

THOMAS W. SMITH

# Catholic Social Thought and Modern Liberal Democracy

## *Introduction*

HOW MIGHT PROPONENTS of Catholic social thought persuade citizens of the United States to take the Church's social teaching seriously? Several problems intrude. The United States does not have a tradition of Christian Democratic parties. These parties, whose platforms were marked by a concern for personal dignity, subsidiarity, and a lively sense of human frailty, often suffused the political life of nations such as Holland, Germany, France, and Austria with principles congenial to those of the Church's social teaching.<sup>1</sup> By contrast, as Louis Hartz argued, the liberal tradition is *the* tradition in American political life, and this may lead to a certain myopia regarding alternative ways of approaching public policy questions.<sup>2</sup>

Complicating the problem is the fact that it is not clear where either side stands in relation to the other. This is partly a result of a long history of mutual suspicion. The anti-Catholic tradition in American public life runs deeper than we like to think.<sup>3</sup> Even more important, however, is the long history of antagonism between the Church and proponents of modern democracy. While this history has been redressed somewhat by the Church's recent promotion

of democratic regimes throughout the world, advocates of democracy may still think of the Church as a relatively recent friend who sometimes backslides.<sup>4</sup> Then again, citizens of liberal democracy—including many Catholics—are often suspicious of the Church's claim to authority on social issues. Why should any American think of this body of teaching as authoritative in the current marketplace of ideas? This attitude is partly a function of the separation of church and state, with its sense that the Church is a voluntary social organization among many others. Recent scandals do not help in this regard. For many, the Church appears to be just another interest group advocating yet one more political agenda. If so, there is no compelling reason to give its social teachings any more weight than we would give to a pundit's or lobbyist's proposals.

Finally, part of the difficulty is that it is not clear where the Church stands in relation to liberal democracy.<sup>5</sup> Sometimes she praises, and other times criticizes, aspects of it. How can we expect our fellow citizens to take the Church's teachings about liberal democracy seriously when she seems muddled about what she thinks? Do we have to resolve this ambivalence before we start a conversation? One cannot explain this ambivalence away by arguing that the Church's social teaching has evolved, for we find that ambivalence persists in more recent encyclicals.<sup>6</sup> If the notion of an evolving social teaching will not do, can we resolve the ambivalence by seeking some underlying consistency in the Church's teachings about liberal democracy? Perhaps, but both these strategies assume that ambivalence should be avoided. Yet, isn't ambivalence a proper response to an ambiguous situation? What if Catholic social teaching's ambivalence toward western liberal democracies reflects ambiguities within them? If so, we should try to understand how modern democracies like the United States contain ambiguities that invite ambivalent judgments. In fact, perhaps this goes a long way toward answering our question about how to get Americans to take Catholic social thought seriously. Perhaps beginning a profitable conversation entails understanding better the ambiguities within American

political practices and showing how Catholic social thought can move beyond them in a way our conventional practices cannot.

Such a rhetorical strategy need not be interpreted as sectarian partisanship. Many thoughtful supporters of liberal democracy agree that it is in an ambiguous situation. On the one hand, liberal democracies are enormously successful. This is evident in the waves of democratization that have swept the globe for the last two centuries. In addition, almost all political regimes today—even nondemocratic ones—increasingly legitimize themselves by using democratic terms. On the other hand, modern democracy is plagued by a nagging anxiety over its meaning and direction. We are told that democracy is victorious, but that its guiding ethos paves the way for small-souled people who herald the end of history.<sup>7</sup> We are warned that the very success of democracy blinds us to the possibility of “illiberal” forms of popular government that use majority will to tyrannize.<sup>8</sup> We are cautioned that democratic freedom is threatened not only by the resurgence of fundamentalist religion but also by the acids of globalizing capitalism that it promotes.<sup>9</sup> Apparently, the threats to modern democracies are not merely external. Somehow their inner meaning leads to a series of difficulties. So let us begin with some reputable opinions about the meaning of modern liberal democracy in the United States that arise within the horizon of our practices. Perhaps this will help us understand better how to present a persuasive case for Catholic social thought in our context.

### *Liberal Democracy's Self-Understanding*

Political theorists often legitimate liberal democracy by sketching a genealogical narrative. Prior to the discovery of liberal democracy, the story goes, societies were devoted to fundamental conceptions of the human good derived from religion. At best, these conceptions fostered intolerance. At worst, they occasioned violence and repression insofar as those with different conceptions of the human

good were threats to the principles that grounded the social order. Liberal democracy was born out of disgust with the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century wars fought over religious identities. As Judith Shklar says,

Liberalism . . . was born out of the cruelties of the religious civil wars, which forever rendered the claims of Christian charity a rebuke to all religious institutions and parties. If the faith was to survive at all, it would do so privately. The alternative then set, and still before us, is not one between classical virtue and liberal self-indulgence, but between cruel military and moral repression and violence, and a self-restraining tolerance that fences in the powerful to protect the freedom and safety of every citizen.<sup>10</sup>

History is written by the winners, of course, and liberal democracy is nothing if not a winner. One would do well to remember that this narrative is problematic, however. First, the Wars of Religions did not result merely from theological differences. They were also the result of early modern princes seeking to consolidate the growing power of their emerging nation-states by manipulating religion to suit the needs of these emerging states.<sup>11</sup> Second, the democratic nation-states that finally emerged victorious in the latter half of the twentieth century employ various kinds of civil religion in order to justify their comprehensive claims about political authority and the good life; they have by and large not abandoned religion in public life but merely employed it in a different vein.<sup>12</sup> Third, modern liberal democracies can be just as rapacious and violent as their pre-modern predecessors. While it is important to point out defects in this narrative, it is also no use complaining about its persistence; it has the kind of status associated with a founding myth. One must accept that it is compelling to those who believe in it and try to understand what it reveals about the self-understanding of the regimes for which it functions as a kind of glue. In this vein, we should note the centrality of safety and freedom in Shklar's passage. Accord-

ing to reputable opinion, the legitimacy of liberal democracy flows from its ability to guarantee its citizens security and freedom. Let us explore each in turn.

### *The Security Imperative*

Most obviously, “security” requires all the apparatuses associated with “national security”: large standing armies with enormously destructive conventional capabilities, nuclear weapons in many cases, long-term devotion to military spending and technological innovation in arms, intelligence services, an international system based on the balance of power among autonomous nation-states, and so on. This, however, does not exhaust the meaning of the security imperative for modern liberal democracies. From its founding, liberalism set an unheard of goal for itself: to secure the dignity of human life by ameliorating the harshness of the human condition for its citizens. While not usually associated with liberal democracy, Hobbes’s *Leviathan* provides an unusually clear example of the attitude toward security underlying modern democracy’s claims to legitimacy.<sup>13</sup>

We can get a sense of Hobbes’s intention if we reflect on the title of his most famous book. *Leviathan* refers to a sea monster mentioned in the book of Job. For Hobbes, “Leviathan” stands for all the impersonal forces in the world that cause human suffering. It symbolizes natural disasters such as hurricanes, earthquakes, floods, and tornadoes. It also points us to miseries such as sickness, death, depression, anxiety about death, psychological turmoil, and moral and physical evil. For Hobbes, the point of the book of Job is to reaffirm the inevitable harshness and limits of the human condition; the author of Job believes that human beings can neither understand nor control these forces. To try is hubris insofar as it denies man’s place in the created order; humble awe in the face of God’s majesty and inscrutability is the only proper response to questions arising out of suffering. Nevertheless, Hobbes thinks that this affirmation of limits

is cruel, for it prohibits efforts to ameliorate human suffering by condemning them as prideful. By positing a perfect world beyond the here and now, traditional religion resigns believers to the harshness and limited character of the human condition. Hobbes's goal is not to secularize the political sphere so as to secure the conditions for tolerance. It is not even merely to subdue organized religion to the sovereign's will. The point is more radical: for Hobbes, the sovereign of a modern state is legitimate to the extent that he or she renders the lives of his or her citizens more secure in the broadest sense—safer, more convenient and prosperous, less subject to suffering in all its manifestations. The only way of doing so, however, is to repudiate the notions of human and natural limits associated with ancient western philosophy and traditional Christianity. Hobbes understands his project as active, practical, and compassionate.

Thus Hobbes is a theorist not just of state power but also of scientific, economic, and technological power insofar as these are required to ease the human estate. Further, for him, power must not be limited by considerations of teleology precisely because such considerations might serve to limit the ways power can be used.<sup>14</sup> For these modern powers to be developed they must be capable of being put to whatever use human desires specify.<sup>15</sup> In this sense, Hobbes considers modern science to be a power, for it helps us manage disease, nature, the limits of space, and psychological suffering; it makes our lives more convenient, faster, easier, more comfortable, and more productive.<sup>16</sup> Modern economics is a power. Hobbes's economics is crude, and it will be deepened in thinkers like Locke, Smith, Ricardo, or Keynes. But the germ of some of the central notions of modern economics is there. Wealth does not have to be stagnant; it can be grown through effective state policies and efficient allocation of resources. Wealth should not be thought of merely in terms of currency or natural resources; technological dynamism, individual initiative, and entrepreneurship are important elements in the creation of wealth. Individuals are better off and societies are stronger in a host of ways if they can find ways

to create the political conditions for positive economic growth.<sup>17</sup> Modern political science is also a power, for one can use it to create a peaceful, prosperous commonwealth with stable institutions.

Contemporary liberal democracies inherit this comprehensive understanding of security. The legitimacy of American administrations flows in part from their ability to improve the quality of everyday life and minimize suffering. On the more obvious level, this means that people's lives and property must be safe from foreign invasion and domestic threats. It also means that to be considered legitimate, our government must do its best to secure the conditions of a safe, healthy, convenient, comfortable, and prosperous life from the forces that tend to impinge on it. In the economic realm, for example, it is axiomatic in public speech that the democratic state has a duty to preserve positive economic growth. Presidential administrations in the United States often stand or fall depending on whether they are seen as fostering the expansion of the GDP. Consequently, the state has to employ fiscal and budgetary policies that insure the proper management of the nation's economic life. Of course, modern economies pose their own social dangers, to which the state must respond. Market capitalism has negative consequences—what economists call “externalities”—ranging from environmental problems, to more-or-less permanent structural unemployment due to technological and market dynamisms, to the creation of pockets of poverty and the problems associated with the existence of a permanent underclass. For a large part of the twentieth century there was a working consensus in most western democracies that governments had some moral responsibility to reign in the excesses of the market through environmental and economic regulation and to provide a social safety net that protected people from the more rapacious elements of capitalism. In sum, the state was seen as having duties both to promote the kind of technologies that would bring about economic progress and to protect people from the negative consequences of those technologies.

In this vein it is worth noting that the legitimacy of liberal democracy is essentially connected to the advancement of modern technology. Modern technology is centrally involved in harnessing power and energy—thermal, hydroelectric, chemical, solar, atomic, economic. The goal is to provide easily accessible resources that can be put to a variety of uses, depending on the will of the individual user. “Modern technology is less a bringing forth of objects [as in ancient technology] than a setting upon, a challenging forth, a demanding of nature: that its concealed materials and energies be released and ordered as standing reserves, available and transformable for any multitude of purposes. Not the loom or the plow, but the oil storage tank or the steel mill or the dynamo, is the emblem of modern technology.”<sup>18</sup> The point is to master the vagaries of the world so as to make them less threatening to human purpose and desire. Modern democracy is thus not merely allied with modern technology; they are in a symbiotic marriage and divorce is impossible.<sup>19</sup>

### *The Security Impasse*

Paradoxically, the relentless pursuit of security has made citizens of liberal democracies less secure in a variety of ways. To take an obvious example, Islamist terrorists know that one way to undermine a state that rests its claim to legitimacy on its ability to deliver security is to make its citizens feel systematically unsafe. From this perspective, terrorism is a terrible, terribly clever political response to western democratic claims about legitimacy. To take another example, the United States seeks military power so that it can guarantee its citizens’ security. However, rogue states like North Korea or Iran know that the only way to guarantee that they will not be overrun by the superior conventional forces of western democracies is to acquire weapons of mass destruction. Paradoxically, the security imperative renders us less secure by contributing to the proliferation of nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction.

In the economic realm, most liberal democratic states have adopted the argument of neoclassical economics that the most effective way to ensure long-term positive growth is to promote international trade and economic cooperation. So they have fostered free trade zones like the European Union and that created by the North American Free Trade Agreement. They have used tax incentives to compete for multinational corporations and have lowered trade barriers. They have made free flow of capital across borders easier. These policies may have a positive impact on overall GDP growth. One question is whether this aggregate measure obscures the ways in which free trade harms particular individuals and communities. Another is whether such measures obscure more important assessments of human development that cannot be quantified.<sup>20</sup> In addition, however, the drive to make citizens' lives more dignified by making them wealthy through participating in a global economy also makes it more difficult for modern democratic states to manage their economies in a way that protects their citizens from the vagaries of the market. Signing free trade agreements often mean a loss of a nation's ability to engage in the kind of protectionist policies that were hallmarks of the state's pursuit of economic security for its citizens. Moreover, liberal democracies have a harder time setting fiscal and budget policies that protect their citizens precisely because these are so affected by exogenous factors outside of their control. And these factors are harder to control in part because states have opted for more international interdependence as a way of making people more secure. Thus pursuing one dimension of the security imperative in the economic realm undermines another.

In addition, there is a tension between the pursuit of comprehensive security and deeply intuitive notions of democratic freedom. We have seen that the security imperative is leading to a situation in which international agreements make it more difficult for citizens to help structure the shape of their nation's economy by influencing the policy process. My point is not to ask whether such agreements are good or bad economics. Rather, it is that the secu-

rity imperative in these instances is at odds with another principle source of legitimacy for democratic nations: their ability to respond to their citizens' will. If the security imperative leads to a situation in which governments find it more and more difficult to regulate their own economic house or to respond to citizens' demands for this or that economic policy, to what degree will they continue to be able to describe themselves as representative?

Another dimension of the security impasse derives from liberal democracy's embrace of modern natural science and technology as ways to ease the human estate. Citizens of liberal democracies demand that their politicians foster the kind of technological and scientific mastery of nature required to ameliorate our mortal condition. Yet this understandable demand for publicly sponsored scientific projects aimed at easing our suffering raises the possibility that we are headed toward a "posthuman future."<sup>21</sup> When we reflect on the abyss of moral choices raised by issues like cloning, selective abortion, stem cell research, organ harvesting, eugenics, or various forms of genetic therapy we start to wonder when the drive to dignify the human condition by easing our suffering actually winds up degrading our humanity.

In short, a liberal democratic nation like the United States that pursues a comprehensive understanding of security may find it increasingly difficult to keep its citizens secure in a variety of ways.

In summary, no nation-state can assure its citizens safety from weapons of mass destruction; no nation-state can effectively control its own economic life or its own currency; no nation-state can protect its culture and way of life from the depiction and presentation of images and ideas, however foreign or offensive; no nation-state can protect its society from transnational perils, such as ozone depletion, global warming, and infectious epidemics. And yet guaranteeing national security, civil peace through law, economic development and stability, international tranquility and equality, were the principle tasks of the nation-state.<sup>22</sup>

If a regime's *raison d'être* itself becomes an obstacle to its legitimacy, it has a problem that its own self-understanding cannot resolve. The problem is not that the United States has failed to provide security of various kinds. Rather, it is that in our relentless pursuit of security, we have undermined it.

### *The Freedom Imperative*

Recall that the other source of legitimacy for modern democracy is its ability to secure freedom for its citizens. Freedom means above all the consent of the governed. Power derives its legitimacy from the people's consent, and all power must be exercised by the people or their duly appointed representatives. In liberal democracies, it is illegitimate to make people obey a law that they have not chosen themselves.<sup>23</sup> From this guiding principle flows the constitutional, institutional, and legal arrangements associated with American democracy: free and fair elections; constitutionalism (limited government under fundamental law); the rule of law generally; a system of equal rights and liberties; separation of powers; separation of civil society and church from the state; political parties that exist to help translate popular will into effective political action, and so on. However, recall Shklar's quote. The legitimating narrative of liberal democracies insists that we must reject a situation in which governments foist off a comprehensive conception of the human good on their people. The freedom implied in this narrative cannot be bound by prior determinations of what is good for human beings to be and do. Ideally, freedom should be indeterminate, for to insist on that would be to determine the choices available to individual citizens. Government derives its legitimacy in part from its ability to create and facilitate the private choices of citizens.

It is important to note the essential difference between modern liberty and ancient liberty. In the ancient world, liberty was enacted when citizens participated in the deliberations and decisions of the political body.<sup>24</sup> This meant that citizens were understood as

those who took turns ruling and being ruled. Ancient liberty accepted this alternation; a citizen was still considered free even if he occasionally obeyed someone else's rule. By contrast, in liberal democracies, legitimate government represents the people's interest or will. So even when the government commands me to do something, in principle, I have previously authorized it to issue that command. In liberal democracies, commands are the worst-case scenario, however. In order for citizens to obey only themselves in the full sense, the government must foster a private realm of freedom that is as open-ended as possible. If caveats or limitations are placed on freedom from outside or from above, one cannot be said to be governing oneself in the full sense. This notion of freedom is taken as a given in contemporary political discourse. The only questions debated are how much to regulate the power to choose, how to ensure that the greatest number of people will have access to it, and what are the most efficient means of multiplying people's choices.

### *The Freedom Impasse*

The freedom imperative, however, leads American democracies to a series of impasses. For one, the conception of freedom that the United States fosters to legitimate itself also makes it extraordinarily hard to resolve the problems its political culture creates. The conception of freedom that I have just described entails that citizens of liberal democracies are increasingly tempted to think about politics on the market model wherein the government is a service provider reacting immediately to the demands of its citizens and interest groups. These are carefully tracked through political polling, market research, or focus groups. But it is clear from even a perfunctory survey of the political problems liberal democracies face that they cannot hope to resolve them without some long-term reflection, long-term planning, and long-term sacrifice. For example, the economic policies modern societies pursue apparently lead to a degradation of the

earth. Real disasters are sufficiently far enough over the horizon to allow us to put off the problem for the time being. Yet if we think of citizenship as entailing a set of consumer preferences, we will be uniquely unprepared to make the kind of difficult choices that seem to be required. Political freedom understood on the model of consumer choice is inimical to the virtues of practical wisdom and sacrifice required to meet the kind of environmental problems that our practices have created. Traditionally, political freedom was understood to include a set of virtues of intellect and character that make possible the critical questioning of options in light of an overarching vision of the way to deliberate among competing claims to the human good. That kind of practical wisdom depends on a sustained attention to wider contexts, as well as a long-term devotion to the health of a community over several generations. Such attention and devotion are undermined by the notion of freedom as immediate access to individual unfettered choice.

More disturbingly, liberal democracies find it increasingly difficult to justify rationally the kind of freedom they advocate. If the state must be neutral among competing values to refrain from imposing a conception of the human good, what can one say about the value of protecting freedom and human rights? One might seek to justify such a commitment rhetorically: if you want the kind of life associated with liberal democracies, here are the kinds of institutions and practices you need to achieve that life. However, the minute those practices and institutions are widely interpreted as justifying a way of life that is destructive of the kind of freedom wished for, that regime has a problem. For instance, a right is increasingly understood in western democracies to be a private sphere sustained by the state that creates the space one needs to pursue individual desires free from religious hierarchy, the state itself, society, or some majority. Rights in this sense are understood as constraints on the power others have to impinge on one's ability to pursue happiness as one sees fit. Put another way, rights guarantee the free power individuals have to choose the shape of their lives unencum-

bered by others. However, rights understood in this sense are what social scientists call a zero-sum good. That is, in some cases, such as abortion or public smoking, the ability of one person to exercise a right impinges on the ability of another person to exercise the same or a contrary right. So a central problem in contemporary democracies becomes, how do we determine where one person's rights begin and another's end? In such a context, the political problem is not to generate a shared sense of value for possible future prospects; rather it is a question of who has the advantage. In this situation, the struggle over the definition and scope of rights will be conducted through political and economic power. In the political realm, it will be conducted through the courts and the policy process. Those with the appropriate resources to mount successful litigation or those with the political and financial resources to lobby public officials will see their rights expanded at the expense of the weak and uneducated. The poor, the unorganized, and those unable to gain access to the policy process will see their rights constricted. And yet, above all, rights are said to exist to protect the weak. What happens if rights are justified and assigned in ways that allow the strong to dominate the weak? One will no longer be able to give a straightforward answer to the rhetorical question that justifies our commitment to rights. However rights may be justified rhetorically, the way they are assigned will be interpreted as a power play used to dominate the weak. Human rights will become discredited.<sup>25</sup>

Some may object that I overlooked the central benefit of this conception of freedom. In liberal democracies the whole point of fostering the power of private, indeterminate choice is to avoid the kind of substantive claims about the human good that led to intolerance, exclusion, and violence in predemocratic regimes. The liberal democratic state merely facilitates the creation of the power to choose, thus allowing individual citizens to determine their own ends. Perhaps it is true to insist, as Aristotle does, that every action aims at some good. The point is that in liberal democratic regimes, the good is determined by private individuals, not the state.

This response is a classic example of the liberal democratic trend toward separation. Democracies separate society from the state in order to create a private realm of choice unencumbered by government. The problem is that this very system of separation makes political freedom problematic in modern democracies.<sup>26</sup> Arguments for the necessity of separations for the sake of liberty can be seen most clearly in the founding documents of modern democracies, such as Montesquieu's *Spirit of the Laws* or the *Federalist Papers*.

The first main separation in modern democracies is between the people and their representatives—stated another way, between civil society and the state. The second is the separation of powers within the government between the different branches, especially between the legislature and the executive. The whole system is animated by a kind of psychic spring: the desires, fears, ambitions, and wills of the participants. At the level of the state, the various branches of government are given distinct interests and independent powers so that by mutual interaction, they will be powerless to take over the whole government; “ambition must be made to counteract ambition.”<sup>27</sup> At the level of society, the community will be “broken into so many parts, interests, and classes of citizens, so that the rights of individuals, or of the minority, will be in little danger from interested combinations of the majority.”<sup>28</sup> The point of the whole “system of separations” is to render the state and social mechanism inert. Citizens will be powerless to harm each other because their ability to act on their desires has been truncated. In sum, the kind of liberty that citizens enjoy in liberal democracies is specifically constructed to minimize the effects of their choices so as to prevent mutual oppression. However, this organization of power in fact sets up a kind of generalized powerlessness: citizens are powerless to do much to one another, and the powers that be, since they are divided, find it harder to oppress the citizens.

The process by which balancing powers produces generalized powerlessness is called liberty. In effect, since citizens cannot act within such a system by ruling politically, they direct their desires

and efforts toward domains that are foreign to power or to politics. In a political regime set up this way, the principle outlets for ambition lie in the economy and culture. Not statesmen, but CEOs and celebrities will be lauded.<sup>29</sup>

The effects of this concept of freedom are deeply ambiguous. Our government fosters a conception of freedom that is associated with private, indiscriminate choice for its citizens. Citizens think of their freedom as a series of utilities that can be used to enact private goods or values. Yet since the system is intended precisely to thwart people's desires, the result will be deeply frustrating. Citizens are told constantly that they are free, and they believe themselves to be. However, they also experience a nagging sense that they are incapable of enacting their wills publicly. Indeed, they will interpret the political process as being set up precisely to thwart their will, because it is. Their national governments will seem distant and unable to respond to their particular interests, even as states promise to fulfill those interests. Ambitious individuals have no choice but to throw themselves into private cultural and economic endeavors; the only outlet for great ambition will be careerism. Thus democratic citizens experience themselves as frustrated in their political freedom even as they celebrate it.

What is the effect of all this on the psyche? If freedom is identified with unencumbered choice, the moment a decision is made—the moment a person commits himself or herself to this rather than that good—he or she is no longer free. Apparently, in this conception, freedom is only genuine freedom to the extent to which it remains undetermined. Yet as Aristotle points out, it is impossible for human choice to be without an end. For Aristotle, an end (*telos*) is not something that happens at the end of an activity. Rather, it precedes the activity insofar as an action is initiated for the sake of the purpose the actor has in mind when he or she undertakes it. Human actions are determined by the existence of the goods at which we aim, for an action would never come about in the absence of some good that the actor seeks. “For something to be good, that is, for something

to be an end, it must, so to speak, determine the act that achieves it before that act determines the end. In this respect, a will cannot will a good except insofar as it is determined by that good prior to its act.”<sup>30</sup> But what about a person who thinks about freedom in terms of the power to choose? To identify undetermined freedom as the human good is implicitly to interpret human life and the world as devoid of objective meaning and goodness. If the will is considered so open-ended as to be self-determining, the will itself becomes ultimate in each of its choices; the individual’s will becomes the source of all goodness and the creator of value. The idea of the good remains indefinable and empty so that private human choice may fill it.<sup>31</sup>

The notion of freedom as the power of private choice creates a kind of spiritual vacuum. To remain freely chosen, no choice can be intrinsically related to a human good that has a claim on us. To remain free, one must constantly expand the realm of choices available and struggle to keep choices open. In one sense, one must constantly expand the range of one’s power even in order to retain the freedom one has.<sup>32</sup> But a multitude of choices creates a kind of dizzying open space. A *horror vacui* is opened by the desire to live independently, unbound by any goods that might be attractive enough to have a claim on our wills. A spirit of anxiety and ennui comes to characterize the souls of liberal democratic citizens. They are no longer certain of their place now that all ranks are leveled; they find it difficult to navigate social relationships because social forms have been eroded in the name of authenticity and equality; they can no longer find a guide to action in tradition; they are uncertain about the value of their own opinions because they doubt the value of having an opinion. In short, they do not know how to orient their lives. The one certain thing is that they must expand the range of their choices in order to increase the freedoms available. Paradoxically, the modern democratic conception of freedom can become a source of loneliness, vacuity, anxiety, frustration, and powerlessness.

Again, liberal democracy reaches an impasse. The problem is not that the democratic state has failed to enact its conception of free-

dom. Rather, in the process of successfully enacting it, the democratic freedom generates consequences inimical to the legitimacy it seeks to foster. The situation reminds one of Aristotle's question: "If water chokes, what does one wash it down with?"

### *The Market State*

Perhaps Tocqueville was right in his worries about the future of America. He predicted that unless Americans realized the dangers inherent in our particular conception of legitimacy and took steps to avoid them, we would paradoxically combine a highly responsive, paternalistic state with a libertarian conception of freedom that grounded an atomistic society. Partly in response to these impasses, our government is taking on the characteristics of the "market state."<sup>33</sup> The kinds of impasses I have described lead to the conclusion that the state is unable to deliver the goods it had promised on the terms its citizens had become used to. This inability to meet expectations has led to a shift into a political mode in which the function of government is to clear a space for individuals or groups to do their own bargaining, to secure the best deal or the best value for the money in pursuing what they want. This process involves massive deregulation and privatization to allow the market room both to grow and to respond to various social problems that government is no longer seen as capable of resolving.<sup>34</sup> In the words of recent American politicians from both parties, government is part of the problem, not part of the solution. The process of deregulation involves outsourcing of various kinds (for instance, private prisons, pensions, police forces, and gated communities) and state withdrawal from many of those areas (such as economic and environmental regulation and social welfare policies) where it used to bring moral pressure to bear. On the market-state model, government should encourage enterprise but not protect against risk. It should increase the purchasing power and private choices of citizens, but must not take for granted anything much in terms

of agreement about common goals or social goods. The state is understood primarily as a service provider for consumer-citizens, responding to their immediate desires, tracked carefully in public opinion polls, focus groups, plebiscites, and market research. The fact that the state must not assume thick conceptions of the human good when it acts, alongside the imperative that it exists partly to facilitate the creation of indeterminate private choices, leads it to adopt a libertarian social ethos. The drive to facilitate private choice produces social atomism because the ability to expand the realm of private choices depends on disentangling oneself from the networks of social obligations that might impinge on one's ability to choose freely. Family, tradition, community, or religious duties, are all manifestations of dependencies that must be cast off to expand the realm of individual choice. Citizens of liberal democracies will find themselves more alone as they move toward their conception of liberation.

Despite its retreat from areas like economic regulation, however, the market state will not cease to try to make its citizens' lives more secure. In fact, the notion that the state exists to provide security and services to consumer-citizens leads to an increase in its powers. As expectations for government services increase, its powers will increase to meet the demand, and the increase in powers leads in turn to increased expectations from the public. One consequence of these processes is a diminished trust in the very government that is providing citizens with more and more services.<sup>35</sup> By raising short-term expectations for convenience and security, governments invite instability, reactive administration, and rule by opinion polls and interest-group pressure. In the face of declining trust, politicians will tend to secure their offices with promises of more services, and perhaps even adventurism abroad.<sup>36</sup> The government justifies its growing power as a way of helping citizens.<sup>37</sup> The state will particularly be devoted to helpful policies no reasonable person could disagree with. So the state will ban public smoking, issue warnings about obesity, pass seat belt and child restraint laws,

regulate automobiles and factory emissions, and inspect meat as well as other food products. These are not trivial goods. However, due to its unwillingness to determine the content of freedom—due to its equation of freedom with indeterminate individual choice—the state will be increasingly unable to rule on even more basic social questions as beginning and end-of-life issues, the nature of marriage, the nature of a good education, or the formation of children in light of the rapacity of the market and popular culture. One of Tocqueville’s main worries was that standing over individuals separated from each other by their desire for a free and independent life would be an immense, tutelary, protective state “responsible for securing their enjoyment and watching over their state.”<sup>38</sup>

In sum, the desire for a free and independent life that maximizes indeterminate individual choice will lead people to withdraw from those associations that impinge on their ability to lead an autonomous life, and thus from active participation in political life. Each individual is sovereign, but only in what concerns himself or herself.<sup>39</sup> In matters that concern society as a whole, he or she obeys the majority or the state. Any account of contemporary American public life has to take into account this paradoxical drive toward paternalistic statism at the top of the regime, and atomistic individualism at the bottom. Both of these trends are encouraged by modern democratic conceptions of freedom. Both are inimical to more capacious notions of the political freedom of democratic citizens.

*A Richer Anthropology, a Richer Politics:  
The Common Good as the Completion of Justice*

If my argument is right, it is no wonder that Catholic social thought offers an ambivalent assessment of western liberal democracies. In the tradition of Catholic social thought, however, the response to these impasses is not to withdraw from public life in a fit of high-minded condemnation.<sup>40</sup> Yet neither is it merely to participate more vigorously in public life on conventional terms. Rather,

such impasses present important opportunities for an evangelization of culture. In his *Ad Limina* addresses to American bishops, Pope John Paul II consistently sounded this theme: “The challenge is enormous, but the time is right. For other culture-forming forces are exhausted, implausible, or lacking in intellectual resources adequate to satisfy the human yearning for genuine liberation—even if those forces still manage to exercise a powerful attraction, especially through the media.”<sup>41</sup>

The point is to recognize the ways that our current political and cultural environment generates a series of impasses it cannot resolve on its own terms and further recognize that Catholic social thought can offer resources that help us understand and react well to this situation. This is one rhetorical strategy that might be effective in getting fellow citizens to take Catholic social thought seriously as an interlocutor. The consistent message of Catholic social thought is that the Church is at the service of humanity. To this end, it offers a theological anthropology that might help move American democracy through the impasses we face. In the face of contemporary movements that reduce human beings to biological or economic motivations, or inescapable networks of power, Catholic social thought argues that the human heart is the driving force of history. “Man is understood in a more complete way when he is situated through his language, history, and the position he takes towards the fundamental events of life, such as birth, love, work and death. At the heart of every culture lies the attitude man takes to the greatest mystery: the mystery of God. Different cultures are basically different ways of facing the question of the meaning of personal existence.”<sup>42</sup>

Politically, the point is to recognize that the search for justice is one with the search for richer visions of human flourishing and to ask how the Gospel vision and the traditions arising out of it bear on these questions. Catholic social thought presents itself as an orientation toward our common life that reorients us away from our conventional views and toward a richer understanding of personal and social life. It provides a set of principles that guide our reflection

on culture in a way that allows us to think more carefully about the problems we are facing as well as move forward in a practically wise way. It does so on the basis of a set of claims about human beings.

For Catholic social thought, human beings are created interdependent and rational. We require justice because we are made for mutual loyalty and assistance. What does it mean to be interdependent? It means that we are developmental creatures. We are not self-creators. We rely on our parents and society in order to help us develop the faculties that make us what we are. We are also interdependent because we are needy. We need food, shelter, clothing, a common economic life, and so on. We rely on various cooperative activities in the most basic ways to meet such needs. It also means that we have to share the earth's resources to meet our needs. We have to agree on rules of cooperation and sharing in order to be interdependent in a flourishing way.

We are rational. Initially, we should think of this less as implying a certain grasp of eternal principles of conduct and more as a being underdetermined. Nature has underdetermined us, and this lack of determination clears ground for our ability to reason. More than any other animal, human beings desire and act as a result of habituation and reflection, rather than mere inherited instincts. In contrast to other animals, human beings can live in a thoughtful way that involves a deliberate choice of goals. Nevertheless the actualization of these uniquely human qualities requires massive socialization. For example, our socialization allows us to discover through deliberation the kinds of goals in terms of which we can organize and interpret our actions and our lives. So we need other human beings even in order to strive to develop some conception of what human beings should strive to be and do. Moreover, we need to reflect and deliberately pursue human qualities such as fidelity, courage, or fairness in a variety of contexts and situations. These are not straightforward or easy to acquire, and reason's job, as it were, is to pick through the thicket of particulars that confront an individual actor in order to discern the right thing to do in particular situations. This implies

that there must be leeway given to the free play of practical intelligence in working out solutions to personal and social questions. The right way to structure a society is not immediately available to us in the absence of the work of reason. We can envisage a variety of legitimate ways of meeting our neediness: there are many good ways to marry and raise children, of engaging in economic life, of wearing clothes and making friends, of getting an education. Perhaps this is one of the reasons the Church has insisted that she must not be tied to any particular political or social order; to do so would give less leeway to the free play of practical intelligence. Thus Catholic social thought is an invitation to dialogue and responsible, sustained reflection; it is not a political program.

Finally, our neediness and interdependence causes us to require justice. Justice is the interpersonal virtue that aims at managing this interdependence. We should contrast this conception of justice as an interpersonal virtue with an alternative conception of justice as an intrapersonal virtue. The guiding hypothesis of liberal political theory is that no one is a better judge of my own good than I am myself. It follows that I possess certain prepolitical rights that I can hold as a trump against individuals, groups, or power structures that force me to act contrary to my own will. The problem becomes how to provide individuals a motive to act for the good of others. On this account, the origin of injustice is the inability or unwillingness of people to be other regarding. Injustice is due to a lack of sensitivity. The unjust person is prone to violate another person's rights or conception of the good because he or she does not respect or value others as he or she should. Often, the cure for this is some form of sensitivity training, wherein the offender is immersed in the worldview of those he or she is offending. For example, Philippa Foote asserts,

Virtues such as justice correspond not to any particular desire or tendency that has to be kept in check but rather to a deficiency of motivation. If people were as much attached to the

good of others as they are to their own good there would no more be a general virtue of benevolence than there is a general virtue of self-love. And if people cared about the rights of others as they care about their own rights no virtue of justice would be needed to look after the matter.<sup>43</sup>

This view makes justice out to be an intrapersonal virtue that aims primarily at making atomistic individuals less selfish. The implicit anthropology of this conception of justice is that of classical liberalism. Human beings are individuals who can be considered apart from ties of dependencies such as traditions, religions, families, or cultures. They are distinguished from the rest of nature by the possession of autonomous will, through which they create value. These wills often stand in conflict, however, and it is the duty of the state to carve out realms of rights so that individual wills can coexist. One central political problem becomes how to keep these wills in bounds, how to move people from willful egoism to other-regarding altruism.

By contrast, in Catholic social thought, because of its insistence on our created, interdependent nature, justice has a decidedly interpersonal dimension. That is, justice has a much more capacious meaning that reaches out to the question of how to structure a society so as to ensure the flourishing of each part. It aims at coordinating all the various activities we need to do in society to become genuinely human. It is not merely about forcing our characters to be more altruistic; it is also about creating flourishing relationships of mutual help and support among interdependent people in a community. In this vein it should be noted that one of the main problems with conventional democratic notions of politics is that they constrict the proper ambitions of politics. Citizens of liberal democracies inherit much of our public philosophy from early modern contract theory, which views human beings as asocial and politics as instrumental. In this tradition, politics is an artificial system that provides utilities like security and wealth, which can be put to any and all private

uses. Interest-group politics determines the distribution of these utilities and the burdens of paying their costs. Competition, not conviviality, is the law of the jungle. By contrast for Catholic social thought, politics is a coordinating activity responsible for protecting and fostering public goods that all share and all should cooperate to create. In this tradition, justice is not merely about getting egoistic individuals to be other regarding. Moreover, politics is not merely instrumental; it is not merely a tool for the expansion of individual choice. Nor is it simply about keeping people secure in a myriad of ways. Justice and politics cultivate the common good of the entire community by structuring the community rationally to ensure the flourishing of each part.

In this it inherits the best of the classical tradition of political philosophy. In that tradition, politics is architectonic because it aims at fostering and protecting a way of life; in Aristotle's terms, it seeks a conception of human flourishing. Thus a regime decisively affects every aspect of human life, including the individual's formation.<sup>44</sup> In architecture, for example, the various subcontractors and craftsmen take their cue from the architect, who decides the shape and function of the building. The architect coordinates the work of the subcontractors responsible for lighting or plumbing in light of the end for which the building will be employed. In a similar way, a regime manages the overall shape and direction of the constituent parts of the community because its participants are always acting on some conception of what is good for human beings to be and do when they pass laws or engage in typically respectable practices. Human interdependence requires division of labor, trust, partnerships, and cooperation. Harmonious cooperation requires the practically wise coordination of the various activities of a society. Zoning boards help determine the shape of a community. Tax laws influence our practices of family, justice, and generosity. Criminal laws reflect the way we conceive of our sexuality, our mortality, our need for moderation and responsibility. Thus every political act implies an answer to the question, "How do we become human together?"<sup>45</sup>

Our reason cultivates the human good through political activity in a myriad of ways that ought to be left to the free play of practical intelligence of statesmen of good will. Statesmen can create rituals of memory that point to shining examples of virtue for us to follow. For example, by setting aside Martin Luther King Day, we can remember and celebrate a man whose actions help constitute our community around the virtues he manifested. Politicians encourage certain virtues and discourage certain vices by creating systems of incentives and disincentives for conduct, from providing tax breaks for charitable contributions to passing reasonable criminal codes. Politicians also inevitably coordinate the variety of activities in a society. Politics shapes our economic lives by governing what we can and cannot sell, for example. It affects our religious practices in a variety of ways. In sum, justice is the intrapersonal virtue that coordinates the various activities of a society in a way that reaches out for a flourishing common life. Of course, politics can be abused. We can all point to self-serving party hacks who use political authority to pile up goods for themselves and their cronies.<sup>46</sup> Yet this is precisely an abuse that we rightly recoil from in light of our intuitions about the inherent dignity of political action.

All this is why Catholic social thought says that justice aims at friendship or solidarity. Justice and politics arise out of human interdependence and hence are always already about fostering a flourishing common life. Politics is not only about keeping individuals safe and free. Genuine politics is always about creating a flourishing life together. To have an anthropology that stresses our created, rational, interdependent nature is already on the way toward a compassionate politics devoted to the common good. In light of such an anthropology, politics cannot be merely about servicing the powerful and well organized and well funded. Nor can it be merely about facilitating private choice. Rather, it is about protecting a flourishing common life in which everyone can share in public goods.

In this vein Catholic social thought consistently insists that politics has a special duty to protect those people and those public

goods that the market cannot or will not. The democratic “market state” cannot simply deregulate and hope that the market will take over and resolve the social issue through the invisible hand.<sup>47</sup> We simply cannot treat the earth and human beings merely as raw materials. It follows that there can be no democracy without respect for all persons. Further, the state has a special duty to care for the weak and disadvantaged. So respect for dignity of all persons—not just the rich and powerful—is paramount in a genuine democracy. You can’t define rights merely through lobbying and litigation or else the powerful win and the weak lose. Governments are to give a preferential option for the poor in making social and economic policy. In the face of the rise of the market state, which insists that the state should deregulate and allow the economy to grow and roam as it will, Catholic social thought says that an economy is for the people, not the other way around. This means that we have to prioritize being over having; the question is not simply how much we own, it is what we are doing with what we own.

Mutual giving and support, solidarity, generosity, especially for the weak and defenseless, and evenhanded fairness are manifestations of justice. What are the requirements for developing such characteristics? They rely on a proper understanding and valuation of things in the world. For Catholic social thought, political authority serves rather than is served; it exists to coordinate the practices of a whole community in a way that fosters genuine flourishing of every part rather than the aggrandizement of the ruling part. It follows that spirituality and genuine political life cannot be distinct. Further, political authority requires a practically wise sense of the overall shape and proper end of the regime as a whole, the needs and potentials of its constituent parts, and an ability to weave those parts into a harmonious, integrated community based on firm convictions about the meaning of human dignity. When coordinating the activities within a society, a Christian statesman would consistently ask, “what notion of human flourishing and destiny do our practices and institutions imply?” In other words, the Christian en-

gaging in political action must struggle to develop a realistic assessment of the virtues and vices of his or her regime and a notion of the proper end of that regime.

### *Conclusion*

The last few paragraphs are a very cursory summary of some of the main political themes of Catholic social thought. Yet considered in light of what American democracy needs and cannot supply itself, these themes takes on a new light. Given the long history of mutual suspicion and sometimes outright animosity between the Catholic Church and modern democracy, it is ironic that the Church may have the resources to help democracy out of its self-generated impasses. According to Catholic social thought, every social ethos contains some implicit notion of ultimate human destiny; every political action, no matter how corrupted, expresses some deep longing for the felicitous communion that we naturally desire. In light of this, Catholic social thought's theological presentation of politics does not give way to a moralistic political radicalism that undermines political life by condemning in toto the way politics is practiced today. Instead, it insists at one and the same time on a lively sense of the limits of politics, but also on the grandeur of its vocation. In short, it seeks a moderate, yet elevated, politics—one that invites a dialogue into richer notions of freedom, flourishing, and human life than the conventional ones we in America are working with.

I have sketched a rhetorical strategy for entering into a dialogue with fellow citizens, trying to discover a way of getting them to take the Church's social teaching seriously. The most serious problem with this strategy is that it may lead faithful Christians to take the current impasses of liberal democracy as not only the starting point, but also the final horizon of their reflection on social and political reality. If the temptation of Catholic political reflections in the nineteenth century was to condemn liberal democracy, the temptation today is to adopt its ethos as the definitive horizon for

reflection on justice. Christian faith is not in crisis nowadays as much as faith in liberal democracy is. Just a few generations ago, apologists for liberal democracy could assume that history was like a single glacier flowing inexorably toward an ever brighter future. At that time, Christians had cause to fear that their beliefs would be ground to dust under this glacial weight, for it was comprised of uncontested and apparently mutually reinforcing trends like modern natural science, technology, democratic politics, and Enlightenment accounts of the dignity of the individual. However, the floe broke apart on the chaotic waters of world wars, the dissolution of European colonialism, critiques of Enlightenment, ecological disasters, nuclear weapons, and the realization that democracy does not automatically guarantee human dignity. Today secular advocates of liberal democracy find themselves navigating the relationships among these sometimes dangerous cultural icebergs. They do so, however, without a compass, for they participate in a culture that increasingly undermines the spiritual resources needed to deal with such fragmentation. Indeed, by seeking popular support through the pursuit of a materialistic conception of flourishing, late-liberal societies foster alienation among the spiritually sensitive people that communities rely upon for periodic renewal.

Yet we are suffering from a lack of ambition if we limit the implications of Catholic social thought to saving our democracy from its self-generated impasses. While this is a necessary rhetorical strategy in getting partisans of liberal democracy to start to seriously consider Catholic social thought as an alternative, it cannot be the final word on the subject. The final word is to be open to the work of the Kingdom of God. Human beings are not exhaustively defined by their participation in political life, however important that life is to the completion of our interdependent nature. Human life has dimensions that go beyond this. So Catholic social thought urges us to use our imagination and practical wisdom to carve out some reasonable, sane alternatives within the Church and society, while recognizing that this work is always radically incomplete

and in need of divine grace. To be useful to our fellow citizens, we most of all cannot worry about the usefulness of the Church's social teachings. This is not a strategy of condemnation and resistance. It seeks dialogue so as to learn and be of service to others. Catholic social thought urges us to the kind of unconventional wisdom and hopeful audacity that comes from hope in and love of the Kingdom of God.

### Notes

1. For an account of these parties and this process, see Virgil Nemoianu, "Compassionate Conservatism and Christian Democracy" *The Intercollegiate Review* 38, no. 1, 44–51.
2. Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America* (New York: Harcourt, 1991).
3. For recent treatments of this theme, see Philip Jenkins, *The New Anti-Catholicism: The Last Acceptable Prejudice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Mark Massa, *Anti-Catholicism in America: The Last Acceptable Prejudice* (New York: Crossroad, 2003).
4. "Before the mid-1960's, the Catholic Church usually accommodated itself to authoritarian regimes, and frequently legitimated them. After the mid-1960's [i.e., Vatican II] the church almost invariably opposed authoritarian regimes, and in some countries, such as Brazil, Chile, the Philippines, Poland, and Central American countries, it played a central role in the effort to change such regimes," (Samuel Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization In The Late Twentieth Century* [University of Oklahoma Press, 1991], 77).
5. To take an obvious example, recent documents such as *Dignitatis Humanae* and *Centesimus Annus* extol the kind of religious liberty that the Church condemned in encyclicals such as *Mirari Vos* (1832) or *Vehementer Nos* (1906). For an excellent discussion of the problem, see Pierre Manent, *Modern Liberty and Its Discontents*, ed. and trans. Daniel Mahoney and Paul Seaton (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998), 97–116.
6. *Centesimus Annus* gives a positive assessment of many aspects of modern democracies and market economies. Yet there are also deeply critical comments about certain liberal democratic conceptions of freedom and unrestrained capitalism in *Centesimus Annus* or *Laborem Exercens*. Even more dramatically, *Evangelium Vitae* argues that Christians in western democracies are living amidst a culture of death marked by a deeply flawed anthropology and conception of human freedom.
7. Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Avon Books, 1993).
8. Fareed Zakaria, *The Future of Freedom: Illiberal Democracy at Home and Abroad* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2003).

9. Benjamin Barber and Andrea Schulz, *Jihad versus McWorld: How Globalism and Tribalism are Reshaping the World* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1996).
10. Judith Shklar, *Ordinary Vices* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1984), 5. For other prominent statements of this view, see John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 50; Rawls, "Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 14 (1985): 225, 230; Jeffrey Stout, *The Flight from Authority: Religion, Morality, and the Quest for Autonomy* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 13, 235–42; Bruce Ackerman, "Why Dialogue," *Journal of Philosophy* 86 (1989): 5–22.
11. For this point, see William T. Cavanaugh, "A Fire Strong Enough to Consume the House: The Wars of Religion and the Rise of the State," *Modern Theology* 11, no. 4 (October 1995): 397–420.
12. For an extended account, see Michael Burleigh, *Earthly Powers: The Clash of Religion and Politics in Europe, from the French Revolution to the Great War* (New York: Harper-Collins Publishers, 2005).
13. Whatever his preferences for arranging political institutions, Hobbes's insistence that sovereignty must be traced back to the voluntary delegation of authority on the part of the majority of free, individualistic citizens makes his political theory at least quasi-democratic in the modern sense. For this point, see Leo Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes: Its Basis and Genesis*, trans. Elsa Sinclair (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 63–67.
14. This is obvious in the full title of the book *Leviathan: The Matter, Forme, and Power of a Commonwealth, Ecclesiastically and Civil*. "Matter," "Forme," and "Power" refer to three of Aristotle's four causes. Left out is Aristotle's notion of final cause. In human affairs the end is the guiding principle of action, and thus its cause. Hobbes's implicit point is that a consideration of the final end of politics might serve as a limiting principle on the use of power. The denial of teleology in political affairs goes hand in hand with the desire to employ power at the service of human desires, whatever they happen to be.
15. "Felicity of this life, consisteth not in the repose of a mind satisfied. For there is no such *Finis ultimus*, (utmost ayme) nor *Summum Bonum* (greatest Good) as is spoken of in the Books of the old Morall Philosophers. . . . Felicity is a continuall progresse of the desire, from one object to another; the attaining of the former, being still but the way to the later. The cause whereof is, That the object of mans desire, is not to enjoy once onely, and for one instant of time; but to assure forever, the way of his future desire," (Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* [New York: Penguin, 1968], 160–61).
16. *Ibid.*, chap. 10.
17. Hobbes's political economy can be found in *Leviathan*, chap. 24 ("Of the Nutrition, and Procreation of a Commonwealth").
18. Leon Kass, "The Problem of Technology and Liberal Democracy" in *Life, Liberty, and the Defense of Dignity: The Challenge for Bioethics* (San Francisco: Encounter Books,

- 2002), 32. Much of my reflection on the relationship between modern technology and democracy comes from this essay.
19. The framers of the U.S. Constitution apparently understood this point, for while that document is silent about both education and morality, it cultivates scientific and technological progress: “The Congress shall have power . . . to promote the Progress of Science and the useful Arts, by securing for limited Times to Authors and Inventors the exclusive Right to their respective Writings and Discoveries” (Article 1, section 8).
  20. This is one of Nobel Prize winning economist’s Amartya Sen’s critiques of GDP as a measure of development. Instead he proposes that we measure development in terms of a country’s ability to develop specifically human capacities. See his *Development as Freedom* (New York: Anchor Books, 2000). This point finds resonance in the tradition of Catholic social thought. See, for example, John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus* (1991), sections 28–29.
  21. For a good sketch of some of the main problems, see Francis Fukuyama, *Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2002).
  22. Phillip Bobbitt, *The Shield of Achilles: War, Peace, and the Course of History* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2002), 228.
  23. “The democratic nation-state exists to determine the desires of its constituencies and translate them into legislative action” (*ibid.*, 177).
  24. For an excellent treatment of this conception of liberty and the centrality of politics to it, see Paul A. Rahe, “The Primacy of Politics in Classical Greece,” *The American Historical Review* 89 (1984): 265–93.
  25. “If the promotion of the self is understood in terms of absolute autonomy, people invariably reach the point of rejecting one another. Everyone else is considered an enemy from whom one has to defend oneself. Thus society becomes a mass of individuals placed side by side, but without any mutual bonds” (John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae* [1995], no. 20). If the struggle for individual power is paramount, everything becomes negotiable, even rights.
  26. My treatment of the tendency to separation in modern democracies owes much to Pierre Manent, “Modern Democracy as a System of Separations” *Journal of Democracy* 14, no. 1 (January 2003): 114–25.
  27. “Federalist no. 51” (Publius [James Madison], *The Federalist Papers* [New York: Signet Classic, 1961], 322).
  28. *Ibid.*, 324.
  29. Manent, “Modern Democracy as a System of Separations,” 121.
  30. David C. Schindler, “Freedom Beyond our Choosing: Augustine on the Will and Its Objects” *Communio* 29 (Winter 2002): 628.
  31. Because the will lacks all intrinsic determination, it possesses in fact no goodness with which to fill the idea of the good. In its sheer power, it is impotent to do anything but reflect its emptiness into the world. Its intrinsic emptiness is,

as it were, logically contagious. Making all values contingent upon choice does not magnify the power of the human ego, as it might seem to at first glance, but dissolves the substance of both world and ego into the empty abstraction of freedom. (ibid." 629)

32. This is Hobbes's view:

So that in the first place, I put for a generall inclination of all mankind a perpetuall and restlesse desire of Power after power, that ceaseth only in Death. And the cause of this, is not always that a man hopes for a more intensive delight, than he has already attained to; or that he cannot be content with a moderate power: but because he cannot assure the power and means to live well, which he hath present, without the acquisition of more. (*Leviathan*, 161).

33. The term is taken from Bobbit, *The Shield of Achilles*, 283–94, 302–9.

34. For a good description of this process, its theoretical basis, historical track, as well as its problematic consequences, see Robert Kuttner, *Everything for Sale: The Virtues and Limits of Markets* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

35. If the [social] contract is to be based on service delivery, . . . then it is only natural and rational for the typical citizen to reduce the level of trust in government to a point where each government service can be judged rationally in terms of its adequacy and timeliness, the distribution of costs and other burdens it entails, and the service's distribution in terms of overall social needs, social classes, and so on. It is very probable that such a democracy—let us call it “service democracy”—would have as one of its standard characteristics a low level of trust in general within which the evaluation of particular services would vary according to the distribution of specific approval and disapproval ratings. (Theodore J. Lowi, *Personal President: Power Invested, Promise Unfulfilled* [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985], 95)

36. “And this is the pathology: The desperate search is no longer for the good life but for the most effective presentation of appearances. This is a pathology because it escalates the rhetoric at home, ratcheting expectations upward notch by notch, and fuels adventurism abroad [because people tend to rally around politicians in crises]” (ibid., 20).

37. “Firmly embedded in the public mind is the relatively new idea that institutions, including government, are to be trusted and accorded legitimacy not in terms of the effort they make or in terms of the amount and character of the representation they provide but in terms of service delivery” (ibid., 94–95).

38. That power is absolute, thoughtful of detail, orderly, provident, and gentle. It would resemble parental authority if, father-like, it tried to prepare its charges for a man's life, but on the contrary, it only tries to keep them in perpetual childhood. It likes to see the citizens enjoy themselves, provided that they think of nothing but enjoyment. It gladly works for their happiness, but wants to be the sole agent and judge of it. It provides for their security, foresees and supplies their necessities, facilitates their pleasures, manages their principle concerns,

- directs their industry, makes rules for their testaments, and divides their inheritances. Why should it not entirely relieve them from the trouble of thinking and all the cares of living? (Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. George Lawrence [New York: Harper Collins, 1969], 692)
39. "Individualism is the characteristic of a society where each individual perceives himself as the basic unit of society, similar and equal to all other basic units" (Pierre Manent, *Tocqueville and the Nature of Democracy*, trans. John Waggoner [Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1996], 52).
  40. In this vein, Christians would do well to heed the advice Tariq Ramadan gives to fellow Muslims facing analogous problems in seeking a way to live within liberal democracies: "To think of our belonging to Islam in the West in terms of Otherness, adaptation to limitations, and authorized compromises cannot be enough and gives the impression of structural adjustments that make it possible to survive in a sort of imagined borderland but that do not provide the means really to flourish, participate in, and fully engage our societies" (*Western Muslims and the Future of Islam* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004], 53).
  41. John Paul II, *Ad Limina addresses: The Addresses of His Holiness John Paul II to the Bishops of the United States During Their Ad Limina Visits* (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1984), 36.
  42. John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, no. 24.
  43. Quoted in David O'Connor, "Aristotelian Justice as a Personal Virtue," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, ed. Peter French and Theodore Uehling, vol. 3 (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press), 49.
  44. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1141b 21; 1141b 24–28; *Politics* 1252a 1–8; 1260a 17–19. For an elaboration of this point, see Thomas W. Smith, *Revaluing Ethics: Aristotle's Dialectical Pedagogy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), chaps. 1, 6.
  45. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1093a 27–1094b 10.
  46. As Rowan Williams points out, this means that the spiritual and political are not separate concerns; the spiritual is the genuinely political. Williams sees that Augustine is engaged in a redefinition of the public "designed to show that it is life outside the Christian community which fails to be truly public, authentically political. The opposition is not between public and private, church and world, but between political virtue and political vice. At the end of the day, it is the secular order that will be shown to be 'atomistic' in its foundations" ("Politics and the Soul: A Reading of the *City of God*," *Milltown Studies* 19, no. 20 [1987]: 58).
  47. "It is the task of the State to provide for the defense and preservation of common goods such as the natural and human environments which cannot be safeguarded simply by market forces," *Centesimus Annus*, no. 40.