The Heritage Foundation

LECTURE

DELIVERED DECEMBER 1, 2016

No. 1280 | MARCH 7, 2017

The Crisis of Liberty in the West

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Abstract: *The West faces a deep crisis of liberty. Full human flourishing is hindered by the dawning collapse of civil society and by crony capitalism and cultural cronyism. Natural law arguments, with their appreciation of rights and duties, provide a better framework than natural rights or utilitarian arguments for understanding economic liberty; a natural law conception of social justice recognizes the state's role in economic justice but also requires respect for the proper authority of society. Globalization and new technologies are only a part of the problem. The solution to the crisis requires a better intellectual foundation for freedom and a renewed common understanding of what human flourishing looks like. This lecture was delivered as the annual Calihan Lecture on December 1, 2016, in London, England, at a conference sponsored by the Acton Institute on "The Crisis of Liberty in the West" at which Dr. Anderson received the Michael Novak Award for "outstanding scholarly research concerning the relationship between religion, economic freedom, and the free and virtuous society."*

Any lecture on the crisis of liberty in the West faces at least one serious limitation: time. I know time is in short supply, as is liberty, for the crisis of liberty in the West is expansive, multifaceted, and more deeply rooted than many of our political slogans suggest.

Passing through airport security to fly here for this conference served as one reminder of the threat radical Islamic terrorism poses to liberty. Bankrupt nations such as Greece and crumbling cities such as Detroit offer vivid examples of the role that government debt plays in fettering freedom for ourselves and our children. Governments that regulate more aspects of our lives, frequently through unaccountable bureaucrats—be they at the European Union, the United Nations, or

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Key Points

- The crisis of liberty in the West has its roots in an inadequate understanding of the person, deficient arguments for liberty, and the weakening of civil society.
- Reshaping civil society to support human flourishing depends on recovering an understanding of liberty as directional, as freedom for something.
- Human flourishing and economic freedom are intertwined; understanding liberty would help us to address both the economic and the moral crises facing our world today.
- Economic freedom is meant to give us the space to fulfill our economic duties, including the duty to support our families and serve our communities.
- Social justice is both about fulfilling our duties to the various societies of which we are a part and about the state's respecting the authority of the many societies that make up civil society.

the United States Department of Health and Human Services—also threaten our liberty.

I need not spend any more time on these concerns, as they are common examples bandied about in discussions such as these.

Many Westerners feel that the system is rigged against them; that elites despise the values of ordinary people; that political correctness prevents us from naming—and thus combatting—our enemies; that technocrats in Brussels, Geneva, or Washington, D.C., know better; and that we need a radical change to get things back on track. Witness support for Brexit and Donald Trump.

These sorts of concerns are among the standard-issue economic, political, and security threats to liberty, but underlying all of them is a deeper threat with deeper roots: an anthropological and spiritual crisis.

The deepest crisis of liberty in the West is a crisis of moral freedom. Freedom today is understood as a matter of indifference—a freedom from constraint. But freedom rightly understood is a freedom *for*—a freedom for excellence.

Look to the empty pews, the Western European churches turned into museums or mosques, the American churches turned into little more than social clubs with choirs. Look to the opioid and other drug epidemics in America. Look to the unprecedented rates of men simply dropping out of the workforce and the similarly unprecedented rates of family breakdown, nonmarital childbearing, and divorce. Look to the widespread belief that there is no truth—certainly no moral truth.

The deepest crisis of liberty in the West, then, as I see it, is a crisis of moral freedom. Freedom today is understood as a matter of indifference—a freedom from constraint. But freedom rightly understood is a freedom *for*—a freedom for excellence.

We once knew that the most important freedom was freedom from slavery to sin and for virtue. This was a belief once common—and obvious—to great Greek and Roman philosophers as well as Jewish and Christian theologians. It now seems incomprehensible to modern Western man, who cannot even understand the concept of slavery to the passions, to our ungoverned appetites. We no longer know what the West once knew: that the most important freedom is the freedom for excellence, freedom for living in accord with truth.

It is the loss of this conviction—and how it intersects with the more frequently stated concerns about liberty—that I want to explore in the remainder of the time we have together.

Let me give you an idea of what is to come. The first half of my lecture is critical, and the second half is constructive. Each half comes in three parts. So in the critical half, I discuss challenges to freedom in terms of bad intellectual defenses of economic freedom, collapsing communities, and cronyism. In the constructive half, I discuss a natural law account of economic freedom and a natural law account of social justice and close with some thoughts about anthropology and virtue.

Bad Intellectual Defenses of Economic Freedom

I begin with intellectual challenges to liberty. Bad defenses of freedom that don't see it as *for* something allow people to undermine freedom and ignore how important it is. This is especially the case when it comes to economic freedom.

Consider the recent election in the United States. The last three major candidates standing—Donald Trump, Hillary Clinton, and Bernie Sanders—hardly even paid lip service to the importance of economic freedom. Part of this is likely the result of weak intellectual defenses of market freedoms that have traditionally been proffered, the two most common being some form of Lockean self-ownership natural right and some form of utilitarianism.

Bad defenses of freedom that do not see it as *for* something allow people to undermine freedom and ignore how important it is. This is especially the case when it comes to economic freedom.

The Natural Rights Argument. Allow me to simplify things for rhetorical effect. The first way of defending economic freedom goes something

like this: Economic freedom is a demand of justice. That's it. It takes liberty as a starting point and includes economic liberty within that axiom. Locke himself tried to ground this right in self-ownership, but others, sensing that this grounding ultimately fails, have rested content to defend what one scholar has called "natural rights without foundations." That is, such arguments simply take it as a given that human beings have an unlimited, unconditional natural right to economic freedom.

This defense is flawed for at least two reasons.

First, it is not true. Economic liberty, like liberty in general, is not an intrinsic good. It is an instrumental good at the service of intrinsic goods. Thus, rights to economic freedom are both grounded in and limited by the demands of justice and the common good, rightly understood. The real economic freedom rights we possess are limited, not unlimited; conditioned, not unconditional. An argument that says all taxation is theft, for example, simply tries to prove too much. And, of course, no argument for natural rights without foundations has been able to explain why anyone has a *duty* to respect natural rights.

Second, not only is it not true, but it is not persuasive, and it is particularly unpersuasive precisely in the respects in which it is not true. That is, people find it unpersuasive that there is a natural right to economic freedom even when respecting such a right is the cause of manifest harms, either for an entire society or for a particular community. "Economic freedom is a natural right" is a pretty poor argument for someone who believes that the market is to blame for his community's plight. Witness support for both Trump and Sanders.

This reaction reflects the insight that economic freedom is meant to serve the human good, and not vice versa. So if—and this is an important if—economic freedom *does* create bad outcomes for communities, that should give us pause in defending it. It should prompt us to ask whether a particular scheme for protecting liberty has gone awry or should be conditioned, directed, or compensated for in some way.

The Utilitarian Argument. The utilitarian argument for economic freedom suffers similar defects. We can leave aside for today the fact that utilitarianism, like all forms of consequentialism, is, strictly speaking, intellectually incoherent. It tells us to pursue the greatest good, as if all goods were on a single scale and hence readily commensurable. Even if we did have knowledge of all of the consequences of our actions—which we cannot—there is no way to say how many books are worth how many works of art, compared to how many moments of divine contemplation or how many widgets produced at a factory.

Of course, consequentialism itself provides no standard at all of what should count as a good outcome—which is why it is so frequently accompanied by sheer preference satisfaction or hedonism. But in a corrupt culture, there is no reason to think that satisfying any given preference is actually good or that people take pleasure in the right things, in true goods.

By submitting every individual's most basic interest to a cloudy vision of the good of the collectivity, consequentialism makes nonsense of the idea of basic rights. That is why consequentialist arguments ultimately suffer the same two defects as the natural rights without foundations approach: They are not true, and they are not persuasive.

That a certain economic regime will produce the greatest good for the greatest number overall and in the long run says nothing at all about the justice or injustice of making specific communities foot the bill, of sacrificing their good as a means to our social goals, which is precisely why the argument fails to persuade. That a given trade policy will raise the GDP is cold comfort to people who believe that their town's way of life will be destroyed. If groups of people systematically bear the costs of creative destruction disproportionately, do not be surprised if the losers resent the winners. Again, witness support for Trump and Sanders.

If it had been the upper-middle-class way of life that was threatened by globalism, open-borders immigration, and new labor-saving robotic technologies, it wouldn't have taken a Brexit or Trump victory before the chattering classes took seriously the costs of such innovations and how they were being distributed. This is not to say that the policies proposed by Trump or Sanders would solve these problems. It is simply to say that one crisis of liberty in the West lies in some of the dominant visions of liberty, in liberty's foundations, and therefore the proper scope of liberty. Economic liberty arguments based on axiomatic natural rights and utilitarian theories get the issues wrong and fail to persuade, and the failure of these dominant accounts contributes to the public reaction against our economic liberties.

Effects of a Collapsing Civil Society on Human Flourishing

Of course, bad intellectual arguments are not the only culprits: So too is a collapsed civil society. Michael Novak got it exactly correct when he said that a free society requires both free economies and free polities, but also robust moral cultures to undergird the economic and political orders.

The crisis of liberty in the West is not simply a matter of deficient intellectual defenses of liberty. It is also a crisis of real society, a crisis of community and solidarity, a crisis of truth and virtue.

Why do so many small-business owners complain about how hard it is to find reliable workers—people who will come to work every day on time and actually do their work? Why are so many governments on the verge of bankruptcy because of out-of-control entitlement spending? It is a cultural breakdown that is part of the blame for our political mess and economic challenges.

So it's not just the ideas that matter, then. The crisis of liberty in the West is not simply a matter of deficient intellectual defenses of liberty. It is also a crisis of real society, a crisis of community and solidarity, a crisis of truth and virtue. This matters for at least two reasons.

First, in general, strong civil society is a requirement for limited government and hence for liberty. Strong families and religious communities place a check on the state, and they make liberty and self-government possible. Families and religious communities first create and then raise the next generation of law-abiding, economically productive members of society.

We all need nongovernmental, nonmarket institutions to create the people who can flourish in a free society, people who have the habits of heart and mind to flourish under the conditions of liberty. When this does not happen—when families fail to form or break down prematurely, when citizens fail to receive an education and moral formation in real human virtue—that is when we see welfare states explode and unemployment rise. That is when we see an increase in crime, drug addiction, fatherless children, and a host of other social ills. This is what simultaneously creates people unable to flourish and a government that tries to respond but frequently makes matters worse.

Second, in particular, strong civil society helps people weather the storms that are distinctive of our current moment in economic history in the West. Globalization, free trade, and new technologies can all be best harnessed for the good when our institutions of civil society are strong. In ages past, strong religious communities and moral traditions might have provided guidance on how to think about the best use of new technologies. The computing and digital revolutions have been mixed bags, but we are particularly ill-equipped to harness these technologies for good—for true liberty—because we do not know how to even think about them, because we do not have robust communities of virtue.

We also do not have the support networks—families, guilds, nonpolitical unions, fraternal organizations—to help people weather the storm of globalization. If the benefits and burdens of globalization have been unevenly spread, those on the losing side of things are particularly ill-equipped to handle it because their communities are in shambles. Weak civil society makes it harder for people to make the transition from a labor-based economy to an information economy. Add to this our class division on the basis of marriage—between those who were born to and raised by their married mom and dad, with all the developmental advantages that brings, and those who were not—and it is not surprising that many in the West feel more economically insecure than ever before. We do not have the communities that make liberty possible.

Cronyism

Rightly sensing the limits of natural rights and utilitarian approaches and seeing a decaying culture and fraying civil society, some thinkers are quick to place the blame on economic and political freedom themselves, to blame liberalism or capitalism. But if you are criticizing modern-day Western European political–economic systems or modern-day America, you are not criticizing classical liberalism or free economies—for Western Europe and America do not have free-market economies or classically liberal polities.

Many of the criticisms levelled at free markets are in reality directed at the exact opposite: crony capitalism, the collusion of big business and big government, frequently aided and abetted by big media, law, and labor: businesses that are too big to fail, that rig the economic system in their favor, that hire the best lobbyists to get government to regulate their industry in their favor, to create barriers to entry for competitors and newcomers, to weaken the labor market. Cronyism takes place whenever these groups collude to set the system up against the little guy and the new guy, when they go outside of transparent normal operating procedures to get a result in their favor at the expense of the common good.

In the economic realm, you can see this with large corporations that get the government to create thickets of regulations that only they know how to navigate (and from which they are often exempt) and that prevent smaller, more local firms from competing. You see it, too, with teachers unions and government-run schools that create licensing requirements to prevent new teachers from joining the workforce and local government-run monopolies on education while blocking school choice.

Whether it be crony capitalism or cultural cronyism, conservatives should see that the threat is not primarily voluntary exchange in markets, but government meddling to favor moneyed special interests; not classically liberal constitutions, but rulings that upset constitutional procedures.

The education example quickly leads us to another form of cronyism, what I have called cultural cronyism. Cultural cronyism occurs when the "bigs" collude to use their outsized influence to reshape the culture against the common good. It occurs when elites use their power in nondemocratic, nonaccountable ways to force social change on ordinary people. It occurs when the Supreme Court redefines marriage or strikes down laws protecting unborn babies. It occurs when federal agencies make people of faith pay for abortion or perform sex reassignment surgeries. It occurs when the NBA and NCAA, when Apple and Salesforce boycott a state because the citizens favor a policy that the elites dislike. Cultural cronyism takes place whenever the cultural left cannot win an honest debate and vote and thus forces social change through sheer power.

Whether it be crony capitalism or cultural cronyism, conservatives should see that the threat is not primarily voluntary exchange in markets, but government meddling to favor moneyed special interests; not classically liberal constitutions, but rulings that upset constitutional procedures. Supporting market economies need not entail supporting the business class, and supporting constitutions need not entail supporting judicial activism and rule by lawyers. It is thus by being more faithful, not less, to classical liberal constitutional principles that we can eliminate the unfair advantages that cronyism creates.

After all, market freedoms, though not axiomatic, do play an essential role in promoting human flourishing. Freedom of contract and freedom of association can foster real human goods. Constitutionalism, governments of limited and enumerated powers, separation of those powers, checks and balances, the rule of law—and other hallmarks of classical liberalism—all help secure justice and promote the common good. They are a recognition, as Lord Acton taught, that power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Witness what happens with unaccountable bureaucrats in the Department of Health and Human Services—or, for that matter, in Brussels or Geneva. Hence, Brexit.

Thus, classical liberal forms of government are not simply the result of Enlightenment liberal philosophy. They are fruit of Enlightenment thought along with classical ideas and ideals, medieval political thought, and the common-law tradition. America's Founding, for example, is a lot more than just John Locke. Even Thomas Jefferson admits as much, stating that:

> [T]he object of the Declaration of Independence [was n]ot to find out new principles, or new arguments, never before thought of, not merely to say things which had never been said before; but to place before mankind the common sense of the subject, in terms so plain and firm as to command their assent.... [I]t was intended to be an expression of the American mind.

And he pointed to "the elementary books of public right, as Aristotle, Cicero, Locke, Sidney, &c."

Natural Law and Economic Freedom

I have mentioned the flawed intellectual defenses of freedom and the potential for an overreaction in our critiques of them. What, then, is the alternative? I have hinted that the alternative focuses on arguments about what freedom is for, a freedom for excellence, on how freedom serves the common good and thus is limited by it too. But any sound theory of the common good needs to rest on a theory about what is good for the people who are to live in common, and any sound theory about what is good for people must take seriously their nature.

Natural law arguments take seriously man's nature as a self-directing, freely choosing agent and conclude that man needs the space and the room to determine himself.

In a word, we need to rediscover the natural law (as opposed to natural right) arguments for liberty. Such arguments ground the rightness of economic liberty, for example, in human nature and how liberty enables human flourishing. They take seriously man's nature to labor for his keep and how people should ordinarily interact with one another on a voluntary basis, how we must work together to meet human needs, and how such coordination and "togetherness" should ordinarily be achieved through free associations and free exchanges. "Government" is not the primary word for what people do together; civil society, church, charity, and businesses are how we normally work together.

Natural law arguments take seriously man's nature as a self-directing, freely choosing agent and conclude that man needs the space and the room to determine himself. More than a Lockean self-owner, they see man as a self-author. It is by exercising freedom of economic initiative and freedom of exchange that people ordinarily author their lives.

But if freedom in general, and economic freedom in particular, is grounded in man's nature and in how such freedoms allow man to flourish given his nature, then freedom is directional—it has a purpose and thus has limits. It is not a freedom *from* constraint or a freedom *of* indifference to human choices and outcomes, but a freedom *for* excellence, a freedom *for* human flourishing.

In short, then, natural law arguments strike a balance. They are sensitive to the role that markets can play in fostering initiative and innovation, creating jobs, and lifting people out of poverty, but they are not blind to the damage that market activity can cause. Natural law arguments look to the demands of justice and the ways in which liberty can both foster and undermine the common good. They take seriously the rights of private property owners but also their duties in stewarding their wealth. This, in turn, provides an intellectual framework for thinking about both the justifications and the limits of economic liberty—and the reasons that we might be concerned with market failures and excesses.

None of this provides easy or ready-made policy answers. I am only talking at the level of intellectual foundations, but what these foundations provide is a better framework for thinking through the questions we must face in forging policy. A sound natural law theory will help us distinguish cronyism from legitimate regulation. It can inform our thinking about when an economic regulation is justified because it serves the common good so that justice requires it—and when a regulation is cronyism because it simply favors special interests at the expense of the common good. Natural law can tell us when a social policy is justified because it protects and promotes human dignity—and when it is cronyism because it undermines it.

This means that defenses of freedom cannot be morally neutral, agnostic, or skeptical about the content of human flourishing. This also means that we as market actors need to have true morality inform our market behavior and not allow advertising, marketing, and new technologies to reshape our values. There is a world of difference, after all, between a society with a market and a market society.

America's Founders were able to recognize this truth and distinguish liberty from license. You can see this in what the Founders said about the limits of markets. For the Founders, there would be no markets in killing—whether it be abortion or physician-assisted suicide—and no markets in sex or in illicit drugs. There are some things money should not buy. Tragically, many Founders did not live by their own principles when it came to markets in people.

The failure to distinguish liberty from license is also part of what makes cronyism possible. By ignoring moral arguments, we end up viewing all policy and law as will to power and simply a manifestation of special interests. We lose sight of the fact that justice should govern our economic policies.

The inability of modern progressives to distinguish liberty from license is one of the great threats to real liberty in the West today. A failure to defend rightly ordered liberty has left an entire generation morally adrift, unable to harness freedom to choose excellence.

The inability of modern progressives to distinguish liberty from license is one of the great threats to real liberty in the West today. Progressive defenses of license under the guise of liberty have played a significant role in the destruction of families, religious congregations, and civil society writ large. A failure to defend rightly ordered liberty has left an entire generation morally adrift, unable to harness freedom to choose excellence.

A Natural Law Conception of Social Justice

Since I have just said a few words on natural law and economic freedom, I want to say a few words about a natural law conception of social justice and how it can help us now. Some people think social justice is a 20th century invention of left-leaning thinkers, but this starts the history of social justice midstream. To understand its true meaning, we must look farther back to its real historical origins.

The first usage of the phrase "social justice" that we know of is by a Jesuit Thomist, Luigi Taparelli, in his multivolume work published between 1840–1843 titled *Saggio teoretico di dritto naturale appoggiato sul fatto* (*A Theoretical Treatise on Natural Law Resting on Fact*). I want to emphasize two arguments Taparelli highlighted by coining the new phrase "social justice": first, that man is social by nature and belongs to many societies and, second, that man has natural duties to others in justice.

Taparelli created the phrase "social justice" to highlight that there are societies in between individuals and governments. He wanted to avoid both the individualistic and the collectivistic temptations. He wanted to point out that the truth was somewhere in between. He wanted to highlight that as a matter of nature, man is a social being and that this places duties on individuals—duties people have to their family, to their church, to their community. It also places limits on government—that government is limited by the reality of the natural family, that government is limited by the prerogatives of religious communities, that government is limited by the authority of local communities.

But I want to focus here on the duties, because one aspect of the crisis of liberty in the West is that we no longer realize we have unchosen duties. A sound understanding of our duties, however, gives us one of our best reasons for respecting liberty—to have the freedom to fulfill our duties.

This, after all, is precisely how Madison understood religious liberty. As James Madison wrote in his *Memorial and Remonstrance*, "The Religion then of every man must be left to the conviction and conscience of every man" because of a prior duty to seek out the truth about God and the created order:

> What is here a right towards men, is a duty towards the Creator. It is the duty of every man to render to the Creator such homage and such only as he believes to be acceptable to him. This duty is precedent, both in order of time and in degree of obligation, to the claims of Civil Society.

Indeed, one can understand many of the religious liberty threats in the West today as partly the result of people no longer thinking there are duties to the Creator—no special duties to God, then no special religious liberties either.

A sound understanding of our duties gives us one of our best reasons for respecting liberty—to have the freedom to fulfill our duties.

Something similar may be the case for the economy. Economic freedom is meant to give us the space to fulfill our economic duties, the duty to work to support our families, the duty to work hard and be a

good employee so as not to waste our talents or our employer's time and money, the duty to serve our customers, the duty to serve our communities.

Economic freedom was to allow people the space to fulfill these duties. Social justice is about fulfilling our duties to the various societies of which we are a part, and it is about the state respecting the authority of the many societies that make up civil society.

Take, for example, the society known as the family. The family is a natural society with its own nature and integrity. Because of the natural reality of the family, we have certain obligations. If you are a husband or a wife, you have certain duties to your spouse. If you are a parent, you have certain duties to your children, regardless of whether or not you ever chose them. And children, not Social Security administrators, have duties to their parents, especially as they age. It is the natural reality of father and child, mother and child, that creates the relationship of authority and responsibility.

This places limits on what the government can do. The government is not free to re-create the family. The government is not free to usurp the authority of parents over the education of their children or adult children over the care of their elderly parents.

The same is true for religious organizations, especially if you believe that your church has a divine origin, that it has a divine creation, so government is not at liberty to re-create it, to re-create its authority structure, or to re-create its teaching authority—that your church is something that is entrusted with a stewardship. As a result, the nature of religious authority therefore places limits on political authority and places duties upon members of the church.

None of this, however, says that the state has no role to play in economic justice, just that it must respect the proper authority of society—a society of societies—as it does so. And this means that it must also respect the proper authority of economic societies—employees and employers, consumers and producers.

But while respecting their authority and the markets that allow them to interact and fulfill their duties, government can perform certain welfare activities, as Hayek taught us, without distorting market signals and processes.[1] Insofar as government programs intended to ameliorate the forces of globalization and new technologies distort markets, they are likely to simply make matters worse by prolonging the dying process of outdated industries and preventing the necessary transitions. What a natural law account of social justice would suggest are policies that would empower more people to engage for themselves in the market and flourish.

I can illustrate this with some examples. Consider education. Some taxation-is-theft libertarians say children should receive whatever education their parents, extended families, and charities can provide and that there is no role for government. Liberals say education of children is a matter of public concern, and thus government should run schools and most children must attend them. Conservatives have traditionally said, yes, education is a matter of public concern, but justice requires us to respect the authority of parents, and whatever assistance we provide must empower, not replace, them. Hence conservative support for school choice: vouchers, education savings accounts, and charter schools—programs that help all students get the best education they can without giving the government an unhealthy monopoly on schools.

The same is true for health care. Consider the standard false dichotomy: If taxation is theft, then we should just leave health care to the market and charities; if health care is a matter of public concern, then government should run it and finance it—the typical libertarian and liberal pitfalls. The conservative alternative has been to create markets in health care while empowering patients to choose, whether through premium support, health care vouchers, tax credits, or what have you.

We need to make markets work better and work for more people by empowering more people to be market actors—empower more people to take control of their own lives and flourish.

The details of the policy need not bog us down. The concept is what matters. We need to make markets work better and work for more people by empowering more people to be market actors—empower more people to take control of their own lives and flourish.

So now the question is what can be done for working-class families, especially for workers who find their skills less and less marketable in ever-changing

markets because of the forces of globalization and new technology. Appeals to natural rights or utilitarianism will not allow us to think best about the justice in the distribution of costs and benefits of the creative destruction of free trade and globalization and how best to smooth out the rough patches. We need to think through the appropriate roles of various institutions:

- What does justice require of families and churches, of workers and business owners, of civil society and charitable organizations, of local and national governments?

- What rights and duties do these various individuals and societies have?

In a certain sense, the economic challenges I have mentioned can be classified as partly the result of a deindustrialization making way for the knowledge economy. If Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum*, which inaugurated modern Catholic social thought, was a response to the industrial revolution, what we now need is a response to the deindustrial revolution. What to do is a question for policymakers. That we need to think about what to do is a demand of justice, and the principles of natural law should inform how we think about it.

Spiritual Crisis

But the challenges of the present moment can be overstated. They can be phrased in a way that makes it seem as if globalization and new technologies simply leave people as pawns in a giant chess game, as victims of global economic and technological forces outside of anyone's control. This entirely ignores the importance of human agency and personal responsibility.

Public policy and governmental programs are not, at the end of the day, the main solutions to what threatens freedom in the West. Yes, economic anxiety is a problem, but economic anxiety is partly a result of an underlying anthropological and spiritual crisis that has resulted in an emaciated civil society uniquely ill-equipped to handle our current challenges.

I mentioned at the beginning of this talk the empty pews and the drug addictions, the problems of falling male employment and the breakdown of family that results in fatherless children, and the widespread belief that there is no truth, particularly moral truth. Some of these problems have been caused by various economic and technological changes in the past several decades. But I am not a Marxist, and changes in our values and beliefs are not simply the result of material forces. Some spiritual crises are simply the result of bad ideas and ideals, and these bad ideas and ideals have exacerbated our economic challenges.

Bad anthropology has given us natural rights without foundations or directions—a freedom *of* indifference but not *for* excellence. Bad anthropology has debased modern man's mind so that it is unable to distinguish liberty from license, rendering man unable to think about which desires should be acted on, which preferences should be satisfied. Bad anthropology has sought to liberate man from the very communities where he finds meaning and purpose, alienating man from work, from family, and from God.

The result is a working class without the values and virtues to flourish in the condition of freedom and a ruling class more devoted to a global community of elites than to its own communities. The result is a working class increasingly isolated from meaningful relationships and thus more anxious about its future in an age of economic uncertainty and a ruling class increasingly isolated from its working-class neighbors and thus unaware of their anxieties. The result is a nation—both working class and ruling class—that increasingly lacks a transcendent orientation and thus fails to have even a decent humanistic vision.

If we do not have God for a Father, we will not see our fellow man as our brother. If we are not made in the image and likeness of God, we will not treat every life as created equal and endowed with unalienable rights.

If we do not have God for a Father, we will not see our fellow man as our brother. If we are not made in the image and likeness of God, we will not treat every life as created equal and endowed with unalienable rights—indeed, we will view our neighbors as random, meaningless cosmic dust that gets in our way.

The challenge before us, then, is to recover at the very least a common understanding of what human flourishing looks like and how all of us should help to make it a reality for more people. It requires a better intellectual foundation for freedom. It requires the hard work of rebuilding civil society. It requires acknowledging our duties not to abstract humanity but to concrete, particular neighbors. And it requires respecting the freedom of religious communities to do the important work of ministering to the peripheries and forming disciples with loyalties beyond the state.

This means that now is the time for more engagement in the public square, not less. Now is the time for greater involvement in our local churches and synagogues and mosques, for greater involvement in our schools and little leagues and less time on our smartphones. And now is the time for more political engagement, not less, and pursued more thoughtfully.

Conclusion

Let me close by suggesting that everything I have said in this lecture has been a reflection on man's nature as a "dependent rational animal," in the words of Alasdair MacIntyre.

First, we are animals. We have a nature. Certain things are good and bad for us given the type of animal that we are.

Second, we are rational. We can know our nature and direct our actions accordingly, or not. We do not get to choose what is good or bad for us; we simply get to choose whether we will live in accord with our nature.

Third, we are dependent. We are social creatures. We enter life entirely dependent on our parents, and many of us will exit life in a similar condition of dependency. And all along the way we will depend on family and friends, neighbors and colleagues—farmers and artisans, merchants and bankers.

Our mistakes take place when we forget that we are simultaneously dependent and rational and animal; when we reduce ourselves merely to the level of animal and embrace a crude materialism; when we deny that reason can know truth and embrace skepticism; when we refuse to embrace our dependency under the illusion of a false sense of self-sufficiency and individualism or when we locate our dependency primarily on government rather than on family and friends and markets and God; when we propose that the government should provide for all our physical needs and that our culture should encourage us to act on our every animal instinct.

We must see that our rational capacities can know the good and that, being self-authors, we must choose the good for ourselves. Of course, there is no such thing as *the* good life, but as many good lives as are imaginable. These good lives will be various ways for dependent rational animals to flourish, and that means that initiative and enterprise, free choice, self-determination, and community are just as truly basic needs as food and shelter—and that fulfilling our duties to God and neighbor is why we were given freedom in the first place.

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Endnotes

1. In *The Road to Serfdom*, Hayek famously wrote: "There is no reason why in a society which has reached the general level of wealth ours has attained the first kind of security should not be guaranteed to all without endangering general freedom. There are difficult questions about the precise standard which should thus be assured…but there can be no doubt that some minimum of food, shelter, and clothing, sufficient to preserve health and the capacity to work, can be assured to everybody.… Nor is there any reason why the state should not assist the individuals in providing for those common hazards of life against which, because of their uncertainty, few individuals can make adequate provision." F. A. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom: Text and Documents: The Definitive Edition*, ed. Bruce Caldwell, The Collected Works of F. A. Hayek, Vol. II (London: University of Chicago Press, 2007), p. 148.

   In other writings, Hayek comes to similar conclusions. In *The Constitution of Liberty*, for example, he wrote: "What we now know as public assistance or relief, which in various forms is provided in all countries, is merely the old poor law adapted to modern conditions. The necessity of some such arrangement in an industrial society is unquestioned—be it only in the interest of those who require protection against acts of desperation on the part of the needy." F. A. Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty: The Definitive Edition*, ed. Ronald Hamowy, The Collected Works of F. A. Hayek, Vol. XVII (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), p. 405. Hayek immediately adds caution about *how* the government might provide these protections, stressing caution against market intervention: "Are we really so confident that we have achieved the end of all wisdom that, in order to reach more quickly certain now visible goals, we can afford to dispense with the assistance which we received in the past from unplanned development and from our gradual adaptation of old arrangements to new purposes? Significantly enough, in the two main fields which the state threatens to monopolize—the provision for old age and for medical care—we are witnessing the most rapid spontaneous growth of new methods wherever the state has not yet taken complete control, a variety of experiments which are almost certain to produce new answers to current needs, answers which no advance planning can contemplate. Is it really likely, then, that in the long run we shall be better off under state monopoly? To make the best available knowledge at any given moment the compulsory standard for all future endeavor may well be the most certain way to prevent new knowledge from emerging." Ibid, p. 414.

   Even in the *Mirage of Social Justice*, Hayek embraced various welfare provisions: "There is no reason why in a free society government should not assure to all protection against severe deprivation in the form of an assured minimum income, or a floor below which nobody need to descend.… So long as such a uniform minimum income is provided outside the market to all those who, for any reason, are unable to earn in the market an adequate maintenance, this need not lead to a restriction of freedom, or conflict with the Rule of Law." F. A. Hayek, *Law, Legislation and Liberty: A New Statement of the Liberal Principles of Justice and Political Economy* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), p. 249. This one-volume edition includes Vol. 1, *Rules and Order*, first published in 1973; Vol. 2, *The Mirage of Social Justice*, first published in 1976; and Vol. 3, *The Political Order of a Free People*, first published in 1979.