

# **MEETING HUMAN NEED THROUGH CONSUMPTION, WORK, AND LEISURE**

**By**

**Edward J. O'Boyle, Ph.D.**

---

**This paper was published in the *International Journal of Social Economics*,  
Volume 38, Number 3, 2011. To retrieve this published article, go to  
[www.emeraldinsight.com/0306-8293.htm](http://www.emeraldinsight.com/0306-8293.htm)**

---

**Questions and comments should be directed to:**

**Edward J. O'Boyle, Ph.D.**

**Mayo Research Institute**

**[www.mayoresearch.org](http://www.mayoresearch.org)**

**1217 Dean Chapel Road, West Monroe, Louisiana 71291 USA**

**Tel: 318/396-5779      E-mail: edoboyle@earthlink.net**

Need is a normative concept which is rooted in the value system of the person who uses the concept. Given the many different value systems in a large society such as the United States, there will be many different ways in which need is defined and applied. Our responsibility as researchers is to help reduce any arbitrariness in the different ways in which the concept is used by elaborating in detail what we mean by need and thereby helping to achieve a wider social commitment to a definition as it is used in the public discourse and applied through public policy.

In the following we present a perspective on need that derives from personalism of which there are many different versions all with one thing in common: they oppose the sovereignty of the individual and the totalitarian state (Maritain, 1947). Our presentation is grounded in Catholic social thought and runs counter to the individualism of mainstream economics. Mounier (1952) characterizes individualism as the “very antithesis of personalism, and its dearest enemy.”

Three strands of Christian personalism emerged in 20<sup>th</sup> century Europe: in Paris, Munich, and Lublin. The Paris strand was organized around Emmanuel Mounier, the Munich strand around Edmund Husserl. Both surfaced prior to WWII. The third strand emerged after WWII and was organized in the main around Karol Wojtyla (Stanford Encyclopedia, 2009). Throughout we refer to him as John Paul II, the name he took when elected pope in 1978.

Maritain, Mounier, and von Balthasar posit the antithesis of person and individual in which individual refers to something lower in human nature and person refers to the best or highest in human nature. For Maritain, person refers to the spiritual dimension, individual to the material dimension. Mounier sees the person as generous and self-giving, the individual as acquisitive and self-assertive. Person, according to von Balthasar, is incommunicable, unrepeatable in human nature; individual is just an instance of human nature. Scheler, on the other hand, posits no such antithesis. For him, individuality is an aspect of personhood (Crosby, 2004).

John Paul II advances a different antithesis. In late July 2001, we were invited to a small lunch gathering with John Paul II at his summer residence in Castel Gandolfo. The conversation was wide ranging in Italian, Polish, and English. We asked John Paul specifically the difference between the individual and the person. He answered simply and without hesitation. Extending his left arm far to the left along the table he said: “this is the individual.” Keeping his left arm in place and extending his right arm as far as he could in the opposite direction he stated: “this is the divine.” Then, moving his left hand to the right so that it nearly touched his right hand which remained in place he asserted: “this is the person.” The person, in other words, is very nearly divine.

Nothing we have read about personalism before or since that gathering over lunch has played a greater role in our understanding of this philosophy and our own contributions to personalist economics than John Paul II’s simple but most insightful demonstration. While not intending to diminish the importance of the Paris and Munich strands of personalism, what follows derives mainly from the Lublin strand [1]. Further, our central purpose in the following is not to probe the depths of the personalist philosophy but to see how conceptualizing the economic agent as a person rather than an individual changes our understanding of the three principal

economic activities of consumption, work, and leisure [2].

### **1. Human Need**

We begin with the two norms which constitute any definition of need: material need and nonmaterial need. These two norms reflect the duality of human nature, the human body and the human spirit. In brief, then, a need is a requirement of the human body as in the case of food and clothing or the human spirit as with peace of mind and a sense of self worth. A need is not the same as a want which, simply put, is something desired. Need precedes want but does not displace it. In any right-ordered human being particularly one with dependents want is subordinate to need.

Need is not exactly the same for every human being because every human being is unique. A diabetic, for instance, needs insulin produced by human hands which the nondiabetic does not need because the body produces insulin naturally. Many human beings find peace of mind through communal religious practice, others through private meditation, still others through inspirational readings. Thus, given differences across humankind, there always will be some elasticity in the way in which the concept of need is used and applied in specific instances. Pursuing a definition which in the end achieves universal social acceptance is a futile venture.

In the following we focus on need in consumption, work, and leisure. All three activities are intertwined for four reasons. First, all three are the means by which needs are met and wants are satisfied. Second, all three involve both the human body and the human spirit. Third, all three are subject to limits. Fourth, all three can be separated for purposes of discussion but in practice often are combined. The working lunch combines work and consumption. The three-day holiday weekend mingles consumption and leisure. Working after hours at home and at the same time watching a professional tennis match merges working and re-creating. The working vacation brings together all three. More about each of these four reasons as we explore consumption, work, and leisure at greater length.

However, before we begin that discussion, it is essential to examine the different ways in which the economic agent is represented in mainstream economics and personalist economics.

### **2. The Economic Agent**

In mainstream thinking, *homo economicus* is subject to change in that the economic agent is capable of acquiring or losing the human capital which is embedded in his/her nature. Additionally, mainstream economics acknowledges that at times *homo economicus* acts altruistically, in accordance with the needs and desires of others. Mainstream economics reconciles this kind of behavior with the self-centeredness of *homo economicus* by labeling it “enlightened self-interest.” However, even though a specific flesh-and-blood economic agent modeled after *homo economicus* changes with age, years of education and training, marital status, number of dependents, and other characteristics, his/her behavior in economic affairs is entirely predictable because the economic agent, following Jeremy Bentham, maximizes net personal advantage. For that reason, empirical findings from economic analysis grounded in *homo economicus* can be stated with considerable certainty.

For some time we referred to the economic agent of personalist economics as *homo socioeconomicus* (see O’Boyle, 1994). We are replacing that term with the *acting person* – the

*person in action* -- for two reasons. First, the literature has become cluttered with similar terms such as *homo reciprocans*, *homo politicus*, *homo sociologicus*, *homo hobbesianus*, *homo darwinianus* and others which by and large mainstream economics has not taken seriously. Using *the acting person* [3], we hope, avoids the problem of being thrown together with those terms and then being thrown out with them. Second, *the acting person* connects economic agency to human action in economic affairs, notably consumption, work, and leisure, that unmistakably changes the economic agent who in acting virtuously or viciously accumulates or depletes personalist capital, and thereby is more effective and more highly valued as an agent or less effective and less highly valued.

It is the person, as practical reason, whose activity weaves the web of human life; it is the person which, destitute in its essence, ceaselessly enriches itself with new knowledge, with new moral habits, that is to say virtues, with practical habits, that is arts, and thus gradually building itself up issues at last in those human masterpieces whom we call sage, hero, artist, saint ... from the opening of the Christian era it is no more of man that we speak but of the human person: *persona significat id quod est perfectissimum in tota natura* (Gilson, 1940; emphasis in the original) [4].

In Karol Wojtyla's personalist ontology, the *acting person* or *person in action* is identified by four characteristics: is the author of his own actions, imposes order on his own actions, forms himself through his own actions, and prior to acting distinguishes good from evil only when he surrenders his will to the truth (Rourke and Rourke, 2005).

Finally, and most importantly, mainstream economics asserts that in the end the economic agent, *homo economicus*, maximizes utility and profit based on the proposition that the moral good invariably consists in *having* more. As virtually every student in any mainstream principles course is instructed, wants are unlimited. The discipline of economics is grounded directly in the scarcity of economic resources in which human materials wants are best satisfied by the Pareto-optimal condition wherein no one can be made better off without sacrificing the well-being of someone else. Mainstream economics finds comfort in the certainty that derives from analyzing economic affairs through the constancy of *homo economicus*.

Personalist economics, in contrast, claims that most fundamentally the economy functions best when the economic agent, *the acting person*, maximizes personalist capital thereby enhancing him/herself as a human person and rendering him/herself more effective and more highly valued as an economic agent. Maximizing personalist capital rests on the assertion that the moral good always inheres in *being* more which involves the needs and wants of the human body and the human spirit which must be limited to assure *having* more is subordinated to *being* more.

Some human beings for lack of maturity or opportunity do not realize their full potential. Others are robbed of their potential through injury or old age. Though at times they may be called "monsters," "devils," "vegetables," "tissue," or the like, they are each and every one human persons (Kavanaugh, 2001).

Personalist economics is not impressed with the appearance of certainty in mainstream economic analysis principally because mainstream economics oversimplifies the economic agent. Instead it finds comfort in a more authentic human being, one with needs and wants which derive from the body and the spirit even though it is difficult to achieve consensus on how best to define need. That difficulty coupled with the ever-changing nature of *the acting person* makes certainty in economic analysis a distant goal.

Most important of all, mainstream economics represents the economic agent as an individual being who is valued strictly instrumentally and for whom all existence is solitary existence. Personalist economics, on the other hand, sees the economic agent as an individual being and a social being, a person with a sacred dignity quite apart from instrumental value for whom all existence is co-existence. As Danner (2002) put it: “individuality and sociality are not contradictories but polarities of the same personalist continuum.”

### 3. Consumption

Mainstream economics regards consumption as satisfying human wants and the prudent consumer as the one who maximizes net personal advantage or the utility gotten from the available income. The concept of need is disregarded except when the issue of poverty is addressed and only when it is separated from consumer behavior. Whatever the consumer does with the goods and services purchased is strictly his/her own business because no one knows better than the consumer what will best satisfy his/her wants. For that reason, even when the food bought and consumed is virtually the same, there is no difference between having a holiday dinner alone or spending it with family and friends. No difference between shopping for a suit, dress, or pair of shoes alone or in the company of another. No concept in the mainstream way of thinking that being alone may mean loneliness and loneliness in turn can have a negative effect on the human spirit.

This disregard for the human spirit derives from the premise of mainstream economics that the consumer is an autonomous strictly want-satisfying individual who functions mechanically as an embodied creature in a material, physical world where pleasure and pain are measured and compared in a decision-making process which is essentially passive. Anything relating to the human spirit is not economics even when it is tied closely to consuming as in sharing an appetizer at dinner or sitting in a sport bar with friends watching a favorite team lose. In mainstream economics, all existence is individual existence.

Personalist economics holds fast to the view that consumers are beings with a body and a spirit -- an embodied spirit -- and that they meet the needs and satisfy the wants of the body and spirit through the goods and services they buy and consume in a decision-making process which is essentially active precisely because they are living, breathing, existential actualities, not utility-calculating machines. They are more than individuals. They are *acting persons*, and for better or worse the action undertaken often changes the person who acts. Routinely eating too much diminishes a person who in the extreme becomes a glutton. Regularly sharing lunch with another often makes for a lasting friendship. In personalist economics, all existence is co-existence.

A high-performance sports car is more than a vehicle for transporting a person's body from place to place. A tuxedo is an article of clothing but when worn by a woman can be a fashion

statement as well. A fine Italian wine shared with a companion at dinner can strengthen a friendship and please the palate. Though personalist economics admits there are many difficulties in measuring the effects of consumption on the human spirit those effects are every bit as real as the effects on the human body.

Personalist economics does not dismiss human need and separate poverty from consumer behavior. Rather, consumption not only satisfies human wants but also meets human needs. As already mentioned, need is a normative concept and for that reason there will be differences between researchers regarding how to define and measure the specific dimensions of need. Accordingly, they are well advised to state their specifics as clearly as possible. The disadvantage in doing economic analysis is that these differences make for different empirical results and therefore some uncertainty in the conclusions drawn from those results. The advantage is that consumer behavior is construed in a way that makes sense to the typical consumer who instinctively knows the difference between his/her own personal needs and wants and factors both into the decision-making process. Further, combining needs and wants links consumer behavior to poverty by raising the question as to what society should do for those persons and families without sufficient income to meet their material needs.

John Paul sees two dangers in consumption. The first is the effect of excessive consumption on the person of the consumer. The other is the effective denial of the principle of the universal destination of the material goods of the world by the affluent and comfortable who do not respond adequately to the needs of the poor. As to the first, he voices this warning:

A given culture reveals its overall understanding of life through the choices it makes in production and consumption. It is here that the *phenomenon of consumerism* arises. In singling out new needs and new means to meet them, one must be guided by a comprehensive picture of man which respects all the dimensions of his being and which subordinates his material and instinctive dimensions to his interior and spiritual ones. If, on the contrary, a direct appeal is made to his instincts -- while ignoring in various ways the reality of the person as intelligent and free -- then *consumer attitudes* and *lifestyles* can be created which are objectively improper and often damaging to his physical and spiritual health (John Paul, 1991; emphasis in the original).

As to the second danger, by re-affirming the principle of the universal destination of the earth's goods (see, for instance, John Paul, 1991) which states that the material goods of this world are intended for the use of all humankind and are not governed and protected absolutely in their use by the right of private property, John Paul says in effect that the concept of need must be re-instituted in our economics.

... there are many human needs which find no place on the market. It is a strict duty of justice and truth not to allow fundamental human needs to remain unsatisfied and not to allow those burdened by such needs to perish. It is also necessary to help these needy people to acquire expertise, to enter the circle of exchange and to develop their skills in order to make the best use of their capacities and resources. Even prior to the logic of a fair exchange of goods and the forms of justice appropriate to it, there exists *something which is due to*

*man because he is man*, by reason of his lofty dignity. Inseparable from that required “something” is the possibility to survive and, at the same time, to make an active contribution to the common good of humanity (John Paul, 1991; emphasis in the original).

To John Paul, the material dimension of human existence matters much but is subordinate to the spiritual dimension. Indeed, extravagant regard for one’s own material existence, which increasingly characterizes contemporary western culture, “... consumes the resources of the earth *and* [one’s] own life in an excessive and disordered way” (John Paul, 1991). The danger is that consumption, carried to an extreme, reduces the consumer to a mere material being. Instead of *having* more, which modern economies celebrate and mainstream economics tacitly affirms, John Paul urges men and women *to be* more, to develop the full potential of their personalities, to be a complete human person, and not just a self-absorbed human being [5].

John Paul was not the first to underscore the difference between *having* more and *being* more. In 1951, for example, Lebreton said the following:

Man, in desiring “to have” rather than “to be,” in his eagerness to possess, closes in upon himself. He becomes hostile to others. He becomes the enemy of others (Faulhaber and Faulhaber, 1955).

Years later Clarke, Dawson, and Bredehoft (2004) identified five main areas of childhood overindulgence: toys, clothing, activities, privileges, and entertainment. They noted that overindulgence in childhood which they defined as “the process of giving things to children to meet the adult’s needs, not the child’s” (Clarke *et. al.*, 2004) has negative effects that continue into adulthood.

Some of the overindulged adults reported that they had confused *getting* with *being*. ‘I am if I get,’ one said. ‘I have to get in order to be sure I’m alive.’ (Clarke *et. al.*, 2004; emphasis in the original).

We return to the problem of overindulgence in a latter section on the need for limits.

#### **4. Work**

Personalist economics views work as having two effects on the working person. First, by producing goods and services it provides income to purchase the goods and services needed or desired. Second, it provides opportunities to associate with others in the workplace and develop a sense of belonging to a group with shared aims, and to apply and enhance creative talents and energies. Mainstream economics regards the first but not the second as within the domain of the discipline because the first effect is objective in nature representing what the worker contributes to the production of goods and services whereas the second effect is subjective representing what the work itself does to the person of the one who works. Maritain (1971) traces that subjective/objective distinction to the Schoolmen who referred to them as Action and Making.

The objective side of work demands a human body. Put differently, virtually no work can be accomplished by anyone other than an embodied human. In that regard there is little to choose

between mainstream economics and personalist economics.

The subjective side of work responds to the needs of the human spirit but the spirit first must be embodied because without the body no work can be done and therefore no subjective effect can be brought forth. Here personalist economics clearly departs from mainstream economics.

The second effect can be positive or negative. To illustrate, discriminating in pay and promotion and assigning a person to work for which he/she is overqualified turn the subjective effect negative. Designing and implementing a pay and promotion scheme based squarely on performance and finding the best match between the work to be done and the skills and talents of the worker turn the subjective effect positive. The objective effect of work is tied ultimately to the goods and services produced. The subjective effect is linked to the human spirit and for that reason has an impact on the development of the worker as a person. Anyone who works, even those with good-paying, challenging jobs, knows the difference between a good day at work and a bad day, and that difference often is reflected in their performance and physical appearance.

John Paul's recognition of the need to belong is embedded in his assertions that the fundamental dimension of human existence is co-existence (see John Paul 1994, p. 36), that a person grows through "increased sharing in a supportive community" (see John Paul, 1991) and is implied in his call to "solidarity and common action" as a reaction against "the degradation of man as the subject of work" (see John Paul, 1981).

In *Laborem Exercens* John Paul explains what he means by "man as the subject of work":

Man has to subdue the earth and dominate it, because as the "image of God" he is a person, that is to say, a subjective being capable of acting in a planned and rational way, capable of deciding about himself, and with a tendency to self-realization. *As a person, man is therefore the subject of work.* As a person he works, he performs various actions belonging to the work process; independently of their objective content these actions must all serve to realize his humanity, to fulfill the calling to be a person that is his by reason of his very humanity (John Paul, 1981; emphasis in the original).

John Paul is unyielding in his argument that the subjective dimension of work is more important than the objective dimension.

*... the primary basis of the value of work is man himself, who is its subject ... in the final analysis it is always man who is the purpose of the work, whatever work it is that is done by man -- even if the common scale of values rates it as the merest "service," as the most monotonous, even the most alienating work* (John Paul, 1981; emphasis in the original).

John Paul was not the first to assert this priority. J.M. Clark took the same position in 1947.

The most important product of industry is what it does to the lives of the people who work in it; and for its own safety it needs to contribute to make

well-balanced individuals whose social faculties are neither atrophied nor perverted (Clark, 1948).

It is with regard to the need for creative opportunities, however, that John Paul is most eloquent, instructing not from social ethics but from theological doctrine. He cites from Genesis and Revelations.

The word of God's revelation is profoundly marked by the fundamental truth that *man*, created in the image of God, *shares by his work in the activity of the Creator* and that, within the limits of his own human capabilities, man in a sense continues to develop that activity, and perfects it as he advances further and further in the discovery of the resources and values contained in the whole of creation (John Paul, 1981; emphasis in the original).

Work and the persons who do the work change under the influence of the entrepreneur who introduces new products and services, sets up new processes of production, brings new materials into the production process, penetrates new markets, and initiates new business plans to provide direction to the economic enterprise. In that sense, the entrepreneur is the principal agent transforming the worker both as an instrument and as a person.

The entrepreneur is the driving force behind the evolution of human communication from the oral and script stages into the electronic stage with its digital revolution because it is the entrepreneur who figures out how to transform a strictly technological advance in electronics into an economic gain, thereby making it possible to incorporate that advance into economic affairs.

Because meeting and interacting with others were demanding and costly in the oral and even the script stage of human communication, economics more easily could construe humans as self-reliant, compelled to undertake work alone for whatever gains were associated with that labor, and inward-directed, aggressive, competitive *individuals*. When meeting (in real and virtual space) and interacting with others became more convenient and less expensive in the electronic stage, humans more readily can be seen along the other dimension of their nature as socially-reliant, open to working together especially on tasks that cannot be done as well or at all by the *individual* alone, and outward-directed, nurturing, cooperative *persons*.

Work is the principal means for humans to *have more* and to *be more*. The choices they make, in this regard, powerfully determine who they are, what they are, and to whom or to what they belong.

Years ago Maritain identified a conundrum embedded in scientific, industrial, and technological change. Would that change make human beings subservient to the machine and to technique or would it lead to greater human freedom? Would any given change enslave or liberate humankind (Maritain, no date)? Much depends, we suggest, on whether human beings are seen as having strictly instrumental value that varies as science, industry, and technology change or as having a sacred dignity, a birthright which no one has a right to appropriate.

## 5. Leisure

Mainstream economics defines leisure in negative terms, as time spent not working. Other than reinforcing the passivity of the economic agent, this unfortunate definition which is drilled into the heads of students of economics tells us very little about leisure.

Stockhausen defines leisure in positive terms.

leisure ... [is] non-work that nourishes the health, happiness, and fulfillment of the whole human person. It is time and activity that is not driven by duty, accomplishment, or productivity, time and activity that celebrate being human rather than having and consuming material things. It thus includes such things as quiet time alone, "quality" time with family and friends, and engagement with the arts (Stockhausen, 1998).

Personalist economics also sees leisure in positive terms involving both the human body and human spirit and crucial to personal development. A coffee break and a power-nap at work re-energize the body. A good night's sleep allows the body to handle the demands of the following day. Bed rest after a surgical procedure helps heal the human body. A week in the mountains or at the seashore can infuse the human spirit with the beauty of the natural environment. An afternoon at a ball game with grandfather can instill in a youngster dreams of one day succeeding on the same field of play.

Professional athletes at times describe their work as getting paid for *playing* a kids' game. Leisure can be taken quite seriously as the continuation into adulthood of the play activity which is so vital to the development of children and what they are urged to do every day. In the end, leisure means setting aside time to care for the human body and spirit in ways other than the ones which are available through work and consumption.

According to John Paul, there are two chief threats to human development: disordered work and consumption.

The historical experience of the West, for its part, shows that even if the Marxist analysis and its foundation of alienation are false, nevertheless alienation -- and the loss of the authentic meaning of life -- is a reality in Western societies too. This happens in consumerism, when people are ensnared in a web of false and superficial gratifications rather than being helped to experience their personhood in an authentic and concrete way. Alienation is found also in work when it is organized so as to ensure maximum returns and profits with no concern whether the worker, through his own labor, grows or diminishes as a person, either through increased sharing in a genuinely supportive community or through increased isolation in a maze of relationships marked by destructive competitiveness and estrangement, in which he is considered only a means and not an end (John Paul, 1991).

Stereotypically both disorders are revealed, though not well understood, in the form of the workaholic and the compulsive consumer. To the one, working is everything; to the other,

acquiring and having is everything. Neither one understands or values leisure. Both are like a canvas that a deranged artist has slashed with a knife, both are grotesque caricatures of what was meant to be. Drug abuse and pornography, John Paul says, reflect a human life in disarray through disordered consumption (John Paul, 1991). *Filling that void, repairing that torn canvas, is the purpose of leisure.* In this regard, John Paul compares human work and leisure to the six days of God's own work in creating the universe and His one day of rest (John Paul, 1981).

Following John Paul, a well-ordered human person is one who knows the difference between the needs of the body and the needs of the spirit, and understands that the means which meet the one do not also meet the other. Leisure is absolutely necessary to acquiring that knowledge and understanding. The challenge to the economic order and to economics is to value humans accordingly, to appreciate the full range of their needs, and to recognize that they are more than instruments of efficiency and profits. Humans are most especially ends in themselves, living works of art in progress who require leisure to become what they were meant to be: very nearly divine [6].

### **6. Consumption, Work, and Leisure: The Need for Limits**

Kavanaugh warns of the conundrum of producing and consuming.

... without consuming we're dead. Without things, we could have no embodied reality. The point of the critique is our *attitude* about producing and consuming. Are they extensions, revelations, celebrations of the personal world, or do they crush and repress it? Lovely clothes, a beautiful home, diverse cuisines, stirring art and play are, at the finest, the splendid embodiment and expression of personhood.

If we have no interior life or relational life, however, they can become our prisons (Kavanaugh, 2006).

Certain limits inhere in economic affairs and others must be imposed because humans are embodied spirits. Human materiality assures certain physical limits regarding consumption and work. The human body can consume only so much in one sitting so to speak, and can work continuously only for some fixed number of hours without rest. As with capital equipment, the human body cannot be run continuously without maintenance before it breaks down.

Without other limits on what and how much we consume, on how long and how hard we work, and how much we allow for or indulge in re-vitalizing leisure activities, limits deriving from the virtue of moderation that reside quietly in the human spirit, our development as human persons is arrested or misdirected. Disregard those limits, and consumption becomes gluttony and obesity, work transforms into obsession and exhaustion, and leisure changes into escape and boredom.

To managers, moderation urges growing in the business they know by improving product and workforce and by garnering consumer goodwill as surer ways to profits than moving into alien ventures, where profits are speciously

enticing. To employees, it cautions holding wage demands within profitability and urges increasing that by improving productivity. To consumers, moderation warns that not all that neighbors have is worth their getting and increasing one's income, while a healthy ambition, should not be pursued at the expense of personal growth, family welfare, community values, and friendships (Danner, 2002).

The practical virtues of justice, fortitude and prudence, in addition to moderation, provide useful and effective limits on consumption, work, and leisure, and their faithful practice contributes powerfully to the realization of the full potential of the human person. The practice of justice in the marketplace, for example, condemns the ill-gotten gains from shoplifting and passing counterfeit currency which otherwise boost consumption and transform the consumer into a criminal. Fortitude practiced in the workplace strengthens the supervisor who has an obligation to reject discriminatory practices which diminish human beings as a persons. Prudence involves the exercise of sound judgment regarding where and when to impose specific limits on consumption, work and leisure, and under what circumstances to change those limits.

Mainstream economics teaches that human wants are unlimited and human needs are irrelevant. While it agrees that the economic agent necessarily is self-centered personalist economics insists that proper development as a human person depends on limiting those wants and subordinating them to human needs. Self-centeredness degenerates into selfishness when the virtue of moderation is disregarded and the things sought after become ends in themselves rather than the means to satisfy wants and meet needs (Danner, 2002).

If extreme selfishness is not checked by the virtue of sympathy or other-feeling which assures that both parties benefit from the exchange, a transaction involving agents who are *acting persons*, are free to act, cannot be completed. To the extent that these two virtues are neglected in economic affairs, personal and economic chaos follows.

### **7. Consumption, Work, and Leisure: Effect on Human Development**

Materiality matters importantly to human nature, and material means are necessary to meet human material needs. To a large extent, mainstream economics and modern culture agree. However, John Paul warns that material means will not satisfy the nonmaterial needs of humans, and condemns the "consumerism" of advanced western economies for perpetuating that false and dangerous value. Consumption is good, he says, unless it leads to a life spent in the enjoyment of material things as ends in themselves (John Paul, 1991). In mainstream economics, human wants are regarded as unlimited and *having more* is taken as essentially good. In personalist economics, *having more* matters less than *being more*. Acquiring more of the goods of the world is less important than developing more fully as a human person.

Because in personalist economics human beings are more important than mere things, labor is more important than capital. Indeed, humans alone have rights because they are persons, because they are endowed with an intelligence and free will that differentiate them from all other creatures. Aquinas calls them "the crown of creation," a judgment shared by personalist economics. In the world of economic affairs and mainstream economics, intentionally and otherwise humans often are reduced from persons to things, objectified more and more in both

the workplace and the marketplace.

Human beings are “embodied spirits” and as workers are resources to be applied to the production of goods and services. However, humans have worth not because they are useful toward some economic purpose though this kind of valuing has its own practical application in wage and salary administration and for that reason cannot be dismissed out of hand. Rather, each one has a dignity and worth beyond human measure. In mainstream economics and modern economic affairs, human value commonly is determined instrumentally. One’s own worth is determined by the value attached to one’s work. In personalist economics, this kind of valuing is superseded by the sacred dignity of every living, breathing human person.

Workers have work-related needs and rights are necessary in order to assure the preservation of their fundamental dignity as human persons and access to the means necessary for their material survival, such as the right to associate, the right to strike, the right to a safe workplace, the right to a day of rest. To some extent, mainstream economics and others engaged in economic affairs also affirm these rights but as *legal* rights, as flowing from the hand of government and therefore contingent. Personalist economics sees them as *natural* rights flowing from the hand of the Creator and therefore inalienable.

Humans are more than the one-dimensional self-interested, self-absorbed, and passive individuals of mainstream economics and contemporary western culture. They are the two-dimensional, *acting persons* of personalist economics with an identity as separate and unique human beings never to be taken simply as a cog in a machine or as totally subordinate to the whole, and at the same time united in solidarity with family, company, neighborhood, region, nation, and all humankind. Human existence *always* is coexistence.

## 8. A Final Word

The economic agent is at the very heart of economic affairs. Absolutely nothing in economic affairs happens without the hand of a human being at work. It follows that economic agency is at the core of our understanding of economic affairs and therefore how we express that understanding theoretically.

Will economic theory continue to follow an economic agent who is a pleasure-pain calculating machine that functions in the passive mode, an individual who changes but responds predictably to the opportunities available, who maximizes net personal advantage, whose worth is determined instrumentally, for whom all existence is solitary existence and *having more* matters above all else?

Or will theory be constructed around an economic agent who is a living, breathing existential actuality who functions in the active mode, an ever-changing person who becomes more fully a human person by maximizing personalist capital, whose decision making is not predictable because ultimately every person is unique and wrapped in mystery, whose worth is a birthright which no one may take away or diminish, for whom all existence is co-existence and *being more* matters above all else?

*Homo economicus* or *the acting person*. Which will it be?

### Endnotes

1. Danner's *The Economic Person* which was published in 2002 is constructed around Mounier and the Paris strand. We are not aware of any personalist economics constructed around Husserl and the Munich strand.
2. We attribute the beginnings of personalist economics in the United States to William Water's 1952 doctoral dissertation in which he connects the concept of the person in economic affairs primarily to the pioneering work of Schumpeter on the entrepreneur. Although he cites Scheler, Gilson, and Bergson, Waters relies secondarily on work in psychology – after economics, a special interest of his as a graduate student -- for a behavior-based concept of the economic agent.
3. Neuhaus in 1992 may have been the first to use *the acting person* in the context of economic affairs (Neuhaus, 1992).
4. Literal translation: “person signifies that which is most perfect in all of nature.”
5. John Paul spoke of the difference between *having* and *being* in an earlier encyclical letter (see John Paul, 1987, wherein he calls attention to this difference as pointed out by Paul VI in *Populorum Progressio*).
6. See John Paul, 1995, paraphrasing the 8<sup>th</sup> Psalm, verses 5-6.

## References

- Clark, J. (1948), *Alternative to Serfdom*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, NY.
- Clarke, J., C. Dawson, and D. Bredehoft (2004), *How Much Is Enough: Everything You Need to Know to Steer Clear of Overindulgence and Raise Likeable, Responsible and Respectful Children*, Marlowe and Company, New York, NY.
- Crosby, J. (2004), *Personalist Papers*, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington, D.C.
- Danner, P. (2002), *The Economic Person: Acting and Analyzing*, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Lanham, MD.
- Faulhaber, R. and M. Faulhaber, translators, (1955), *Human Ascent*. Fides Publishers Association, Chicago, IL.
- Gilson, E. (1940), *The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy*, translated by A.H.C. Downes, Charles Scribner's Son, New York, NY.
- John Paul II (1991), *Centesimus Annus*, available at:  
[http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_01051991\\_centesimus\\_annus\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_01051991_centesimus_annus_en.html) (accessed 7 December 2009).
- John Paul II (1994), *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, NY.
- John Paul II (1995), *Evangelium Vitae*, St. Paul Books & Media, Boston, MA.
- John Paul II (1981), *Laborem Exercens*, St. Paul Editions, Boston, MA.
- John Paul II (1987), *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, St. Paul Editions, Boston, MA.
- Kavanaugh, J. (2006), *Following Christ in a Consumer Society*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY.
- Kavanaugh, J. (2001), *Who Counts as Persons: Human Identity and the Ethics of Killing?*. Georgetown University Press, Washington, DC.
- Maritain, J. (1971), *Art and Scholasticism*, translated by J.F.Scanlan, Books for Libraries Press, Freeport, NY.
- Maritain, J. (1947), *The Person and the Common Good*, translated by John J. Fitzgerald, New Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, NY, available at:  
<http://maritain.nd.edu/jmc/etext/CG01.HTM> (accessed 6 January 2010).
- Maritain, J. (no date), *The Philosophy of History in General*, available at:  
<http://maritain.nd.edu/jmc/etext/philhis1.htm> (accessed on 5 January 2010).

Mounier, E. (1952), *Personalism*, translated by Philip Mairet, Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., London, UK.

Neuhaus, R. (1992), *Doing Well and Doing Good: The Challenge to the Christian Capitalist*, Doubleday, New York, NY.

O'Boyle, E. (1994), "Homo Socio-Economicus: Foundational to Social Economics and the Social Economy," *Review of Social Economy*, Vol. LII, No. 3, pp. 286-313.

Rourke, T. and R. Chazarreta Rourke (2005), *A Theory of Personalism*, Lexington Books, Lanham, MD.

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (2009), "Personalism," available at:  
<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/personalism/> (accessed 6 January 2010).

Stockhausen, G. (1998), "Leisure in the Economic Thought of John Paul II," *International Journal of Social Economics*, Vol. 25, No.11/12, pp. 1672-83.

Waters, W. (1952), *Entrepreneurship, Dualism, and Causality: An Appreciation of the Work of Joseph A. Schumpeter*, doctoral dissertation, Georgetown University, Washington, DC.