symmetrically, for deficit producers, it means to find something to sell in order to get the quantity of means of payment they need in order to remain solvent.

The items concerned by these operations may be the same or may be quite different from those traded through voluntary payments. Beyond the possible complexity of these operations, what matters here is that they are all *constrained* in the precise sense that they are *alternative to bankruptcy*. While the flows of payment in Table 1 are all *voluntary*, since they manifest the decisions individual producers have taken in isolation but in view of the market, the flows of means of payment we are speaking about now are all *constrained* by the necessity of being solvent.

If it may be difficult to empirically distinguish voluntary and constrained payments since accounts are not to be publicly shown but when squared, it is absolutely clear that voluntary and constrained payments radically differ from a theoretical point of view. *Voluntary and constrained*

payments are nothing but the outer manifestation of the “dual character of the labour embodied in commodities”.

At the level of abstraction adopted here, it would not make sense to deal with the many forms of partial or total resolution of the hiatus between private and market evaluation (with or without a “lender of last resort” for instance). We need only to complete our story by introducing into Table 1 the constrained operations just alluded to. Table 2 displays these operations. They are noted \tilde{m}_{hk} indicating the flow of means of payment producer h (experiencing excess) addresses to producer k (experiencing deficit).

Table 2 General balances settlement by compensation through constrained payments

	1	2	3	Total
1	m_{11}	$m_{12} \mp m_{12}$	$m_{13} \mp m_{13}$	\bar{m}_1
2	m_{21} $\mp \tilde{m}_{21}$	m_{22}	$m_{23} \mp m_{23}$	\bar{m}_2
3	m_{31} $\mp \tilde{m}_{31}$	$m_{32} \mp m_{32}$	m_{33}	\bar{m}_3
Total	\bar{m}_1	\bar{m}_2	\bar{m}_3	μ

Once balances are settled and accounts squared, we get the social evaluation of producers \bar{m}_h . It makes sense to *interpret* the \bar{m}_h 's as money expression of labour-values. We speak of *interpretation* since, as developments above show, we can directly get the values through the money flows without taking into consideration quantities of efforts or labour. This does not mean that Marx's theory is useless. Quite the contrary! What matters is not labour – a most controversial category which has brought more heat than light – but the “dual character of producers evaluation” which is the consequence of a commodity-division of activities which may defined, paraphrasing Marx:

only the products of mutually independent *activities*, performed in isolation, can confront each other as commodities.

To sum up, the process of commodity production at each period takes place through simultaneous flows of payment reflecting the dual character of wealth evaluation typical of a commodity society:

- Producers privately decide in isolation the efforts (e_h) they consider worth performing in view of what they expect to get the market (l_h^e) given their expectations about values (\hat{v}_h); the outer manifestation of these decisions are the *voluntary payments* they address to other producers
- As a consequence of the commodity division of activities, decentralized voluntary payments generally leave individual with unsquared accounts; unless a general

compensation takes place, a commodity society may experience a general crisis; a general compensation may avoid such an issue; it consists in a settlement of balances by *constrained payments* entailing a *social evaluation imposed to individual producers which is generally different from the one they had expected*.

*
* *

It may be worth exploring some effects and consequences of a reformulation of Marx's theory of a commodity society. For obvious reasons we will limit ourselves to some of them, all relative to the role of labour and commodity as categories in a theory of a capitalist mode of production. First of all, it is the relevance of labour in a theory of a commodity society which raises problem. If we accept to comply with the principle of parsimony (Occam's razor criterion), we have to admit that labour, as a category, does not belong to an economic theory of a commodity society. Labour is neither necessary nor sufficient to evaluate producers in a commodity economy as defined by Marx and following Marx's fundamental idea of a "dual character of commodity producers evaluation".

In *Capital's* section 1, commodity and labour, considered as concepts, are closely related but are not on the same level. *Commodity* production denotes a kind of organization of productive activities which Marx contrasts with "the patriarchal rural industry of a peasant family which produces corn, cattle, yarn, linen and clothing for their own use" (p. 171) or with "an association of free men working with the means of production held in common" (id.) while *labour* is only one of the solutions to the value problem raised by that type of organization.

A commodity division of labour, defined as "mutually independent acts of labour, performed in isolation", generates an opposition private/social; Marx chooses to present that opposition as one between concrete and abstract labour; hence the idea of the "dual character of labour embodied in commodities". In other terms, *commodity is the problem and labour the solution* Marx gives to that problem. Marx's followers formalized that solution with the "canonical" value system $Av + l = v$. Halas, that solution is not true to Marx's "dual character of labour". Labour, as a category of economic theory of commodity, is no longer relevant. As seen above, another solution, true to "dual character of commodity evaluation" does the job in terms of payment matrices.

This does means that labour as a category should not play a role in economic theory. Once labour as a general anthropological category is recognized to belong to a philosophy of human history, but not to an economic theory of a commodity economy, it becomes possible to reconsider labour as an *economic category*. *Labour may be defined as any activity performed by individuals for the account and under the responsibility of other people*. Amongst the multiple examples of such activities, *waged labour* plays a central role since it characterizes a capitalist mode of production.

Obviously, maintaining that waged labour characterizes a capitalist mode de production holds only if it can be shown that a waged relationship cannot be conceived of as a commodity relationship. Otherwise why bother with capitalism? Commodity would be the first and the last word to account for a simple and for a capitalist market economy. Our reformulation of Marx's commodity theory obliges to proceed further along an internal critique of Marx's economic theory.

It is not the proper place to develop the point.⁴ We content ourselves with indicating that two fields are concerned: surplus value theory and exploitation.

A last but not least point is worth discussing: how is the relation of commodity theory (*Capital's* section 1) to capitalism theory (the rest of *Capital*) to be interpreted? Does a reformulation of the former modify the terms of the debate? We tend to answer: yes!

Conceiving the category “commodity” as *logically prior* to that of “capitalism” creates a distance allowing a critical view about what our societies give us to observe. More precisely that distance makes appear a contradiction between “commodity” and “capital”. That “the wealth of societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails appears as an ‘immense collection of commodities’ is misleading. What seems to be “commodities” are in fact “forms of capital” at some stages of its circulation. “Capital” has superseded “commodity”. Understanding that form of production, which fundamentally differs from commodity production, requires a critique of these “false appearances” and of the political economy which tends to justify it. An outstanding example of how political economy may mislead people is given by value theoreticians (Marx and mainstream economists) who deal with a wage relationship as if it were an exchange of commodities (Marx have contributed to that with his labour-power commodity theory in view of subverting Ricardo; but that “good intention” – one of those which pave the hell – does not change anything to that point).

Once shown that the two pillars of capitalism – wage relationship and money issuance by a credit system – are not ruled by the logic of exchange, the appearance of capitalism as a generalized exchange economy loses most of its strength. Waged labour is associated with a specific form of money circulation characterized by the exclusion of wage-earners from an access to means of payment issuance, which entails their (monetary) subordination to entrepreneurs which hire them inside their enterprises. Labour, as a category, may be precisely defined as an *activity performed inside firms according to a monetary subordination*. Relations amongst entrepreneurs are, at that level of abstraction, of the same nature as the ones amongst independent producers of a market economy *i.e.* amongst people having freely chosen their activities of which they endorse responsibility vis-à-vis the market. But the fact that they are embedded in a waged relationship entails a qualitative change: capitalism properties substantially differ from those of a generalized exchange economy.

⁴We ask permission to refer the reader to Cartelier (2018).

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The Interpretation of Ownership: Insights from Original Institutional Economics, Pragmatist Social Psychology and Psychoanalysis

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Abstract

In this work we analyse the main interpretations of ownership in Original Institutional Economics (OIE) and their links with pragmatist psychology and psychoanalysis.

We consider Thorstein Veblen's notion of ownership as a relation of possession of persons, and John R. Commons's distinction between "corporeal" and "intangible" property, that marks the shift from a material possession of goods and arbitrary power over the workers to the development of human faculties in a more participatory environment. For space reasons we do not address other contributions developed both by the OIE and by the New Institutional Economics.

We then consider a number of contributions of pragmatist social psychology and psychoanalysis that, although not dealing directly with the notion of ownership, can cast light not only on the private and "material" aspects of ownership but also on its collective and "relational aspects".

The reason why we consider it useful to address different perspectives is that, as observed by the famous sociologist Karl Mannheim (1952), a landscape can be seen only from a determined perspective and without perspective there is no landscape. Hence, observing a landscape (or phenomenon) from different angles (or disciplines) can help to acquire a much clearer insight into the features of the various perspectives. And this is one of the main advantage of a pluralist approach to the study of economic and social phenomena, also aimed at overcoming the fragmentation so often present in social sciences. In this light, the interpretative theories that we address, however different in many respects, present notable complementarities, in the sense that the aspects more overlooked by some are more completely considered by the others. In our work, these different but complementary notions of ownership can help illuminate the manifold aspects of human relations, also with a view to provide a more tailored policy action for the solution of their more problematic aspects.

Keywords:

Original Institutional Economics, Pragmatist Social Psychology, Psychoanalysis, Social Valuing, Political Economy

JEL Classification:

A12; A13; B52

¹ The usual disclaimer applies.

1. Veblen's Concept of Ownership

Thorstein Veblen, in his article "The Beginnings of Ownership", stresses the importance of psychological factors in the rising of the institution of ownership. He notes that in any discussion on the criteria for the distribution of wealth, the focus should be directed to social or collective production rather than to individual and isolated production. As he puts it,

This natural-rights theory of property makes the creative effort of an isolated, self-sufficing individual the basis of ownership vested in him. In so doing it overlooks the fact that there is no isolated, self-sufficing individual. All production, in fact, is a production in and by the help of community, and all wealth is such only in society. (Veblen, 1934 [1898]: 33)

Veblen's explicit acknowledgment of the social character of ownership allows him to explain how this institution had evolved out of primitive ages. This entails enquiring into the psychological orientations which underlie the relations of the primitive populations with their objects in connections to the social organization,

What is of interest for the present purpose is not whether we, with our preconceptions, would look upon the relation of the primitive savage or barbarian to his slight personal effects as a relation of ownership, but whether that is his own apprehension of the matter...like all questions of the derivation of institutions, it is essentially a question of folk-psychology, not of mechanical fact; and when, so conceived, must be answered in the negative. (Veblen, *ibidem*: 35, 36)

As a matter of fact, it is important to realize that ownership, as we understand it, is a relatively recent concept. In a very early stage, for instance, all the objects at disposal of a person cannot be conceived "to belong" to him in any familiar-to-us sense of the word. As well expressed by Veblen, the primitive man identifies himself with the objects, in that he attributes to them anthropomorphic qualities and so considers them as a part of his personality. Hence,

[For]....The unsophisticated man, whether savage or civilised....All obvious manifestations of force are apprehended as expressions of conation—effort put forth for a purpose by some agency similar to the human will...The objects and facts that fall within the quasi-personal fringe figure in the habits of thought of the savage as personal to him in a vital sense. They are not a congeries of things to which he stands in an economic relation and to which he has an equitable, legal claim. These articles are conceived to be his in much the same sense as his hands and feet are his, or his pulse-beat, or his digestion, or the heat of his body, or the motions of his limbs or brain. (Veblen, *ibidem*: 36, 37)

The absence in the habits of thought of primitive people of the concept of the individual ownership does not imply, as it might appear at first glance, that they had, for the things held on a common basis, a corresponding concept of collective ownership. In fact, the concept of collective ownership requires a pre-existing concept of individual ownership,

"Ownership is an accredited discretionary power over an object on the ground of a conventional claim; it implies that the owner is a personal agent who takes thought for the disposal of the object owned. A personal agent is an individual, and it is only by an eventual refinement—of the nature of a legal fiction—that any group of men is conceived to exercise a corporate discretion over the object. (Veblen, *ibidem*: 39)

In this meaning, ownership is not a static or "absolute" concept existing beyond and apart from the social experiences of the subjects involved, but it is an evolutionary concept that evolves along with the concept of "personal agent" — indeed, as we will see shortly, it constitutes the very expression of individual rights and prerogatives — and, therefore, is acquired through a long process of learning and habituation.

But, if ownership constitutes a social and cultural phenomenon, there arises the intriguing question: what social factors have contributed to its emergence?

Veblen identifies as the main factor driving ancient societies towards a structure of ownership the passage from peaceable to predatory habits of life, which express themselves in exploitation, coercion and seizure. These predatory habits have asserted themselves mainly through seizing durable goods and persons as a result of fights between rival societies. Ownership acquired through such predatory activities constitutes the basis of the invidious distinctions of wealth and status and of ceremonial institutions associated with them.

In this respect, the relevant element of ownership is not the material aspect linked to the possession of goods but the collective element related to the social distinctions made possible through such possession. In his account, Veblen is able to identify the links between acquisitive social institutions and patriarchal family, on the one side; and the importance for social status of seizing goods and, even more, persons, on the other. The common roots of these institutions lie in a predatory attitude typical of war-oriented communities, in which the social status is directly connected to fighting ability. All these connections are vividly expressed by Veblen,

When the practice [of seizing persons and especially women] hardens into custom, the captor comes to exercise a customary right to exclusive use and abuse over the women he has seized; and this customary right of use and abuse over an object which is obviously not an organic part of his person constitutes the relation of ownership, as naïvely apprehended....The result is a new form of marriage, in which the man is master. This ownership-marriage seems to be the origin both of private property and of the patriarchal household. Both of these great institutions are, accordingly, of an emulative origin. (Veblen, *ibidem*: 47, 48)

Thus, the institution of ownership originated in a relation of power and dominion over persons involving both social and family levels. In this regard, the possession of goods is a derivative of the possession of persons and acquires social importance as far as it is able to convey the invidious distinctions based upon the possession of persons. As a consequence, it happens that,

When the habit of looking upon and claiming the persons identified with my invidious interest, or subservient to me, as "mine" has become an accepted and integral part of men's habits of thought, it becomes a relatively easy matter to extend this newly achieved concept of ownership to the products of labor performed by the persons so held in ownership....The appropriation and accumulation of consumable goods could scarcely have come into vogue as a direct outgrowth of the primitive horde-communism, but it comes in as an easy and unobtrusive consequence of the ownership of persons. (Veblen, *ibidem*: 48, 49)

Veblen's fascinating reconstruction of the emergence of the institution of ownership casts a deeper light on its links with and emulative and "conspicuous" possession of goods and persons, on the one side, and with patriarchal family, on the other. It also cast light on the predatory aspects of capitalism (addressed in particular in Veblen 1904) and its relations of wage-slavery (see also later). As we will see in the paragraph 4, such theory has interesting parallels with a number of psychoanalytic concepts.

The links with Veblen's theory of instincts

It can be interesting to analyse how these predatory aspects are linked to Veblen's theory of instincts (or propensities). In his book, *The Instinct of Workmanship and the State of the Industrial Arts* (1914), he examines the role of two fundamental instincts (or propensities), "workmanship" and "parental bent", in economic and social development. Both instincts are intended in a broad sense, "workmanship" meaning not only technical abilities but the whole of manual and intellectual activities, and "parental bent" meaning an inclination to look after the common good that extends beyond the sphere of the family alone.

In Veblen's analysis, these instincts tend, under ideal circumstances, to strengthen one another. This constitutes an important insight confirmed by studies in psychology and psychoanalysis, which stress the need for the person to enhance his or her intellectual, social, and emotional potential through the construction of adequate interpersonal relations.

These instincts are likely to prevail in a situation where other instincts that can act at cross-purposes to them have little social grounds to assert themselves. Veblen seems to suppose that the first stage of human life was of this kind but that, since then, a number of disturbing factors — mainly related, as we have just seen, to invidious distinctions of wealth and status ingrained in a notion of ownership — gained strength with the emergence of capitalism. By anticipating a bit the later discussion, it can be interesting to note that there are various parallels between Veblen's and Sigmund Freud's theory of instincts. These issues have also been addressed by Almeida (2015), who tends to consider Freud's principle of pleasure at odds with Veblen's theory of instincts. We agree with this, but would also note that one important reason why Freud remained

attached to a "biological" concept of instinct resides in his purpose of underlining the role of psychosexuality in human psychology. On that account, Freud has always underscored the role of feelings, interpersonal relations and cultural factors in driving individual behaviour, providing important contributions in which he stresses that libidinal relations are the necessary factor for the existence of society. In this regard, he tends to employ the term *eros* or *libido* as a synonymous with love. With this qualification, Freud's first theory of instincts, based on two main instincts (or drives), sexuality (or libido), and ego-instinct (or self-preservation), has, despite of course various differences, interesting parallels with Veblen's instincts of parental bent and workmanship.

Such parallels are even more striking if we consider the later development of psychoanalysis (addressed in paragraph 4) that stress the need of persons to establish sound interpersonal relations.

Another central aspect, which renders Veblen's theory very synergic with pragmatist psychology and psychoanalysis, is the insight that instincts constitute multifarious entities expressing the complex interplay between the biological, affective and intellective aspects of personality. This appears from the following passage,

The distinctive feature by the mark of which any given instinct is identified is to be found in the particular character of the purpose to which it drives. "Instinct", as contra-distinguished from tropismatic action, involves consciousness and adaptation to an end aimed at....The ends of life, then, the purposes to be achieved, are assigned by man's instinctive proclivities; but the ways and means of accomplishing those things which the instinctive proclivities so make worth while are a matter of intelligence....The higher the degree of intelligence and the larger the available body of knowledge current in any given community, the more extensive and elaborate will be the logic of ways and means interposed between these impulses and their realisation, and the more multifarious and complicated will be the apparatus of expedients and resources employed to compass those ends that are instinctively worthwhile....all instinctive action is intelligent in some degree. This is what marks it off from the tropism and takes it out of the category of automatism. Hence all instinctive action is teleological. It involves holding to a purpose. (Veblen, 1914: 4, 5-6, 6, 31).

2. Commons's Theory of Ownership

As we have seen, in Veblen's analysis ownership is conceived to be the institutional sanction of a relation of dominion over persons. But, in Commons's theory, the whole set of our opportunities can be considered, in a very pregnant way, as "belonging" to us. Thus, by considering these aspects, the concept of ownership acquires manifold meanings, as it embraces the whole range of limits and opportunities of individual action within a social context. Commons's institutional and historical approach illustrates, through the analysis of the orientation of legislation and justice courts' decisions, the evolution of concept of ownership: from a concept, stressed by Veblen, of exclusive disposal of goods and persons, to one of reciprocal rights, duties and opportunities. The

latter forms are associated with the emergence of new economic structures and social classes, in which the immaterial and intangible elements constituted by the contractual obligations represent the main basis of ownership. This does not imply that power and dominion over persons has disappeared but that it may assume more subtle and indirect ways, for instance in the form of unfair contracts. In Commons words,

Thus it is that 'corporeal property', in the original meaning of the term, has disappeared, or, rather, has been relegated to what may be described as the "internal" economy of a going concern or a household in the various processes of producing and consuming physical objects, according to what the economists call their "use-value." And, instead of the use-value of corporeal property, the courts are concerned with its exchange-value....In the course of time this exchange-value has come to be known as "intangible property," that is, the kind of property whose value depends upon the right of access to a commodity market, a labor market, a money market, and so on. (Commons, 1924:18-19)

It can be interesting to look into the concept of liberty employed by Commons in its connection to the concept of ownership. Commons identifies two concepts of liberty, denoted as liberty and freedom. The former — liberty — indicates only the absence of duties, whereas the latter — freedom — denotes a set of concrete rights and prerogatives associated with the emergence of new social classes and the corresponding importance of the immaterial expressions of ownership. As Commons explains,

Liberty, as such, is only the negative of duty, the absence of restraint or compulsion. But "freedom" is positive....The freedom of the ex-slave was not only that empty immunity from legal subjection to his master provided for in the Thirteenth Amendment of Emancipation from slavery, but also the participation in citizenship provided in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments. (Commons, 1924:118-119)

In the analysis of these changes, it seems interesting to observe that this evolution is not limited to the passage from a material to an immaterial concept of ownership but continually transforms and extends the very definition of these concepts in a complex interaction with the economic and social structures. In this regard, Commons shows how the evolution of the concept of ownership has accompanied the rise of capitalism and the new social classes associated with it, and how these classes have addressed the problem of devising an adequate system of norms and institutions in order to allow their unfolding in the economic and social arena.

For instance, as regards the worker, there has been an evolution of the concept of the "ownership" of his person and his labour aimed at extending his right to participate in productive and collective life.

These changes can be traced back to the evolution of legislation and the decisions of justice courts, which together have shaped the development of labour right, unions rights and social legislation. This process is set out in the following passage,

Property is not a physical object but is the relationship which a person necessarily sets up between his personal abilities and the world about [and, as a consequence of the evolution towards an intangible notion of property]....Even organized labor achieves participation with the management in the protection of the job, just as the barons and the capitalists achieved participation with the King in the protection of property and business. A common law of labor is constructed by selecting the reasonable practices and rejecting the bad practices of labor, and by depriving both unions and management of arbitrary power over the job. (Commons, 1924: 156, 311-312).

Transactions, Institutions and Social Value

The interesting aspect of Commons's analysis of ownerships is that is intimately related to his institutional economics. In this regard, one of Commons's most important insights (in particular, 1924 and 1934) is that collective action constitutes a necessary element for an adequate performance of individual action. The dialectic and dynamic relations intervening between individual and collective action are effectively expressed in this passage:

Thus, the ultimate unit of activity, which correlates law, economics and ethics, must contain in itself the three principles of *conflict*, *dependence*, and *order*. This unit is a Transaction. A transaction, with its participants, is the smallest unit of institutional economics. (Commons, 1934: 58, 69)

As emerges from the passage, transactions are classified into three categories — Bargaining, Managerial and Rationing — according to the relationship established between the parties involved.

The first concerns the relation between individuals with equal rights — which does not necessarily correspond to equal economic power — for instance, between buyer and seller; the second regards the relations between people organized within an institution, for instance between a manager and his or her collaborators; and the third refers to the relations between the person and a kind of collective action where there is less direct involvement. This happens, in particular, with the policy action of Government and Parliament, but also with the collective action of the most important economic and social associations of society (for instance, political parties, unions, consumers associations).

These transactions are quite diverse according to the degree of direct intervention of collective action but, at the same time, are extremely intertwined. It is interesting to observe the complex, conflicting and evolutionary role that institutions assume in Commons's analysis, as expressed in the following passage,

Thus conflict, dependence, and order become the field of institutional economics, builded upon the principles of scarcity, efficiency, futurity, working rules, and

strategic factors; but correlated under the modern notions of collective action controlling, liberating, and expanding individual action. (Commons, 1934: 73, 92)

It is interesting to note that (i) what happens in these relations is reflected in the structure of ownership and determines how economic and political power is distributed among persons, groups and social classes. And that (ii) these relations, in turn, are related to the concept of reasonable value, which was elaborated by Commons in order to draw attention to the conflicting, imperfect and evolutionary nature of the process of social value. As he puts it,

Each economic transaction is a process of joint valuation by participants, wherein each is moved by diversity of interests, by dependence upon the others, and by the working rules which, for the time being, require conformity of transactions to collective action....Reasonable Value is the evolutionary collective determination of what is reasonable in view of all changing political, moral, and economic circumstances and the personalities that arise therefrom to the Supreme bench. (Commons, 1990[1934], pp. 681, 683-684)

Reasonable value is, by definition, an imperfect process, whose characteristics can be interpreted as the synthesis of the conflicting and evolutionary components of collective action. The imperfection of social valuing stems also from its partly unconscious and conflicting character, often embodied in habits of thought and life. In this sense, social value process goes to the heart of the nature of political economy, which bears a close relation with law and ethics. Hence,

If the subject-matter of political economy is not individuals and nature's forces, but is human beings getting their living out of each other by mutual transfers of property rights, then it is to law and ethics that we look for the critical turning points of this human activity. [Commons, 1990(1934), p. 57]

Commons's Negotiational Psychology

In order to cast a better light on these manifold phenomena, he has elaborated the concept of *negotiational psychology*, aimed at interpreting the conflicts of collective action as expressed through the complex web of transactions and institutions. In his words,

If it be considered that, after all, it is the individual who is important, then the individual with whom we are dealing is the Institutionalized Mind. Individuals begin as babies....They meet each other, not as physiological bodies moved by glands, nor as "globules of desire" moved by pain and pleasure, similar to the forces of biological and animal nature, but as prepared more or less by habit, induced by the pressure of custom, to engage in those highly artificial transactions created by the collective human will....The psychology of transactions is the social psychology of negotiations and the transfers of ownership....Thus each endeavors to change the dimensions of the economic

values to be transferred....This negotiational psychology takes three forms according to the three kinds of transactions: the psychology of persuasion, coercion, or duress in bargaining transactions; the psychology of command and obedience in managerial transactions; and the psychology of pleading and argument in rationing transactions....Negotiational psychology is strictly a psychology of ideas, meanings, and customary units of measurement. (Commons, 1990, quoted: 73-74, 88, 91, 106)

In concluding these paragraphs, it seems interesting to note that, notwithstanding their differences, Commons's and Veblen's psychological theories present notable complementarities: for instance, it seems true that **(i)** as underscored by Veblen, persons are driven in their action by their instincts (or propensities), which interact in a complex way with the characteristics of the institutional context; and that **(ii)**, at the same time, as highlighted by Commons, persons acquire in their reciprocal interaction an "institutionalized mind" that orients the expression of their propensities according to their role in economy and society.

3. The Links with Pragmatist Social Psychology

As emerges from the previous account, Veblen and Commons provide interesting and complementary interpretations of the ownership where the psychological and "relational" aspects play a central role. Commons's notion of intangible property brings to the fore the corresponding extension of the notion of ownership and of distribution of power related to it. These aspects, coupled with Veblen's notion of ownership as a relation of personal dominion, cast light on the circumstance that the notion of ownership extends itself well beyond the sphere of pecuniary values for embracing the whole domain of social life.

In this respect, ownership embodies also the character of a public good, which includes the capacity of the system to provide an adequate social environment for the inner realisation of the person. In this regard, one central insight of Veblen's analysis is the inability of pecuniary culture based on the profit motive to ensure a full expression of the workmanship and parental bent instincts (or propensities) of the person. These aspects have been developed by social psychologists close to institutionalism, in particular of pragmatist orientation.

John Dewey's "Individualism, Old and New"

We will consider some of these contributions. We can start with John Dewey's article "Toward a New Individualism", that belongs to a series of articles published in the progressive magazine "New Republic" and collected in the book *Individualism, Old and New*. He begins his article by noting that our productive life is acquiring a corporate and collective character. And that, conversely, our moral culture is still "saturated with ideals and values of an individualism derived from a pre-scientific, pre-technological era.", Dewey, "Toward a New Individualism" [1999 (1930): 37], quotation taken from the 1999 edition. The somewhat paradoxical idea of Dewey is that the spiritual roots of such individualism are to be found in medieval religion. In this sense,

The apparent subordination of the individual to established institutions often conceals from recognition the vital existence of a deep-seated individualism....the fact that the controlling institution was the Church should remind us that in ultimate intent it existed to secure the salvation of the individual....The power of established institutions proceeded from their being the necessary means of accomplishing the supreme end of the individual. (Dewey, *ibidem*: 37)

It is interesting to note how this wild form of individualism went in tandem with political absolutism and a very hierarchical society. With the advent of industrial revolution, many things had changed, and societies became more dynamic, but such kind of individualism — expressed in the form of natural rights — remained relatively unaffected and persisted also in the next stage of corporate capitalism. This stage, despite its semblance of individualism, is much more than individual capitalism based on collective action. This assertion can appear paradoxical: in fact, is it not true that corporations are privately owned?

This is true, of course, but it is also true that the activities of corporations require a notable socialisation of their activities as they must work together and interact each other in order to keep the system working. Also, the legally “private structure” of corporations often conceals the articulation of the stakeholders. These include not only the classic shareholders, but also other subjects like workers, consumers, local and (especially today) civic communities and environmental groups.

Although these aspects would require a different and more collective attitude, the earlier creed of economic individualism still persisted. But, notes Dewey, “If [this individual creed] is not an echo of the echo of a voice of a long ago I do not know what it is.” (Dewey, *ibidem*: 38)

In this respect, the “pure individualism” so often held at the basis of American development plays in the corporate time a modest role and exists only “in the movie and the novel”. But the persistence of this old individualistic creed in a context that requires a totally different attitude has caused the phenomenon of “lost individual”.² This comes about in a situation of “anomie”, when there is for the persons a lack of social relations and no clear meaning of the public functions of their activities. As noted by Dewey,

They [influential and wealthy people], may be captains of finance and industry, but until there is some consensus of belief as to the meaning of finance and industry in the civilization as a whole, they cannot be captains of their own souls....Their reward is found not in what they do, in their social office and function, but in a deflection of social consequences to private gain....An economic individualism of motives and aims underlies our present corporate mechanism, and undoes the individual. (Dewey, “The Lost Individual”, 1999 [1930]: 27, 30, quotation taken from the 1999 edition)

² From his previous article first published in *New Republic*, 1930, and later in the quoted volume *Individualism, Old and New*, 1999. A related and interesting analysis is contained in *Liberalism and Social Action* [2000 (1935)] and *Freedom and Culture* [1989 (1939)].

This lack of social meaning has its economic counterparts in economic insecurity, unpredictable and disruptive business cycles, chronic unemployment and precarious work. A situation of this kind, as people cannot live in a *vacuum* and continue to express their need of social relations, calls for vacuous and surreptitious values of “liberty” and “nationalism”. In this way, a kind of uniformity of thought is engendered but, notes Dewey, such standardization does not go deep. In fact,

Its superficial character [of such standardization] is evident in its instability. All agreement of thought obtained by external means, by repression and intimidation, however subtle, and by calculated propaganda and publicity, is of necessity superficial; and whatever is superficial is in continual flux. The methods employed produce mass credulity, and this jumps from one thing to another according to the suggestion of the day. We think and feel alike—but only for a month or a season. Then comes some sensational event or personage to exercise a hypnotizing uniformity of response. At a given time, taken in cross-section, conformity is the rule. In a time span, taken longitudinally, instability and flux dominate. (Dewey, “Toward a New Individualism”, quoted: 42)

² From his previous article first published in *New Republic*, 1930, and later in the quoted volume *Individualism, Old and New*, 1999. A related and interesting analysis is contained in *Liberalism and Social Action* [2000 (1935)] and *Freedom and Culture* [1989 (1939)].

It is then a psychological anchorage to a wild and unsocial form of individualism that produce these evils. Their overcoming, for Dewey, rests in promoting an economic system based on element of democratic socialism and new, social oriented, forms of individuality.

Some Aspects of George Herbert Mead's Symbolic Interactionism

This interesting analysis of Dewey, which seems written yesterday, is of course not alone in the field of institutionalist and pragmatist social psychology. For space reasons, we cannot address in the detail various contributions (see also Hermann, 2020), that often have significant complementarities with Dewey's analysis. We will briefly address George Herbert Mead's Symbolic Interactionism.

The symbolic interactionism of George Herbert Mead underlines the social nature of our thoughts, that take form of an inner dialogue between the “Me” of the persons (their conscious instance, broadly corresponding to the psychoanalytic *ego*) and the I, that corresponds to the unconscious internalisation of the others' response to our action through the internalisation of a common code of conduct (which has interesting parallels with the psychoanalytic notion of *superego*). These concepts are vividly expressed in the following passage,

The self which consciously stands over against other selves thus becomes an object, another to himself, through the very fact that he hears himself talk, and replies. The mechanism of introspection is therefore given in the social attitude

which necessarily man assumes toward himself, and the mechanism of thought, insofar as thought uses symbols which are used in social intercourse, is but an inner conversation. (Mead, "The Social Self", 1913, in Reck 1964, p.146)

The interest of this analysis lies in the circumstance that it wonderfully blends the individual and social aspects of human psychology. For instance, the capacity of the person to respond to his/her own inner talk implies the capacity of the self to take the role of others (or of a 'generalised other') in the case of widely shared opinions.

This capacity also constitutes an essential ingredient of child development. In this regard, notes Mead, the capacity of the child to acquire the role of parents cannot be reduced to mere imitation, since it represents for the child a way for getting acquainted with its social world. A notable aspect of this analysis is its evolutionary character. Values and opinions are not a static whole but are co-extensive with the evolution of persons and society. Hence, conflicts between different values are the stuff and substance of such evolution and the acceptance of the new values implies a reorganisation of the self. Hence, the incapacity of social empathy is at root of many social evils. For instance, notes Mead, there can be persons who would risk their lives to save other persons in danger, but that nonetheless would consider it "normal or inevitable" the deaths linked to bad road conditions and lack of medical aid for the poor. The social implications of his theory are addressed in the article "Natural Rights and the Theory of Political Institution". Here he underscores the necessity for the system of natural rights – as set forth in the 17th and 18th centuries in Europe – to go beyond an abstract formulation in order to address the real needs of the living society. In this sense,

"Human rights are never in such danger as when their only defenders are political institutions and their officers... [in fact]... every right that comes up for protection by our courts or other constitutional institution is confessedly in a form which is incomplete and inadequate, because it represents a social situation which is incomplete and inadequate....[for this reason].... the ultimate guarantee must be found in the reaction of men and women to a human situation so fully presented that their whole natures respond. (Mead, "Natural Rights and the Theory of Political Institution", in Reck, quoted, pp.169, 170)

Of course, this is true, but it is also true that the legal and judicial decisions are important for expressing what is the "reasonable value" in complex and often inherently conflicting matters. As noted before in dealing with Commons's analysis, the selection of the reasonable practices, for instance in labour issues, constitutes a central aspect of the evolution of the notion of public purpose. This finds its expression in the complexity of policy action, which includes not only the action of government and parliament, but also that of justice courts, and of social subjects like unions, consumers associations, local communities. Hence, all social bodies can play an active role in policy action.

A better participation process, by improving the related process of social valuing, can contribute to formulate policies more tailored to the profound needs of society.³

Further remarks

The previous theories of social psychology underscore, among other things, how the ideology of wild individualism conflates with the inner need of socialisation of the persons. This aspect is central, of course, but leaves somewhat in the background the reasons that lead to unsound social relations. What psychological factors make it difficult for persons to create a socio-economic system more responsive to their real needs? And what are their “real needs”? This relates to the central question of the characteristics of human nature. Are we sure that human nature really prefers egalitarianism and democracy? It cannot be the case that the intrinsic nature of the persons is that described by Thomas Hobbes—the war of all against all? And that, for this reason, the wild and predatory individualism of our societies is but a “normal expression of the real nature of people?”

On that account, even cursory look at the real societies shows the prevalence of, in Veblen’s terminology, invidious distinctions of wealth, power, rank and status. These features are typical not only of capitalism but go back to virtually all early societies, where the ceremonial and relatively immutable aspects of these invidious distinctions were even more marked. In a sense, it is only from the 1789 French revolution and the emergence of the industrial era that — along with its enormous problems, exploitation and injustices — such rigid and hierarchical societies began to be challenged by progressive movements aimed at asserting the rights of workers and citizens. As a result, more democratic and fair systems in the workplace and in the society began, slowly and imperfectly, to make their inroads. But, despite such progress, our societies are still largely based on marked inequality of income and power.

There are of course reactions against this state of affairs, but in the main the psychological roots of inequalities seem hard to eliminate since many persons seem to have “internalised” these aspects. In the face of such evidence, many people tend to think, in a typical conservative way, that socio-economic inequalities cannot be amended as they constitute but an expression of the true human nature. Such view, however, seems too simplistic since disregards the intrinsic need, underscored by Dewey and Mead, of the persons to establish sound interpersonal relations and the related evolution, however difficult and slow, towards fairer societies. So, the question poses itself as whether the distress of “the lost individual” can be traced back to psychological factors that go to reinforce the cultural split underscored by Dewey and Mead. One aspect that hints towards such direction is that the related instability over time of “the uniformity of thought” is certainly true but it is also true that, however different the specific contents of such thoughts may be, some typical characteristics remain very similar. On that account, it is easy to see that virtually all phenomena of uniformity of thought and mass manipulation are based on a strong and

³ Another interesting definition of the concept of social valuing is the following, “To conceive of a problem requires the perception of a difference between ‘what is going on’ and ‘what ought to go on’. Social value theory is logically and inescapably required to distinguish what ought to be from what is....The role of social value theory is to provide analyses of criteria in terms of which such choices are made.” (M. Tool, in Hodgson, Samuels and Tool, 1994, pp. 406, 407). This is linked to the “instrumental value criterion” which pertains to the goal of “the continuity of human life and the non-invidious re-creation of community through the instrumental use of knowledge”, (Tool, 1986, p. 50).

emotional identification with a collective entity and its leader. Such entity can be the nation and/or regional or local areas, various groups like political parties, clubs, and associations.

The leader(s) and the related groups tend to be idealised, often in a fanatic way: everything they do is, by definition, appropriate, and the critical spirit is at its minimum. And when the leader and/or the group do something patently wrong, this tends to be justified on the ground that such actions were necessary for withstanding an external attack. Thus, for instance, many people tend to attribute all the good to their nations/regions/neighborhoods and all the bad to outside groups.

Now we will look at a number of psychoanalytic theories that can cast light on these manifold issues.

4. Psychoanalytic Contributions to the Concept of Ownership

Let us see what psychoanalysis can say about these aspects. Given the complexity of the issue, we consider, without any claim of completeness, only few relevant concepts/psychoanalytic schools.⁴

Some Aspects of Sigmund Freud's Theory

In order to illustrate some of the potentialities of psychoanalysis to the study of these phenomena, we will address the main theses contained in one of the most important Freud's contributions—*Totem and Taboo*.

In this book, Freud underlines the uncertainties which accompany the study of primitive populations and the highly conjectural nature of the conclusions emerging from all the studies dealing with them. In investigating the social structures of these populations, Freud discovers that they embody more restraints concerning their social and sexual life that one can imagine at a first sight. The main aim of these restrictions is to prevent sexual relations among family and tribal members, and especially between the son and the mother and between the brother and the sister. The interesting aspect of these restrictions is that they are at the same time social and religious restrictions, and so concur to shape the structure of these early societies. But, how did Freud arrive at such conclusions? His starting point was the relation between totemism and exogamy. The totem can be an animal, a plant or a natural force to which a tribe has attributed particular sacred qualities. The totem is considered as the originator of the family and is assumed to protect and guide its members as long as they abstain from committing two major crimes; (i) killing (and eating) the totem and (ii) being married or having sexual relations with the members of the tribe.

These prohibitions — and also many others, related to the first two, pertaining to the social life of these populations, as the phobias of touching and being infected, which have many parallels with the obsessive neurosis of our time — assume the character of a taboo, which is defined by Freud as a feeling of "sacred horror" towards an object stemming from an affective ambivalence which expresses itself through a conflict related to opposite feelings: for instance, the (mostly unconscious) desire of touching an object paralleled by an opposite fear of doing such prohibited action. In this sense, the object may stand for parental figures. Without entering the complex social consequences of these prohibitions, there appears to be a close link between the sacred

⁴ For a general orientation on the complex world of psychoanalysis see, among others, Charles (2018), Fine (1979), Kernberg (1998, 2004), Nagera (1969).

character of the totem — which comes to assume the nature of a religious taboo — and the exogamic organization of these early societies. But, where do these prohibitions stem from and which is the nature of their social ties?

The common roots from which these prohibitions originate are identified by Freud in the dynamics of the *Oedipus* complex which constitutes a relevant experience for the child.⁵ Given the importance of the issue, it can be useful to briefly recall the main aspects of such complex, which can be defined as the organized whole of a child's loving and hostile feelings toward its parents. In such complex, from a son perspective, the father is hated, as he stands for a rival in the possession of the mother. In this way, the father assumes a repressive character in that he prohibits the sons from having sexual intercourse with the women of the group. But the father is, at the same time, loved and admired as he tends to constitute, in his role of parental figure, a social and cultural model to be imitated. And the opposite relation, in which the mother stands for the "rival" parent and so assumes a repressive role, tends to happen in the daughter's experience. As a result of this situation — in which there is a desire, considered "bad", and a corresponding defence trying to repress it — a neurotic disturbance emerges, which may express itself in many different forms of behaviour and fantasies.

This conflict tends to become distressing for the child and so needs to be repressed. But this repression does not solve the affective problem, it obtains only that such conflict is not expressed directly but by means of neurotic disturbances.

Needless to say, the dynamics of the *Oedipus* complex are far more tangled than could appear from this brief description. Owing to this complexity, throughout his research activity, Freud identified many aspects and forms of the *Oedipus* complex and many neurotic disturbances which may be caused by it.

In his analysis of these societies, Freud hypothesized that, at their beginnings, they were characterized by the dominance of a jealous and aggressive father.

The mounting anger of the sons at the father's behaviour may have led them to join together in order to kill and eat him, but their inner sense of guilt, accompanied with their unconscious identification with the father, prevented them from fully accomplishing their desires.⁶ In this sense, the totem was made object of an ambivalent feeling of love and hate, which was closely intermingled with the emergence of the first institutions and the related moral duties (or social conscience). For this reason, the interest of these findings for institutional economics can hardly be exaggerated.

In this respect, the concept of *superego* can help to explain such patterns of behaviour as it represents the psychological instance through which cultural values are internalised by the person and for this reason constitutes a fundamental link between individual and collective psychology. The *superego* can be considered as the heir of the *Oedipus* complex, since it arises from the

⁵ As already noted, Freud himself and later psychoanalytic contributions stressed the importance of every stage of life for the formation and evolution of personality and the related psychological disturbances.

⁶ Freud's account is mainly related to the analysis of the psychological conflicts of fathers and sons. Obviously, also mothers and daughters undergo the same kind of conflicts. For this reason, investigations on these aspects of differential psychology would be particularly interesting. Among the many psychoanalysts women who provided important contributions to these issues we can mention Anna Freud, Karen Horney, Edith Jacobson, Melanie Klein, Margaret Mahler, Clara Thompson.

internalisation of the prohibitions and of the moral and cultural values of the child's caretakers—as perceived by the child. As shown by psychoanalytic experience, the *superego* tends to be shaped after the *superego* of the parental figures and this is one of the reasons for the strain of conservatism present in many societies.

Freud is well aware of the highly conjectural nature of these historical reconstructions but underlines that the important factor for the arising of a neurotic conflict is not so much the reality but the fantasy of aggression concerning the parental figure. In this regard, Freud points out that these historical processes unfolded throughout many centuries and gave rise to different outcomes across different societies. In this respect, the important aspect stressed by Freud is that the inner sense of guilt of the sons for killing (at a real or imaginary level) the father pushed them to repress in various ways their aggressiveness. Nevertheless, as evidenced before, this evolution had not eliminated the neurotic structure of these societies.

The "Object Relations" Theories

Other noteworthy contributions — indicated as object relations theories even though it is difficult to identify for them a completely unitary framework — have been provided by the so-called "Independent Approach" (the former "Middle Group") in British psychoanalysis.^{7,8} Some important exponents are Michael Balint, John Bowlby, Marjorie Brierly, Ronald Fairbairn, J.C. Flugel, John Rickman, Ella Sharpe, Donald Winnicott. This approach has many parallels with the American contributions to this field. Some important authors are Edith Jacobson, Heinz Kohut, Otto Kernberg, Hans Loewald, Margaret Mahler and Arnold Modell.

Such contributions have been, in various ways, critical of Sigmund Freud's, Anna Freud's and Melanie Klein's theories on the grounds that, notwithstanding their differences, they all tend to focus attention mainly on the "biological" side of instincts.⁹ And, for this reason, they do not fully consider the role of affection and object relations in individual development.

Although these contributions have triggered a lively debate, they hold important aspects of Freud's theory and also adopt, in many cases, a Kleinian framework for the explanation of the first stages of development.¹⁰ Also Anna Freud's contributions played a significant part in the

⁷ For a deep analysis of these theories refer to, among others, Aviram (2009), Clarke, Hahn and Hoggett (2018), Grotstein (2009), Klein, Heimann and Money-Kyrle (1955), Rayner ((1991), Sandler and Dreher (1996), Tyson and Tyson (1990).

⁸ The label "Middle Group" refers to the circumstance that these theorists adopted a kind of intermediate stance between the theories of Anna Freud and Melanie Klein, which were still considered too "biological oriented" (more on this just below).

⁹ As noted before, one important reason why S. Freud remained attached to a "biological" concept of instinct resides in his purpose of underlining the role of psychosexuality in human psychology. In this regard, he tends to employ the term *eros* or *libido* as a synonymous with love.

¹⁰ The approach of Melanie Klein (1964, 1975) is particularly significant for our theme. She analysed, from a new perspective, the mechanisms underlying the child-mother relationship in the early stages of infancy. Particularly relevant are the mechanisms of internalization, scission and projection, through which the child tries to cope with its ambivalence and aggressiveness towards the mother. These feelings are likely to be particularly intense in the first months of life. In its (the child) attempt to cope with the anxiety and aggressiveness related to this early relation, the mother is divided into "a good and a bad object", which are unconsciously "internalised", through an identification process. This stage is

formation of these new theories, even if her major influence was on the formation of the “ego psychology” school, mainly developed in the American context.

In this sense, the object relations psychoanalysts try to integrate and deepen these theories rather than dismissing them. They have adopted a more integrated view of the human personality, which more explicitly embraces its complex needs and orientations. In this sense, the distinction between “biological”, affective and intellectual needs tends to be considered as an expression of the various aspects making up the human personality, which, therefore, need to be studied in their complex interaction.

On the basis of this approach, it seems reasonable to posit that human needs are complex and interrelated and, as a consequence, a child needs: (1) to be fed and protected; (2) to establish sound object and interpersonal relations; (3) more generally, to develop in an integrated way all the aspects of its personality.

In this light, psychoanalysis, especially in these new developments, is acquiring a more distinct evolutionary character (see, for instance, Rayner, 1991, Sandler and Dreher, 1996). This implies that, as these relations cannot unfold in a *vacuum*, the analysis of characteristics of the social contexts become more and more pertinent. For this reason, there is arising a growing area of collaboration between psychoanalysis and social sciences.

The Psychoanalysis of Groups and Organizations

The widely held idea that psychoanalysis is only an individual psychology is a bit out of mark. As a matter of fact, Freud considers individual and collective psychology as two complementary aspects of the same phenomenon—owing to the circumstance, that in ancient times group life was pre-eminent and that only subsequently the person (and the institution of family) has gradually acquired a more defined role within the various groups of society.

As noted by Freud (in particular, 1912-1913, 1921) and by subsequent psychoanalysts, group cohesion tends to be based on the following processes: (i) emotional links among the members of the group; (ii) projection of individual aggressiveness into people and/or institutions lying outside the group; (iii) identification with the group leader — who symbolizes the parental instance (typically, the father) — in order to repress the conflicts related to the *Oedipus* complex. These processes can help to explain the scission that often occurs within groups between “the good and right”, lying inside the group, and “the bad and mistaken”, lying outside its boundaries.

described as “the schizo-paranoid position”, because in this way the child tends to split its personality into two mutually incompatible elements. The child tries to retain all its “good qualities” through the following defence mechanisms: internalising the “good and protecting mother” and, at the same time, projecting its aggressiveness into the “bad and aggressive mother” who is therefore — as result of this process, named “projective identification” — felt as a hostile and persecutory figure.

Subsequently, as the child grows up, this stage may be overcome to varying degrees as the child recognizes that the mother is just one person and, as a consequence, tries to compensate for the imaginary attacks made against her. This stage is indicated as “the depressive position”, which corresponds to the process of (psychic) differentiation from the mother and the parallel discovery of the father, other persons and, more generally, the external world. M. Klein’s theory sheds new light on many social phenomena by providing a deeper understanding of the conflicts that, while arising in the infantile development, may heavily impinge upon the type of relations adults establish within groups and institutions.

Building on these insights, there has been among psychoanalysts a growing attention to the collective dimension of psychological phenomena.

By using the Kleinian framework, Bion (1970) investigated unconscious group dynamics by means of "The Therapeutic Group", while Kernberg (1998) made significant contributions to the analysis of group behaviour by employing his approach based on the object relations theory.

All these contributions stress the role of groups and organizations for expressing the needs and conflicts of the person. For instance, to the person, the group may represent an idealized ego; and, in this connection, its "morals" and "code of conduct" symbolize parental figures who, through a process of "internalisation", play the role of *superego*. In this regard, it is important to note that the instance of *superego*, certainly, stems also from a normal human tendency to establish sound interpersonal relations, and, accordingly, to behave with affection and solicitude towards each other and continually improve the "bright aspects" of personality. However, whereas in non-neurotic situations the "code of conduct" emerging from such tendencies asserts itself as a genuine behaviour, in neurotic situations leading to the formation of *superego* things run in a completely different way: here, the tendency of improving personality tends to be, under an appearance of goodness and morality, subordinated to the expression of neurotic contents at cross-purposes with such tendency. As stressed by the authors just mentioned, quite often the severity of *superego* leads — through the so-called paranoid and narcissistic transformation of personality, extensively studied in psychoanalysis — single individuals, groups or societies to do nasty and persecutory actions towards other individuals, groups or societies into which their aggressiveness has been projected, and so to sabotage, in the meaning reviewed before, the possibility of establishing sound interpersonal relations. This process constitutes an important explanation, complementary to those proposed by social psychology, of the phenomena of nationalism and xenophobia so often present also in our time. Of course, the intensity of these phenomena is exacerbated by economic crisis, but these are never absent even in period of booms, when international relations are (or seem) more friendly and relaxed.

Conclusions: Implications for the Analysis of the Ownership

We can start by noting that Veblen and Commons's analysis are particularly illuminating of the evolutionary pattern of the concept of ownership. In fact, these theories allow us to track the contradictions related to the historical passage from **(i)** a "materialistic" concept of ownership that, as we have seen, corresponds to the "possession" of all the relations occurring therein, to **(ii)** a concept of intangible ownership, more based on the actual recognizance of the rights and needs of the person involved in the institutional life.

On that account, there are many areas in which Veblen's and Commons's analyses can interact with social psychology and psychoanalysis.

As for the social psychology of Dewey and Mead, the predatory aspects of ownership highlighted by Veblen go in tandem with an unsocial notion of individualism resting on the Hobbesian "war of all against all". And, conversely, only a social oriented conception of individualism can allow the unfolding of Commons's intangible property based on a more equitable society.

As for psychoanalysis, the importance, stressed by Veblen, in the institution of ownership, of the possession of persons, finds a new explanation and validation in the psychoanalytic concepts addressed before.

Thus, every disturbance occurring in particular in the *Oedipical and pre-Oedipical* stages of development may lead to a later incapacity of the person in establishing sound social relations and to the corresponding neurotic need of getting a mere, narcissistic-oriented, "dominion and control" over these relations.

In this respect, linking the neurotic and predatory concept of ownership to predatory habits towards institutions can constitute a promising avenue of research.

In fact, such predatory habits entail a fight for power having its focus in — at the real and symbolic level — "possessing institutions". But, since, as noted before, an institution constitutes an organized whole of collective action controlling, liberating, and expanding individual action, this implies that "possessing" an institution is related to an unconscious fantasy of omnipotent control over all the relations occurring therein. This is another way of showing that ownership is not a person-to-goods but a person-to-person relation. According to this interpretation, the reason why, under these predatory habits, institutions are considered like things to be owned does not rest in the circumstance that institutions are appraised as things in any meaning of the word, but in the fact that "the owners" of the institutions, in trying "to control and dominate" the social relations taking place therein disregards all the needs and opportunities that may potentially arise from the people involved in these (frustrating and neurotic) social relations.

The investigation into the predatory character of institutions makes it easier to identify the social relations underlying the exchange of goods (and persons). In this sense, it can be fruitfully employed in the anthropological enquiry into the social and psychological structures of different societies.

Furthermore, it has significant parallels also with Marx's analysis of alienation of capitalistic society based on "social relations between goods". These relations are characterized by considering, on the one side, the worker just like any other good, and, on the other, by appraising the goods not for their use-value but as symbols of wealth — e.g., for the related social relations of economic dominion — they carry with them. But since, according to Marx's theory, the value of goods derives from the labour embodied in them, it ensues that possessing goods and wealth means, at real and symbolic level, possessing and controlling the labour required for their production. In this context, the notion of wage-slavery, on which is based the extraction of surplus value (coming from the unpaid labour in the factory system) for the capitalistic class, well synthesizes these aspects.

In this respect, the historical process of the concept of ownership can be considered as the evolutionary outcome of a conflict, socially rooted, among different tendencies:

- (i) one, more neurotic-based, mostly resting on the predatory possession of goods and persons to which, however, corresponds a situation in which persons do not really know and "own" their minds;
- (ii) the other, more oriented towards achieving a more sustainable, equitable and participatory society and aimed at empowering persons to better "own", and hence express, their potential.

In this regard, looking at these socio-economic perspectives also through the conceptual lens of a more far-reaching notion of ownership can help attain a better process of social valuation—which, as we know, constitutes a central concept of OIE. And such process, in turn, can improve the capacity of policy action to realise the progressive perspective (ii) just mentioned. The concepts addressed before can help better define various complementary aspects of such perspective. One of this is the “instrumental value” criterion, that pertains, as noted before, to “the continuity of human life and the non-invidious re-creation of community through the instrumental use of knowledge”. This goal is coextensive with the overcoming of the cultural split of the “lost individual” highlighted by pragmatist social psychology, and of the neurotic aspects leading to predatory behaviour underscored by psychoanalysis. This virtuous process will help realise a better capacity “to love and work” highlighted by psychoanalysis, a perspective which bears a striking parallel with Veblen’s theory of workmanship and parental bent instincts.

There are numerous fields where this approach can be applied. These include studies of the motivations and conflicts underlying the various spheres of economic action — work, consumption, investment, saving — related to persons, groups, classes, public and private institutions, and how progress can be promoted, distorted or frustrated in economic and social life. Relatedly, this perspective can also provide significant elements for the analysis of the imbalances and tensions of the economic system and the most effective policies for overcoming them.

In the analysis of these issues, an interdisciplinary perspective seems particularly indicated for casting a better light on these aspects.

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On the Importance of Altruism, Prosocial Behavior and Christian Love in Behavioral Economics research

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Abstract

The article discusses the concepts of altruism and prosocial behavior and their importance in interdisciplinary studies of behavioral economics. The basic theoretical models and concepts of altruism in Behavioral Economics are reviewed. Altruism is shown to be a hidden and complicated form of selfishness. In essence, altruism and prosociality are therefore not fundamentally different concepts: both are ultimately self-oriented. In the article, we take the Christian worldview and compare altruism with Christian love and discuss their differences and the importance of their theoretical and practical implications. We show that altruism and Christian love are not only diverse but contradictory concepts, which in our opinion is of great importance at least in terms of promoting a well-being of human society.

Keywords:

Altruism, Prosocial Behavior, Christian Love, Christian Worldview, Evolutionary Worldview, Behavioral Economics.

1. Introduction

Reading the title of our article one might wonder what the notion of altruism, prosocial behavior, and Christian love has to do with science, and in particular with the field of economics. Or even, what do these concepts have to do with each other, and why do pay attention at all to these concepts? In our opinion, first of all, it is important to understand the true definitions of these concepts. A correct understanding of the concepts, I think, gains even more important as understanding the spirit of the evolutionary worldview behind today's interdisciplinary scientific research. The "mainstream" theoretical economy is having theoretical challenges and one of the solutions might lie in an interdisciplinary approach to these challenges (Papava 2018). Indeed, a large part of scientific research today is an interdisciplinary one, and if the twentieth century can be called the era of specialization within disciplines, the twenty-first century can boldly be called the era of interdisciplinary synthesis.

Evidence collected by experimental economic research led at least part of economists to "turn to humans" again and put on the agenda the need to revise the main assumptions of "mainstream" neoclassical economics (Camerer 2003, Colander 2005, Kahneman and Tversky 2013, Thaler and Ganser 2015, Kahneman, Knetsch, and Thaler 1991, Thaler and Sunstein 2009, Белянин 2017). However, "mainstream" theoretical economics still maintains a dominant position in both scientific research and economic education (Gintis et al. 2005, Renegade 2013). Some economists believe that combining economic science with other disciplines such as

sociology, biology, social psychology, anthropology, etc. will be able to study human behavior in a more fruitful way (Gintis et al. 2005, Van Dijk 2015). In addition to the above interdisciplinary synthesis, there are also attempts to synthesize science and theology, in which human altruism and prosocial behavior play an important role (Meisinger 2000).

Development of interdisciplinary studies of behavioral economics, altruism and prosociality gained special attention from researchers. One can question: How should modern science find common ground with theology when most of the leading scientists believe in evolutionary theory? (Clément 2015, Masci 2019). Why has altruism gained interest in the economic research of behavioral economics? What do prosocial behavior and altruism mean? How do altruism and Christian love relate to each other? And does it have any theoretical or practical significance to distinguish these two concepts?

To answer these questions, first of all, a brief overview of the essential aspects of the theoretical models of altruism in behavioral economics is required. After, I discuss the differences between the concepts of altruism and Christian love and the importance of their theoretical and practical implications.

2. Importance of altruism and prosocial behavior in behavioral economics research

Since the 1970s, the interest of researchers in the social sciences, including economics, has shifted from the study of antisocial behavior to the study of prosocial behavioral (Bierhoff 2002, Batson 2012, Spinrad 2015, Eisenberg and Beilin 1982). Probably one of the reasons why prosocial behavior has become a subject of special research interest is that it is directly related to the fundamental issues of human nature, which have been the subject of philosophical judgment for centuries. Thinkers and scientists have faced, and still face, the following questions: What is human nature like? Is it good? Is man by nature selfish or altruistic? Can a person act with purely altruistic intentions or his behaviour is always accompanied by selfish motives? (Stürmer and Snyder 2010).

Introduction the encouraging mechanisms of altruism and prosocial behavior in society has also significant practical economic importance. Assuming we remain in the "mainstream" economics paradigm of selfish "Homo Economicus", there is no room left for altruism and prosocial behavior. In the society of such individuals, to reduce unethical and antisocial behavior, standard neoclassical economics indicates the need for sanctions, penalties, and similar economic policies, which in itself is associated with high costs (Gintis et al. 2005). In this way, combating opportunistic and antisocial behavior places a heavy tax burden on the economy. The maintenance of many state institutions (i.e. police, court, etc.) is associated with higher taxes, not to mention the economic costs incurred by bureaucratic and legal procedures. Society and economy dominated by prosocial behavior are much more efficient and state institutions bear much fewer costs to constrain antisocial behavior.

As psychology joined the field of economics, that eventually led to a critical revision of the main assumptions of the neoclassical, "mainstream" economy. Numerous economic experiments indicated on non-selfish nature of humans and its importance in economic behavior (Andreoni 1995, Camerer and Fehr 2004, Cameron 1999, Henrich et al. 2001, Fehr and Rockenbach 2003, Fehr, Kirchsteiger, and Riedl 1993, Andreoni, Harbaugh, and Vesterlund 2010, Falk,

Fehr, and Fischbacher 2008). In the interdisciplinary studies of behavioral economics, the cornerstone of the well-being of society has become the altruist type. In the study of prosocial behavior, altruism is of the main interest of research. This is not surprising, since initially prosocial behavior was equated with altruism, but later these two concepts were separated (Batson 2012, Batson and Powell 2003).

The experimental evidence on human altruistic behavior has become an inspiration for theoretical models of social preferences. The economist James Andreoni developed the theory of impure altruism, in which the individual is characterized by both selfish and non-selfish behaviour (Andreoni 1990). Soon followed a Theory of Fairness, where an economic agent does not like inequality, especially when she has much less income than others, and for that reason she is willing to reduce the income of others (Fehr and Schmidt 1999, Bolton and Ockenf 2000). The theory of reciprocity or "The Theory of Altruistic Reciprocity" was also developed (Rabin 1993, Falk and Fischbacher 2006). In this model, special attention was paid to the intention behind the behavior. According to the theoretical model, people evaluate behaviour according to whether it was guided by good or bad intentions. As a result, altruism has been guided by principle of "tit for tat". According to this principle, a person treats another person altruistically only if she responds altruistically as well.

The path of behavioral economics' interdisciplinary research of human altruism was significantly influenced by evolutionary biology. This should come as no surprise, since biology, with its evolutionary theory and natural selection, had much in common with the "mainstream" theoretical economy, in which selfishness was a key assumption. On the analytical base of game theory, gene- evolutionary theoretical approaches have emerged. The common theoretical challenge of both disciplines was the existence of the phenomenon of altruism and cooperation among species. Large-scale cooperation between strangers remains one of the most open and challenging questions that modern science faces (Pennisi 2005, Kennedy and Norman 2005).

The "Theory of Reciprocal Altruism" developed by Robert Trivers has influenced behavioral economics. In evolutionary biology, reciprocal altruism is a behavior in which an organism reduces its fitness and increases the fitness of another organism, expecting that this organism will reciprocate in the future (Trivers 1971). According to the model, altruistic behavior can also occur between individuals who are strangers to each other in a particular situation of natural selection. This behavior is based on the profit-loss ratio mechanism and receiving an altruistic response from another individual (Trivers 1971). A similar concept of reciprocity based on evolutionary cooperation was developed by R. Axelrod and W. Hamilton (Axelrod and Hamilton 1981). In their model, a person will only behave altruistically toward another person if the costs (time, energy, etc.) associated with her altruistic behavior will be less than the future benefits. Unlike models of fairness, the theory of reciprocity rewards good behavior and punishes bad behavior, even when equality cannot be restored. However, the principles of fairness in these models and their origin remain an open question.

William Hamilton attempted to explain altruistic cooperation by presenting a theory of kinship (Hamilton 1964). The theory of inclusive fitness offered a new solution to the question of why humans behave altruistically. Based on mathematical calculations, W. Hamilton showed that in the evolutionary process, genetically related individuals help each other in the survival and reproduction of genes. In the evolutionary process, altruism is preferred only when it brings

personal benefit to the individual. Given this fact, the main question of the "kinship theory" is: when does the benefit exceed the costs? Or in other words, when the altruistic action will take place? According to the theory, the mechanism of inclusive fitness in the selection process precisely gives preference to those individuals who maximize inclusive fitness, which in turn is achieved through altruistic interactions. However, kinship theory is limited to relatives and has little to say about large-scale cooperation among strangers.

Economics was also influenced by anthropology and culture (Gächter, Herrmann, and Thoni 2010). Researchers tried to find an explanation for the origin of human altruism using "group selection" and "gen-culture coevolution" approaches (S. Bowles, H. Gintis, P. Richerson, J. Henrich, R. Boyd). This direction of research, also known as the "cultural group selection", is the most widely researched area with several theoretical models (Boyd and Richerson 1990, Bowles and Gintis 2013, Henrich and Henrich 2007, Henrich 2004, Richerson and Boyd 1978, 2008, Gintis et al. 2003, Gintis et al. 2005, Gintis 2000). According to this approach, two processes - cultural and gene - interact with each other and ultimately shape human behavior in society. "Cultural learning" process influences the natural selection forces of the human genome, while the genome evolving under the influence of culture, in turn, shapes the human mind, which, as a result of this co-evolution process, returns the updated information to its cultural consciousness (Henrich and Henrich 2007). This kind of co-evolution directly affects human altruistic behavior. Altruism is the answer to the question of why strangers cooperate (Fehr and Fischbacher 2003).

The existence of different norms and altruistic behavior in different cultures, researchers try to explain with help of "cultural group selection". Namely, according to this concept, the norms that are established in one group of individuals can be extended to other groups. Norms of one kind are spread through competition and selection between groups that have different norms gained from "cultural evolution". Thus, if one group defeats the other group, they spread their norms in the group that lost. Maintaining a norm of altruistic behavior within a group is associated with costs. The mechanisms of "cultural learning" determine the choice to be made by the individual: to obey the norm established in the group or to break it. The decision is made based on a cost-benefit analysis related to compliance and violation of the norm. In a group where most of the members are altruists and at the same time are willing to punish at their own expense the violator of the altruistic norm, in such case prosocial behavior is sustained in the group.

Behavioral economics research focuses on the interaction of two key types of individuals: the strong reciprocal and the selfish. The main object of interest is a "strong reciprocal" type. A strong reciprocal type of economic agent does not belong to either the selfish type or the purely altruistic type but is a mixture of these two types. A strong reciprocal type can be at the same time a "conditional cooperator" in the sense that she acts altruistically if others do so, and she is also an "altruistic punisher": she is willing to punish selfish ones.

Altruistic punishment is of critical importance. If there is no altruistic punishment, prosocial behavior cannot be sustained, particularly in large groups (Fehr and Fischbacher 2003). The interaction of culture and genes is continuous (Henrich 2015). The explanation for such an evolution of the altruistic norm is that they are largely based on "cultural learning" and cognitive adaptation, through which the individual aligns her behavior to those established in the group. Thus, when the punishment of individuals who violate altruistic norms is influenced by "cultural learning", then we get a stable equilibrium and altruistic norms are sustained. J. Henrich notes:

“This intellectual move dissolves the destructive dichotomy between ‘evolutionary’ and ‘cultural’ explanations and fully incorporates cultural explanations under an expanded Darwinian umbrella” (Henrich 2015, p.87).

The theories of "cultural group selection" leave unanswered a key question: If altruism is achieved through the selection process of "gen-culture co-evolution", why then a punishment is necessary to maintain altruism? In "cultural group selection" theories, everything depends on "strongly reciprocal" individual and "altruistic punishment", without it altruistic behavior cannot be sustained. In turn, altruistic punishment largely depends on the profit-loss ratio: if the costs associated with "altruistic punishment" exceed the expected benefits, "altruistic punishment" does not take place. Researchers recognize that attempts to study the phenomenon of human altruism and to establish a common theoretical basis are still in their infancy and that answers to the questions remain far from satisfactory (Kimbrough and Vostroknutov 2016, Henrich 2015, Fehr and Fischbacher 2003, Gächter, Herrmann and Thöni 2010, Fernández 2008).

The theoretical models such as "Impure Altruism", "Theory of Fairness", "Theory of Reciprocal Altruism", "Theory of kinship" and "Cultural Group Selection", have different types of shortcomings, be they empirical or conceptual (Burnham, 2005, Binmore and Shaked 2010, Binmore 2010). For example, from an empirical point of view, it is difficult to argue about the robustness of the "kin selection" model, when its basic experimental data are obtained from observations based on non-relative individuals. By the same logic, it is prudent to use experimental results in favor of "gen-culture co-evolution" models when the participants in the experiment do not know each other, do not belong to the same evolutionary group, and do not continue any relationship after the experiment (Binmore and Shaked 2010). In addition, theoretical models and their results depend significantly on the number of individuals: the more the number of individuals in a group the more difficult it is to maintain norms (Binmore and Shaked 2010). In addition, theoretical modeling of psychological, cultural, or other factors has greatly complicated these models.

In terms of theoretical concepts, all models ignore the existence of a moral system behind behavior and its origins. Thus, whether it is an altruist, a reciprocal altruist, or a strong reciprocal individual, their behavior is analyzed without the moral system. In all models, the unanswered question remains as to where the altruist comes from and how the criteria emerged by which she can distinguish altruistic behavior from selfish and fair from unfair.

3. Christian love and altruism

What is the difference between altruism and Christian love, and what is the significance of this difference from a theoretical and practical point of view? To answer this question requires a substantial analysis of both concepts first and I will try to do so.

Modern science seeks to "turn to humans", to improve their well-being and to be able to promote prosocial behavior. Therefore, questions arise: What type of human is today's science trying to "turn to"? Towards an altruist? Towards a strong reciprocator? Toward an evolutionary species derived from gen culture co-evolution? Or to the creation of God? We think the answer is straightforward: the evolutionary worldview remains dominant in modern science. Thus, modern science is non-Christian in terms of worldview. Although, there are attempts in science to go

beyond the paradigm of selfish "Homo Economicus", in its essence it remains "under an expanded Darwinian umbrella".

Since a human being is composed of flesh and spirit, in my opinion, it is impossible to have a correct idea of humankind and social behavior by neglecting spiritual part. If we step out from the evolutionary paradigm and turn to the Christian worldview, we can acquire more understanding of human nature. The Christian teachings and the teachings of the Holy Fathers convey comprehensive and depth knowledge of true human nature. Indeed, modern science has very few facts about human nature, since the spiritual part of humans is beyond the material world (Veter Vasa 2017). Human is the union of two worlds: the visible and the invisible, the material and the spiritual (Данил 2016а). St. Blessed Theophylact of Ochrid explains: "the love of neighbor is conducted through the flesh and largely through the spirit, since man is made up of flesh and spirit (Блаж. Феофилакт (Болгарский) 2015, p.229).

One can question whether it is correct to discuss science and religion since they belong to different fields and categories. First of all, in my opinion, true science and true Christian teaching cannot contradict each other, since truth is one. In other words, true science discovers the laws of neuter and mechanisms of universe created by GOD. The St. Gregory Palamas points out that scientific research is useful when it is carried out in the light of Scripture (Св. Григорий Палама 1995). Furthermore, when talking about the theory of evolution, it should be well understood that scientifically the theory of evolution can neither be approved nor rejected and thus it is purely a product of worldview and philosophy (Hieromonk Seraphim (Rose) 2000, p.317), Протоиерей Константин (Буфеев) 2014, p.18, Altukhov 2002). One important circumstance should not be overlooked: any theoretical economic doctrine has an ideological content, which is a product of the creative thinking of men of certain moral and value systems (მეცნიერებათა აკადემია 2018, Schumpeter 1949, Javdani and Chang 2019, Colander 2005). Therefore, the subject of discussion is not any scientific fact, but rather a worldview and beliefs.

4. About altruism

The term altruism was coined by Auguste Comte, a French sociologist and founder of the "philosophical of positivism". The term "altruism" is derived from the French word "altrui", which means "other people", "others", and the French word itself is derived from the Latin word "alter", which is also interpreted as "other" (Online Etymology Dictionary). According to the French philosopher A. Comte, a man had a moral obligation to renounce personal interests and live for others (Online Etymology Dictionary). Thus, according to A. Comte, altruism in its essence implies self-sacrifice for the welfare of others, without any personal benefit. According to A. Comte, social relations should have become a source of moral ethics (Scott and Seglow 2007). The philosophy of positivism utilizing science aimed to reorganize and contribute to the progress of society, where a "positive society" is the religion of the people. The main commandment of the "human religion" of this positive society was "vivre pour autrui" or "live for others" or so-called altruism. Interestingly, the churches were built in Paris and New York to worship this new "human religion" (Harp 1991).

Altruism in contemporary science is defined as a behavior where one person acts voluntarily for the benefit of another person, and his target is not himself but another person (Batson and

Powell 2003). Altruism manifests itself in prosocial behaviors such as: helping, cooperation, charity, and sharing (Batson 2012). Although once altruism and prosociality were equated with each other, they are different (Clarke 2003). Prosocial behavior is ultimately self-centered behavior. According to most researchers, that is the main distinction between prosociality and altruism. Altruism is a motivational concept and appears to be the main and necessary condition of prosocial behavior (Clarke 2003, Schroeder and Graziano 2015, Batson and Powell 2003).

The evolutionary definition of altruism is that it is the best choice for the individual in the case of a group of altruistic individuals, but if a group is dominated by selfish ones, the altruism act is abandoned. As far as a source of the moral system is concerned, according to the Darwinist perspective, it stems from feelings of sympathy inherent in human nature (Scott and Seglow 2007). Evolutionary theory does not fully explain the origin of altruism as a moral system and leaves the main open question: How did altruism evolve if it is impossible to "select" at all? (Pope 2007). Moreover, even if moral norms evolve, then its normative power is completely useless (Scott and Seglow 2007). This should come as no surprise since the moral system as an integral part of human dignity is alien to evolution and is considered only at the level of human-animal spirits (Архимандрит Рафаил (Карелин) 2011а). Altruism as a moral concept inevitably involves definitions of good and evil, right and wrong, fair and unfair behavior (Scott and Seglow 2007).

Although, altruism is a moral concept, from the point of view of Christian morality, it is at least controversial if not contradictory (Pope 2007). We would like to emphasize that as a result of the synthesis attempts of science and religion, many false approaches can be observed. Namely, Christian love appears as a source of altruism (Grant 2000, p.167). In one place, evolution appears as an action of God and God as the source of altruism (Meisinger 2000). We even find such misconceptions as if gospel and sociobiology study the same phenomenon of prosociality and altruism, and in this respect, scientific and religious approaches complement each other (Meisinger 2000 p.749, Pope 2007).

5. About Christian love

In the Christian religion, the love of God and neighbor is two intertwined commandments in which all other commandments are combined. Since love is God, man cannot express with his bounded mind and define what love is. The exact definition of God is a precarious task and unfeasible to the human mind (Данил 2016b, წმ. იოანე სინელი 2011 (VI-VII centuries)). When defining love, we can draw certain boundaries and outline only certain characters of true love. Such a partial description of Christian love can be found in St. Paul's Epistle to the Corinthians, St. John Sinaites' "Ladder of Divine Ascent" and in works of St. Basil the Great.

St. John Sinaites writes: "Love is assimilation in nature of God as much as it is possible and accessible to human" (წმ. იოანე სინელი 2011 (VI-VII centuries), p.142). For man, love is not a state or feeling, but love in its essence is a certain state of human will that is achieved through the fulfillment of the commandments (Даниил свщмч 2016c, წმ. იოანე სინელი 2011 (VI-VII centuries)). St. John Sinaites points out that to understand the love we must first understand what liberation from passions is. Liberation from passions is the purification of our heart or when the senses are subdued by the mind (წმ. იოანე სინელი 2011 (VI-VII centuries)). Without this,

love will remain illusory, emotional, and far from true Christian love (Архимандрит Рафаил (Карелин) 2013).

In his Epistle to the Corinthians, St. Apostol Paul teaches us that virtues, if not accompanied by love, are useless for man, and proceeds with a description of love: "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, and it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hope, always perseveres" (I Cor. 13; 4-7).

St. Basil the Great explains that with the acceptance of the commandment of love, man also received the power of love, which was rooted in his nature as soon as he was created, and its approval is not placed outside, but its approval rests inside of human nature (Св. Василий Великий 2009, p.157). A man was created as kind, not evil, evil does not exist by nature, it is a behavioral category that can be chosen by man's free will (წმ. იოანე დამასკელი 2000 (VIII century)). Thus, it is organic and natural for human nature to strive for beauty, love, and voluntary goodness (Св. Василий Великий 2009, p. 157).

Therefore, love is not learned, nor it is comprehended from outside environment, it is an aspiration embedded in human nature, which includes the desire to have a relationship with God (Св. Василий Великий 2009, p.156) It is this sown seed of love that needs to be sprouted, cultivated, and perfected by further obedience to the commandments and by the grace of God. We will not succeed in fulfilling the commandments if we do not obey the will of God, just as the craftsman does the job according to the client's order (Св. Василий Великий 2009). St. Basil the Great points out that since a person is obliged to love everyone equally, the one who loves one person more than another, indicates his incomplete love, and where love diminishes, hatred inevitably takes its place (Св. Василий Великий 2009, p.146).

According to Christian teaching, selfishness is a direct result of man's fall. The fall was followed by the reversal of the hierarchy that originally existed in human nature: the soul starts to dominate the spirit, and the body dominated the soul. In this sense, overcoming selfishness and egocentrism is the restoration of a destroyed hierarchy of human nature and a return to God (Архимандрит Рафаил (Карелин) 2013). Restoring this broken condition and learning and cultivating the right love is the work of a person's whole life (Киностудия МДА БОГОСЛОВ 2015). The essence of love becomes more understandable for a person when he starts to keep the commandments and learns about love through personal experience (Игумен Нектарий (Морозов) 2019; Архимандрит Иоанн (Крестьянкин) 2014, p.166).

Selfishness is a corrupt virtue or wrong self-love. Thus, overcoming selfishness should not be understood as a denial of human self-love. Christianity is not opposed to self-love, we just need to know our true, Christian love (Роупе 2007, Игумен Нектарий (Морозов) 2019, Киностудия МДА БОГОСЛОВ 2015). From the beginning, self-love was probably an appreciation of God for how He created us (Игумен Нектарий (Морозов) 2019). A man could not oversee that he was kindly and perfectly created as the crown of the universe. The notion of neighborly love implies that a person should love himself, and love in a Christian way. It means to love himself as he was created by God (Киностудия МДА БОГОСЛОВ 2015). Wrong love is love with oneself who has been torn from God as a result of sins (Киностудия МДА БОГОСЛОВ 2015). After the fall into sin, when God no longer became the center of existence for the fallen

man, man made himself the center of the universe. And at this point, the self-love once derived from a sense of gratitude has taken a distorted form. For a person who is distorted by sin, it is difficult to understand what is good for him and what is good for his neighbor. A fallen man has limited power and without the help of God, he cannot do true goodness (Данил 2016b). Striving for God, His true love, and doing goodness converts man and teaches right love (Pope 2007).

The way to teach yourself the right love goes through learning the love of neighbor and God. In this way, there is a constant conflict between love for oneself, the neighbor, and God. When in this struggle man chooses for love of neighbor and God, he not only loves himself less but begins to love himself in the right way (Игумен Нектарий (Морозов) 2019). We should look at our neighbor not as a stranger, but as a creature of God of our kind (Православни Центар 2011). The Christian love of neighbor is one-sided, unconditional, and selfless, and expects nothing in return, he is not like reciprocal altruism expecting anything in return. Love for one's neighbor requires hard work, effort, and struggle with oneself (Архимандрит Иоанн (Крестьянкин) 2014). It is much harder to love people whom we know and meet in our life than it is to love distant and unknown people, such as the people under starvation in Africa, the homeless people, the refugees, and the like (Данил 2016c).

The above description of Christian love should not be understood as if feelings, emotions, man's soul, and biological structure were unknown to Christian teaching. The Holy Fathers knew thoroughly and deeply about the action of the biological and psychic parts of human nature. St. Basil the Great notes: "Who does not know that man is a tame and sociable animal, and not a solitary and fierce one? For nothing is so characteristic of our nature as to associate with one another, to need one another, and to love our kind." (Св. Василий Великий 2009, p. 160). Exactly, from embedded striving for love and goodness in the creation of all humans, despite the diverse culture and history of humankind, follows that everyone knew good and evil, greed and generosity, false and truth, cowardice and bravery (Архимандрит Рафаил (Карелин) 2011a). Hieromonk Raphael (Karelin) notes that without the universal moral system of humankind, it would have been impossible to spread the gospel worldwide, or that ancient and contemporary man to comprehend alike the epic poems such as the "Iliad" or the "Odyssey".

These embedded characteristics of humankind can be regarded as a response of the Christian teaching to the puzzle of modern science today: How come human qualities such as large-scale cooperation, and other forms of prosociality are common and universal? The evolutionary worldview tries to explain the existence of different norms of people of different times and cultures by the "gene-cultural co-evolutionary" process. But can we, for example, explain the cannibalism that was the norm in tribes of Papua New Guinea and the cannibalism that was observed during the blockade of Leningrad in WWII by this gene-cultural co-evolutionary process? Can we explain differences by diverse notions of good and evil?

St. Basil the Great writes that these animal instincts embedded in human nature are the ground on which Christian love must grow. Logically, the New Testament given to Christianity could not be "new" if it was an equal notion of the animal instincts of a "tame and sociable animal" being (Тихомиров 1906). Love on the level of soul of a man is a natural human trait, while Christian love is spiritual, an opportunity that has to be achieved through the grace of God (Архимандрит Рафаил (Карелин) 2011b).

6. The Differences between Altruism and Christian Love and their Significance

From the above characteristics of altruism and Christian love, it is already clear that equating them with each other is not even a misconception (Pope 2007, p. 234), but they are opposite concepts (Тихомиров 1906).

The love in a soul and on the level of human instincts is the highest point that the evolutionary approach can reach (Pope 2007). Thus, the feelings embedded at the level of instincts, which is altruism, are part of human-animal nature. An evolutionary approach considers altruism precisely at the level of human instincts and at the level of soul (Архимандрит Рафаил (Карелин) 2011а, Тихомиров 1906). According to Christian teaching, these feelings are embedded in human nature as the only necessary ground for the emergence of true love. It stands at a much lower level than Christian love. Altruism belongs to human instincts, while Christian love belongs to the spiritual part of human nature. Thus, altruism would be a part of both human nature and the nature of other animal beings, even without the New Testament, and Christian love could not, since its source is God. Without God, there would be no love.

The question arises: what is the source of altruism? The source of altruism is society, which influences human nature. For the altruist God was replaced by "society" and it is for the welfare of society that she strives. The altruist is ready to punish those who do not contribute to the welfare of this society and to reward those who contribute (Тихомиров 1906). An altruist might commit an act unacceptable to Christian morality and even contrary to it. The contradiction between altruism and Christian love is less noticeable in the case of a "bad" altruist and a "bad" Christian but is obvious between a "good" altruist and a "good" Christian (Тихомиров 1906). For example, if we take extreme cases, an altruist can be a racist who is willing to transplant his organ to another, but will only do so if he belongs to his race. An altruist can also be a terrorist who sacrifices his own life and the lives of other innocent people for the benefit of his people. There are misconceptions that the parable Good Samaritan is presented as an altruistic act (DSPT - Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology 2017). A Good Samaritan cannot be an altruist, simply because he shows Christian love for a historical enemy that an altruist cannot. Christian love does not divide people into groups or as "others", as altruist does.

An altruist obeys society, he is afraid of public opinion, its social sanctions, and laws. At the same time, the moral system of a man under influence of society becomes unstable and variable. Replacing God with society leads to the destruction of man's dignity and his morality, and subordinating to the abstract and variable society she loses her freedom (Тихомиров 1906). The replacement of God's relationship and love with an impersonal, abstract society the altruist at the end arrives at some abstract love. An altruist avoids a personal relationship with a man and her satisfaction manifests itself in good citizenship. For example, the altruist might believe that it is not necessary to provide direct help to her neighbor pensioner who is in need since as a good citizen she pays the taxes from which the pensions are financed. A particular neighbor and person are replaced by a generalized and abstract person. Thus, altruism preaches the love of an abstract, non-existent person when Christian love is concrete and begins with the closest people around (Архимандрит Рафаил (Карелин) 2006; Тихомиров 1906). It is obvious that such an abstract person does not exist and cannot exist. Finally, we come to the logical conclusion that

the altruist is not interested in the "other", but only in herself (Тихомиров 1906). Thus, the altruist on the path of love of an abstract and generalized man returns back to her selfishness, but not to the original and natural one that she initially owned, but more "polished" and powerful, mixed with self-deception and self-glorification (Тихомиров 1906). The differences between the above characteristics of altruism and Christian love are summarized in the table below (see Table N1).

Table N1- Differences between Characteristics of Altruism and Christian Love

Factors	Altruism (Prosociality)	Christian Love
Category	Soul	Spirit
The center of the universe	Man	God
Source	Society	God
Subordinate	Society	God
The moral system	Variable	Absolute
Human	Imperfect	Perfect
The object of love	Abstract	Concrete
Love	Conditional	Unconditional
Love	Unequal	Equal

The question is: what kind of society do we want to build? One where altruists will be or one where people with Christian love? Note that altruism is not a precondition for well-being, some studies have shown that altruism, like selfishness, can also harm the well-being of society (Batson et al. 1999). To answer the above question, we consider the distinction between these two moral systems to be an important one, with their practical and theoretical consequences. And which one is preferable, we leave this choice to the reader.

7. Conclusion

Although economics, and primarily behavioral economics, seeks to "turn to human" and go beyond the paradigm of selfish "Homo Economicus", it offers nothing fundamentally new. As a result of our analysis, altruism is a hidden and complicated form of selfishness. Therefore, the

view established in interdisciplinary studies of behavioral economics that altruism and prosocial behavior differ primarily in the sense that the first is focused on the well-being of the "other" and the latter on self-interest, is misleading: both altruism and prosocial behavior are ultimately self-centered concepts.

It is also a fact that evolutionary theory and its modifications are not based on scientific facts and belong to a purely philosophical category. For modern science, many puzzles, such as the origins of altruism or large-scale prosocial cooperation between strangers, are driven by the evolutionary paradigm itself. If we go beyond the "imprisonment" of this paradigm and are guided by the Christian worldview, we think that scientific research would bring more fruitful solutions to many such puzzles. We believe that it is time for science to return to Christian teaching and the rich intellectual heritage of the Holy Fathers. Without the true Christian teaching of the nature of man, we cannot consider any economic approach and mechanism to benefit the welfare of man. There is no doubt that evolutionary and Christian worldviews, altruism, and Christian love are contradictory concepts, and thus any compromise or synthesis between them is impossible. By comparing altruism and Christian love and analyzing their theoretical and practical implications, we at least should admit that the evolutionary worldview is anti-Christian, and thus, in our opinion, cannot bring any goodness and prosperity to humankind.

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Reply to Rati Mekvabishvili’s ‘On the Importance of Altruism, Prosocial Behavior and Christian Love in Behavioral Economics research’

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Getting involved as a referee for a paper on altruism is an activity that has an inherently reflexive dimension: Why should I bother to accept the task, given that fulfilling it will consume my time and mental energy, for no financial gain, and probably also for no gain in academic standing and no reciprocal benefits? As an atheist, I did not find myself being driven by religious principles when I accepted the task. But as a long-standing behavioural economist and a past editor of the *Journal of Economic Psychology*, I can make sense of my decision to take on the task as follows:

I know what it is like to be a journal editor trying to find a referee for a paper, especially in order to get a timely report to the author, and as an author of journal articles I know what it is like to be kept waiting for inordinate periods of time to receive feedback. In other words, I sympathise with the plight of the editor and the author and that feeling of sympathy made me feel that I should agree to take on the task; it seems somehow wrong to me not to help if I can and am qualified to do so. In this sense, my altruism is consistent with the views that Adam Smith expresses in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Smith’s ([1759] 1976) contribution is not considered in the paper, and it deserves to be, as an early contribution to behavioural economics, one that contrasts sharply with the views regarding the role of selfishness in the working of the capitalist system for which Smith is better known.

As an author myself, I am aware that the refereeing process will break down if authors generally behave selfishly by concentrating their efforts on writing works for submission while declining to accept refereeing tasks due to the latter chewing up time that could have been used in writing further works. To a degree, the refereeing system guards against such selfish behaviour via the possibility that those who consistently refuse to referee work in their areas of expertise will be punished by journal editors giving them desk rejections if they attempt to submit papers for review despite having never been willing to serve as referees. But to the extent that there are multiple journals that are both good targets for a paper and have similar standing, that potential punishment mechanism is somewhat limited. As a late-career author, with no plans to write papers that I would submit to this journal, such considerations also do not apply to me. However, one reason for accepting the refereeing task is that, given how much I have been writing and am likely to continue to write, I feel a duty to keep contributing to the refereeing process to a degree that is consistent with the burden that I impose on the academic publications system as an author. In psychological terms, this comes down to my self construct – I don’t see myself as the kind of person who freeloads in this sort of situation – and to the feeling of guilt that I immediately start to experience at the very thought of doing something that conflicts with my self-construct. This view of guilt in relation to the prospective dislodgement of one’s self is to be found in Kelly’s (1955) *Psychology of Personal Constructs* (defined on p. 502 as “the awareness of dislodgement of self

from one's core role structures." I don't know whether others have used the emotion of guilt as something that kicks in to drive altruistic and prosocial behaviour, but I think it deserves consideration (and we may note how advertisers play on this, as with 'guilty mother'-style ads for, say, dietary supplements that a caring mother should give to her children).

Guilt and sympathy aside, I also found it difficult not to accept the invitation to referee this paper due to experiencing the urge to ensure that the paper does not proceed to the acceptance stage if it presents an unduly narrow view of behavioural economics and where altruism and prosocial behaviour figure within the behavioural literature. At present, it has this shortcoming because it seems to have bought into the fiction promoted by Thaler (2015 – my copy, by the way, shows no sign of the co-author listed in the paper under review) that behavioural economics dates from around 1980 and his early contributions. The urge that I have to set the record straight here may partly reflect the operating rules of scholarship that I have absorbed by operating in academia for over four decades (consistent with Hodgson's 'hidden persuaders' view of the assimilation of rules in cultural settings) but it may also reflect what Csibra and Gergely (2011) refer to as the human tendency toward 'natural pedagogy' in a much more general sense: whether on a genetic basis or via social norms passed down the generations, humans have an urge to share knowledge with those who seem to be in need of it to avoid wasting their time and other resources, and this knowledge-sharing tendency and being brought up to respect the wisdom of elders, has fitness-conferring evolutionary consequences for social groups (and note here, contrary to the penultimate paragraph of section 4 of the paper under review, that the selection of altruistic behavioural tendencies works via its impact on the fitness and survival of carriers of those tendencies, i.e., people within a group, or a group of people competing against other groups, via the behaviour that it generates).

Given that in modern market processes much of altruistic behaviour pertains to the reviewing and recommending of products and potential solutions to problems, this urge to share knowledge with others warrants consideration in the paper. It may function in tandem with sympathy and guilt: for example, if there is a callout on a suburb's social media for assistance in learning how to shop for gluten-free food by the mother of a newly diagnosed sufferer of Coeliac disease, an experienced Coeliac sufferer may have great trouble holding back from volunteering, mindful of her own experience when she was diagnosed. This 'difficulty in holding back' aspect of altruistic choices based on such foundations is, I think, problematic to frame in terms of a 'rational cost-benefit' calculation: one does it because the genetic and socially programmed rules of one's operating system dictate that we do it, without there being any side glances to other ways of spending our time, unless other more basic, higher-priority rules kick in to over-rule operating in an altruistic way (cf. Maslow, 1970, 1971).

From the above standpoint, I do not think that there is any need to make Christian love a central part of a paper on the economics of altruism. Quite apart from the issue of what is supposedly going on among those of other religious persuasions or among agnostics and atheists, we simply don't need to bring religion into the economic analysis if we start trying to understand altruism in terms of the more general framework of the operating rules (genetically inherited, socially acquired and personally constructed) by which people run their lives: a religion is simply a particular set of 'do' and 'don't' operating rules. Hence, I think the author would be wise, in a revised version of the paper, to remove most of what is said in relation to Christian love

and present the prosocial and altruistic aspects of religious modes of thought as cases of outsourced elements that those of faith have chosen to take into their operating systems or have acquired via the Hodgson-style 'hidden persuader' mechanisms of social life.

Finally, as far as work by behavioural economists who operate in a pre-Thaler way or whose thinking predates 1980, I think that in addition to following up the ideas above and seeing what can be gleaned from the pioneering book by Collard (1978), the author particularly needs to consider the role of altruism in the thinking of the first behavioural scholar to receive a Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences, namely, Herbert Simon, the 1978 winner. Unlike the modern behavioural economists, Simon's focus was on problem solving in organizations and a key concern there was with the challenge of getting workers to contribute to the organization's activities in ways that go beyond what they need to do to keep their jobs or believe they need to do to ensure good enough promotion prospects. (The distinction that Williamson, 1975, 1985 draws between 'perfunctory cooperation' and 'consummate cooperation' may be useful here.) Simon's concerns arise because job contracts are vaguely specified and, to make matters worse, those in leadership roles are granted their authority by those that they manage giving them respect, rather than this authority coming from their formal role in the organization. A docile, altruistic workforce is a great asset to an organization, though not one whose members are so docile as to hold back from being whistle-blowers when questionable things are being done (corruption) or when they think they can see a better way of doing things (challenging the boss, rather than being a 'yes man/woman'). So Simon's limited writing on altruism (I list below the ones that I am aware of, plus his key work on organizations) relates to an important context that the paper needs to consider – a context not unrelated to the 'shall I agree to be a referee?' question with which I started this report, for academic job contracts are very vague, and though academic managers are increasingly more explicit in telling their staff about what they will need to deliver if they are to get tenure or promotion, refereeing track records are not part of those kinds of deliverables (even though academics may attempt to use them as indications of the extent to which they are being taken seriously).

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Reply to Rati Mekvabishvili's 'On the Importance of Altruism, Prosocial Behavior and Christian Love in Behavioral Economics research'

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Have Christians cornered the market on love?

As an economist studying love for more than a decade, I was intrigued by this paper's title. Its title promises, at least, a literature review of the scholarly contributions of economists regarding what have been collectively called "other-regarding preferences" by whiteboard-scribbling theorists, or might more informatively be referred to in a way decipherable by the man on the street as "love" or "care." Whether the author was to embark upon a literature review of works self-describing as being about these things (or that the author viewed as being about these things), or whether the author was going to sleuth out evidence of love in the hearts of the generators of economic research by poring over their writings, or even how exactly the generic word "importance" was going to be defined, I didn't know. I began to read, alert and open to being led towards connections I might not have made already between, particularly, the Christian understanding of love and the understandings of it suggested by the dismal science of (behavioural) economics. I was therefore quite unprepared for the author's method of investigation, and even more unprepared for his conclusion. He writes in the abstract that "altruism and Christian love are not only diverse, but contradictory concepts," and that "altruism and pro-sociality...both are ultimately self-oriented." By process of deduction then, Christian love is NOT "self-oriented," meaning that the well-worn Homo Economicus model of selfish pursuit of own gain fails to capture only one of these three allegedly distinct dimensions of seemingly "irrational" feeling or behaviour – altruism, pro-sociality, and Christian love – and from the sounds of things, this One True Love is something from which non-Christians are excluded.

The author, at the first post, thus purports to have the power unilaterally to redefine the main words that form the focus of his work. This is not a conceit unique to the author; economists regularly apply sleights-of-hand to accepted definitions in order to try to "own" things that are bigger than the discipline at present can accommodate. Ideas like love, identity, and power are leading examples of this, as discussed at length in Foster and Frijters 2022. In the present work, the author wishes us to accept his definitions of "love" (the only "unselfish" motive, and only definable in a Christian context) and of "altruism" (an opportunistic behaviour that emerges, yielding good for another person, only when the altruist has received or expects good favour himself). Yet these terms simply cannot, by force of the author's will alone, be redefined. Readers will not allow him that much power.

The Secular Stagnation

Semantics aside, I agree wholly with the author's contextualising contention that the canon of mainstream economic theory is in something of an existential crisis, being shown up regularly by today's practicing economists for its formal models' lack of verisimilitude. This leads to a hunt within the profession for methods of reconciling the primary assumptions of mainstream models with real human behaviour, and thereby justifying both the content of first-year economics courses and much of the research from the economics academy. The author is correct in his observation that some economic theorists looking for a solution to this crisis have turned to interdisciplinary research, and the author isolates evolutionary theory in particular as a seductive area for economic theorists looking to explain the "rationality" of apparently unselfish behaviour. By this choice and his ensuing statements, the author reveals himself not to adhere to the primary tenets of evolutionary theory, and instead to believe in the value of reconciling economic models of human behaviour with what he terms "theology." How can this proceed, he asks, if most economic theorists subscribe to the theory of evolution and, he assumes, are uninterested in attempts to reconcile their assumptions with or link their work to ideas about God? The author's essential proposal is that evolutionary arguments are inadequate to explain altruism and that therefore, without God, economists' capacity to comprehensively explain human behaviour, selflessness and all, will die on the vine.

Reading on, in spite of the author's significant struggles with the English language, I found a competent and at times quite thoughtful review of much of the now-standard thinking of economists about pro-sociality. The most influential works of the last 20 to 30 years are cited by the author, as are seminal works from the 1960s and 1970s by Hamilton (kinship theory) and Trivers (reciprocal altruism) that still guide much research today about why humans sometimes feel and act in ways that seem misaligned with their personal self-interest. The author also reviews the line of literature examining the development of cultural norms and the triumph of some norms over others, in what is often termed a process of "cultural evolution." In particular, he notes that in such a paradigm, altruism can only be sustained as a norm if some members (called "strong reciprocators") are willing to punish others for acting selfishly. This, and other theories' similar reliance on some type of relation or interaction in order to sustain altruism, he sees as a core weakness – one that leads to secular puzzlement about why altruism in the human species is observed even between strangers.

While slightly over-stated, the author's observation that "a society and economy dominated by prosocial behaviour among individuals are much more efficient" accords with the generally accepted contention, even in secular social science, that it is cheaper to program people not to do the wrong thing than to police them. Marrying this with his review of the frameworks economists have used to try to understand apparently unselfish behaviour, the author concludes that while humanity evidently benefits from unselfishness, "the unanswered question remains as to where the altruist comes from and how the criteria emerged by which she can distinguish altruistic behaviour from selfish and fair from unfair behaviour." How refreshing to see an economist admit this total failure of our discipline to engage with the core question of how altruism arises! But the best was yet to come.

Pivot to God

This is where the paper takes a courageous and intriguing turn. The author invites us next to accept the proposition that all science is conducted by people who hold ideologies – whether secular or theological – and that on this basis one should not dismiss or denigrate the efforts of a scientist who looks to theology for guidance on the scientific puzzles he faces. In his words: “any theoretical economic doctrine has an ideological content, which is product of creative thinking of men of certain [sic] moral and value system.” While not commonly confessed in scientific circles, the notion that *ex ante* beliefs unavoidably guide scientific pursuit is unarguable. We scientists do not stop to prove the validity of every prior conclusion on which we base our present work: we take them, hopefully after some reflection but nearly never after first-hand replication, to be roughly correct. In other words, we “believe” them – as fervently as our present author believes in his God. Some of these beliefs derive from conclusions written in books and articles, some derive from what others (such as our parents or our friends) have told us is true, and some derive merely from our own introspection. Some may well have to do with morality and with what the author here terms “values.”

Returning to the problem of altruism, the author notes that generations of scientific philosophers have opined that care for others is hard-wired into humans. I am reminded of that foundational observation of Adam Smith, from *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759):

How selfish soever man may be supposed, there are evidently some principles in his nature, which interest him in the fortune of others, and render their happiness necessary to him, though he derives nothing from it, except the pleasure of seeing it.

On this basis, our author asks, how then is it tenable to hold a belief that altruism “evolved” (via culture for example) – if it was already there, a core “principle” “in his nature”?

Then begins the author’s review of Christian writing about God and about love. While stating that both of these entities – which he views, as many Christians do, as one and the same – are beyond the ken of people to understand, and therefore side-stepping entirely any interrogation of how they come about, he does point to a method of experiencing them. He advises that someone wanting to experience love should “liberate” himself from his “passions,” which is achieved by a process of mental control, and should not seek to experience any emotion together with the love, since that would not yield a “pure” love. He reassures the reader that “the seed of love” need not be taught but is rather built into us from the start, together with “the desire to have a relationship with God,” and needs merely the right behaviours (specifically, adherence to the Commandments) and God’s help (“grace”) to develop. The author contends that loving some people more than others is a sign of “incomplete love,” that lesser love inevitably becomes hatred, and that selfishness is the result of the “brokenness” of a person.

A strong sense of judgment, not to say fire-and-brimstone dogma, invades the authors’ prose from this point onwards. We are told about right love and “wrong love”; about “sin” and how it creates a self that cannot distinguish between right and wrong; about the corrupting danger of not putting God at the centre of one’s internal universe; and about the universality of sociability, core morality, cooperation, and deep wisdom that all people and cultures share – ostensibly because they were all created by the same hand.

The crux of the author's argument is that "[t]he Christian love of neighbor is one-sided, unconditional and selfless, expects nothing in return" – unlike altruism and pro-sociality, depicted by secular social science as conditional at some level on reciprocation, and moreover as behavioural traits that strengthen and recede as cultures grow and fade. In addition, altruism, he contends, cannot be extended to those outside one's own group: "Christian love does not divide people into groups or as "others", as altruists does so [sic]." He writes further that "[a]ltruism belongs to human instincts and the part of soul, while Christian love belongs to the spiritual part of human nature," and hence that the latter is the purest form of love, the only true love, that is moreover only experienced by, and experienceable by, human beings and only because of God.

God or Bust?

The best scientists, one may argue, are those who constantly question and try to test their own prior beliefs. Charles Darwin himself was perhaps the best example of this. He lived through what could reasonably be called an existential crisis when putting together his theory, knowing how heretical it was, and having been raised in religious traditions that entreated him to believe in Creation. He wondered whether he would be disowned by friends and family for daring to suggest an alternative belief system – one grounded in the empirical observations he had felt compelled to keep making to satiate his rapacious curiosity about where species in all their wondrous variety came from. One might say that Darwin was not satisfied with the *ex ante* belief system he had been fed by his teachers, and reached for something different. In a similar way, our present author is not satisfied with what modern economics, even in its interdisciplinary flavours, has proposed that we should believe about altruism. He feels it is lacking – and so do I.

Yet this does not imply that the only appropriate, scientific, or justified alternative to present approaches, evolutionary or otherwise, is to turn towards theological answers. One might just as well seek answers (read, beliefs on which to found new theories about altruism) in the gods of the forests and rivers, or in the Buddha, or in the Jewish or Muslim gods. The author offers no reason that his beliefs in particular are the right ones. He merely asserts this. Now, one may claim that this is exactly what many social scientists do as well in relation to the theory of evolution, and one would be right about that. Yet evolution is a theory for which evidence is sought in the empirical realities perceived by Darwin and generations of scientists after him. If it is not proven for sure – a point I concede – then it is surely proven more fully than a theory about the existence and nature of any of the supernatural beings that various religions the world over have variously claimed to exist but for which evidence in empirical reality is absent.

A secular scientist might view the Christian worldview not as evidently correct because it has survived for a long time, but rather as an unusually useful worldview which survived the test of time over millenia due to its efficiency and power in suiting humans' needs. Societies are more peaceful and hence productive when people do not hate one another; as such, how useful is the Christian teaching of love for one another. People love to be loved; as such, how useful is the Christian teaching that some all-powerful entity somewhere loves us unconditionally. Children need to be taught right from wrong; as such, how useful is a canonised set of diktats to which harried parents can merely refer without having to field uncomfortable questions from inquisitive young scientists-in-the-crib. Religions of many stripes, not only the Christian one, have proven

themselves in such ways to provide the comfort, security, and meaning that people clearly do require in order to develop their potential and find happiness.

Yet, is a belief in God the only way to satisfy these needs? The literature on what makes people happy has found that a primary driver of self-reported satisfaction with life is the quality of our relationships (see, amongst many others, Polenick et al. 2018, Proulx et al. 2007, and Tough et al. 2018). A relationship with a believed-in supernatural being is one option for this, but one might additionally or instead have relationships with living people (the type of relationship most studied in the existing happiness literature), with one's deceased relatives, with the overarching concept of "humanity", or even with concepts broader than our species, like "the community of mammals". Such relationships occur all in the mind, as does one's relationship with a god, and all are a priori contenders for the role of satisfying the deep human need for comfort, security, meaning, and connection with something bigger than ourselves. As the author says of the "abstract person" with whom a particular non-God-knowing person may build a relationship that provides him with moral guidance, "[i]t is obvious that such an abstract person does not exist and cannot exist." Just like God, then, the atheist may reasonably retort – and besides, so what, if the fiction is useful to people?

Many and various belief systems that guide morality are held by peoples all over the world, yet the author presents a cripplingly narrow and uncharitable characterisation of the way that "altruists" (read: non-God-knowing pro-social actors) conceptualise the world, themselves, and others. The beliefs he ascribes to this cardboard cut-out of "secular man" are painted with a judgmental hand. I do hope that the author does not mean to insist, with this piece, that we partake of his beliefs instead – simply based on his assertion that his beliefs alone (contra a belief in evolution, for example) are the correct ones, and because the alternative is to live as the spiritually and morally bereft figure he paints – but I do sense from his prose that he is twitching to say this. His self-restraint from outright proselytizing to his audience is commendable, but still he proceeds as far as to suggest that we may not wish to build a society "where altruists will be", but rather, only a society featuring people with "Christian love." His brazen claims against secular beliefs, such as that replacing God with "society" as the source of moral guidance necessarily leads to an "unstable and variable" moral system and the destruction of human dignity, are immodest assertions that will offend the morally upright non-believers in the crowd and that can be explained, though this will not be to the author's liking, as an attempt at dominating those he does not understand rather than disciplining himself to love them.

Real Love

Proceeding from the author's resonant claim that economists have not yet offered a reason for the existence of seemingly selfless behaviour, someone wishing to fill this gap might turn not to theology but to the features of humans (whether evolved, created, or otherwise) that are conspicuously absent from modern economic thinking. Evolution need not come into it, at least in the first instance. What then does social science know about humans that economics does not like to see?

For one, from psychology and neuroscience we know that there is such a thing as an unconscious mind, something that we cannot directly control but that feeds us information

(whether via dreams, or via thoughts or urges that we become aware of only after they arise outside of our conscious control). Also from these sciences plus simple introspection, we know that humans have a capacity for abstract thought and a rich imagination that we use in myriad ways, including to form a sense of personal identity, to create visions of the future, and to sustain intangible bonds to others and to ideas. From political science we know that humans are debilitatingly affected by power, a substance that to our species is an aphrodisiac. We also know that humans are innately a social species, despite the protestations of defenders of *Homo Economicus*, and suffer when deprived of regular interactions with other humans.

These are all elements of humanity that are simply not taught in introductory economics courses. If they are taught at all in the economics curricula of highly ranked universities, they are introduced only in forms deemed acceptable to modern mainstream economic science, typically via shoehorning into utility functions and preference maps.

Can innovative playing with these “known unknowns” – as an alternative to the author’s appeal to Christian teachings and dogma, and free of both reliance on evolutionary theory and the ball-and-chain of the discipline’s modern techno-scientific customs – point the economist towards where real love comes from, and what it is? Over the years my co-authors and I have tried to show that the answer is if not “yes”, then at least “maybe”. In Frijters and Foster (2013) we propose a theory of love with both explanatory and predictive power, heavily based on the observations listed above about power and the unconscious mind and on observations of humanity and its loves across time and across cultures. We term our theory “the love principle,” and write it in prose rather than in mathematical form. The essential proposal is that the love response becomes possible when our unconscious mind perceives an outside power that we cannot control but is capable of satisfying some core need of ours. As an example, our author (like many believers worldwide) loves his god, whom he perceives as very powerful, outside of his direct control, and able to satisfy many of his core needs. Non-believers experience love responses too, but in response to other external powers, such as other people, or abstract ideas like “my country” or “science.”

In Foster et al. (2019), my co-authors and I show how the dynamics of love in a relationship can be explained by a reduced but tractable mathematical form of this “love principle.” In Frijters and Foster (2017), we show how the imaginative mind of a person may simultaneously support a variety of loves, including for the concept of oneself, that motivate her feelings and behaviour. Admittedly we do not explain how the capacity for love arises within a human being, and I expect that future research will further explore whether this capacity is hard-wired, as claimed by Adam Smith and other philosophers, or to some extent programmed in childhood (and if the latter, how that programming works). A detailed origin story of love could be highly useful in guiding policy choices about investments in children. However, a framework for predicting the circumstances in which the love response, and hence pro-social or altruistic behaviour, is likely to be switched on or extinguished is already a step forward from where mainstream economics presently languishes in its conception of love. Neither God nor evolution needed.

As economists, my co-authors and I do not expect humans to be able to sustain any behaviour over the long term that does not provide some type of personal reward, and this includes apparently unselfish behaviour. The form of this reward may be a “warm glow” of enjoying someone else’s happiness, or simply feeling good about oneself for doing a “good thing”

(a feeling like what the author experiences, presumably, when he observes himself adhering to his god's commandments). The fact that apparently unselfish behaviour may have some positive return to the one exhibiting it is not, to the eye of an economist, something shameful or impure. Indeed, mainstream economics does not acknowledge shame or purity at all, a liberating feature of the discipline that reflects its professed stance of unconditional acceptance of humanity's true nature. The positive personal return to engaging in apparently unselfish behaviour is not something shameful, but rather a robust and happiness-providing mechanism for ensuring the perpetuation of that apparently unselfish behaviour. What is bad about that?

By contrast, one might be forgiven for interpreting the author's statements to imply that only saints can experience "true love." I would counter that he then requires the most powerful abstract force in the world (love) to be sustained in a species that receives no direct reward from it. How can that possibly be? What loving god would create a world with such suffering, where billions of individuals love their hearts out every day and receive no good feelings in return, being thereby inevitably depleted by the effort? To me that sounds, if not like hell on earth, then at least too draining to be sustainable. The author may counter that a relationship with God can provide the rejuvenation required to sustain this continued effort. Yet why then not entertain a simpler solution, in which an act of love provides its own reward, thereby removing the need for a separate source of rejuvenation?

The answer may lie in the author's own internal psychology. As indicated earlier, several signals in the author's prose indicate that in spite of his claim that Christianity's version of love does not divide people into "us" versus "them", he does not himself actually love non-believers but rather wishes to dominate them. He also seems to see his relationship with God as distinct from, rather than embedded within, his relationship with other humans (and particularly non-believers). In addition to his frustration with non-believers' refusal to share his beliefs, perhaps our author does not experience them to be as powerful or as capable of providing things he needs – requirements for the development of love, according to the "love principle" – than he would if he had no relationship with God, in part because his needs are already so mightily satisfied for him in his mind by God.

It is surely a joyful experience for the author to experience God's unconditional love and bask in its bounty. Yet this can be seen as a selfish pursuit to the extent that negative consequences for his relationships with real humans – such as a reduction in his capacity for true love for other people, and particularly for non-believers – are part of his devotional sacrifice. As a scientist, he therefore may be unable to entertain the possibility that the power of human relationships can offer the sustenance that non-believers (and many believers as well) receive from them, thereby blinding him to the possibility that real love can exist apart from God.

Conclusion

At the end of the day, the author offers value in his direct admission of massive holes that the discipline of economics regularly attempts to cover up. He reviews most of the highly cited contributions by economists exploring altruism and pro-social behaviour, and by calling out their inability to explain love, he emphasises the need for the discipline to do far more in this area in order to progress theoretically. He also states plainly for all to see that ideology drives much of

scientific investigation, again a refreshing admission of something obvious yet frequently papered-over. For all of this, the author deserves our thanks.

Yet our author makes no more progress than other economists in his pondering of love. He merely asserts that love is the exclusive province of the faithful and cannot be understood through scientific means (including appeals to evolution), implying that we should stop seeking to understand it and instead simply accept and bask in what has been God-given. He thereby offers yet another closed door in the face of social scientists wishing deeply to understand love. In pointing to his God as the sole source of love, the author fails just like countless economists before him to provide an empirically justified, testable, and tweakable theoretical model of the love process that can be used as a starting point of the rejuvenation that economics so desperately needs if it is to live up to its calling of seeing humans as they really are.

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Limits to economics, religion and (maybe) everything else: Reply to Rati Mekvabishvili's 'On the Importance of Altruism, Prosocial Behavior and Christian Love in Behavioral Economics research'

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Mekvabishvili (2023) provides a unique perspective on the relationship between economics, especially behavioural and evolutionary economics, and Christian thought and theology. The literature on Christianity and economics is overrepresented by American authors, so I'm glad that Mekvabishvili offers another perspective, of an Eastern Orthodox background. The theology of love is usually considered one of the least controversial topics among different Christian denominations. And this is relevant not only to Christians, but to humanity in general, because it is also part of the sum of human knowledge, therefore it can be studied, criticized and appreciated. In spite of disagreements, I believe Mekvabishvili raises important questions.

That being said, the relationship between Christianity and evolutionary and behavioural economics is underexplored. In *Faith & Economics*, the peer-reviewed journal of the Association of Christian Economists, there is only two reviews on this issue, one from Bloem (2015) and another from Yungert (2018). Tan (2014) wrote a literature review of these issues.

The relationship between economics and Christianity, however, is a topic with a larger literature. Nelson (2001) showed that many of founders of economics as we understand today were children and grandchildren of Protestant ministers. Economics, Nelson argued, took the niche that once belonged to theology in the Anglo-Saxon 19th century academy. It was now up to economists to 'save the world'. Easterly (2014) observed the religious connotations in using the word 'mission' to describe to the World Bank and International Monetary Fund's initiatives to help underdeveloped countries. Dow (1994) cites this religious origin as a reason why economics is not as value-free as it claims, a point that Mekvabishvili mentions. There is a vestigial theology in economic doctrines, that is masked by secularization.

So, when Mekvabishvili writes 'First of all, in my opinion, true science and true Christian teaching cannot contradict each other, since truth is one,' this is not just a religious squabble. It does invoke the idea of 'natural theology' – the idea that God can be revealed through Nature –, but there is more than that. The idea of 'truth' has obviously been discussed since the dawn of mankind. In economics, one of the most important discussions on the 'truth' of the economic method was the Keynes-Tinbergen debate (Almeida, 2014; Boumans, 2019). Jan Tinbergen was one of the founders of econometrics and hoped to find a definitive cause behind the business cycle, but Keynes wondered if that is possible, if we can ever find the *verae causae* of economic phenomena. He cited the miracle of the Septuagint, when 70 scribes returned with the same

Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible; is such a thing possible with econometric methods? While Tinbergen was enthused by the possibility of finding the truth behind economics through econometrics, Keynes was more cautious about it, because of fundamental uncertainties in the economy.

Tinbergen's model had many issues, that were corrected with better models and better data sets, but the question about uncertainty remains. Overcoming uncertainty has been one of the objectives of scientific research. Stephen Hawking (1988, p. 169) famously ended his *A brief history of time* writing that if we knew 'why we' and 'the universe exists...we would know the mind of God'. He regarded the unification of physics – between quantum mechanics and general relativity – as a step in this direction. Can economists ever *aspire* to say something similar to that as well?

Although an imaginative rhetorical question, I consider this kind of statement somewhat imprudent, especially coming from a public intellectual. In context, Hawking was talking about how philosophers and physicists disagree and how their fields do not advance in the same pace. As a consequence, knowledge and wisdom do not grow in the same rate. There is this idea that should exist a 'perfect model', but physicists are coming to an agreement that a 'theory of everything' is the catchiest misnomer ever (Teller, 2001; English, 2017).

That brings us the question: what science are we referring to? Because this raises another question: who defines what is science? One relevant example is James Clerk Maxwell. His work helped to revolutionize 19th century physics. He was also a devout Presbyterian. Due to his high academic profile, he was constantly invited to join organizations to defend the faith, to practice apologetics. One of them promoted the idea that the Bible proves that ether exists, therefore it is true. Maxwell refused to support these ideas, much to the chagrin of his fellow Christians. He argued that the physics of 1876 would be different from 1896, predating a bit of Karl Popper's falsifiability – today, the ether is an extinct doctrine (McNatt, 2004). And some Christians do not seem to have learned the lesson. William Dembski (1999), one of the main representatives of the intelligent design movement, wrote that 'intelligent design is just the Logos theology of John's Gospel restated in the idiom of information theory'. The use of the word 'just' betrays an unwarranted overconfidence. What will happen to this argument when scientists move on from current information theory?

This shows the problem of science-based apologetics: they are founded in this principle that science and Christian doctrine are true, but it does not give the due attention that science is always changing. For fourteen centuries, scholars relied on the Ptolemaic astronomical model. C. S. Lewis (1964, p. 216) called it one of the most beautiful intellectual constructions mankind ever produced, by combining 'splendour, sobriety, and coherence' (and it was the foundation of his *Narnia* and *Space Trilogy* series). It was the base of much of Christian apologetics, including the Church Fathers, focusing on the perfection of the celestial sphere being akin to the perfection of the received Christian doctrine. And yet, the Ptolemaic model was surpassed not just because of new observations, but because the mental disposition of scholars, and people in general, also changed (*ibid.*, p. 219-220).

And if economic theories are not value-free, that also applies to theology. González (1990, p. 221) argued that Augustine of Hippo created the basis of later Christian conformism with tolerance to inequality and in favour of the privileged because Augustine saw the 'true' human

law as extension of the divine one – no more ‘do not conform to this world’ (Romans 12:2), but rather accept the rule of the privileged. This has had negative consequences for centuries. In the 1930s, Karl Barth shocked the Western European theological academia by criticizing natural theology. But his reasons are important to consider, because the Nazi intelligentsia wanted to place *Mein Kampf* in the same level as the Bible. Being a supporter of the Barmen Declaration against Nazi intervention in the churches, Barth saw Nazis appropriating natural theology to their means (Houtz, 2016). Although some may think he went too far, Louth (1969, p. 271-272) argued Barth had a point, because natural theology fails to consider grace – undeserved and unpayable favour – and similarities between the believer and the non-believer, as if natural theology existed to benefit a particular view of the world. That fosters presumption, not faith. The result is that God becomes ‘part of the machine’ (Pennock, 1999, p. 308). Western European thought in the 17th century, then, evolved to what Charles Taylor (2007) called ‘providential deism’, a prologue to complete secularism: ‘the successor to agape, [the Christian love], was to be held strictly within the bounds of measure, instrumental reason, and perhaps also good taste.’ (*ibid*, p. 247). Thus, Hawking, an agnostic, could write about discovering the ‘mind of God’.

If God becomes part of the machine, then this can be modelled and used to support the machine’s ideology. Returning to Augustine’s theology of conformism, it provided a basis for the stratified feudal society and ideas such as the divine right of kings. Although making a connection between 5th century ideas and today requires a more rigorous treatment, we can see similar ideas *in vogue*. Although the theology of conformism is fundamental part of religious Traditionalist politics (Teitelbaum, 2020), they also are in nonreligious contexts. Sociobiology, just like rational choice theory, provides an alluring and totalizing explanation of human action. Important biologists such as Stephen Jay Gould and Richard Lewontin pointed the issues with it, because it does not address structural sources of inequality (Allen et al, 1975). Roscoe (2014) argued some evolutionary biologists, such as Richard Dawkins¹, turn evolution theory into a neoliberal (a)theology of conformism.

And that brings to the last point. Mekvabishvili writes that ‘evolutionary theory and its modifications are not based on scientific facts and belong to a purely philosophical category.’ I am not a biologist myself, but from what I know ‘nothing in biology makes sense except in the light of evolution’ (Dobzhansky, 1973). As put by Russo and André (2019, p. 123):

Science, as a process, starts with the acceptance of our ignorance about a natural phenomenon and by seeking natural explanations for it. Hence, ignorance drives the engine of Science. Even if evolution were, hypothetically, rejected, contested by new data, scientists would have to study hard to find an alternative natural explanation that was able to explain everything that evolution explains to day plus the new data that contested it.

¹ Dawkins became a controversial figure as an antireligion public intellectual. In refuting the idea that evolution theory necessarily leads to moral degeneracy, Pennock (1999, p. 336) mentions Dawkins’s example of someone who uses evolutionary theory as a source of existential relief. Pennock emphasizes that this is a personal case, nothing guarantees that evolution leads to atheism, but one can see Dawkins finding this personal meaning as similar to a religious experience.

Because evolution theory is a human creation, it is flawed. But that also applies to theology, because it is also science, and thus a human creation, imperfect, flawed and in constant need of being reevaluated by its practitioners. Mike Anderson (2015) argued that 'anti-evolutionism provides a very precarious basis for faith in the Creator' because it tells us to not engage with evidence that says otherwise (or worse, claiming that it is there as a test to Christians). It favors a 'self-flattering, populist common sense perspective that truth about God is manifest to the natural human intellect,' i.e. that will 'coincidentally' validate our biases and ideologies (Anderson, 2016).

This discussion also highlights issues of the meaning of mainstream itself. In biology, evolutionary theory is mainstream and there are few contenders. But, in economics, the tenets of neoclassical economics have been disproven, unverified, refuted both at empirical and theoretical level so many times (browsing the WEA's site, who hosts this journal, can give us a modest sample of critiques to orthodox economics). And yet, it still remains the same: rational economic agents in a general equilibrium framework. It has changed at a snail's pace. And the main journals still publish thousands of studies in these lines yearly, PhDs students in the most prestigious centres are taught these doctrines and so on. And yet, the majority of economists still subscribe to it because it opens to a wide range of issues and has produced good enough results. And, especially, no heterodox doctrine managed to get enough clout to challenge its hegemony or serviceability. Being a heterodox economist is still a career gamble.²

That being said, the article does show the limits of altruism itself. Most of the criticism of altruism are associated with Randian jeremiads, but these are distractions. A more careful analysis is needed and Mekvabishvili provides a literature review of it. Easterly (2014) showed that many attempts to 'altruistically' help the underdeveloped countries ended up making everything worse, because it is a process that treats the one helped passively. When I was a teenager, before entering college, I never understood what Paul meant in 1 Corinthians 13:1-3³, that you can die for someone and yet have no love. After finishing my PhD. in economics, I could say 'Ah, that is how'.

The documentary *Freakonomics: The Movie* (Ewing et al, 2010) provides an example of these limitations, even though it was supposed to be a celebration of its results. In the section 'Can you bribe a 9th grader to succeed?', it depicts an economic experiment in a school in Chicago. The documentary followed a few students who participate in an experiment developed by University of Chicago economists in which students would be paid for better grades – to test

² From a personal point of view, I have to admit it feels a bit weird making a case for the mainstream of a discipline (Biology) and for the heterodoxy of another (Economics). Anti-evolutionism, however, is mainstream in some Christian circles. I remember telling the pastor of a church that I don't go anymore that I don't subscribe to young-Earth creationism, because it has more to do with 19th century scientific methodology than the Bible; he replied by calling a creationist physicist to do a conference series in that church. In the day of the conference, he said all who don't subscribe to this particular view of creationism are heretics and, then, he spent a lot of time defending reactionary politics, like telling robbers where the houses of families who don't support gun rights are. Needless to say, it didn't convince me.

³ 'If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.'

the very economic hypothesis of ‘incentives matter’. The documentary makes clear that the economists behind the experiment are doing it for science, you can even say they are ‘altruistic’. Their objective is to get better grades in a quick and low-cost way. The result is that they observed an increase in the average grades, but it was not as high as they expected. In the conclusion, the economists are making plans to redo this study with even younger students.

In my opinion, this shows lack of self-awareness from rational choice economics. If you teach children that they will be paid for better grades, will they learn that studying is good or will they learn that studying is a job, that requires payment in order to be done?⁴ In other words, the documentary does not consider what will happen if the incentive is removed or even if the children internalized what they were supposed to. Plus, it does not consider people who have different incentive structures – what if some students were neurodivergent, such as having attention deficit disorder, with a different reward processing structure (Beauchaine, Ben-David and Sela, 2017)?

The use of the edgy term ‘bribe’ in Ewing et al (2010)’s section title is meant to gratuitously shock the viewer, following the click-bait tradition. But what if we reword it? ‘Can you bribe a person to behave altruistically?’ Why aren’t we talking in terms of bosses bribing their workers to work, instead of paying wages to them? If incentives matter (or just read that as ‘if bribes matter’), can we find the *right* incentives, so that we can have the *right* result, so we can have the *right* people for the *right* social result? In other words, ‘Can you bribe a person to be *good*?’ An even better rewording is ‘With enough bribes, can you make a person a *good* person?’ Let us go to the *reductio ad absurdum* of thinking like a ‘freak’: is non-bribeable *good* behaviour even possible?

The issue is that altruism, as exposed by Mekvabishvili, might be empty. C. S. Lewis (1952) said that there is a difference between ‘nice people’ and ‘new men’. However, questioning the statement ‘incentives matter’ does not mean endorsing ‘incentives do not matter’. Incentives can help forming ‘nice people’. Incentives can matter. A lot. While the *Freakonomics* experiment was awkwardly framed as an attempt to find ‘algorithms’ of human behaviour, the reality is that stipends can make all the difference for the disadvantaged. To use an example I am familiar with, the Brazilian ‘*Bolsa Família*’ program, which provided cash transfers to poor income families, has had significant impacts to reduce poverty, allowing families to spend less time into just thinking how to survive. In fact, one of the issues of the program is that the value of transfers was too low (de Souza et al, 2018).

In Brazil, there is a saying: ‘the hungry are in a hurry’. Whether these communities might revert if the transfers stop is not immediately relevant, they need at least a minimum to flourish and they need in the ‘now’. And this shows the relevance of the altruism literature. Taylor (2007, p. 255) wrote that the greatest achievement in the 17th philosophy, from which altruism would be an heir, is in the fact that

...for the first time, we have such an opening to the universal which is not based in some way on a connection to the transcendent. Even if we think that this appeal is insufficient, because it leaves something important out, we have to recognize

⁴ To be fair, the interlude before the section has one of the economists mentioning how the incentives to his own daughter failed when she started exploiting his incentive system. But, even so, the impression I had is that he talks about it as if it was just a curiosity.

that the development of this purely immanent sense of universal solidarity is an important achievement, a milestone in human history.

In order to analyse or criticize altruism, this needs to be kept in mind. It is questionable, however, if altruism can create 'new men', as if humans were just an input-output mechanism. Altruism lacks a concept of grace, one of the first casualties of providential deism (Taylor, 2007). The Cross is 'foolishness' (1 Corinthians 1:18) because the gap between God, who is gracious and immutable, and our knowledge, our science, is always changing – can we find the *vera causae* of everything? That includes economics and theology as disciplines. So, independent of what we believe, we shouldn't presume God, history, economics, physics, any field of study exists to validate what we think is the truth.

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