

ELLACURÍA'S TRIPARTITE  
SALVATION: A HISTORICAL-  
SOTERIOLOGICAL RESPONSE TO THE  
CRISIS OF NEOLIBERALISM

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This dissertation in the area of Christian Systematic Theology offers a critique of the political-economic, philosophical, and cultural framework of neoliberalism through the framework of Ignacio Ellacuría's liberation theology. The project grounds itself in Ellacuría's theological vision of historical soteriology, where one understands salvation as the persistence of Christ's salvific act through history and in which all are called to participate through cooperative grace. It is through this theological lens, in conjunction with Ellacuría's philosophical and political thought, that a full critique of neoliberalism's various facets is accomplished. The project offers this critique through an analysis of neoliberalism's false promises of prosperity, stability, and salvation from impoverishment.

Chapter 1 offers a definition of neoliberalism as manifesting in three ways: a political-economic theory that manifested in the policies of the Reagan administration in the United States and the Thatcher Government in the United Kingdom, a philosophical

high theory critiqued by thinkers in the Marxist and Foucauldian traditions, and a cultural framework that is open to theological critique. The chapter serves as a survey of significant figures of each facet of neoliberalism. Chapter 2 outlines the focal points of Ellacuría's philosophical thought, most importantly his theory of historical reality. Using these philosophical tools, Ellacuría is put into dialogue with the philosophical critics of neoliberalism to show the philosophical claims implicit in neoliberal thought are untenable. Chapter 3 explores Ellacuría's theology with a focus on historical soteriology and engagement with reality. The theory of historical soteriology then serves as a critical tool to examine neoliberalism's underlying tenets that offer a false promise of salvation. Chapter 4 develops a political theology of dissent drawing from Ellacuría's work in "Utopia and Propheticism in Latin America," in which Ellacuría offers one of his strongest critiques of the civilization of capital. The political theology of dissent offers an alternative framework to the contemporary neoliberal conception of political economy, focusing on discernment and community. Finally, Chapter 5 synthesizes the Ellacurían Critique from Chapters 2-4 and puts it into conversation with other theological critics of neoliberalism. This dialogue shows the Ellacuría Critique to be a complimentary to other critics of neoliberalism while adding a unique Catholic liberationist voice to the conversation.

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## 1.0 A NAMELESS IDEOLOGY: NEOLIBERALISM AS A THEOLOGICAL PROBLEM

*The ideology that dominates our  
lives has, for most of us, no name.  
Mention it in conversation and  
you'll be rewarded with a shrug.  
Even if your listeners have heard  
the term before, they will struggle  
to define it. Neoliberalism: do you  
know what it is?*

~George Monbiot, "Neoliberalism—the ideology at the root of all our problems"

The first challenge to building the argument for Ellacuría's theological response to neoliberalism is to have a clear understanding of what is meant by the term "neoliberalism." The problem arises from the use of the term in three different contexts: the economic high theory, as represented by figures such as Friedrich von Hayek and Milton Friedman, the philosophical critiques by neo-Marxists such as Gérard Duménil and David Harvey as well as philosophers including Michel Foucault and Wendy Brown, and the cultural critiques made by theologians such as Keri Day, Joseph Rieger, and Kathryn Tanner. The goal of the following chapter is to clarify how each group of thinkers understands neoliberalism in their respective contexts, explain how all three of these understandings of neoliberalism are connected, and finally articulate how neoliberalism is a systematic theological problem.

The method of argumentation for this chapter will proceed in the following way. I will first examine the economic theory and policies that constitute neoliberalism in an

economic form. Next, I will address the philosophical issues to articulate how the philosophers of both Marxist and Foucauldian traditions understand neoliberalism and its impact on the self-understanding of both individual human beings and society. Finally, I will examine the various theologically oriented critiques, which will inform the conclusion that neoliberalism must be analyzed using the methods and foci of systematic theology.

## **1.1 NEOLIBERALISM AS ECONOMIC THEORY AND PRAXIS**

This first section addresses the economic theories and policies that are referred to as neoliberalism. This section focuses on three main points of interest. First, it treats the economic theory of the Chicago School of Economics, focusing on Friedrich von Hayek, Milton Friedman, and Gary Becker. This school stands as the intellectual foundation of neoliberal economics.<sup>1</sup> Second, this section considers how ideas from the Chicago School become policy, focusing on the Reagan administration in the United States and the Thatcher government in the United Kingdom.<sup>2</sup> Finally, this section explores the adverse effects created by such neoliberal ideas and policies, focusing on austerity measures in fiscal policy, the prioritization of the profitability of capital, the use of debt as a method of profit, and widening economic inequality.

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<sup>1</sup> This list is by no means exhaustive. The major figures of the Chicago School include other thinkers working on a variety of economic issues. This is a carefully curated list of thinkers who represent the core of neoliberal thought that will impact the issues directly related to the questions this work seeks to explore.

<sup>2</sup> For the sake of clarity and concision, I will limit my commentary on the Reagan administration and Thatcher government to the domestic policies and their impacts.

### 1.1.1 “The Chicago Boys”

To understand the economic implications of neoliberalism, we must begin with the economists who proposed the major ideas that went on to influence the policies that become associated with neoliberalism: the Chicago School of economics, or “the Chicago Boys.” Through an analysis of selected works of von Hayek, Friedman, and Becker, I argue that the economic theory of neoliberalism is rooted in a conception of freedom that understands economic freedom as the condition for the possibility of all freedom and envisions the human person as primarily an economic unit.

#### 1.1.1.1 Friedrich von Hayek

The first figure to examine is Friedrich von Hayek (1899-1992), as he offers one of the earliest expositions of the principles of neoliberal economics.<sup>3</sup> He writes to address what he sees as the rising problem of socialism leading to totalitarian governments.<sup>4</sup> He develops an argument in *The Road to Serfdom* against both a planned economy, like that seen in the Weimar Republic and Soviet Russia, and a semi-planned economy, like that proposed by John Maynard Keynes and seen developing in the United States and United

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<sup>3</sup> While von Hayek does not use the term neoliberal or neoliberalism in the text of *The Road to Serfdom*, its ideas, which will be discussed below, are foundational for the policies that will be enacted by the United States and the United Kingdom in the 1980s under Reagan and Thatcher.

<sup>4</sup> In the introduction to *The Road to Serfdom*, von Hayek writes of the United Kingdom: “It is not to the Germany of Hitler, the Germany of the present war, that this country bears yet resemblance. But students of the current ideas can hardly fail to see that there is more than a superficial similarity between the trend of thought in Germany during and after the last war and the present current of ideas in this country. There exists now in this country certainly the same determination that the organisation of the nation we have achieved for the purposes of defence shall be retained for the purposes of creation.” Friedrich von Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (London: George Routledge & Sons Ltd., 1943), 2. I take this selection to be a clear indication that he sees socialist leaning policies as the first steps to totalitarian regimes, following the example of the Weimar Republic leading to Nazi Germany.

Kingdom. His recommendations are rooted in understanding the planning of an economy as the central way totalitarian governments can cement their power.<sup>5</sup>

Von Hayek draws a distinction between individualist and collectivist policies. According to von Hayek, classical liberal ideas, such as those proposed by de Tocqueville and Lord Acton, are centered on the individual as the primary agent of economic activity and presuppose that the freedom of the individual is central to the system's functioning.<sup>6</sup> von Hayek furthers this classical liberal theory by claiming that economic freedom serves as the condition for the possibility of personal and political freedom.<sup>7</sup> In short, he understands freedom to be rooted in economics, and an individual's economic freedom to be necessary for the proper functioning of the economy and a free society.<sup>8</sup>

According to von Hayek, the best way to foster this proper functioning of an economy and society is through competition.<sup>9</sup> Detailing how this would work, he writes:

The successful use of competition as the principle of social organisation precludes certain types of coercive interference with economic life, but it admits of others which sometimes may very considerably assist its work and even requires certain kinds of government action. But there is good reason why the negative

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<sup>5</sup> von Hayek discusses this explicitly in Chapter VII "Economic Control and Totalitarianism." See von Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*, 66-75.

<sup>6</sup> von Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*, 8-10.

<sup>7</sup> von Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*, 10.

<sup>8</sup> von Hayek offers more on his understanding of the connection between economics and politics: "The gradual transformation of a rigidly organised hierarchic system into one where men could at least attempt to shape their own life, where man gained the opportunity of knowing and choosing between different forms of life, is closely associated with the growth of commerce. From the commercial cities of Northern Italy the new view of life spread with commerce to the west and north, through France and the south-west of Germany to the Low Countries and the British Isles, taking firm root wherever there was no despotic political power to stifle it. In the Low Countries and Britain it for a long time enjoyed its fullest development and for the first time had an opportunity to grow freely and to become the foundation of the social and political life of these countries." von Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*, 11. This passage offers the reader an insight into how von Hayek envisions capitalism as the foundation of a society, and that democratic political systems are preferable as they allow for commerce to have the most freedom to make profitable transactions.

<sup>9</sup> von Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*, 27.

requirements, the points where coercion must not be used, have been particularly stressed. It is necessary in the first instance that the parties in the market should be free to sell and buy at any price at which they can find a partner to the transaction, and that anybody should be free to produce, sell, and buy anything that may be produced or sold at all. And it is essential that the entry into different trades should be open to all on equal terms, and that the law should not tolerate any attempts by individuals or groups to restrict this entry by open or concealed force. Any attempt to control prices or quantities of particular commodities deprives competition of its power of bringing about an effective co-ordination of individual efforts, because price changes then cease to register all the relevant efforts, because price changes then cease to register all the relevant changes in circumstances and no longer provide a reliable guide for the individual's actions.<sup>10</sup>

The system that von Hayek envisions here is that of a self-regulating market that responds to changes, and that individuals, as truly free, are able to make choices against unfair pricing or develop a pattern that can shift the market through those choices. From the quoted selection above, we can see von Hayek's understanding of regulation as a negative force. The major point is that the freedom to produce, buy, and sell among willing parties at a mutually agreed upon price cannot be infringed upon. This produces two major assumptions that fit into neoliberal political economy. First, anything can be commodified as long as the participant is willing to make the exchange. Second, the agreed upon transaction between buyer and seller cannot be modified by outside parties and must be allowed to proceed in its natural course. This second piece is at the heart of von Hayek's emphasis on a laissez-faire attitude in regard to government intervention.<sup>11</sup> Without these two pieces, the market, and therefore the organizing principle of society, cannot function properly.

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<sup>10</sup> von Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*, 27.

<sup>11</sup> von Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*, 27. In von Hayek's text, he associates laissez-faire as having absolutely no legal framework to help shape the market, and finds it lacking. On the same page, von Hayek recognizes that no legal framework for a market is perfect, but an imperfect framework is preferable to no framework.

To briefly summarize, von Hayek's significant contributions to neoliberal economic theory for the purposes of this project fall into two categories. First, he shows the significance of freedom, specifically economic freedom, as central to a society's proper function. Second, all regulation must be a negative regulation, allowing for anything to be bought and sold on the market as long as there are willing parties. These ideas are then further developed by other thinkers in the Chicago School.

### 1.1.1.2 Milton Friedman

The first part of the examination of Friedman's work comes in his 1951 essay, "Neo-Liberalism and its Prospects,"<sup>12</sup> which is the first time a member of the Chicago School refers to himself as a neoliberal.<sup>13</sup> In this piece, Friedman offers a succinct outline of what he understands to be the core of neoliberal ideas. He writes:

Neo-liberalism would accept the nineteenth century liberal emphasis in the fundamental importance of the individual, but it would substitute for the nineteenth-century goal of laissez-faire as a means to this end, the goal of the competitive order. It would seek to use competition among producers to protect the consumer from exploitation, competition among employers to protect workers and owners of property and competition among consumers to protect the enterprises themselves. The state would police the system, establish conditions favorable to competition and prevent monopoly, provide a stable monetary framework, and relieve acute misery and distress. The citizens would be protected against the state by the existence of a free private market; and against one another by the preservation of competition.<sup>14</sup>

This excerpt provides an outline of Friedman's vision, which, upon a brief parsing, gives us a more detailed list of the moving parts of neoliberal economics. First, it is clear that

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<sup>12</sup> Milton Friedman, "Neo-Liberalism and its Prospects," in *The Indispensable Milton Friedman: Essays on Politics and Economics*, ed. Lanny Ebenstein (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, Inc., 2012), 3-10.

<sup>13</sup> The earliest use of the term neo-liberal/neoliberal is found in Charles Gide's description of Pantaleoni's school of thought in Charles Gide, "Has Co-Operation Introduced a New Principle into Economics?" *The Economic Journal*, vol. 8, No. 32 (December 1898), 490-511.

<sup>14</sup> Friedman, "Neo-Liberalism and its Prospects," 6-7.

Friedman shares the individualist focus of von Hayek, as well as von Hayek's rejection of the laissez-faire attitude. Friedman also elaborates on the various forms of competition that take place in the market, expanding the concept beyond a single idea. For Friedman, these interrelated forms of competition are central to what makes the market an ideal location for to be exercised. Third, this statement on freedom hearkens back to von Hayek in that it shows how, assuming competition stands as the guarantor of freedom, economic freedom is the condition for the possibility of personal and political freedom.<sup>15</sup>

Finally, Friedman is able to lay out an idea of what role the government plays in policing the market in three parts: create favorable conditions for competition while preventing firms from becoming monopolies, provide a currency that can be a stable standard for transaction, and engage in the relief of acute misery. The first part is relatively straightforward in its logic: the government should prevent monopolies, which are in direct opposition to competition, from occurring. The second part of government's role in the economy is to provide currency. This function is no real surprise, as even Adam Smith's articulation of classical liberalism recognizes the importance of a society's government providing a legitimizing standard of currency for the sake of ease of commerce.<sup>16</sup>

The third part of this description, however, adds a new wrinkle: the government is to enter into the market and correct acute problems, but not systemic ones. For example, if a natural disaster, such as a flood, wipes out a city's ability to have clean water and

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<sup>15</sup> This, of course, ignores the possibility of human choice that exists prior to the possibility of economics. This challenge will be discussed below in conjunction with Foucault and Brown.

<sup>16</sup> For greater exploration of a history and theory of currency, see "Chapter IV: The History and Use of Money," in Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and The Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, ed. James E. Thorold Rogers (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1880), 23-30.

reliable power sources, then the government is then required to step in to alleviate the suffering, preventing the victims of the disaster from being further preyed upon by unscrupulous opportunists looking to profit from the misfortune of others. Intervention on systemic problems, such as regulations to ensure the use of green energy to help prevent the climate change that precipitated the flood, would not be allowed. Parsing out this difference shows an assumed premise of Friedman's system: the free market itself is not problematic in any way. Instead, it is the market that solves systemic problems that arise as long as a perfect market is allowed to exist. This idea stands at the heart of the next work of Friedman's I will examine: *Capitalism and Freedom*.<sup>17</sup>

Friedman's book-length work, written about a decade after "Neo-Liberalism and Its Prospects," shows a further development in his thinking on the neoliberal approach to political economy. The first development worthy of mention is a continuation of von Hayek's narrative on the history of political development as caused by economic development. In the first chapter, Friedman writes:

Because we live in a largely free society, we tend to forget how limited is the span of time and the part of the globe for which there has ever been anything like political freedom: the typical state of mankind is tyranny, servitude, and misery. The nineteenth century and early twentieth century in the Western world stand out as striking exceptions to the general trend of historical development. Political freedom in this instance clearly came along with the free market and the development of capitalist institutions. So also did political freedom in the golden age of Greece and the early days of the Roman era.<sup>18</sup>

This passage offers two points worthy of note for this project. The first is the furthering of the argument that economic freedom is the condition of the possibility of political freedom by attempting to make a historical argument for his position, basing the United

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<sup>17</sup> Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1962).

<sup>18</sup> Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*, 9-10.

States and Europe's political freedom on their economic freedom as unique in the world.<sup>19</sup> The second is that he is projecting this interpretation of capitalism anachronistically on to classical Greece and Rome. To provide the most charitable read of Friedman, let us assume that by capitalism in this context he means commerce, which would be a more historically accurate statement. Even in this case, Friedman ignores the issues of slavery and imperial control, both of which heavily impacted the way these classical societies conducted daily life.<sup>20</sup> Regardless of the veracity of these claims, Friedman's intellectual viewpoint throughout *Capitalism and Freedom* is based on this narrative that capitalism is the driving historical force behind freedom.

From this premise, Friedman goes on to develop his political-economic thought, including how social ills are remedied by capitalism. The prime example of this is in Chapter VII, where Friedman claims that discrimination has been reduced by capitalism.<sup>21</sup> Friedman's argument goes as follows: the prime motivator of any business is economic efficiency.<sup>22</sup> If a person is only concerned with that question, then she will hire the best worker for the job, regardless of her religion, race, or any other factor not tied to her efficiency.<sup>23</sup> Yet, Friedman makes exception to this claim: if a store manager chooses to hire a black clerk and the community shows prejudice against the store for that

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<sup>19</sup> While I do not claim expertise as a historian by any means, Friedman's historical narrative fails to consider various complications to this narrative, such as the colonial exploitation that provided the economic power to the nations in western Europe and the United States that come from a long history of empire. For a historical reflection on the questions of empire and coloniality in a general sweep, see Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2010).

<sup>20</sup> For an exploration of these issues see Keith Bradley and Paul Cartledge, ed., *The Cambridge World History of Slavery, Volume 1: The Ancient Mediterranean World* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2011).

<sup>21</sup> Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*, 108-118.

<sup>22</sup> Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*, 109.

<sup>23</sup> Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*, 109-110.

hiring choice leading to the possible closing of the store, then the manager may prefer a white clerk not out of the manager's own tastes, but "he may simply be transmitting the tastes of the community."<sup>24</sup> Any legislative attempts, says Friedman, would not be as successful as simply trying to convince one's fellow citizens of this way of thinking, allowing freedom to operate unencumbered.<sup>25</sup> Again, this kind of political economy allows for biases to continue to shape the way in which the world operates in the name of the primacy of freedom. This weakens Friedman's argument to the point that capitalism allows for one's economic self-interest to overcome potential biases if one is sufficiently committed to profit, making his claims questionable at best.<sup>26</sup>

As shown in this subsection, Friedman continues to advocate for a political economy that is motivated by the idea that economic freedom is the condition for the possibility of political freedom, and that these claims expand to social benefit from this theory of economic and political freedom. These political economic ideas would go on to inform the policy that will be discussed below.

### 1.1.1.3 Gary Becker

I turn now to Gary Becker's *Human Capital*,<sup>27</sup> which contributes to the line of argumentation about the political-economic theory of the Chicago School by shifting to the question of anthropology. A third Nobel laureate of the Chicago School, Becker's

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<sup>24</sup> Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*, 112.

<sup>25</sup> Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*, 114-115.

<sup>26</sup> Another interpretation of this position would be that this is Friedman's subtle argument for how any compromise on the capitalist ideals can lead the system to falter, harkening back to von Hayek's concern about mixed economies, but on an ideological level. This interpretation has its merits, but Friedman's text does not read as making that kind of subtle ideological claim, but rather focused on putting a priority on freedom as the only way to make meaningful change.

<sup>27</sup> Gary S. Becker, *Human Capital: A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis, With Special Reference to Education*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Nation Bureau of Economic Research, 1975).

work was the inspiration for the popular book *Freakonomics*,<sup>28</sup> coauthored by contemporary University of Chicago economist Steven D. Levitt. Becker's analysis transforms the understanding of the human person from an economic unit to a financial unit for investment and thereby develops the neoliberal economic theory to a point at which policy decisions become a natural conclusion. Since the nature of this project is theoretical and is unable to comment on the empirical findings of Becker's study in a meaningful way, I will focus my analysis on the theoretical elements of the study, found primarily in Part I.

With the first edition of *Human Capital* published in 1964, Becker's work follows the trajectory of his teacher and eventual colleague Milton Friedman. Becker's contribution to the argument is the concept of human capital. Becker defines human capital as the idea that certain activities can lead to the development of resources within individuals, and these resources eventually influence their monetary income and "consumption."<sup>29</sup> Becker's use of the term consumption here appears to mean a kind of subjective, personal fulfillment. He uses sailing, a personal hobby one may take up, as one example increasing consumption, which fits within the parameters of a subjective, personal fulfillment.<sup>30</sup> He also states that a college education can influence both monetary income and consumption as the higher wages one earns with a college degree allows for more time and money with which one can pursue one's hobbies and thereby consume.<sup>31</sup> Becker proposes there are several forms of investment in human capital, such as

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<sup>28</sup> Steven D. Levitt & Stephen J. Dubner, *Freakonomics: A Rogue Economist Explores the Hidden Side of Everything* (New York: William Morrow, 2005).

<sup>29</sup> Becker, *Human Capital*, 9.

<sup>30</sup> Becker, *Human Capital*, 9.

<sup>31</sup> Becker, *Human Capital*, 9.

education, on-the-job training, medical care, migration, and researching prices and incomes.<sup>32</sup> Each of these investments can provide one with developed personal resources. For example, a college education can provide one with the critical thinking skills necessary to be gainfully employed, but it can also provide an appreciation of various other leisure activities to consume.<sup>33</sup> Throughout his analysis, Becker approaches choices of education and training in the same way he would any other microeconomic analysis: calculations to find equilibrium points, several plotted graphs with familiar exponential curves, looking for the point at which one can maximize the return on the education or training one into which one is investing.

Becker's findings are not as significant as his methodological assumptions. This transformation of human formation into another form of investment that can be analyzed in a similar manner to commodities serves as the final key to the line of argumentation that began with von Hayek: the human person can be analyzed as a firm to be invested in, developed, and offering services to be traded on the open market. It is this statement that is able to propel this political-economic theory of neoliberalism into the realm of fiscal policy, as we will explore in the next section.

To briefly summarize this section, the Chicago School of Economics established the fundamental economic principles of neoliberalism as a form of political economy. These principles, drawn from the work of von Hayek, Friedman, and Becker, are the ideas of freedom as the highest good, the need for a negative regulation, economic freedom as the condition for the possibility of political and personal freedom, the social

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<sup>32</sup> Becker, *Human Capital*, 9.

<sup>33</sup> My suspicion is that Becker is assuming that personal fulfillment comes from consumption based on his language and examples. This idea will tie into other analyses below.

benefit of this economic freedom, and the human person understood not just as a consumer but as a firm that requires investment. These economic ideas go on to influence the fiscal and monetary policies employed during the 1980s, which will be discussed next.

### **1.1.2 Neoliberal Governance in the United States and the United Kingdom**

In this section, I offer an analysis of the economic policies that were influenced by neoliberal political-economic thought, focusing on the policies of the Reagan Administration in the United States and the Thatcher Government in the United Kingdom. Prior to starting the analysis in earnest, it is important to define a few common economic terms that may not be familiar to a general theological audience. Economic policies generally fall into two categories: fiscal policy and monetary policy. Fiscal policy is the area of economic policy dictated by administrations regarding taxation and spending of the government in an attempt to influence the economy; the most common way one sees fiscal policy in action is in tax legislation, budgets offered by administrations in the US context, and debates about government spending by congressional representatives and political pundits. Monetary policy, on the other hand, is implemented by a nation's central bank to influence the money supply and impact the economy through the setting of interest rates, regulating what percentage of a bank's reserve is required for solvency, and purchasing foreign currency on the open market.<sup>34</sup> By analyzing these policies in the context of the neoliberal political-economic ideas

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<sup>34</sup> Steven A. Greenlaw and David Shapiro, *Principles of Economics*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Houston, TX: Open Stax, 2018), 672-675.

mentioned in the previous section, it becomes clear that neoliberal economic policy sets up a political situation that greatly benefits the upper class at the expense of the middle and lower classes.

### **1.1.2.1 Starving the Beast: The Reagan Administration**

The first set of policies that we will examine is that of the United States during the Reagan Administration. While the neoliberal moment in monetary policy begins when Paul Volcker becomes Chairman of the Federal Reserve in July of 1979,<sup>35</sup> the forefront of neoliberal economic policy in the United States comes from the administration's use of fiscal policy, namely tax cuts and deregulation.<sup>36</sup>

When the Reagan administration took power in January 1981, it faced an economy in a state of what is known as "stagflation."<sup>37</sup> Normally, when an economy is strong and wages are high, the value of the currency decreases in a phenomenon known as inflation. The 1970s, however, experienced a different turn of events: inflation occurred while the economy stagnated; the value of the dollar decreased while wages stayed the same. When the dollar's value decreased, goods became more expensive, leading to a higher rate of unemployment: 6.2% for the 1970s, compared to the 1950s rate of 4.5% and the 1960s rate of 4.8%.<sup>38</sup> It is this economic crisis that precipitated a

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<sup>35</sup> David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 1.

<sup>36</sup> Manfred B. Steger and Ravi K. Roy, *Neoliberalism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 21-37.

<sup>37</sup> Isabel V. Sawhill, "Economic Policy," in John L. Palmer and Isabel V. Sawhill, ed., *The Reagan Experiment: An Examination of the Economic and Social Policies under the Reagan Administration* (Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute Press, 1982), 31-34. I intentionally chose this work to detail the policies of the Reagan administration because its early publication date of 1982 implies that this is a work that is able to explore the policies without too much commentary given the benefit of history.

<sup>38</sup> Sawhill, "Economic Policy," 33.

major change in policy, especially with a more conservative Republican administration taking over from Jimmy Carter's Democratic administration.

The foundational premise for the Reagan administration's policy was "that individual initiative and unfettered markets will produce the best possible outcomes."<sup>39</sup> This sentence could very easily be mistaken for a line from *The Road to Serfdom* or *Capitalism and Freedom*, providing clear evidence that Chicago School ideas are at work in this policy. Isabel Sawhill goes on to discuss how unregulated markets are by no means perfect, but the best available option.<sup>40</sup> She also confirms the goal of this economic plan: "elements in the Reagan plan are all designed to reduce the role of government in economic life."<sup>41</sup> It is from this point that rest of the policies expand.

The first piece of this plan deals with tax cuts and the reduction of federal government spending. The policy idea fits with a Republican political strategy of seeking a small federal government that can allow for state and local governments to determine the needs of their citizens.<sup>42</sup> With the policies enacted in 1981, personal income taxes were cut by 25% across-the-board in conjunction with other reductions in both individual and corporate taxes that, when combined, went well beyond the specific cuts Reagan sought.<sup>43</sup> This was projected to cause a loss of over \$1 trillion in federal revenue over 6

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<sup>39</sup> Sawhill, "Economic Policy," 37.

<sup>40</sup> Sawhill, "Economic Policy," 37.

<sup>41</sup> Sawhill, "Economic Policy," 37.

<sup>42</sup> For greater detail, see "Republican Party Platform of 1980," The American Presidency Project, accessed March 28, 2019, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/republican-party-platform-1980>.

<sup>43</sup> John L. Palmer and Gregory B. Mills, "Budget Policy," in John L. Palmer and Isabel V. Sawhill, ed., *The Reagan Experiment: An Examination of the Economic and Social Policies under the Reagan Administration* (Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute Press, 1982), 76-77.

years, requiring a major cut in government spending, which had to be adjusted further due to the failure of interest rates to drop like expected.<sup>44</sup>

At this point, one needs to examine the details of the budget to fully understand the impact of these cuts on the polity. An important point to highlight before diving into the cuts is that the budget cuts were not universal, with planned national defense spending increasing by 4% in 1982 and 13.1% in 1986.<sup>45</sup> Rather, the cuts focused on domestic programs, including the social safety net, with total reductions of 5.8% in 1982 and 8.2% in 1986.<sup>46</sup> From this data, a clear connection is made: the budget adjustments made to balance out the large tax reductions focus primarily on non-military domestic programs that are supposed to help alleviate systemic problems like poverty, homelessness, and the lack of necessary skills to avoid such circumstances. Once again, the Chicago School's neoliberal economic theory manifests in policy. As discussed above, Friedman argues that government should only offer aid in circumstance of acute suffering, like a natural disaster, and not for systemic problems. This approach to budget reductions takes Friedman's framework and concretizes it in public policy.

The other major piece of the Reagan administration's policy that bears mentioning here, even though it does not fit cleanly into fiscal policy, is the issue of regulation. In their discussion of the Reagan administration's approach to regulation, George Eads and Michael Fix write:

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<sup>44</sup> Palmer and Mills, "Budget Policy," 77.

<sup>45</sup> Palmer and Mills, "Budget Policy," 80.

<sup>46</sup> Palmer and Mills, "Budget Policy," 82. Significant cuts include the following: Low income assistance reduced by 10.4% in 1982 and 12.3% in 1986, Social insurance (including Social Security) reduced by 2.3% in 1982 and 4.1% in 1986, Employment and training programs reduced by 47.4% in 1982 and 52.6% in 1986, and Housing and community development reduced by 11.6% in 1982 and 6% in 1986, and Education programs reduced by 15.8% in 1982 and 28.8% in 1986.

Reagan administration officials, however, have been troubled by more than regulation's costs. The growth in social regulation is viewed as yet another manifestation of the federal government's intrusion into private decision making. Administration officials believe that federal rule makers have involved the government in the minutiae of business decision making, have imposed unwanted paperwork burdens, and have prescribed private behavior in areas previously left to the discretion of private citizens or to rules set by common law. This relatively new, expanded federal regulatory presence is opposed by administration officials on the grounds of both efficiency and ideology.<sup>47</sup>

This formulation of the opposition to regulation with the Reagan administration follows von Hayek and Friedman's arguments against regulation discussed in the previous section. This third connection establishes a pattern that the Reagan administration's articulation of political economy is in lockstep with the neoliberal ideals espoused by the Chicago School.

To briefly summarize, the Reagan administration implemented fiscal and regulatory policies that took the Chicago School's neoliberal theory of economics and put it into practice through government policies. The tax cuts, budget restrictions on social programs, and regulatory practices create a political atmosphere that allows business to do as it wills, effectively forcing individuals into the free market without recourse.

### **1.1.2.2 The Thatcher Government**

The Reagan Administration was not the only major world power to implement a neoliberal economic strategy. Margaret Thatcher's government, starting in 1979, approached the problem of inflation primarily through means of monetary policy, namely money supply. In this subsection, I explain how the Thatcher government's plan through

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<sup>47</sup> George C. Eads and Michael Fix, "Regulatory Policy," in John L. Palmer and Isabel V. Sawhill, ed., *The Reagan Experiment: An Examination of the Economic and Social Policies under the Reagan Administration* (Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute Press, 1982), 131.

monetary policy functioned in the 1980s and how this embodies the neoliberal theory expressed by thinkers in the Chicago School.

Monetary policy, as mentioned above, deals with questions of money supply as controlled by a nation's central bank. All commercial banks borrow money from the nation's central bank to help finance loans, and therefore allow new businesses and commerce to continue.<sup>48</sup> The amount that is borrowed from the central bank is determined by the interest rates; if interest rates at the central bank are low, commercial banks will be able to lend money at a lower rate to entrepreneurs. This new influx of money into the economy comes at the risk of inflation. When the value of the currency starts to decrease, the central bank raises interest rates, causing commercial banks to lend less money, making the money supply decrease. When the money supply decreases, the value of the currency increases, reversing inflation. This is the way that a central bank's monetary policy can influence the economy.

A major issue that comes into play is how fiscal policy and monetary policy work together when addressing economic crises. During the 1970s in the United Kingdom, the question was approached from an "economics of consensus," where the government's primary goal was to maintain full employment<sup>49</sup> by using fiscal and monetary policy to control economic growth.<sup>50</sup> Thatcher's Conservative government took a different approach, citing the significance of the problem of inflation that needed to be combated. The Keynesian approach that the United Kingdom had taken after the Great Depression

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<sup>48</sup> For greater detail see Greenwall and Shapiro, *Principle of Economics*, 675-680.

<sup>49</sup> The term full employment in the economic sense means that everyone who is seeking employment is able to be employed. The question of what kind of employment, part-time or full-time, temporary or permanent, is ignored. This will be discussed further in the next subsection.

<sup>50</sup> E.H.H. Green, *Thatcher* (London: Hodder Education, 2006), 56.

stated that by increasing the money supply through government spending and low interest rates from the central bank, an economy could, in essence, buy its way out of a recession, or in this case a depression, with easily available money to help jump start commerce. The eventual downside to this great influx of money into the market was the eventual devaluation of the currency due to its easy availability. Thatcher's explicit concern during her time as both opposition leader and Prime Minister was protecting those she saw as responsible citizens by ensuring their savings would not become devalued due to inflation.<sup>51</sup>

The Conservative response to the problem of inflation is rooted in a simple economic equation: the money supply (M) multiplied by the velocity of money<sup>52</sup> (V) is equal to the price index (P) multiplied by the quantity of goods (Q), also known as the real GDP. The idea is that this equation can balance out the problem of inflation, which is represented by the price index. If the price index goes up, then one can lower the money supply to rebalance the equation without disturbing the Real Gross Domestic Product (Real GDP) of a country. The Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) proposed by the Thatcher government intended to bring down inflation with a two-pronged approach. In the first prong, the Bank of England would restrict the money supply, lowering M. The second prong has the government, using austerity measures of raising taxes while cutting spending,<sup>53</sup> lower demand, therefore lowering Q. Since the monetarist position assumes

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<sup>51</sup> Green, *Thatcher*, 65-67.

<sup>52</sup> The velocity of money is the speed at which money circulates in the economy. This is calculated by taking the national GDP and dividing it by the money supply. For more see Greenwall and Shapiro, *Principle of Economics*, 669-688.

<sup>53</sup> C.F. Pratten, "Mrs. Thatcher's Economic Legacy," in *Thatcherism: Personality and Politics*, ed. Kenneth Minogue and Michael Biddis (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987).

that  $V$  is relatively constant,<sup>54</sup> the equation dictates that  $P$  must also go down, leading to an end of inflation.<sup>55</sup>

The impact of this approach to fighting inflation was the large jump in unemployment. According to data from the Bank of England, unemployment in the United Kingdom in 1979, the first year of Thatcher's government, was 5.3%,<sup>56</sup> which is close to the commonly accepted 5% unemployment rate as good.<sup>57</sup> Looking at the years following the implementation of MTFs in 1980, the unemployment rate rose to 11.77% in 1984, more than doubling in five years.<sup>58</sup>

These unemployment numbers were coupled with the Thatcher government's decision to privatize several assets owned by the British government, such as British Petroleum, British Aerospace, and Britoil to name a few.<sup>59</sup> When these public assets are privatized, the public benefit of lower prices disappears as the private owners seek to make a profit, as one would expect when one enters the marketplace. The higher prices once again place another burden on the consumers, but since it is now utilities like oil that are privatized, the freedom of the neoliberal promise actually restricts options of consumers by taking away an affordable public option.

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<sup>54</sup> For an overview of the monetarist position on this question, see Milton Friedman, "The Counter-Revolution in Monetary Theory," in *The Indispensable Milton Friedman*, 167-189. Friedman is indirect in making this point, but he says the three main elements of monetarism are money supply, inflation, and GDP. This allows us to infer that the velocity of money is understood as a constant. For a brief contemporary overview, see Sarwat Jahan and Chris Papageorgiou, "Back to Basics: What is Monetarism?," *Finance and Development*, Vol. 51, No. 1, March 2014, 38-39.

<sup>55</sup> It is important to stress that this is the monetarist view of the money supply equation. The Keynesian view of the money equation does not assume  $V$  is a constant, instead recognizing the potential for hoarding wealth. For a more detailed explanation of the difference in approaches to  $V$ , see Greenwall and Shapiro, *Principles of Economics*, 681-685.

<sup>56</sup> "A millennium of economic data," Bank of England, accessed 3 April 2019, <https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/statistics/research-datasets>.

<sup>57</sup> Greenwall and Shapiro, *Principles of Economics*, 444-445.

<sup>58</sup> "A millennium of economic data," accessed 3 April 2019.

<sup>59</sup> Green, *Thatcher*, 97-101.

An important question to ask is what information does this data provide us about neoliberalism. It shows that the neoliberal policies, fiscal or monetary, tend to negatively impact those who are not economically well off, specifically those who rely on the social safety net for their survival. Budget cuts such as those made by the Reagan administration discussed above make the difference between life and death for the many people who depend on those domestic programs. This means the neoliberal political agenda does not actually seek to cultivate an economy that raises the standard of living of everyone, but rather to favor the wealthy regardless of the consequences.

### **1.1.3 The Economic Problems of Neoliberalism**

In this final section of the first part of the chapter, I offer a brief exploration of the economic problems that arise from neoliberal economic theory and the policies they inspire. The goal here is not to touch on problems of philosophy, theology, and culture, which will be addressed in the next two parts. The economic problems are separated into three categories: the first addresses questions of the primary focus on capital and its consequence of economic inequality, the second deals with the question of debt as a method for profit, and the third considers the question of austerity measures that are used to pay for capital-friendly tax cuts. By looking at these three problems, the major conceptual issues around the economic elements of neoliberalism will come into focus; this will be important as these concepts will be central parts of the critiques moving forward.

### 1.1.3.1 The Primacy of Capital and Economic Inequality

The first problem that will be addressed is the primacy of capital in economics. First, it is important to define capital, as the term can seem ambiguous. In standard capitalist economic discourse, the meaning of capital has developed throughout the history of the field.<sup>60</sup> Peter Lewin provides a detailed explanation of capital and its profitability through the lens of productive function, a form of calculating capital value reaching back to Adam Smith, and growth theory, a classical conception of how businesses make money in relation to the mathematical functions of land, labor, and capital, represented by the variables  $L$ ,  $N$ , and  $K$ , respectively.<sup>61</sup> In the midst of his describing his own challenges to the development of modern capital theory, Lewin writes:

Growth theory is an implicit capital theory—it includes  $K$  as a factor of production, where  $K$  is some measure of the produced means of production. In addition, growth theory appears to address the related question of income distribution. Because capital, like any other input, is subject to diminishing returns, it will be accumulated up to the point where the value of its marginal product just repays the opportunity cost of its employment, conveniently expressed, for example, by the interest cost of the financing that facilitates it. In this way, the Neoclassical (production function) approach supports the impression that thrift, by providing funds for investment, is a positive contributor to growth, in a measure directly related to the productivity of capital. This, incidentally, also provided a justification for the earnings of capital (owners of capital) which needed to be paid the value of its marginal product if it were to be wisely invested.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> For greater detail on the specifics of this development, see Peter Lewin, *Capital in Disequilibrium: The Role of Capital in a Changing World* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 47-71.

<sup>61</sup> Lewin, *Capital in Disequilibrium*, 72-80.

<sup>62</sup> Lewin, *Capital in Disequilibrium*, 81.

This paragraph is admittedly rather dense, but it provides us with an important understanding of what capital is in this traditional economic sense and what it does.<sup>63</sup> Capital is understood as the excess money one has beyond meeting one's expenses. The purpose of capital in the Neoclassical conception, an understanding shared by the Chicago School of economics who tended to identify as Neoclassical economists, implies that capital only goes to those who know how to invest wisely, therefore justifying large returns on investment (ROI).

This statement belies two points: first, there is an assumption that capital will not be hoarded by those entrusted with it, but instead invest it wisely, fitting with the Smithian adage of thrift and enterprise. Second, there is an assumption that capital investment is a central part of the equation to make the system work. Just as in any mechanical application, whether it be an engine, plumbing, or a circuit board, if you change a central piece that has no work around, then the machine fails to work.

The neoliberal agenda adds a new dimension to this schema with the financialization of the economy. With the anti-regulation policies of both Reagan and Thatcher opening new opportunities for the growth of capital, the capitalist class blossomed during the 1980's through the financialization of the economy. What happens when this capital ROI becomes not only central, but the primary focus of economic production? What transformations occur in political economy when the Smithian mantra of thrift and enterprise is abandoned for one of pure profit?

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<sup>63</sup> Both of these will be challenged by the Marxist critiques that will be explored in 1.2.1 below. For the sake of clarity, I am choosing to engage Marx and neo-Marxists after setting up this preliminary understanding that would be a part of accepted economic vocabulary.

The answer is revealed in Thomas Piketty's award-winning book: *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*.<sup>64</sup> In this historical investigation of capitalist economies of the United States, Japan, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom from 1700 onward, he comes to a startling conclusion about income inequality represented in a rather simple inequality:  $r > g$ .<sup>65</sup> These symbols represent the following explanation: the more perfect<sup>66</sup> the market, the more likely it is that the annual average rate of return on capital, including profits, dividends, interest, rents, and other investment income will be greater than the rate of growth of the economy, namely incomes and other forms of output.<sup>67</sup> In other words, a market without monopolies or even an imbalance in power among competitors, the best case situation for a capitalist economy, leads to extreme income inequality, which, according to Piketty, takes the form of not only executive compensation packages like those seen in the aftermath of the 2007-2008 financial crisis,<sup>68</sup> but also that of stratification between so-called "first-world" nations and "third-world" nations.<sup>69</sup> While Piketty offers solutions, such as a global tax on capital, his diagnosis of the problem in terms of these factors satisfies the needs of this project.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014). Piketty won the British Academy Medal and the Financial Times and McKinsey Business Book of the Year awards for this work in 2014.

<sup>65</sup> Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, 34-38.

<sup>66</sup> The term "perfect" here is used in the economic sense, meaning perfectly competitive, or that a firm must sell its product at market value and has no power in the market. For further explanation, see Greenwall and Shapiro, *Principles of Economics*, 235-255.

<sup>67</sup> Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, 34.

<sup>68</sup> For more details, see Heather Landy, "Wall Street Bonuses Draw Scrutiny in Bailout's Wake," *The Washington Post*, January 24, 2009, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/01/23/AR2009012303888.html>.

<sup>69</sup> For greater detail, see Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, 424-475.

<sup>70</sup> Piketty's suggested solutions, such as the tax example, simply do not address the systemic issues at play, namely as will be shown by the analyses in sections 1.2 and 1.3 of this chapter. From a theological standpoint, another mechanism to complicate the system will not solve the systemic problem. The markets are imperfect mechanisms created by imperfect human beings. Without some form of intellectual and moral

### 1.1.3.2 Debt as a Method of Profit

The second economic problem brought forth by neoliberal economic practices is the use of debt as a means of profit. In a certain respect, this is not truly a new phenomenon. Debt, in the modern understanding with loans from banks, has been used as a means of profit for lenders going back to the mercantile banks of the Italian city-states during the early modern period.<sup>71</sup> The problem in our modern context comes from the issue of predatory lending practices, which arises from the idea of maximizing profit from risky investments. For example, in the lead up to the housing crisis that inaugurated the financial crisis of 2007-2008, mortgage companies were allowing borrowers to make loans for money far beyond their ability to repay. These “toxic mortgages” were then packaged together and sold to other companies, knowing full well that these mortgages would eventually go into default.<sup>72</sup> Archbishop Rowan Williams, commenting on the financial crisis, explains the problem clearly:

Trading the debts of others without accountability has been the motor of astronomical financial gain for many in recent years. Primitively, a loan transaction is something which enables someone to do what they might not otherwise be able to do — start a business, buy a house. Lenders identify what would count as reasonable security in the present and the future (present assets, future income) and decide accordingly.

But inevitably in complex and large-scale transactions, one person’s debt becomes part of the security which the lender can offer to another potential customer. And a particularly significant line is crossed when the borrowing and lending are no longer to do with any kind of equipping someone to do something specific, but exclusively about enabling profit — sometimes, as with the now

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conversion, a healing vector cannot be introduced into the system to address the fundamentally corrupt issues.

<sup>71</sup> David Graeber, *Debt: The First 5,000 Years* (Brooklyn, NY: Melville House, 2014), 290-293.

<sup>72</sup> For more, see Heather Boushey, “It Wasn’t Household Debt that Caused the Great Recession,” *The Atlantic*, May 21, 2014, <https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2014/05/house-of-debt/371282/>.

banned practice of short-selling, by effectively betting on the failure of a partner in the transaction.<sup>73</sup>

The key to Williams' analysis is that the business practice of selling and trading these loans was done in bad faith, making a short-term profit while setting up a chain of financial failures that end up damaging people and the trust required for an economic system to function properly. Without the solid foundation of that trust, the system begins to break down, creating a new set of problems without a set of commonly agreed upon rules to help adjudicate the situation, leading to a system rigged to benefit the financial institutions and their owners at the expense of everyone else.

There is, however, a subtler way that debt is used as profit beyond traditional loans: the wide-spread marketing and use of payday loans. Payday loans are short-term loans with periods of about 2 weeks with the expectation of repayment on the borrower's next payday; they are a part of an alternative financial market that allows individuals who do not have relationships with institutions like banks and credit unions to have access to credit through conventional means.<sup>74</sup> The issue, however, is that the interest rates are extremely high, as high as a 1000% annualized rate.<sup>75</sup> This high interest rate, combined with the financial situation that leads a significant number of payday loan borrowers to become repeat loan users leads to a situation of ever-increasing debt, called a "debt treadmill."<sup>76</sup> While there are some economists who claim that the situation is not problematic on a systematic level, but the issues rather deal with the way people use their

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<sup>73</sup> Rowan Williams, "Face it: Marx was partly right about capitalism," *The Spectator*, September 24, 2008, <https://www.spectator.co.uk/2008/09/face-it-marx-was-partly-right-about-capitalism/>.

<sup>74</sup> Paul Sergis Koku and Sharan Jagpal, "Do payday loans help the working poor?", *International Journal of Bank Marketing* Vol. 33, Issue 5 (2015), 594.

<sup>75</sup> Koku and Jagpal, "Do payday loans help the working poor?", 594.

<sup>76</sup> Koku and Jagpal, "Do payday loans help the working poor?", 595.

borrowing potential,<sup>77</sup> discussions are ongoing about the systemic nature of the problem with the Pew Charitable Trust<sup>78</sup> and the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC),<sup>79</sup> showing the systemic problem to be one that is accepted in economic circles.

### 1.1.3.3 The Politics of Austerity

The final economic problem to be discussed in this section is that of the economic policy of austerity. As shown in the aftermath of the financial crisis of 2007-2008, the economic policies focusing on austerity began to reemerge. Following a similar logic to that of the Reagan administration and the Thatcher government, the idea of austerity is to bring about a voluntary deflation of currency by cutting wages, prices, and debt primarily through cutting government spending.<sup>80</sup> The goal of these cuts is to initiate spending in the private sector, allowing the free market to take over government spending,

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<sup>77</sup> An example of this is in Bart J. Wilson et al., “An Experimental Analysis of the Demand for Payday Loans,” *The B.E. Journal of Economic Analysis* Vol. 10, Issue 1 (2010), Article 93. Wilson and his coauthors admit that their study is flawed in the use of undergraduate students to find results, but still stand behind those results. To do studies of this type without accounting for the social situations of the people it is actually impacting is once again representative of the neoliberal mindset that a significant number of economists hold.

<sup>78</sup> The Pew Charitable Trusts, *Standards Needed for Safe Small Installment Loans from Banks, Credit Unions*, (Philadelphia, PA: The Pew Charitable Trusts, 2018).

<sup>79</sup> Gerald Apaam et al., *2017 Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation National Survey of Unbanked and Underbanked Households* (Washington, D.C.: Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, 2018), 39-42, 67. The FDIC’s survey shows that the majority of underbanked and unbanked households are mainly in need of small dollar amount transactions, and obtain them from alternative financial services, such as payday lenders. The report also asserts that recent underwriting technologies can help FDIC insured banks, which are held to stricter interest rates than alternative financial services, offer these small dollar amount loans and service these communities.

<sup>80</sup> Mark Blyth, *Austerity: The History of a Dangerous Idea* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 2. While there is a great deal of other scholarly works on austerity measures, I am choosing to use Blyth as my primary source here as he outlines the problematic aspects without diving into the full economic debate. For a wider range of opinions on the topic, see Robert Skidelsky and Nicolò Fraccaroli, ed., *Austerity vs Stimulus: The Political Future of Economic Recovery* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

eliminating the need for perceived government overreach.<sup>81</sup> The problem, as Blyth is quick to point out, is that these policies do not lead to the widespread growth that proponents claim. Instead, the failures of the private sector, namely banks, are shifted onto the public through bailouts, and the public is expected to pay for it through cuts to the social safety net.<sup>82</sup> In the case of the 2007-2008 financial crisis, studies by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and US Congressional Research went to show that there is no proof that austerity measures actually cause growth in a strong economy, let alone in a weak economy in need of acceleration.<sup>83</sup>

The key link of austerity to neoliberalism is the idea that the power lies in the investors, and not the consumers.<sup>84</sup> Reasoning from this principle, those who invest must be kept solvent and ready to invest to ensure the steady growth of the economy. From this line of reasoning, the concept of austerity to ensure the possibility of investment is a valid conclusion; it does, however, lose sight of other aspects of economic transactions that are required to ensure the firms invested in are able to become profitable. For example, for a firm to have economic transactions, it must have a consumer base that is able and willing to purchase its goods. If consumers' budgets are stabilized by government programs, an austerity program will cause consumers to reorder their budgets, possibly losing the ability to purchase certain products. This inevitably leads those respective firms to lose revenue and become less profitable.

At this point, the major elements of the economic theory and praxis of neoliberalism have been clearly established. Yet the economics themselves do not make

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<sup>81</sup> Blyth, *Austerity*, 2.

<sup>82</sup> Blyth, *Austerity*, 6.

<sup>83</sup> Blyth, *Austerity*, 212.

<sup>84</sup> Blyth, *Austerity*, 37.

up the whole of a problem that requires theological reflection. It is at this point necessary to move onto neoliberalism understood through the lens of philosophy to understand the further implications of these economic ideas exported beyond the realm of economics.

## 1.2 NEOLIBERALISM AS A PHILOSOPHICAL PROBLEM

In the second section of the chapter, I will begin the shift to the analysis of neoliberalism in a second context: the realm of philosophical theory. The philosophers who take up neoliberalism as a philosophical problem tend to fall into two schools of thought: one following a neo-Marxist tradition, building upon concepts Marx first explored in *Capital*<sup>85</sup> and *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*,<sup>86</sup> and the other following Foucault and his discussion of neoliberalism in his lecture series *The Birth of Biopolitics*.<sup>87</sup> This section will be broken into two subsections, each discussing its respective tradition and the primary line of argumentation for each tradition. The argument of this section is that neoliberalism can be understood as more than just an economic theory, but a philosophy that impacts one's understanding of anthropology and epistemology.

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<sup>85</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, 3 vol., trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (New York: International Publishers, 1967).

<sup>86</sup> Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844 and The Communist Manifesto*, trans. Martin Milligan (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1988), 13-168.

<sup>87</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979*, ed. Michel Senellart, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2008).

## **1.2.1 Marx, Neo-Marxists, and a New Alienation**

The first subsection deals with the neo-Marxist tradition of philosophical inquiry dealing with neoliberalism. This subsection is split into three parts: one dealing with Marx and his early critiques of capitalism, a second working exploring the work of Duménil and Lévy who emphasize the impacts on political theory and economics, and a third examining David Harvey's work emphasizing the philosophical and anthropological impacts of neoliberalism. Using these three thinkers, it will show that the neo-Marxist analysis of neoliberalism provides insight into the malformed conceptions of politics and human society brought about by the implementation of neoliberal theory.

### **1.2.1.1 Marx, Surplus Value, the Profit of Capital, and Alienation**

The goal of the following section is to outline two major concepts in Marx that will allow one to have a greater understanding of the Neo-Marxist critique of neoliberalism. While it would seem unnecessary to provide an extended treatment of Marx given his predating of neoliberalism by nearly a century, Marx's concepts of surplus value, profit of capital, and alienation lay the groundwork for the Neo-Marxists' critiques.

#### **1.2.1.1.1 Surplus Value**

In the second volume of *Capital*, Marx links capital to the circulation of money. In Chapter 4, Marx discusses two different flows of money and commodities. The first of

these is sale of a commodity where the money is used then to buy another commodity.<sup>88</sup> For example, when Jones sells a guitar for \$500 so he can buy a crib and diapers that cost a total of \$500, he is engaging in this first flow. For the sake of clarity, this will be referred to as the commodity-end flow. Marx understands this as proper consumption, linking back to Becker's discussion of consumption discussed in 1.1.1.3.<sup>89</sup> The second flow is when one takes her money, buys a commodity, and then sells it again.<sup>90</sup> This will be called money-end flow. To maintain the Jones example, let us say that Jones takes \$500 to buy a guitar, but he finds that he does not play the guitar enough to justify the cost, so he sells it for \$500 to recoup the cost of the guitar, or returns it to the store for a full refund. Once again, the exchange of value is the same. The key issue is the circulation of the money and commodities.

The change, as Marx sees it, is when the money-end flow adds value to the transaction.<sup>91</sup> For example, let us keep the parameters of the second example: Jones buys a guitar for \$500, but he wants to sell it since he is not playing it. If he is able to sell the guitar to another buyer who is willing to pay \$550 for whatever reason, Jones has created \$50 of value without any production or addition to the material. This is what Marx refers to as surplus-value. He writes: "The value originally advanced, therefore, not only remains intact while in circulation, but adds to itself a surplus-value or expands itself. It is this movement that converts it to capital."<sup>92</sup> Marx, then, is able to provide a definition of capital that is clear and concise: it is money expanded by surplus value, or value

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<sup>88</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, 146.

<sup>89</sup> Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, 147.

<sup>90</sup> Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, 147-148.

<sup>91</sup> Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, 149.

<sup>92</sup> Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, 149.

created without making a physical modification to the commodity sold. This idea of creating value without making a modification to the item one is selling becomes central to understanding the critiques of neoliberal capitalism.

#### 1.2.1.1.2 Profit of Capital

The second piece of Marx's philosophical outlook that comes into play is the profit of capital, which comes from a section of the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*.<sup>93</sup> In this chapter, Marx first defines capital as governing power over labor and its products.<sup>94</sup> This is important, as it makes an explicit link between capital and power. Marx establishes that there is a disproportionate amount of profit given to the capitalist over the worker, primarily because, as he cites Smith, the employer would not be interested in employing the workers without the possibility of such profits.<sup>95</sup> From this, Marx concludes that the capitalist profits twice: once from the labor of his workers and once from the raw materials.<sup>96</sup> Marx goes on to say how this profit is variable, but this variability may be exploited in various ways: secrets of trade and manufacturing, colonial expansion by the capitalist's nation, or simply through more human refinement, because "the greater human share in a commodity, the greater the profit in dead capital."<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, 35-52. This particular work of Marx is a rather fascinating group of papers that include, as the chapter selected, as notes with commentary on Smith's *Wealth of Nations*. This helps the reader to understand Marx as a careful reader of Smith, pointing out the problems within Smith's system.

<sup>94</sup> Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, 36.

<sup>95</sup> Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, 36-37.

<sup>96</sup> Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, 38.

<sup>97</sup> Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, 39. Marx's use of the term "dead capital" here is a reference to his earlier allusion in the *Manuscripts* to the way labor responds to the "natural, spiritual, and social variety of individual activity is manifested and is variously rewarded," as opposed to capital's indifference to individual activity. *Ibid.*, 21.

The most significant point Marx offers here is one about the relationship between competition and profit. Marx finds, according to Smith, that competition only occurs when there are enough people with capital to begin firms, which implies a wide dispersal of capital.<sup>98</sup> Marx also finds there to be an inverse correlation between profit and competition; the greater the competition in a particular market, the lower the profits.<sup>99</sup> From these premises and the assumption that there are small, medium, and large capitalist firms, that the fall in profits from competition will do the greatest damage to the small, and eventually medium, firms, allowing the larger firms to buy them, minimizing competition to as few firms as necessary.<sup>100</sup> This leads to the concentration of capital into a few hands, meaning that power over workers is concentrated into the hands of a small number of very wealthy people. This means workers are left with little or no power over their own labor, as the market will favor capitalists and the wages the capitalists are willing to pay.

### 1.2.1.1.3 Alienation

Finally, the last concept from Marx's work that will impact the analysis of the Neo-Marxists is that of the alienation of the worker from her labor. In the section of the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* dedicated to estranged labor<sup>101</sup>, Marx chooses to abandon previous political economic theories because political economics prior to Marx

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<sup>98</sup> Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, 41.

<sup>99</sup> Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, 42.

<sup>100</sup> Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, 44-45. For a contemporary example of this, one can look to the failed merger of Comcast with Time Warner Cable. For details, see Emily Steel et al., "Comcast Is Said to End \$45 Billion Bid for Time Warner Cable," *The New York Times*, 23 April, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/24/business/media/comcast-time-warner-cable-merger.html>.

<sup>101</sup> In his translation notes, Milligan points to the fact that while the German phrase *Etfremdete Arbeiten* could be translated as "alienated labor," *Etfremdedete* lacks the connotation associated with law and property that alienation implies. For further explanation, see Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, 10-11.

do not properly analyze the relations between economic factors, namely the power dynamic between capital and workers and its implications.<sup>102</sup> Marx claims one must begin reasoning from a new “economic fact”: there is a negative correlation between a worker’s productivity and a worker’s value.<sup>103</sup> This creates not only commodities of the products made, according to Marx, but also transforms the workers themselves into commodities.<sup>104</sup> This transformation is the heart of Marx’s understanding of alienation.<sup>105</sup>

The alienation of the worker manifests itself in three primary ways that Marx describes: objectification of the worker, the dehumanization of work through alienation from the process of labor, and reversal of the relationship between the worker’s essence and her existence.<sup>106</sup> The first manifestation of alienation, the objectification of the worker, follows from the logic that the worker is enslaved to an object in two ways: by way of the object of work, labor, and the means of subsistence in exchange for her

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<sup>102</sup> Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, 70.

<sup>103</sup> Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, 71.

<sup>104</sup> Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, 71.

<sup>105</sup> A modern example that connects to Marx’s understanding of alienation is the shift in the US economy since the 1980s from a manufacturing economy to a service economy. The main idea is as follows: During the 1980s, international competition grew because goods can be manufactured in places like Japan and China at a lower cost due to US labor laws, bolstered by labor unions, require companies to pay factory workers fair wages and keep reasonable working hours. These rules did not apply to the factories in Asia; even today, as the suicides of Foxconn workers show, modern sweatshops are still in use without concern for the well-being of the workers. For more information on the Foxconn issues, see Lei Guo et al., “A case study of the Foxconn suicides: an international perspective to framing the sweatshop issue,” *The International Communication Gazette* 74(5) (2012), 484-503. Since American manufacturers could not compete while producing goods, the shift was made to producing services, such as waiters and retail employees to name a few, which could pay workers a lower rate. Benjamin Friedman points out that in 1987, while the average worker in construction and manufacturing was paid a weekly wage of \$477 [\$1030.4 in 2019 United States Dollars (USD)] and \$406 [\$877 in 2019 USD], respectively, the average retail employee was paid a weekly wage of \$179 [\$386.67 in 2019 USD]. When averaging the manufacturing and construction salaries, the employee wage gap between the service industry and manufacturing/construction is 58%. In the 40 years between 1948 and 1988, service industries went from employing 52% of the US labor force to over 70%. This means that a significant portion of the US market has moved into providing services, which leads to overall lower wages. For more on the wage data, see Benjamin Friedman, *Day of Reckoning: The Consequences of American Economic Policy under Reagan and After* (New York: Random House, 1988), 190. The situation has continued to degrade in the last 30 years, as now the average weekly wage of manufacturing, construction, and service employs are \$753.60, \$984.80, and \$519.20, respectively.

<sup>106</sup> Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, 76.

labor.<sup>107</sup> This means, according to Marx, the worker is enslaved to the object because she cannot survive without labor, becoming an object herself.<sup>108</sup> This issue of objectification and the worker's enslavement to the object of labor is one that traditional political economics does not discuss, and why Marx engages in his project.<sup>109</sup>

The second element of alienation that Marx discusses is the way in which the worker is alienated from the process of labor. According to Marx, labor is external to the worker, meaning that the worker only does labor when she is not at home.<sup>110</sup> Since the worker does not labor when she is not fulfilling her employment obligations, Marx considers this to be forced labor.<sup>111</sup> The worker labors not to satisfy a need, such as the need for food, clothing, or shelter. Instead, the labor is a means to fulfilling these needs; the money the worker earns from her labor allows her to purchase food and clothing, pay rent and utilities, and provide for other needs that may arise.<sup>112</sup> To put this concretely, a luthier does not design and craft instruments to directly put food on the table or barter for his rent. A luthier builds the instruments he designs as that he may sell them to musicians. The money he earns from these sales allows him to pay for food, rent, and so on. While this described example is benign, the situation changes when labor comes under the control of capitalist demands.

Marx's concern about the alienation from the active process of labor is that it is the process of the dehumanization of the worker. For Marx, the human person is distinct

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<sup>107</sup> Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, 72-73.

<sup>108</sup> Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, 73.

<sup>109</sup> Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, 73.

<sup>110</sup> Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, 74. Feminist theologians, such as Christine Firer Hinze, would object to this statement given the labor women do in the home, even when they are fully employed. While I accept the feminist critique, I will not further engage it for the sake of clearly elucidating Marx's point.

<sup>111</sup> Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, 74.

<sup>112</sup> Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, 74.

from animals in what Marx calls her life-activity.<sup>113</sup> The concept of life-activity is the activity through which a person takes part of their essence and places it into something else, normally through some kind of labor.<sup>114</sup> To perform this life activity, for Marx, is to engage in one's essence.<sup>115</sup> When labor is then forced, so that the worker is able to eat, drink, and have shelter, Marx argues that this is a confusion of a worker's essence with her existence, alienating the worker from herself to the point that she has more in common with animals than with what her essence dictates she should be.<sup>116</sup>

The confusion between essence and existence for Marx also contributes to the alienation of one worker from her fellow workers.<sup>117</sup> This can be understood in the following way: a human person must have a foundational understanding of what kind of creature she is to be able to properly relate to other creatures or objects, regardless of what those creatures or objects may be. This implies that a person must understand her essence to be capable of having relationships with other human beings. When capitalism leads to the worker confusing her existence with her essence, she is then unable to form meaningful relationships with others. If this is the case, community becomes impossible, leading workers to be alienated from each other without any power to push back against capitalist demands.

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<sup>113</sup> Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, 75. Another topic worthy of reflection given this assertion by Marx would be a comparison between Marx's position and that of John Paul II in *Laborem Exercens* where he provides the framework of human beings as co-creative with God. Since this discussion would take the line of argumentation too far afield from the point of establishing the philosophical critique of neoliberalism from a neo-Marxist position, I will leave that conversation for another project.

<sup>114</sup> This interpretation of Marx is highly metaphysical, providing a depth to his materialism for which the neo-Marxists discussed below will not have the same appreciation. Michel Henry's phenomenological interpretation of Marx as a metaphysical philosopher concerned with the reality of the human person informs a great deal of my reading of Marx's life-activity. For more of Henry's reading of Marx, see Michel Henry, *Marx: A Philosophy of Human Reality*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1983).

<sup>115</sup> Henry, *Marx*, 225-227.

<sup>116</sup> Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscript*, 76-77.

<sup>117</sup> Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, 78.

Through these major concepts, the Marxist tradition provides the groundwork for a critique of neoliberalism that neo-Marxist thinkers will provide. While different neo-Marxist thinkers emphasize certain elements over others, the overarching themes will appear in the following subsection.

### **1.2.1.2 Duménil and Lévy**

The first branch of neo-Marxist critique I will examine is the work of Duménil and Dominique Lévy as representatives of French neo-Marxism.<sup>118</sup> In this subsection, I will discuss three main elements: Duménil and Lévy's theory of structural crises and how neoliberalism forms between the third and fourth crises, the development of Marx's bipolar class analysis into a tripolar class analysis, and the application of Marx's theory of surplus value to neoliberal capitalism.

The first contribution Duménil and Lévy make to the philosophical critique of neoliberalism is the situating of neoliberalism in the midst of structural economic crises. According to Duménil and Lévy, there have been four structural economic crises since the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and each have caused a fundamental change in the way capitalism functioned by the end of the crisis. The first of these crises began in the United States in 1865 and lasted until the turn of the century and in Europe, specifically France, from 1875-1893.<sup>119</sup> One major result of this crisis is the separation of ownership and management, creating a stockholder class separate and distinct from the managerial class

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<sup>118</sup> For the sake of brevity and pertinence to my argument, I am limiting my discussion of French neo-Marxism to this pair of coauthors. My main reasoning for choosing Duménil and Lévy is their specific focus on neoliberalism in two books and several articles.

<sup>119</sup> Gérard Duménil and Dominique Lévy, *Capital Resurgent: Roots of the Neoliberal Revolution*, trans. Derek Jeffers (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 11.

and a more complex system of creditors and financiers.<sup>120</sup> The second crisis, as one might expect, was the Great Depression, resulting in the Keynesian mixed-economy that drove policies through the 1970s. The third crisis, to which most of *Capital Resurgent* is dedicated, is the stagflation crisis described above, and where neoliberalism emerged as a third structural change.<sup>121</sup> The fourth and final structural crisis Duménil and Lévy discuss is the crisis brought about by the financial crisis of 2007-2008.<sup>122</sup> By using the logic of this theory, one can understand that one aspect of a neo-Marxist analysis of neoliberalism, from the perspective of Duménil and Lévy at least, is that neoliberal capitalism is a repetition of the cycle of a form of capitalism leading to some form of crisis that requires a restructuring of how capitalism functions. This means that the current moment is one of restructuring, leading to the possibility of directing a new philosophy of economic development.

The second aspect of Duménil and Lévy's scholarship pertinent to the current examination is the development of the tripolar class analysis. As alluded to in the previous point, Duménil and Lévy depart from classical Marxist class analysis by introducing a third class.<sup>123</sup> The beginnings of this third class emerge with the first structural crisis, when the capitalists and managers split into two different classes.<sup>124</sup> This third class develops during the neoliberal era into three distinct income brackets as Duménil and Lévy show: the bottom 90% of income earners, the next 9% of income

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<sup>120</sup> Duménil and Lévy, *Capitalism Resurgent*, 12.

<sup>121</sup> Duménil and Lévy, *Capitalism Resurgent*, 15-18. Further details on the argumentation about this new structure, see Duménil and Lévy, *Capitalism Resurgent*, 69-139.

<sup>122</sup> Gérard Duménil and Dominique Lévy, *The Crisis of Neoliberalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 207-263.

<sup>123</sup> In the language of *The Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Marx makes a distinction between two classes: bourgeoisie and proletarian. Duménil and Lévy will also use the terms of productive/popular class and non-productive class, fitting with language from *Capital*.

<sup>124</sup> Duménil and Lévy, *Capitalism Resurgent*, 12.

earners, and the top 1%.<sup>125</sup> Duménil and Lévy further analyze this point by first making the distinction between non-productive and popular classes.<sup>126</sup> While this seems to break down Marx's dialectic with the addition of a third class, Duménil and Lévy have actually found a nested dialectic within the non-productive class. The capitalist and managerial classes, while both non-productive by Marxist standards, still develop class conflict developing out of the financial revolution.<sup>127</sup> By showing that class conflict can evolve out of any center of economic power, Duménil and Lévy actually show the Marxist dialectic to be at work in capitalism as a whole, with deeper layers in neoliberal capitalism.<sup>128</sup>

The third element of Duménil and Lévy's analysis is the shift in surplus value in the era of neoliberalism. According to Duménil and Lévy, the traditional formulation of surplus value cannot apply to the neoliberal framework of capitalism without some adjustments.<sup>129</sup> Part of the way they choose to address this need for a different analysis is due to the changes of relations between classes and modes of production.<sup>130</sup> This is

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<sup>125</sup> Gérard Duménil and Dominique Lévy, "Neoliberal Managerial Capitalism: Another Reading of the Piketty, Saez, and Zucman Data," *International Journal of Political Economy* 44:2 (2015), 79. As one can see from the title, the whole of this article serves as a neo-Marxist analysis of the data behind Piketty's *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*. For more detail on Duménil and Lévy's take on Piketty, see Gérard Duménil and Dominique Lévy, "The Economics and Politics of Thomas Piketty's Theses," *Actuel Marx* 2014/2 and 2015/01.

<sup>126</sup> Gérard Duménil and Dominique Lévy, "Marxian Political Economy: Legacy and Renewal," *World Review of Political Economy* 1.1 (2010), 12.

<sup>127</sup> Duménil and Lévy, "Marxian Political Economy: Legacy and Renewal," 10. Duménil and Lévy further analyze data to support these claims in their chapter on class distinctions in *The Crisis of Neoliberalism*. For further detail, see Duménil and Lévy, *The Crisis of Neoliberalism*, 73-89.

<sup>128</sup> This serves as a central thesis for *Capitalism Resurgent*, showing the Marxist theory of history at work through the financial revolution. For more, see Duménil and Lévy, *Capitalism Resurgent*, 13-18.

<sup>129</sup> Duménil and Lévy, *The Crisis of Neoliberalism*, 91. Duménil and Lévy argue that the major issue at work in this issue is that managerial salaries, namely those of CEOs, are so astronomically high they cannot be rightly be considered wages in determining the extracted surplus value. Traditional Marxist analysis does not make a distinction between executive compensation and traditional labor wages, so any computation would be flawed.

<sup>130</sup> Duménil and Lévy, *The Crisis of Neoliberalism*, 92-93. Part of this change is in part due to technological and economic transformations that change the way income is directed. For example, in

dependent on recognizing the emergence of a managerial class that overlaps with the capitalist class and has complicated relations with the capitalist class.<sup>131</sup> While Duménil and Lévy go into great detail in their economic analysis, they do not place a great amount of detail into the philosophical elements outside of their use and modification of the historicity of class struggle.

The significance of this point is that traditional Marxist economics needs serious revision to be able to properly engage with the problem of neoliberalism. Marxist philosophy of history and class dynamics, however, provide a more useful set of tools to articulate and understand the problem of neoliberalism. To further understand the philosophical contribution of neo-Marxism to the conversation about neoliberalism as a philosophical problem, I will turn to the work of David Harvey.

### **1.2.1.3 David Harvey**

Harvey's neo-Marxist analysis offers a different take from Duménil and Lévy in that besides the economic considerations, Harvey also provides a fuller analysis of the philosophical, anthropological, and social-ethical concerns that arise with the problem of neoliberalism. The three main elements of Harvey's work that will help further illuminate the philosophical challenges of neoliberalism are the madness of economic reason, the problem of universal alienation, and the reaction of human nature.

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previous eras of capitalism, the capitalist extracts surplus value by charging customers a higher price than the cost of the natural materials and the wage of the workers who crafted it. With the revolution of financialization that ushers in the era of neoliberalism, those streams of income change, requiring a new understanding to see how that surplus value is obtained.

<sup>131</sup> Duménil and Lévy, *The Crisis of Neoliberalism*, 94-95. Duménil and Lévy's analysis continues in the following chapters, but it is not germane to the further theological argument I am making. For more of their economic analysis, see *The Crisis of Neoliberalism*, 101-338.

One of the most philosophically interesting aspects of Harvey's critique in *Marx, Capital, and the Madness of Economic Reason* is his discussion of the madness of economic reason, which can be understood as a problem of epistemology.<sup>132</sup> The monograph, while serving as an application of Marx's *Capital* to contemporary finance-driven capitalism, also provides a reflection upon the grounds of capitalist logic, finding significant problems with the foundational logical principles upon which the economic system stands.

One such problem is the constant reference to acts of God or irrational human behavior as the root cause of crises.<sup>133</sup> Given the centrality of crises to economic history, as seen above in the work of Duménil and Lévy, a fair question to ask is whether or not, given the frequency of these events, the cause of crises is something that should not only be considered but anticipated. Instead of considering such a proposition, writes Harvey, economists blame individuals' poor choices for the crises, preferring the explanation of human error over flaws in their economic theory.<sup>134</sup> It appears as though, from Harvey's portrayal, economists are more concerned with the internal coherence of their economic theory than its correspondence to what actually occurs in the marketplace.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> David Harvey, *Marx, Capital, and the Madness of Economic Reason* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018). Throughout the monograph, Harvey references the impact of knowledge and mental concepts on how capitalism functions. Since there are questions of knowledge, Harvey's questions are inherently epistemological, and therefore can be explored using some more traditional philosophical tools.

<sup>133</sup> Harvey, *Madness of Economic Reason*, 174.

<sup>134</sup> Harvey, *Madness of Economic Reason*, 175.

<sup>135</sup> To develop Harvey's claim in a more philosophically robust way, the concern about economic theorist could be described as a preference for a coherence theory of truth as opposed to a correspondence theory of truth. Correspondence theory has multiple formulations from Aristotle to contemporary thinkers, but the most relevant articulation, and perhaps the most familiar to the reader, would be Thomas Aquinas' definition of truth ST I.16.1 that "Truth is the equation of thought and thing," implying a relationship between truth and being. By contrast, coherence theories of truth define a true statement as one that does not contradict a coherent set of statements of a similar kind. In an extreme form, coherentism eventually moves towards an all-encompassing system of coherent beliefs, which, according to Pascal Engel, is akin to the systems of Spinoza and Hegel. In terms of Harvey's argument, his claim about standard capitalist

Another example of the madness of which Harvey speaks is the illogical abuse of resources that will ultimately result in a production-halting scarcity. Further in his discussion of the madness of capitalist reason, Harvey discusses the way neoliberal capitalism has cut down the turnover time for consumption.<sup>136</sup> Harvey's example of this minimal turnover time for consumption is that of a Netflix special. If Harvey watches program X, it in no way impedes me or any other Netflix subscriber from watching that same program simultaneously. This is radical when compared to the sale of another commodity, like hammers, where Miller's purchase of a hammer can directly impede Wilson's purchase of the hammer because the quantity matters; in other words, Miller and Wilson cannot purchase the same hammer in the same way that Harvey and I can watch the same Netflix special. The Netflix example is even a step beyond traditional entertainment media formats, such as tentpole films from major studios, where there is a discernable limit to who can access the product at a time, whether it be number of seats in a theater or number of physical copies available for retail or rental at one time. While this can work in terms of digital content, it is an approach that would encounter difficulties if applied to traditional commodities. Yet, Harvey argues, neoliberal capitalism sees only the potential for ever increasing profits from a limit exertion of resources, and can consider such radical levels of consumption to be rational as it leads to endless capital

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economists is that they prefer the coherent system that is taught in economics departments in universities around the world without addressing the problem of the seeming lack of correspondence between economic theory and praxis in a substantial way. For a further overview of philosophical problems concerning truth in general, see Pascal Engel, *Truth* (London: Routledge, 2014). For an overview of the variations of the coherence theory of truth, see James O. Young, "The Coherence Theory of Truth", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2018 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2018/entries/truth-coherence>, accessed July 11, 2019.

<sup>136</sup> Harvey, *Madness of Economic Reason*, 198-199.

accumulation.<sup>137</sup> The problem, however, is that traditional commodities, like hammers, bread, and books, require physical resources that are finite, and require time to replenish. The misapplication of the production logic of a Netflix program to traditional commodities leads to a use of resources that outpaces the ability for said resources to be replenished. Therefore, neoliberal capitalism inherently puts itself in danger by losing the ability to produce by eliminating its own resources.<sup>138</sup>

The second aspect of Harvey's neo-Marxist critique of neoliberalism is the problem of universal alienation. In his monograph *Seventeen Contradictions and the End of Capitalism*, Harvey argues throughout the book that the manner in which capital operates is built upon a series of contradictions, any of which would lead to a collapse in the system.<sup>139</sup> The final contradiction, however, lies not with the economic flaws of capital itself, but rather the human cost required to maintain these contradictions.<sup>140</sup> The question for Harvey, then, is whether or not the majority of the population will eventually work in concert to resist the capitalist class's actions.<sup>141</sup> The key to this move for Harvey comes in understanding the centrality of alienation to the problem. Citing sources ranging from Marx and Engels to Pope Francis, Harvey highlights how alienation is not just a

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<sup>137</sup> Harvey, *Madness of Economic Reason*, 199.

<sup>138</sup> Harvey, *Madness of Economic Reason*, 194. For Harvey's extended treatment of the topic of environmental degradation as a contradiction in capital accumulation, see David Harvey, *Seventeen Contradictions and the End of Capitalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 246-263. It is also worth noting that there are considerable connections to be made with this aspect of Harvey's work and Chapter III of Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'*. While such a pursuit would be interesting and worthwhile, it would distract from the argument at hand.

<sup>139</sup> Harvey, *Seventeen Contradictions*, 5-8. In this section of the introduction, Harvey explicitly makes a distinction between a critique of capital and a critique of capitalism, primarily because a critique capitalism and the social formation it entails requires a discussion of the problems of racial and gender discrimination that accompany the social formation. Since these forms of discrimination are not exclusive to capitalism, Harvey chooses to focus on the economic functions at work to see their impact on the social situation, rather than attempting to address these two complex topics that would distract from his argument.

<sup>140</sup> Harvey, *Seventeen Contradictions*, 264.

<sup>141</sup> Harvey, *Seventeen Contradictions*, 264-5.

Marxist understanding of the problem, but a universal concept that is accepted by various ideological camps.<sup>142</sup> The contemporary addition to the concept of alienation that Marx describes in the *Philosophical and Economic Manuscripts of 1844* is the addition of consumption as a method of alleviating the feeling of alienation. Citing André Gorz, Harvey argues that workers accept alienation in their employment because it provides opportunities to be fulfilled via consumerism.<sup>143</sup> It is through this form of socialization that human beings become further alienated as their entire existence, working and non-working hours, are structured by a capital flow dependent on both production and consumption in their most efficient forms. This socialization, taking place globally, is universal alienation.

A significant factor in Harvey's understanding of this problem is that human beings are "freely associating and self-creating individuals."<sup>144</sup> At a certain point, human persons will find themselves without a creative outlet, caught in a cycle of producing and consuming. Harvey's hope is that individuals will be able to use technology to overcome the neoliberal ideology that attempts to isolate people and make connections that will allow people to come together and resist the capital machine that seeks to dominate human life.<sup>145</sup>

In the above subsection, a selective survey of Neo-Marxist contributions to the conversation of neoliberalism as a philosophical problem has been laid out. The topics covered by the neo-Marxist authors have provided context to understanding how a new class emerged to complicate the classical class struggle dynamic, the issue of crises, and

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<sup>142</sup> Harvey, *Seventeen Contradictions*, 270-6.

<sup>143</sup> Harvey, *Seventeen Contradictions*, 276.

<sup>144</sup> Harvey, *Seventeen Contradictions*, 277.

<sup>145</sup> Harvey, *Seventeen Contradictions*, 277-9.

the human cost of neoliberal capitalism to those who live within its system. While these authors have contributed significant categories for this investigation, the Neo-Marxist approach is not sufficient by itself to fully grasp the philosophical problem of neoliberalism. The most significant point is that the neo-Marxist thinks focus primarily on the economic side of the problem of political philosophy, let alone other philosophical issues that arise. For that reason, we must look beyond the Marxist tradition to the Foucauldian tradition to gain a greater perspective on the range of philosophical issues neoliberalism creates.

### **1.2.2 Foucault, Brown, and Structures of Power**

In this subsection, I examine the work of Michel Foucault and Wendy Brown, a student of Foucault's work, for an analysis of the political power dynamics that neoliberalism has impacted and how that in turn impacts life in the state. My reading of Foucault and Brown provides an analysis of how neoliberal theory impacts political and social philosophies by fundamentally shifting how knowledge and the human person operate within a society where the economy is the organizing principle.

#### **1.2.2.1 Michel Foucault and *The Birth of Biopolitics***

The first work to be examined is Foucault's lecture series, given at the Collège de France during the 1978-1979 academic year. Continuing the previous year's lecture course entitled *Security, Territory, Population*, Foucault sought to have a deeper understanding on how economics serves as an internal limitation of governmental

reasoning.<sup>146</sup> In my overview of Foucault, I highlight three aspects of his analysis of neoliberalism: the role of the *raison d'Etat* in the neoliberal state, the epistemological shift within neoliberalism from one of understanding systems and processes to one of choices between competing ends, and the assertion of a new interpretation of *homo oeconomicus*.<sup>147</sup> Through this analysis, I argue that Foucault's understanding of neoliberalism is a clear understanding of the political philosophy that served as the foundation for not only the governments mentioned above, but their successors leading up to and including the present.

The concepts of biopower and governmentality are central to Foucault's understanding of neoliberalism. For Foucault, biopower and biopolitics are matters of power, control, and rationality. As Johanna Oksala concisely describes it, biopower is the shift in understanding power as license to kill using explicit violence to power as control over bodies with hidden violence.<sup>148</sup> In the context of modern society, biopolitics, the political application of biopower, does not use laws as its method of control; instead, it uses experts outside of a legal framework to establish patterns of control, such as healthcare professionals and prison wardens, harkening to *The Birth of the Clinic* and *Discipline and Punish*.<sup>149</sup> Such techniques require shifts in both philosophies of

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<sup>146</sup> Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 327.

<sup>147</sup> It should be noted that Foucault gave the final lecture of *The Birth of Biopolitics* series on April 4, 1979, a month to the day before Thatcher became Prime Minister of the United Kingdom on May 4, 1979 following the general election on May 3. While this timing is merely coincidental, it provides a quality of foreshadowing to the eventual reorientation of government and economic policies toward the neoliberal agenda.

<sup>148</sup> Johanna Oksala, "From Biopower to Governmentality," in *A Companion to Foucault*, ed. Christopher Falzon, Timothy O'Leary, and Jana Sawicki (Chichester, West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 321-322.

<sup>149</sup> Oksala, "From Biopower to Governmentality," 321-2.

knowledge and the human person to accomplish their task, and hence require analysis in those areas below.

When Foucault shifts the focus to governments and more traditional topics of political philosophy, the concept of biopower remains as his hermeneutic lens. In the first lecture of *The Birth of Biopolitics*, Foucault states that the questions in the course are no different from those of prisons and sexuality that he explored elsewhere.<sup>150</sup> The significant difference is that government that is using these biopower techniques as a manner of control requires new categories to understand why and how governments function, namely the rationality behind these governments and their techniques. As opposed to asking after a *raison d'être*, Foucault seeks *raison d'Etat*.

Foucault's opening comments of the lecture course provide the context for Foucault's reflection on governmental reasoning, emphasizing the concept of *raison d'Etat* of the state.<sup>151</sup> Foucault defines the term as follows:

*Raison d'Etat* is precisely a practice, or rather the rationalization of a practice, which places itself between a state presented as given and a state presented as having to be constructed and built. The art of government must therefore fix its rules and rationalize its way of doing things by taking as its objective the bringing into being of what the state should be.<sup>152</sup>

Foucault's understanding of the *raison d'Etat* is central to understanding the way neoliberalism impacts the implementation of a political philosophy. As discussed above, one aspect of the neoliberal ideology in relation to politics is that the marketplace exists as the foundation of human relations, and since human beings are involved in the art of governing, to use Foucault's terminology, governments should operate in a similar

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<sup>150</sup> Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 19.

<sup>151</sup> Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 4.

<sup>152</sup> Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 4.

manner. The state, then, is in competition with other states to see which can best exert its power to regulate the lives of its subjects as a police state.<sup>153</sup> At first, this seems to contradict the neoliberal ideas on the relationship between individual freedom and government intervention. What Foucault proposes, however, is that the neoliberal government acts like a firm in the marketplaces. It is through this lens that Foucault is then able to define neoliberalism as follows:

The problem of neo-liberalism is rather how the overall exercise of political power can be modeled on the principles of a market economy. So it is not a question of freeing an empty space, but of taking the formal principles of a market economy and referring and relating them to, of projecting them on to a general art of government. This, I think is what is at stake, and I tried to show you that in order to carry out this operation, that is to say, to discover how far and to what extent the formal principles of a market economy can index a general art of government, the neo-liberals had to subject classical liberalism to a number of transformations.<sup>154</sup>

Neoliberalism, for Foucault, is a governmental rationality in which the government operates as if it were a firm competing in the marketplace. This rationality needs adaptation as the political order does normally operate under the guiding principles of market exchange. With this understanding of neoliberalism, Foucault is then able to further investigate how economic principles are applied to the art of government with this new *raison d'Etat*. The two primary foci of Foucault's analysis are epistemological and anthropological, and I will provide an overview of each one in turn.

The first of Foucault's analyses to examine is that of the epistemological implications of neoliberalism. To understand Foucault's argument in *The Birth of*

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<sup>153</sup> Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 7. Foucault places significant emphasis on the idea of the police state as a central understanding of the power dynamics of government. I will not be discussing this concept at great length as it will inevitably distract from the primary argument. The essential aspect is to understand that for Foucault, governments determine effectiveness in terms of how they exercise power as a police state.

<sup>154</sup> Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 131.

*Biopolitics*, it is important to look back at Foucault's overall critique of questions of knowledge as found in *The Order of Things*.<sup>155</sup> In Part II of *The Order of Things*, Foucault describes the division of knowledge that emerged from the break between a classical conception of knowledge and modern conception of knowledge that produced the human sciences. Taking topics that once were the realm of philosophy in the classical era, modernity, reoriented by a rationalist tradition represented by Descartes, Spinoza, and Comte, added to the realm of philosophy and the realm of mathematics and the physical sciences a realm of the human sciences, including biology<sup>156</sup>, linguistics, and, most importantly for the purposes of this chapter, economics.<sup>157</sup> These human sciences explored areas, says Foucault, untouched by the other two areas of knowledge, allowing for a different methodology to develop.<sup>158</sup> The danger for knowledge in the break between the modern and the post-modern is the "anthropologism" of knowledge, where knowledge loses its rigor, as will be shown in the context of economics in *The Birth of Biopolitics*.<sup>159</sup>

The further context of Foucault's breaks in economics arrive in two distinct events. The first, breaking from classical views on economy,<sup>160</sup> is Adam Smith's

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<sup>155</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994). This overview is by no means comprehensive and covers only as much as is necessary to understand Foucault's argument in *The Birth of Biopolitics*. For a more comprehensive discussion of Foucault's epistemology in the greater context of epistemology as a whole, see Linda Martín Alcoff, "Foucault's Normative Epistemology," in *A Companion to Foucault*, ed. Christopher Falzon, Timothy O'Leary, and Jana Sawicki (Chichester, West Sussex, UK: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd: 2013), 207-225.

<sup>156</sup> It is interesting to note that Foucault chooses to include biology as a human science rather than include it with mathematics and physical sciences. The primary reason for this is the implication of power dynamics as described in *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*. For further reading on the topic of biopower in Foucault, see Oskala, "From Biopower to Governmentality," 320-336.

<sup>157</sup> Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 344-345.

<sup>158</sup> Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 345-346.

<sup>159</sup> Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 347.

<sup>160</sup> For Foucault's analysis on exchange that influences his view of economics, see Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 167-214. This detailed analysis of exchange is very archeological, and does not contribute much to

development of the science of economic mechanisms and processes.<sup>161</sup> This shift to the study of mechanisms allowed Smith to articulate the way in which labor impacts prices and adds a level of depth to understanding the processes by which exchange happens.<sup>162</sup> Smith's change, however, is significant, as it shifts the understanding of economics from that of the cycles of wealth and impoverishment to that of a type of organism that has its own form of native laws, namely laws of capital and production.<sup>163</sup>

When Foucault turns to the epistemological structure of neoliberalism in the lecture course, he notes the second break in economic thinking, arriving with the introduction of neoliberal thought: rather than studying the systems and mechanisms of commerce, economics becomes the study of choices of individuals.<sup>164</sup> Foucault understands this shift as centered on the idea of an exchange of power, namely labor power, for wealth, and then the application of that wealth to consumption.<sup>165</sup> This shift to the study of individual choices changes the kind of knowledge economic analysis provides us, and therefore creates a new power dynamic. This power dynamic takes away power from understanding systems labor and exchange and into the realm of individual decisions of capital investment.<sup>166</sup> This imbalance of power provides an understanding for the income inequality and other imbalances of economic power discussed above. To put succinctly, the change to the neoliberal knowledge of economics creates a power shift that creates a barrier for economic activity by placing the emphasis on individual choices

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his analysis of neoliberalism that cannot be found in *The Birth of Biopolitics*. Therefore, for the sake of brevity and focus, I will abstain from commentary on this section.

<sup>161</sup> Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 221-226.

<sup>162</sup> Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 222-223.

<sup>163</sup> Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 226.

<sup>164</sup> Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 223.

<sup>165</sup> Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 223-4. It is also at this point that Foucault engages with Becker, mentioned above in 1.1.3, to formulate this understanding.

<sup>166</sup> Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 224.

as opposed to rules of exchange that can be learned and analyzed, creating a further centralization of power into the hands of an investor class and out of those who may seek to improve their modest economic station.

The second focus of Foucault's analysis of neoliberalism that is significant is his critique of the neoliberal reinterpretation of the *homo oeconomicus*.<sup>167</sup> According to Foucault, the classical understanding of *homo oeconomicus* as expressed by John Stuart Mill deals with the person of exchange, where the question of commerce is at the heart of economics.<sup>168</sup> The hallmarks of this classical conception of *homo oeconomicus*, according to Foucault, is the human person as one partner in an exchange, who analyzes the utility of her decisions based on her ability to decipher and articulate her needs.<sup>169</sup>

The neoliberal vision, however, does not place commerce as the center of economic activity, as seen above. Instead, says Foucault, the neoliberal *homo oeconomicus* is, at his core, an entrepreneur and the enterprise itself, investing in himself for the sake of consumption in the way Becker discusses above.<sup>170</sup> This anthropological understanding creates a great shift from the classical view in that it redefines the human being as no longer an actor engaging in a system of activity, namely exchange, but now as a firm that can be invested in and leveraged for the sake of higher social standing and

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<sup>167</sup> The term *homo oeconomicus* originates from an abstract concept of the human person as economic unit used by John Stuart Mill in his 1863 essay "On the Definition of Political Economy; and on the Method of Investigation Proper to It." This idea of the *homo oeconomicus* became a standard moniker of understanding how the economic actor is motivated to act in the way she does. For a further discussion of this concept's history, especially Mill's conception, see Joseph Persky, "Retrospectives: The Ethology of *Homo Economicus*," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 9.2 (1995), 221-231.

<sup>168</sup> Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 225.

<sup>169</sup> Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 225.

<sup>170</sup> Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 226.

consumption in Becker's sense.<sup>171</sup> This allows for the application of market principles to non-market relationships.<sup>172</sup>

Foucault's analysis of the *raison d'Etat* of the neoliberal state, the epistemological shift concerning economics, and the new *homo oeconomicus* provide the groundwork for the neoliberal order that would emerge in the decade after his lecture course. To continue the tradition of Foucauldian analysis of neoliberalism after its emergence and dominance in Western society, we must now turn to Wendy Brown.

### 1.2.2.2 Wendy Brown and *Undoing the Demos*

As Foucault offered his reflections on the eve of neoliberalism's rise, Brown, continuing Foucault's tradition of political philosophical critique, offers her reflections on the philosophical impacts of the neoliberal program in the aftermath of the 2007-2008 financial crash. In her books *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution*<sup>173</sup> and *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism: The Rise of Antidemocratic Politics in the West*<sup>174</sup>, Brown's analysis of neoliberalism takes Foucault's concepts discussed above and revisits

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<sup>171</sup> Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 227-228.

<sup>172</sup> Foucault dedicates his 21 March 1979 lecture in *The Birth of Biopolitics* course to this very topic, analyzing the shift specifically from the discipline-punishment model discussed in other lecture courses and monographs, best known in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. This is only one example of how neoliberal capitalism and its conception of human capital begins to radically shape the way culture operates. For Foucault's in-depth analysis, see *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 239-265.

<sup>173</sup> Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (New York: Zone Books, 2015).

<sup>174</sup> Wendy Brown, *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism: The Rise of Antidemocratic Politics in the West* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019). Brown discusses in her introduction to this monograph how the events of the various far right movements since the election of Donald Trump in 2016 have created a new wave of antidemocratic movements emerging from the unintended consequences of the neoliberal agenda. These movements have caused her to revise arguments made in *Undoing the Demos* as they appear to contradict some of her previous arguments, namely that the goal of neoliberalism was only about economizing. For her full analysis, see *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism*, 10-11. While these revisions are important, there are still valuable pieces of her arguments in *Undoing the Demos* that are pertinent to my argument, namely her explicit discussion of Foucault that provides a direct line of continuity from Foucault. For this reason, I will offer relevant commentary on both works to further illuminate the Foucauldian method with which Brown is working.

them after thirty-five years of policy implementation and the proliferation of ideas, focusing on framing the neoliberal project as a “markets-and-morals” project that seeks to severely limit the operation of a democratic state, the education and formation of human capital, and the matured form of the neoliberal state that culminates in decisions such as *Citizens United* that have led to the antidemocratic movements beginning in 2016.

The first aspect of Brown’s analysis is her understanding of neoliberalism as not only a market solution but a political-moral program that seeks to dismantle the concept of the social in political discourse.<sup>175</sup> Part of what makes Brown’s commentary unique is that she reads Hayek not only as an economist, but also as a political and legal theorist. She cites his *Law, Legislation, and Liberty* throughout the first chapter of *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism*. In her reading of Hayek, Brown sees that Hayek’s understanding of political and economic order stands in opposition to any understanding of “society” in the modern context.<sup>176</sup> The social connections that would be commonly understood as society are, according to Hayek, instead groups of individuals acting in ways dictated by market signals and moral codes.<sup>177</sup> This forces the neoliberal to deny the concept of society, as Margaret Thatcher did in her famous *Women’s Own* interview in 1987.<sup>178</sup> Without a concept of society, any concept of the common good or social justice becomes unintelligible, requiring a different moral framework that focuses on interactions between individuals exclusively to come into play.

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<sup>175</sup> Brown, *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism*, 13.

<sup>176</sup> Brown, *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism*, 31.

<sup>177</sup> Brown, *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism*, 31.

<sup>178</sup> “Interview for *Women’s Own* (“no such thing as society”)", Margaret Thatcher Foundation, accessed September 6, 2019, <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/106689>.

According to Brown, Hayek has an answer to this problem: the idea of voluntary conformity inherent to one's adherence to moral traditions.<sup>179</sup> For Hayek, the voluntary aspect of choosing to adhere to a moral tradition preserves freedom, while conformity occurs through habitual practice as opposed to adherence to an explicit set of rules.<sup>180</sup> The point here is not a genuine faith in a set of religious beliefs; Hayek understands the religious aspect to be a useful fiction.<sup>181</sup> The morality aspect of the project is merely an effective, coherent tool to maintain order so the market will be able to function.<sup>182</sup> This framing of neoliberalism as a markets-and-morals project puts the problem of neoliberalism firmly within the realm of philosophy and theology, moving the onus for solving the problem away from the realm of economics. Also, by using the philosophical tools related to epistemology and philosophical/theological anthropology, which will be discussed below, the conversation moves into the realm of systematic theology. In short, Brown's articulation of the neoliberal project help provides the conditions for the possibility of an analysis of neoliberalism from the perspective of systematic theology.

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<sup>179</sup> Brown, *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism*, 99.

<sup>180</sup> Brown, *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism*, 99. It would be prudent to point out that Brown's presentation of Hayek implies Hayek's understanding of morality and moral traditions are not based on any kind of rules, which leads to the question of what kind of moral tradition does Hayek mean to argue for in his freedom-based system. While there are ways to formulate traditional ethical systems in a way that coalesce with market-based freedom, the standout opportunity is a form of virtue ethics, as it has the potential to be construed as highly individualized without set rules that limit freedom per se. While many ethicists would claim this is not an authentic form of virtue ethicists as it significantly alters the foundational concepts of the good life and *eudaimonia*, and rightfully so, but that authenticity is not a concern for Hayek so long as it provides a tradition that will allow for the voluntary conformity that Hayek seeks.

<sup>181</sup> Brown, *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism*, 101.

<sup>182</sup> As a part of her larger project of understanding the antidemocratic political movements in arising in the west after 2016, Brown's discussion of this point is more geared to see how American "value voters"—religiously motivated voters that tend to support Republican candidates—are a part of the neoliberal election strategy that eventually put antidemocratic figures in positions of power. I am inclined, however, to not see the morality aspect as merely a tool of the neoliberal agenda, but rather as a significant aspect of the theological problem of neoliberalism, as will be explored in 1.3 below.

Brown's Foucauldian critique also emphasizes the way the epistemological change of economics and the neoliberal *homo oeconomicus* fundamentally changes the concept of education, and by extension, formation as a human person.<sup>183</sup> To understand Brown's analysis of the education of human capital, we must first understand the two major components of this question of education: knowledge and the person. Based on the neoliberal presupposition of the market as the only site of veridiction<sup>184</sup> of any human activity, the market serves as the arbiter of truth, and therefore is the determining factor in knowledge and education.<sup>185</sup> Brown offers a further insight into this neoliberal shift about knowledge and economics, citing that until the 1940s and 1950s (the same time period of the initial neoliberal works of von Hayek and Friedman), the word "economy" was used only as an adjective; the use of the noun "economy," signifying an object of knowledge, only came into use during the 1940s and 1950s.<sup>186</sup> This reification of the economy, says Brown, turns questions of commerce and exchange, once a single part of life in a society, into an autonomous sphere of knowledge with structured goals that can separate itself from other concerns.<sup>187</sup> All of this goes to point out that when considering

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<sup>183</sup> While Brown herself does not use the terminology of formation given her secular approach to the topic of education, her understanding of the education of human capital does have significant overlap with Christian theological understandings of formation. For this reason, I will offer some commentary on the links between these concepts when relevant.

<sup>184</sup> Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 67. Veridiction, according to Brown, is "Foucault's coinage for the production and circulation of truths that are established, rather than foundational, but, importantly, govern." This means that any site of veridiction, therefore, applies the foundational rationality to produce established truths.

<sup>185</sup> Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 67, 176.

<sup>186</sup> Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 81.

<sup>187</sup> Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 82.

the grounds of education in a neoliberal society, questions of wealth acquisition are foundational in how one goes about educating members of said society.<sup>188</sup>

This question of reframing education lies in understanding the human person as the neoliberal *homo oeconomicus*, a “firm” in which to be invested. Rather than considering education a necessary part of reaching the proper end of the human person,<sup>189</sup> education is instead another form of investment that no person/firm is entitled to, only one among many possible investments one can make to make a person/firm more competitive in the marketplace.<sup>190</sup> Another aspect of the neoliberal educational ideas follows down a parallel path, emphasizing the concept of “high-value” skills that potentially make one more profitable.<sup>191</sup> According to Brown, this is a stark contrast to the democratic ideal of the well-educated citizen, who benefits from her education by being able to comprehend and evaluate issues and candidates on the ballot in an election and from the ability to have an intellectual appreciation of culture, society and the world at large.<sup>192</sup> This new conception of *homo oeconomicus* is totalizing, meaning that the human person must operate in the context of the market first and foremost, as opposed to one’s status in the market serving as only one aspect among many of the human person.<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> In the context of Christian theological concerns, this can be understood instead as questions of wealth acquisition being the principle and foundation of the formation of the human person as *homo oeconomicus*, a corrupt variation on the Principle and Foundations of St. Ignatius Loyola’s *Spiritual Exercises*.

<sup>189</sup> Drawing connections once again to the theological tradition, this assertion stands in direct contradiction of the precept of natural law explained by Aquinas as the inclinations toward the good shared with all animals, namely the education of offspring. For further details, see St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, ed. John Mortensen and Enrique Alarcón, trans. Fr. Laurence Shapcote, O.P. (Lander, Wyoming: The Aquinas Institute for Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012), I-II, Q. 94, A. 3.

<sup>190</sup> Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 177.

<sup>191</sup> Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 177.

<sup>192</sup> Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 177-8.

<sup>193</sup> Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 178-87.

Brown offers a small revision to this argument in *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism* in the context of her reformulation of neoliberalism as a markets-and-morals project. In this revision, Brown widens the scope of how human capital is formed via the traditional “family values” morality in what she refers to as “responsibilization,” a term that puts the impetus of a particular aspect of care or development out of the hands of the state and into the hands of individuals as a way to weaken a democratic state.<sup>194</sup> One example that Brown provides, fitting with the current topic, is that of education; the neoliberal policy-makers “responsibilize” education by prioritizing private education and cutting funding for public schools.<sup>195</sup> Once again, neoliberal policy makers strategically use the concept of personal responsibility to make a moral argument for the individual to not shirk responsibility for investing in her own education by allowing the state to do it for her. By using moral claims to instigate a market-focused response, the neoliberal concept of the education of human capital provides a clear example of the markets-morals program in action.

The third aspect of Brown’s analysis that is significant for this project is her understanding of the impact of the mature neoliberal state and its implication for antidemocratic movements, notably in the way it has been codified in American jurisprudence in *Citizens United*. Brown’s analysis in *Undoing the Demos* focuses on the majority decision offered by Justice Anthony Kennedy, in which Brown identifies

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<sup>194</sup> Brown, *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism*, 38-9. Brown notes that this term is used more prominently in French and British literature, while in American literature the preferred term is “entrepreneurialization.” I find the former term to be more helpful in understanding neoliberalism as a markets-and-morals project as it emphasizes the idea of personal responsibility as a moral category, reinforcing that neoliberal ideology is not only an economic idea, but a moral one as well.

<sup>195</sup> Brown, *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism*, 109.

Kennedy's opinion as neoliberal jurisprudence.<sup>196</sup> Kennedy's opinion, further highlighting Brown's anthropological concerns, explicitly makes the transformation from *homo politicus* to *homo oeconomicus* in American legal precedent by taking political concepts, such as citizenship and rights, and replacing them with economic analogues.<sup>197</sup> The most significant way that Kennedy does this is by providing a neoliberal reading of the First Amendment to the United States Constitution, by articulating the idea in electoral politics of money as speech<sup>198</sup> in a new way: claiming speech is like capital.<sup>199</sup>

One aspect of Brown's analysis of Kennedy's opinion is in his description of speech as force that tends to proliferate and circulate.<sup>200</sup> Speech, therefore, like capital, is a natural and good force "that can be wrongly impeded and encumbered, but never quashed."<sup>201</sup> This pairs with Brown's point about speakers, individuals or corporations in Kennedy's opinion, as both producers and consumers of speech, which should not be regulated by the government under the protections of the First Amendment.<sup>202</sup> Brown presents Kennedy's opinion in a language that mirrors that of Becker's conception of the human person as primarily consumer, showing a link between Kennedy's thinking and the work of Becker. This link goes to show how deeply Kennedy's thought is steeped in

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<sup>196</sup> Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 154-5.

<sup>197</sup> Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 155.

<sup>198</sup> This phrase is used as justification for individuals to make unlimited donations to candidates running for elected office by arguing that political donations are a method by which individuals can express their political opinions, which is protected by the First Amendment.

<sup>199</sup> Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 156.

<sup>200</sup> Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 159.

<sup>201</sup> Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 159. Kennedy's language in the opinion is not as clear as Brown presents on this point, but if one looks to the location Brown cites, Kennedy uses the language of anti-regulation, which is a central neoliberal concept as discussed above. For our purposes, her argument, while imperfect, is sufficient.

<sup>202</sup> Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 159.

neoliberal ideology, further strengthening her claim of the *Citizens United* decision as setting the precedent of neoliberal jurisprudence.

Another aspect of Brown's analysis is the ability of speech to be "innovative and productive, just as capital is."<sup>203</sup> As Brown mentions earlier in her analysis, this is an example of the replacement of political, or perhaps even humanistic, categories with roughly parallel economic categories. A humanist like Brown would emphasize the creativity of language that has provided not only the conditions for the possibility of political discourse and philosophy, but also literature, poetry, and drama; she considers language a good for its ability to connect the human race in communication and develop cultural achievements. On the other hand, Kennedy's opinion emphasizes speech as something that can be productive so long as it is not held back by government intervention.<sup>204</sup>

The fourth and final aspect of Brown's analysis, and the part she understands to be the most crucial for reading Kennedy's opinion as neoliberal jurisprudence, is how Kennedy sets up the powers of speech and powers of government as diametrically opposed in a zero-sum game.<sup>205</sup> Rather than understanding free speech and government as powers that are able to negotiate boundaries through compromise and perhaps collaboration, Kennedy interprets the relationship as that of competitors in a winner-takes-all contest. By framing the entire debate, and therefore the meaning of the First Amendment, in terms of competition, the United States Constitution no longer stands as a document outlining the structure of a democratic republic, but as marketplace, solidifying

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<sup>203</sup> Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 159.

<sup>204</sup> Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 159-60.

<sup>205</sup> Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 160.

a neoliberal interpretation of jurisprudence in the United States context. Brown's thoughtful analysis provides a convincing argument that neoliberal ideology has taken root in the very heart of American political theory and philosophy.

The contributions of both the Marxist and Foucauldian traditions have provided two important links in the chain of argumentation this chapter follows. First, the Marxist tradition helps to move the conversation around neoliberalism out of economic terms as conditioned by capitalist economic theory and into an economic language that is open to philosophically oriented analyses. Second, the Foucauldian tradition provides a strong argument for approaching the problems of neoliberalism not merely as an ethical analysis of actions in the marketplace, but as a systematic analysis of a form of reasoning that must be engaged on a more foundational level. These two links provide the conditions for the possibility of understanding neoliberalism as a problem for systematic theological reflection, which will be discussed in the following section.

### **1.3 NEOLIBERALISM AS A SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGICAL PROBLEM**

The ultimate section of this chapter is dedicated to providing a survey of select thinkers on how neoliberalism is a problem for systematic theology. First, I offer a reading of Franz Hinkelammert<sup>206</sup>, one of the earliest critics of neoliberal ideology in Latin American Liberation Theology reacting to Pinochet's policies in Chile, which were influenced heavily by the "Chicago Boys" and their neoliberal ideas. Second, I examine

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<sup>206</sup> Franz J. Hinkelammert, *The Ideological Weapons of Death: A Theological Critique of Capitalism*, trans. Phillip Berryman (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986).

the work of Jung Mo Sung,<sup>207</sup> a Brazilian theologian who develops aspects of Hinkelammert's thought in the context of a mature neoliberalism in the early-to-mid 2000s. After this discussion of neoliberalism in the Latin American context, I examine the work of four American theologians working in different denominational contexts: Joerg Rieger,<sup>208</sup> Keri Day,<sup>209</sup> Adam Kotsko,<sup>210</sup> and Kathryn Tanner.<sup>211</sup> By synthesizing the work of these six thinkers, I provide a preliminary sketch of existing scholarship's understanding of neoliberalism as a problem of systematic theology.

Before I begin to discuss the theologians in this section in earnest, it is important to highlight and explain the choice not to engage neoliberalism on the level of ethics. The rationale goes back to the above discussion of Brown and her analysis of neoliberalism as a markets-and-morals project. Since neoliberalism operates by making use of moral traditions to maintain order for market functioning, moral traditions have the potential to be manipulated into maintaining neoliberal principles. This becomes evident in looking at major contemporary works on economic theological ethics, such as the work of Finn<sup>212</sup> and Barrera<sup>213</sup>, who accept the framework of the marketplace as a place where virtue can be a resource for overcoming moral problems that arise in the market. Finn and Barrera both provide respectable work with compelling arguments, but they are predicated on the

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<sup>207</sup> Jung Mo Sung, *Desire, Market, and Religion* (London: SCM Press, 2007).

<sup>208</sup> Joerg Rieger, *No Rising Tide: Theology, Economics, and the Future* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009).

<sup>209</sup> Keri Day, *Religious Resistance to Neoliberalism: Womanist and Black Feminist Perspectives* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

<sup>210</sup> Adam Kotsko, *Neoliberalism's Demons: On the Political Theology of Late Capital* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018).

<sup>211</sup> Kathryn Tanner, *Christianity and the New Spirit of Capitalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019).

<sup>212</sup> Daniel Finn, *The Moral Ecology of Markets: Assessing Claims about Markets and Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

<sup>213</sup> Albino F. Barrera, O.P., *Modern Catholic Social Documents and Political Economy* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2001).

acceptance of a neoliberal capitalist mindset in their decision not to critique the marketplace as the realm of moral action.<sup>214</sup> This is not to say that ethicists are not taking the challenge of neoliberalism seriously; there are theological ethicists, such as Ahn<sup>215</sup> and Hargaden<sup>216</sup>, who are undertaking dedicated studies of the ethical dimensions of neoliberalism. However, it remains possible to question whether or not these ethical reflections are suited to making the larger ideology critiques required to grasp the larger whole of the problem of neoliberalism. From these points, I reach the conclusion that the engagement of theological ethics with neoliberalism is, in a logical sense, a necessary but insufficient response to the theological problem of neoliberalism. To be clear, the ethical dimension of the problem of neoliberalism is essential to understanding the theological issues that arise, but the goal of this project is to provide an analysis of the more foundational issues that serve as the ground for the ethical analysis. For these reasons, the analysis below will not engage in the terms and relations of theological ethics, focusing on the systematic theological aspects.<sup>217</sup>

The first two thinkers, Hinkelammert and Sung, are writing in the context of a neoliberalism prior to the crisis of 2007-2008 (pre-crisis). These pre-crisis thinkers are writing about neoliberalism from a point before its flaws caused a collapse of the global economic system; the neoliberalisms considered by Hinkelammert and Sung are

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<sup>214</sup> See Finn, *The Moral Ecology of Markets*, 4-5, and Barrera, *Modern Catholic Social Documents and Political Economy*, vii-ix. Both Finn and Barrera make explicit comment that they are seeking to find solutions within the market context, implying that they will not question the logic of the market.

<sup>215</sup> Ilsup Ahn, *Just Debt: Theology, Ethics, and Neoliberalism* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2017).

<sup>216</sup> Kevin Hargaden, *Theological Ethics in a Neoliberal Age: Confronting the Christian Problem with Wealth* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018).

<sup>217</sup> I recognize that there will be some overlap between the realms of systematic theology and theological ethics, especially given liberation theology's emphasis on praxis. I will, however, endeavor to avoid crossing into exclusively ethical considerations.

ideologies that are growing in influence and culturally dominant, respectively. With this in mind, we can look to the earliest theological critiques of neoliberalism.

### 1.3.1 Franz Hinkelammert

The first critique of neoliberalism comes from the German-born Latin American liberation theologian Franz Hinkelammert. With training in economics, Hinkelammert has been an explicit critic of neoliberal policies in Latin America, notably Chile under the rule of Augusto Pinochet, who was heavily influenced by the Chicago school of economics.<sup>218</sup> Hinkelammert offers one of the earliest theological critiques of neoliberalism, and he makes that critique from a synthesis of economic concerns with a theology of life and death.

Hinkelammert's first major contribution in his critique of neoliberalism is his commentary on the work of Friedman. In Part I of *The Ideological Weapons of Death*, Hinkelammert dedicates an entire chapter to analyzing the work of Friedman from a Catholic theological perspective, making three points that are significant to this project. The first of these points is that Friedman is committed to the concept of freedom to the point that the freedom to murder can coexist with the freedom to live, two contradictory ideas. According to Hinkelammert, Friedman breaks from classical liberalism by rejecting the idea that certain freedoms, such as the freedom to murder, must be given up to maintain society.<sup>219</sup> Instead, Friedman argues that these two freedoms can coexist as

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<sup>218</sup> Hinkelammert, *The Ideological Weapons of Death*, iv.

<sup>219</sup> Hinkelammert, *The Ideological Weapons of Death*, 76.

long as physical force is avoided.<sup>220</sup> This is a distinction without a difference since murder implies some sort of physical force, whether it is an explicitly violent act or a subtler method, such as poisoning. The point, however, is clear: Friedman cannot hold that his vision of freedom is not without violence; in Hinkelammert's formulation, Friedman's conception of freedom is, at its core, "a struggle to the death, although physical force is not used."<sup>221</sup> All of Friedman's conceptions of value and philosophy derive from this struggle to the death, as will be shown in Hinkelammert's further critiques of Friedman.

One significant place where Hinkelammert sees this struggle play out in Friedman's thought is in Friedman's understanding of human interiority as a marketplace. Hinkelammert describes Friedman's understanding of human interiority as a matter of negotiation and exchange between two subjects: the portfolio-subject, which makes decisions, and a second subject, which is defined by preferences.<sup>222</sup> In this exchange, the portfolio subject purchases 24 hours from the preference subject. The portfolio subject then sells some of those hours to an outside market, namely a public exchange market where one is able to exchange hours of labor for a salary. With that salary, the portfolio subject is able to purchase leisure hours to return to the preference subject, who will then distribute those leisure hours in accordance to with the intensity of one's preferences.

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<sup>220</sup> Hinkelammert, *The Ideological Weapons of Death*, 76.

<sup>221</sup> Hinkelammert, *The Ideological Weapons of Death*, 77.

<sup>222</sup> Hinkelammert, *The Ideological Weapons of Death*, 78. One could understand the preference subject as a form of the appetitive part of the soul from the allegory of the chariot in Plato's *Phaedrus*, §246a-254e.

From Hinkelammert's perspective, this anthropology becomes totalizing, turning human beings into mere commodities to be traded.<sup>223</sup>

The last part of Hinkelammert's analysis of Friedman is a critique of Friedman's understanding of charity. According to Hinkelammert, Friedman understands poverty as merely something distressing that should be alleviated, but it should only be alleviated by personal charity.<sup>224</sup> For Friedman, says Hinkelammert, charity can be done by anyone to the same effect, so a self-interested individual need not feel obligated to do the charitable giving herself.<sup>225</sup> Hinkelammert rejects this conception of charity outright, instead showing a preference for the charity of St. Vincent de Paul.<sup>226</sup> This Vincentian conception of charity, which recognizes the importance of the human person in poverty, seeks not only to bring that person out of this material poverty that dehumanizes, but also to enter into community with the poor person, affirming one's own humanity.<sup>227</sup> By contrast, Friedman's understanding of charity never recognizes the human face of poverty, nor how the absolute self-interested freedom of his system perpetuates and worsens this problem.

The primary theological argument Hinkelammert seeks to advance in the rest of *The Ideological Weapons of Death* is that a theological response to capitalism must engage with the life and death struggle of capitalism with a theology of life, namely a

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<sup>223</sup> Hinkelammert, *The Ideological Weapons of Death*, 80. Hinkelammert's analysis continues, but covers ground discussed both in the above section on Friedman as well as the section on neo-Marxism, given Hinkelammert stands as a part of the Christian reception of Marx.

<sup>224</sup> Hinkelammert, *The Ideological Weapons of Death*, 95.

<sup>225</sup> Hinkelammert, *The Ideological Weapons of Death*, 95.

<sup>226</sup> Hinkelammert, *The Ideological Weapons of Death*, 95.

<sup>227</sup> Hinkelammert, *The Ideological Weapons of Death*, 96.

theology of liberation.<sup>228</sup> Hinkelammert builds his theology of life and death upon discussions in the Gospels of Christ's death and resurrection as well as the Pauline epistles of embodiment to understand the heart of the theological project is salvation from death while dealing with questions of empire, consumerism, and the slavery of sin.<sup>229</sup> While the majority of what follows his analysis of Friedman is interesting, it is not germane to my current argument. The insight of Hinkelammert's work that serves as a premise in my argument is that the work of neoliberal thinkers, in this case Friedman, can be understood and critiqued in a theological register. This premise will be further supported in the following subsection on Jung Mo Sung, where he engages von Hayek's philosophical categories in a theological register.

### **1.3.2 Jung Mo Sung**

Sung's work takes Hinkelammert's theme of a theology of life and applies it to contemporary circumstances. It is important to note that the English edition of *Desire, Market, and Religion*, the version of the text that will be cited throughout this discussion, is composed of the original Brazilian text published in 1998, along with two additional chapters written in 2003 and 2006.<sup>230</sup> In practical terms for this project, Sung's work is reflective of a pre-crisis neoliberal order, which is helpful for two reasons. First, Sung's

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<sup>228</sup> Hinkelammert, *The Ideological Weapons of Death*, 226-228. Hinkelammert's theological reflections on topics of crucifixion, eucharist, poverty, and Catholic Social Teaching and their relation to capitalism are very interesting and provide a great deal of material to reflect upon how to understand the tensions behind holding one's position as both a Catholic and a Marxist. An analysis of the merits of Hinkelammert commitments as a Catholic and Marxist thinker, while very stimulating, distract from my purposes here, and therefore must be left for another project.

<sup>229</sup> Hinkelammert, *The Ideological Weapons of Death*, 127-152.

<sup>230</sup> Sung, *Desire, Market, and Religion*, 4.

reflections provide a reflection on neoliberalism at a point of established dominance, showing a development in theological critique without a focus on the structural crisis to come. Second, Sung's work, following Hinkelammert shows that figures within the tradition of Latin American Liberation Theology were acutely aware of neoliberalism's dangers even before theologians in the Global North were awakened to the problem following the crisis of 2007-2008. This provides justification for the use of another Latin American Liberation Theologian, Ellacuría, in providing my analysis in the following four chapters. Specifically, Sung's analysis contributes supporting arguments for the importance of theology interfering with economics, the theology of the neoliberal economic order, and the idolatry of the market, which is Sung's most significant contribution.

The first aspect of Sung's work to discuss is his argument that theology must interfere with economics. Sung, starting with Aquinas's assertion that human beings cannot know God in Godself, claims that theological reflections must explore different images of God to help further one's understanding of God as much as possible given one's finitude.<sup>231</sup> The image of God that Sung pursues is that of God as creator and giver of life, citing creation accounts in Genesis as well as Jesus' sayings in the Gospel of John.<sup>232</sup> Sung continues, citing the Gospel of Matthew, that there are material necessities to life, specifically food, drink, clothing, safe housing, freedom, "and affection or acceptance," and how one provides these needs for those on the margins of society, who can never repay or reciprocate these actions, is the criterion by which one is judged in the

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<sup>231</sup> Sung, *Desire, Market, and Religion*, 8-9.

<sup>232</sup> Sung, *Desire, Market, and Religion*, 9.

eyes of God.<sup>233</sup> Since the way these material necessities are produced, distributed, and consumed are all within the realm of economics, it follows that theology must interfere with economic forces that perpetuate forces of death.<sup>234</sup>

The second relevant aspect of Sung's work is his understanding of the implicit theological claims made by neoliberal thinkers that shape a theology of neoliberalism. This theology is not a Christian one, strictly speaking, but rather a theology of the market that has troubling similarities to Christian theological concerns, particularly dealing with questions of death, fallenness, and sacrifice.

The first neoliberal theological tenet is a promise of eliminating death via the myth of technological progress. According to Sung, neoliberalism is built around the idea that the technological and economic engine of progress is in a perpetual forward motion; progress cannot be stopped and is always moving us closer to paradise.<sup>235</sup> Problematically, as Sung points out, this vision of progress eliminates the need for limits on human actions.<sup>236</sup> Without this need for limits, progress then supposedly creates a utopia that ends violent death.<sup>237</sup> This transforms the understanding of death in neoliberal society. Instead of seeing death as a natural part of life that can only be rectified in terms of salvation through Christ<sup>238</sup>, individuals formed by neoliberal culture see death as a failure of medical science and can be avoided if enough time is given for progress to cure

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<sup>233</sup> Sung, *Desire, Market, and Religion*, 9-10.

<sup>234</sup> Sung, *Desire, Market, and Religion*, 10.

<sup>235</sup> Sung, *Desire, Market, and Religion*, 12.

<sup>236</sup> Sung, *Desire, Market, and Religion*, 13.

<sup>237</sup> Sung, *Desire, Market, and Religion*, 13.

<sup>238</sup> Sung appears to be alluding to 1 Cor 15 and Paul's discussion of salvation as victory over death through Christ's sacrificial death for humanity's sins. This line of thinking continues throughout the Christian tradition, taking a new form in Latin American Liberation Theology, given the grim reality of death seen by these thinkers. During a lecture at Marquette University on 20 April 2015, Gustavo Gutiérrez spoke of the significance of "people dying before their time," showing how this question is in the background of his and other liberation theologians' thought.

a particular malady.<sup>239</sup> From a neoliberal perspective, death is a sign of losing the competition of life, and must be put off. The Christian, seeing the powerful message of the crucifixion, knows that death is unavoidable but not the end.

The second theological tenet Sung discusses is the question of original sin, and its neoliberal analog as presented by von Hayek. While traditional Christian theology understands original sin in terms of a rejection of God's love leading to a broken relationship between God and humanity, von Hayek's understanding of an "original sin," according to Sung's description, comes from a similar line of logic. Sung describes von Hayek's understanding of what could be considered an original sin in economics as the presumption of knowing more about the market and its workings than is possible and breaking the laws of the market based on these presumptions.<sup>240</sup> As Sung puts it succinctly, the problem for von Hayek is that attempting to intervene in a situation only makes it worse; the "temptation to do good" serves as the fundamental starting point for economic sin.<sup>241</sup> Sung notes that this neoliberal approach reduces the natural law precept of "do good and avoid evil" to a simple avoidance of evil, removing an impetus for active pursuit of good.<sup>242</sup> This idea shows a coherence in thought with the significance of freedom in neoliberal thought as well as mirroring attitudes towards regulation of the marketplace. The principle of the avoidance of evil alone provides an imperative of self-interested non-interference that allows for the injustices one may encounter to continue under the assumption that the market will settle matters itself.

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<sup>239</sup> Sung, *Desire, Market, and Religion*, 13.

<sup>240</sup> Sung, *Desire, Market, and Religion*, 15.

<sup>241</sup> Sung, *Desire, Market, and Religion*, 15.

<sup>242</sup> Sung, *Desire, Market, and Religion*, 16.

The final theological tenet of neoliberalism relevant for the current discussion is that of necessary sacrifices. One question that Sung asks about the neoliberal theology is how it accounts for the violence done to innocents for the sake of progress.<sup>243</sup> The answer from the neoliberal perspective is that these are necessary sacrifices to make it possible for the market to function.<sup>244</sup> These “necessary sacrifices” are contrary to a Christian notion of sacrifice, which involves a voluntary act of self-giving for the sake of another in an interpersonal relationship.<sup>245</sup> The sacrifices Sung describes are not voluntary acts on the part of those sacrificed, performed by those who seek only to gain by sacrificing the poor for the sake of a transaction. Instead, the neoliberal “necessary sacrifices” seem to be more in line with Robert Daly’s understanding of sacrifice in the ancient world: the destruction of the sacrifice is merely a fact of the ceremony, not something to be celebrated or even acknowledged. This is similar to the way the “necessary sacrifices” to the market are considered.<sup>246</sup>

Looking at these three theological tenets of neoliberalism, shaped by the context of a globalized economy that consistently victimizes the poor, particularly in the global south, one may wonder how to articulate the relationship between the neoliberal theological vision presented by Sung and Christian theology broadly understood. Sung articulates this relationship, building on the work of Hinkelammert and Hugo Assmann, as the idolatry of the market.<sup>247</sup> In Assmann’s account, the critique of the idolatry of the

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<sup>243</sup> Sung, *Desire, Market, and Religion*, 18.

<sup>244</sup> Sung, *Desire, Market, and Religion*, 18.

<sup>245</sup> This brief description of the Christian notion of sacrifice does not represent the wealth of scholarship on the topic, which would distract from the primary argument of this dissertation. For further reading on Christian conceptions of sacrifice, see Robert J. Daly, S.J., *Sacrifice Unveiled: The True Meaning of Christian Sacrifice* (New York: T&T Clark, 2009).

<sup>246</sup> Daly, *Sacrificed Unveiled*, 27.

<sup>247</sup> Sung, *Desire, Market, and Religion*, 110.

market follows a metaphysical or absolute critique of the market, which he develops from readings of Marxist and socialist thought.<sup>248</sup> After encountering Hinkelammert's writings on utopias, Assmann develops a second form of critique dealing with the material practices within the market using categories of fetishism and, more importantly, idolatry.<sup>249</sup> Sung, through his commentary on Assmann's work, shows that the sacrifices discussed above are made to a deity of market processes, whose favor is granted upon those who do not fall into "the temptation to do good."<sup>250</sup>

The formulation of the idolatry of the market and the other theological tenets of neoliberalism that Sung provides are helpful in that they articulate in systematic theological terms what one aspect of the problem that neoliberalism poses to theologians: that of neoliberal culture taking on modified form of religious ideas. On top of his interrogation of neoliberal thought to show that there are theological claims at work in the thought of von Hayek and others, Sung shows that the framework of theological ethics or moral theology is not the only way to understand the problems posed by economic ideas. Recognizing that politics and economics need to be engaged by theologians in a way beyond questions of ethics while not losing the concrete details that impact the lives of those being sacrificed upon the alter of the market.

It is at this point that a shift will occur in the literature: the following four thinkers wrote in the context of the aftermath of the economic crisis of 2007-2008 (post-crisis). While Hinkelammert and Sung are tracing neoliberal ideology from its infancy in the mid-1970s to its maturity in the late 1990s and early 2000s, Reiger, Day, Kostko, and

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<sup>248</sup> Sung, *Desire, Market, and Religion*, 110.

<sup>249</sup> Sung, *Desire, Market, and Religion*, 110-111.

<sup>250</sup> Sung, *Desire, Market, and Religion*, 111-112.

Tanner are all reflecting upon the aftermath of the failure of several banks that were “too big to fail,” sending the entire economy, connected by these financial institutions and their networks, into a freefall, requiring government intervention through quantitative easing, where a nation’s central bank, the Federal Reserve of the United States in this case, purchases government securities, increasing money supply to encourage lending. While most businesses would recover in the following decade, the widespread impacts are still being felt by the rest of the population. There is a paradigm shift for these post-crisis thinkers that will demonstrate a recognition that neoliberalism has failed, and the consequences of this failure must be considered.

### 1.3.3 Joerg Rieger

The first post-crisis thinker to be examined is Joerg Rieger. Rieger’s *No Rising Tide: Theology, Economics, and the Future* was published in 2009 in the immediate aftermath of the crisis. The significance of Rieger’s text for the argument presented here is his argument for the need for a systematic analysis of neoliberalism beyond the traditional arguments involving values and ethics, the reintegration of the poor into society, and how economics creates a reality that ignores the struggle of real life in its logic of progress.

According to Rieger, the conversation about the relationship between economics and religion is filled with dead ends.<sup>251</sup> A significant number of these dead ends come in the form of discussions about values and morals. One such dead end is the call to replace

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<sup>251</sup> Rieger, *No Rising Tide*, 24.

market values with proper Christian values. Rieger finds this argument to be faulty for two reasons. First, anyone in the market who rejects market values will not last in the marketplace for long; second, such approaches ignore the systematic problems underlying the situation, resulting in support for the status quo.<sup>252</sup> Another approach Rieger rejects is the implementation of business ethics and using moral norms to dialogue with actions in the marketplace.<sup>253</sup> These approaches also fail to satisfy Rieger's concerns as they do not question the logic of the system.<sup>254</sup> In short, Rieger claims that the problem of neoliberal economics is a systematic problem, and therefore requires a systematic answer.<sup>255</sup>

The second significant piece of Rieger's reflection on the framing of the problem of neoliberal economics is the question of reintegrating the poor back into society. Rieger is critical of any such idea because it puts the onus on the poor to change somehow to reenter society, implicitly claiming that there is nothing wrong with the social logic that ostracized the poor.<sup>256</sup> Individuals victimized by a system cannot be held responsible for situations that have been thrust upon them, especially when poverty is not an exception, but a rule of the economic scheme of recurrence.<sup>257</sup> Instead, Rieger argues, the central economic logic of society must be restructured at its core to fit the needs of the poor, addressing systemic problems that cannot be dealt with by superficial changes.<sup>258</sup>

Finally, Rieger offers insight into understanding the problem of neoliberal economics creating a reality that is separated from the realities of daily life. Rieger, citing

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<sup>252</sup> Rieger, *No Rising Tide*, 25.

<sup>253</sup> Rieger, *No Rising Tide*, 25.

<sup>254</sup> Rieger, *No Rising Tide*, 25.

<sup>255</sup> Rieger, *No Rising Tide*, 25.

<sup>256</sup> Rieger, *No Rising Tide*, 25-26.

<sup>257</sup> Rieger, *No Rising Tide*, 26.

<sup>258</sup> Rieger, *No Rising Tide*, 26-27.

the Michigan Supreme Court ruling in *Dodge v. Ford Motor Company* that states a company's responsibility to shareholder profits overrides the company's responsibility to its workers, claims that this precedent creates a reality grounded in stockholder benefits, ignoring the dangerous conditions that impact workers.<sup>259</sup> This maps on to a logic of infinite growth, where the assumption is that economic growth will steadily continue *ad infinitum* into the future. This logic blindly accepts growing profits and record sales figures as the only factors in understanding the how the system functions, and this trajectory shapes the way the world works. This logic fails in the face of crises like that of 2007 and 2008, where the standard neoliberal economic ideas are thrown into question, providing the opportunity to rethink said assumptions as a silver lining to the pain and destruction caused by the crisis.

A new framework Rieger suggests in opposition to this logic of infinite progress is the logic of downturn, which forces one to recognize that someone is always facing downturn, created by some kind of concrete conflicts and hardships.<sup>260</sup> This allows one, says Rieger, to see how the working class is divided by manipulations with racial and religious politics to prevent a unified workers movement from taking shape.<sup>261</sup> As Rieger's title insinuates, there is no rising tide that will lift all boats. Someone must face

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<sup>259</sup> Rieger, *No Rising Tide*, 29-30. A clear example of this is internet retailer Amazon, whose steady growth and profits standing alongside dangerous workplace conditions illustrate the tension Rieger is describing. For more on Amazon's profits, see Rani Molla, "Amazon's tiny profits, explained," last modified August 21, 2019, <https://www.vox.com/recode/2019/8/21/20826405/amazons-profits-revenue-free-cash-flow-explained-charts>. For examples of Amazon's dangerous workplace situations, see Alexia Fernández Campbell, "The problem with Amazon's speedy shipping, in one graphic," last modified October 18, 2019, <https://www.vox.com/identities/2019/10/18/20920717/amazon-shipping-workers-injuries>.

<sup>260</sup> Rieger, *No Rising Tide*, 31-32.

<sup>261</sup> Rieger, *No Rising Tide*, 32-34. The example Rieger gives here is how working-class whites are manipulated in political campaigns to ignore class division on racial grounds, such as the image of "Joe the Plumber" from the 2008 US presidential campaign implemented by Republican Vice-Presidential candidate Sarah Palin. This kind of subtle manipulation serves as a political sleight-of-hand trick to prevent these working-class whites from recognizing that their interests are more in line with their fellow Black and Latinx workers rather than the white millionaires benefiting from their struggles.

downturn in order for another to have massive success. Following this premise, Rieger claims, one is able to further interrogate economic assumptions and pay attention to the concrete realities that are often overlooked in strategic meetings. After all, Rieger notes, Jesus did not enter into history as a money changer or a tax collector or a merchant, but a simple day laborer, alluding to a closeness to and solidarity with those who often face downturn.<sup>262</sup>

Rieger's reflections in the midst of the initial aftermath of the crisis of 2007-2008 provides an initial critique of how the neoliberal economic system and culture failed, and the assumptions made about how the economy uplifts all classes to be false. These initial critiques serve as foundational ideas that later critics of neoliberalism will incorporate, as will be shown below.

#### **1.3.4 Adam Kotsko**

Kotsko's political-theological discussion of neoliberalism, published in the fall of 2018, stands apart from the other thinkers discussed in this section due to his analysis through the lens of post-secular continental philosophy of religion as opposed to a denomination of Christianity. Nonetheless, one of Kotsko's strengths in *Neoliberalism's Demons: A Political Theology of Late Capital* is his ability to articulate how neoliberalism has a theological system underlying it. In the following subsection, I will explore how Kotsko articulates neoliberalism as a political theology.

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<sup>262</sup> Rieger, *No Rising Tide*, 31-32.

To begin, we must start with how Kotsko defines political theology. Following Carl Schmitt's *Political Theology*, Kotsko makes a distinction between two conceptions of political theology: a restricted conception and general conception.<sup>263</sup> The restricted conception of political theology concerns only Schmitt's intellectual commitments to questions of the political as central to human existence and of "a singular, personal, omnipotent sovereign as the guarantor of the political."<sup>264</sup> The general conception of political theology is one that analyzes the isomorphic structures of the theological and the political and how they seek to solve interrelated problems of evil and legitimacy.<sup>265</sup>

In his analysis, Kotsko finds neoliberalism to fit the general conception of political theology. The convictions of the neoliberal, namely the concepts discussed in Section I above of freedom, competition, and a finance-driven worldview, have both descriptive and normative elements that inform political structures by way of a theory of governance as well as theological structures by way of an account of human nature.<sup>266</sup> This clearly fits within Kotsko's definition, tying to questions of evil and legitimacy. Kotsko continues the argument in the following chapters, clarifying the relationship between the economic and the political to strengthen the case for understanding neoliberalism as a political theology.

While Kotsko's other arguments are interesting, the most relevant aspect of his text is that he shows that, even without the tradition Christian understanding of the field of political theology, neoliberalism can be articulated as a kind of political theology

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<sup>263</sup> Kotsko, *Neoliberalism's Demons*, 31.

<sup>264</sup> Kotsko, *Neoliberalism's Demons*, 31.

<sup>265</sup> Kotsko, *Neoliberalism's Demons*, 31.

<sup>266</sup> Kotsko, *Neoliberalism's Demons*, 33.

dealing with systematic questions. This further strengthens the case that neoliberalism is a systematic theological problem and must be reflected upon as such.

### 1.3.5 Kathryn Tanner

The next post-crisis thinker to be discussed is Kathryn Tanner. While Tanner has multiple monographs on the topic of theology and economics, the primary focus for this part of my overall argument will be 2019's *Christianity and the New Spirit of Capitalism*.<sup>267</sup> The monograph, developing from Tanner's initial reflections in 2010 until her 2016 Gifford Lecture Series of the same name, is an attempt to rethink neoliberalism through a Weberian lens.<sup>268</sup> It is important to note, however, that Tanner does not use the term neoliberalism, but rather finance-driven capitalism to describe the phenomenon upon which she lectures. This is not problematic because it is clear, given her references to Foucault's *The Birth of Biopolitics* and similarities to concepts used by Wendy Brown, that Tanner's finance-driven capitalism is the neoliberalism that has been in the chapter thus far.<sup>269</sup> Tanner's contribution to understanding neoliberalism as a systematic theological problem is that she explicitly names systematic theological concepts in relation to neoliberalism, specifically salvation and theological anthropology.

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<sup>267</sup> For more on Tanner's theological engagement with economics, see Kathryn Tanner, *Economy of Grace* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005).

<sup>268</sup> Tanner, *Christianity and the New Spirit of Capitalism*, ix, 1.

<sup>269</sup> I can only offer conjecture as to why she chooses to use the term finance-driven capitalism as opposed to neoliberalism, but my suspicions are concerning the way the term liberal is used in anglophone political conversation. Since the term liberal has come to mean left of center in anglophone political discourse, the term neoliberal is a challenging one to use and be understood by a wide audience. Given the nature of the lectures, Tanner probably elected to use the term finance-driven capitalism as a way to prevent her audience, who may not be familiar with the scholarly literature on neoliberalism, from misunderstanding her argument due to a confusion over terminology.

Tanner articulates an explicit link between neoliberal ideology and salvation early in her first chapter of *Christianity and the New Spirit of Capitalism*. Citing Weber's analysis of the Protestant work ethic, Tanner claims in classical capitalism, hard work for the sake of profit is done not for the sake of profit, but for the salvific promise it represents as one has the disposition of being predestined for salvation.<sup>270</sup> Yet salvation in the Christian sense is actually a transformation that radically breaks from the world through divine agency.<sup>271</sup> The finance-driven capitalism she describes stands in stark contradiction to this kind of transformation, expecting the drives of competition, debt, and totalizing work ethic to continue *ad infinitum*. In short, Tanner argues that Christian salvation is contrary to this neoliberal ideology that promises infinite progress and profit.

The second theological topic Tanner brings to the conversation deals with a theological anthropology finance-driven capitalism creates. According to Tanner, finance-driven capitalism requires individual workers to be flexible and total commitment to one's job to remain employed. Returning to the classical conception of *homo economicus*, Tanner states that there has always been some element of understanding oneself as property to be loaned for a time on the market for a price, namely one's wages for a day's work.<sup>272</sup> The transition to finance-driven capitalism, however, changes the person from a worker who loans her property to a human capital investment that must maximize profit. Tanner describes this new internalized view of the self in the following way:

My employer considers me human capital to be put to maximally profitable use at the least expense, and this is also how I see myself: my personal assets are my

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<sup>270</sup> Tanner, *Christianity and the New Spirit of Capitalism*, 3.

<sup>271</sup> Tanner, *Christianity and the New Spirit of Capitalism*, 31-32.

<sup>272</sup> Tanner, *Christianity and the New Spirit of Capitalism*, 74.

own human capital in the running of what I hope will be the enormously profitable business of my own life. It is hard therefore to criticize my employer for seeing me that way. In each case the assets of my person are being put to work in a manner designed to produce maximum profit; that simply seems to be what they are for.<sup>273</sup>

The internalization of the logic of human capital becomes insidious because it requires a person's total commitment to profit maximization above all else.<sup>274</sup> This runs counter to the Christian's total commitment to God. In Tanner's view, conversion requires one to divest oneself of one's pursuit of ordinary desires and offer that commitment to God.<sup>275</sup> This means that one's orientation towards God runs contrary to what a finance-driven capitalist anthropology claims must be the central commitment.

Tanner's articulation of how theological concepts of salvation and theological anthropology are directly engaged with and stand contrary to neoliberal ideas on related subjects adds further evidence that neoliberalism is an ideology that engages concepts that are related to, if not explicitly central to, topics within the realm of systematic theology. Tanner, complimenting the work of Hinkelammert, Sung, Rieger, Day, and Kotsko, provides the final pieces to show that neoliberalism is problem for systematic theology, and must be dealt with in a systematic mode.

In this chapter, I have examined the various forms neoliberalism can appear. First, there is the economic theory of neoliberalism that was championed in public policy during the 1980s, creating economic crises that are still impacting the world to this day. Second, neoliberalism as a philosophical problem emerges out of questions of political and economic philosophy, as shown in the neo-Marxist and Foucauldian traditions.

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<sup>273</sup> Tanner, *Christianity and the New Spirit of Capitalism*, 76-77.

<sup>274</sup> Tanner, *Christianity and the New Spirit of Capitalism*, 75.

<sup>275</sup> Tanner, *Christianity and the New Spirit of Capitalism*, 89.

Finally, neoliberalism is also a systematic theological problem, dealing with the interconnected assumptions that engage and challenge systematic theology.

Recognizing neoliberalism as a multivalent problem allows for a significantly better chance at developing a response following from the work of Ellacuría. To prepare a full response, we must now turn to Ellacuría's philosophical, theological, and economic works to understand his thought and how his concepts can build a framework of an explicitly Catholic liberationist response to neoliberalism as a multifaceted problem.

### 1.3.6 Keri Day

Day's 2015 monograph *Religious Resistance to Neoliberalism: Womanist and Black Feminist Perspectives* develops ideas presented by Rieger and builds upon them in a way that only distance from an event can allow. This distance for reflection allows Day to articulate several anthropological concerns about how neoliberalism forms a person's self-understanding and interpersonal relationships.<sup>276</sup> The relevant points from Day's monograph for my purposes here are her discussion of the acquiring mode, the loss of *eros* in neoliberal society, and her discussion of hope and love as revolutionary social praxis.

In her second chapter, Day offers an argument as to how the transformation of individuals impact how society transforms, claiming individual change and social change

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<sup>276</sup> It is important to note here that Day understands neoliberal as a term that goes beyond western capitalism in contemporary times, but also has variations in Chinese state capitalism and the monetarist approaches in Latin America. While Day makes these distinctions, it does not impact my argument given that her analysis applies to all variations of neoliberalism. For more on Day's distinctions in the introduction, see Day, *Religious Resistance to Neoliberalism*, 1-17.

are not distinct phenomena.<sup>277</sup> To do this, she investigates the acquiring mode, which she defines as “a neoliberal way of being that defines human meaning based on the material things one can acquire. This mode then shapes the consciousness of the human subject within diverse market societies.”<sup>278</sup> As Day unpacks this definition, she notes that neoliberal capitalism often commodifies the human being through unmitigated competitive impulses, causing one to understand non-market concepts, such as trust and love, in terms of market practices, which imply material objects and objectification.<sup>279</sup> The problem with relating to everything as a material object is that material objects cannot, in Day’s words, give, share, love, or create, which are all actions requiring an acting subject, namely other humans.<sup>280</sup> These actions, which are intended to be done in relation to other acting subjects, are what Day means when she says that “to be human is to ‘alive.’”<sup>281</sup> This understanding of being “alive” is to be engaged in either productive activity or non-alienated activity, where one experiences oneself as a subject and is able to understand herself, her productivity, and the result of that productivity are one.<sup>282</sup> This stands in opposition to alienated activity, where one is not able to experience herself as a subject of her activity.<sup>283</sup>

To illustrate Day’s point, let us take an example of a carpenter building a table to give as a gift for her friend’s family who just moved into a new home. This act is productive, in that the carpenter is practicing her craft. The carpenter can experience this as a non-alienated activity, where she recognizes her skill at work, sees the creation of

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<sup>277</sup> Day, *Religious Resistance to Neoliberalism*, 47.

<sup>278</sup> Day, *Religious Resistance to Neoliberalism*, 47.

<sup>279</sup> Day, *Religious Resistance to Neoliberalism*, 48-50.

<sup>280</sup> Day, *Religious Resistance to Neoliberalism*, 50.

<sup>281</sup> Day, *Religious Resistance to Neoliberalism*, 50.

<sup>282</sup> Day, *Religious Resistance to Neoliberalism*, 50-51.

<sup>283</sup> Day, *Religious Resistance to Neoliberalism*, 51.

bringing an object to life from pieces of wood by her own hand, and knows that there is continuity between herself, her actions, and the table she is constructing that will be used by a family to share meals and have conversations. In other words, the carpenter is doing more than building a table; she is sharing her gifts with those she loves to help facilitate more giving, sharing, and loving in a way fundamental to human relationships: table fellowship. She can also experience her work as alienated activity, where she builds a table to sell as a part of a large retailer's mass-produced collection, never seeing herself as the subject of her actions, but merely as a machine producing another product for sale on the market so she can pay her debts and buy a new television. Day's insight is that the acquiring mode replaces this non-alienating activity, which is life-giving through its loving, sharing, and giving, with alienating activity, the acquisition of material objects, that destroys what it means to be human.<sup>284</sup> This destruction of humanity on the individual level eventually leads to a society and individuals who "presume that the acquiring of wealth says something about who is worthy or commendable and who is not praiseworthy within society."<sup>285</sup> In short, neoliberal culture transforms human value into something that can be measured on an sheet of assets and liabilities.

The second aspect of Day's analysis relevant for this project is her analysis of the loss of *eros* in neoliberal culture. Day takes care to begin by emphasizing that *eros* is not merely a pornographic sexual desire, but a wholistic, passionate, unifying love that desires the beloved.<sup>286</sup> Citing Karen Baker-Fletcher, Day understands *eros* as a love that

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<sup>284</sup> Day, *Religious Resistance to Neoliberalism*, 51.

<sup>285</sup> Day, *Religious Resistance to Neoliberalism*, 53.

<sup>286</sup> Day, *Religious Resistance to Neoliberalism*, 81.

recognizes humanity's embodied, creaturely status and has the ability to heal both the body and the soul.<sup>287</sup>

In depriving human beings of their ability to live, Day claims that neoliberalism emphasizes a “sensation without feeling,” which contributes to the reduction of the complexity of *eros* to mere sexual desire that can be fulfilled without interpersonal connection.<sup>288</sup> Day illustrates this point in a powerful way, writing:

The erotic is a passionate life force and creative energy that fuels all of our endeavors and loving acts of labor in the world. The horror of neoliberal societies is that it defines the good and beautiful in terms of profit rather than in terms of human connection and care, which robs us of erotic value and power within our ways of being and living. We are emotionally numb to ourselves and others, unable to feel anything because our false “good” is bound up with the reckless pursuit of money and its concomitant alienating ways of acting (social distrust, lack of care, etc.). The numbness of feeling that neoliberal society produces cuts us off from the emotional, connective power needed to transform our societies into just and compassionate communities.<sup>289</sup>

Day's powerful articulation shows us that through the acquisitive mode and alienation, neoliberalism deprives humans of the erotic that allows us to connect to one another, depriving us of having a society that is built upon compassion and justice, replacing those foundational pillars with empty acquisition and competition.

The final aspect of Day's work that is significant is what she understands as the responding resistance to neoliberalism: hope and love as concrete practices. While Day dedicates two chapters of the monograph to each, her articulation of how these two theological virtues function as social practices is not as important to the present argument

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<sup>287</sup> Day, *Religious Resistance to Neoliberalism*, 81.

<sup>288</sup> Day, *Religious Resistance to Neoliberalism*, 82.

<sup>289</sup> Day, *Religious Resistance to Neoliberalism*, 82.

at this point in the project as the fact that she names them as practices.<sup>290</sup> In understanding hope and love as more than just abstract concepts about which one homilizes, but as praxis that one must engage in to emulate Christ, Day provides a groundwork of how to make resistance to neoliberalism more than just a political act, but a religiously liberating one.

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<sup>290</sup> For more on Day's articulation of love and hope as social practices, see Day, *Religious Resistance to Neoliberalism*, 105-159. They will be of greater importance in Chapter 5, where they will be brought into dialogue with responses to neoliberalism derived from Ellacuría's philosophical, theological, and political thought.

## 2.0 THE GADFLY OF SAN SALVADOR: ELLACURÍA AS PHILOSOPHER

*Socrates thought that without philosophy  
humanity and the state would not be able to  
come to know themselves, much less to fulfill  
themselves as they ought. Therefore,  
philosophy is necessary.*

~Ignacio Ellacuría, "What is the Point of  
Philosophy?"

To understand how Ellacuría's thought can provide an answer to the tripartite problem of neoliberalism (neoliberalism as philosophical problem, theological problem, and politico-economic problem), one must first understand the structure of Ellacuría's thought and its guiding principles. The foundation of Ellacuría's thought lies in his philosophical work. As a scholar whose most advanced training was in philosophy under the Spanish philosopher Xavier Zubiri, Ellacuría grounds his economic, political, and theological reflections in his philosophical thought. Ellacuría's precise and distinctive approach to philosophy that blends classical metaphysics and praxis-based materialist concerns allows him to develop a philosophy focused on the human person and her inherent dignity. It is this approach that makes his philosophical work an ideal Christian philosophical perspective for offering a critique of neoliberalism. Specifically, Ellacuría's philosophy, working in conjunction with the critiques of the neo-Marxist or Foucauldian traditions, responds to neoliberalism as a philosophical problem, where the principles of neoliberal political economy are reconstructed into a set of philosophical positions.

This chapter is divided into three main sections. The first is an analysis of the elements of Ellacuría's philosophical thought that are relevant to engaging the philosophical questions posed by neoliberalism. The second will offer a sketch of an Ellacurían analysis of neoliberalism as a philosophical problem that serves as a plank in the tripartite response that will be offered in Chapter 5. Finally, the third section provides an engagement with both the neo-Marxist and Foucauldian traditions discussed in chapter 1 above to offer substantial critiques of the positions of the philosophy of neoliberalism.

## 2.1 THE PHILSOPHOCIAL THOUGHT OF IGNACÍO ELLACURÍA

In this section, Ellacuría's philosophical foundations and methodology, metaphysics and epistemology of historical reality, and a social philosophy rooted in a praxis-centered anthropology will be analyzed to provide a focused understanding of Ellacurían philosophical tools.<sup>291</sup> These tools will become the foundation of the engagement with the other philosophical critiques of neoliberalism.

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<sup>291</sup> This overview of Ellacuría's philosophy will be narrowly focused on what is essential to the critique of the philosophical problem of neoliberalism. For a short, general overview of Ellacuría's philosophy, see Thomas Fonet-Ponse, *Ignacio Ellacuría interkulturell gelesen* (Nordhausen, Germany: Traugott Bautz, 2008).

### 2.1.1 Philosophy as a Way of Life: Foundations and Methodology

The first section argues that Ellacuría's philosophy is grounded on three foundational and methodological elements. The first of these is that Ellacuría's philosophy is best understood as a Socratic philosophy concerned with the well-being of society. From this framework of a Socratic philosophy, Ellacuría's philosophy functions with two complimentary methodological approaches: 1) the critical function of philosophy as de-ideologization and 2) philosophy as maieutic, creative and historically productive in five areas of inquiry, namely epistemology, metaphysics, sociohistorical anthropology, fundamental ethics, and fundamental theology. By articulating these methodological points, the Ellacurían critique of neoliberalism as a philosophical problem will become clear.

The first place where Ellacuría's starting point for philosophical reflection appears clearly is in the essay "What Is the Point of Philosophy?"<sup>292</sup> Starting with Socrates as the initial model for philosophical reflection, Ellacuría notes that what makes Socrates distinct from the pre-Socratic philosophical tradition is Socrates' focus on questions of the human person and society. The questions of knowledge Socrates asks are rooted in concern for both the individual and the political.<sup>293</sup> Socrates philosophized as a

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<sup>292</sup> Ignacio Ellacuría, "What Is the Point of Philosophy?" *Philosophy and Theology* 10, no. 1 (1997), 3-18. This essay, translated by T. Michael McNulty, S.J., was originally published in 1976 in *ABRA*, no. 11. This essay, as Ellacuría notes in the introductory section, is aimed to explain to students in an introductory philosophy course, among other types of beginners, why philosophical studies are significant. While this essay may not be the most philosophically dense of Ellacuría's essays, it does present a uniquely clear exposition of Ellacuría's philosophical starting point, as will be discussed below.

<sup>293</sup> Ellacuría, "What is the Point of Philosophy?" 5-6. From Ellacuría's argument in the text, it does not appear that he is making a distinction between the historical Socrates and the character of Socrates in the Platonic dialogues, which ignores a debate in Plato scholarship on how many of Socrates' positions in the Platonic dialogues are actually authentic positions of the historical Socrates as opposed to Plato's own developed positions spoken through the mouthpiece of the character of Socrates. Ellacuría's point,

vocation, emphasizing that the activity of philosophy is one that is rooted in the human person, and he philosophized with a rigorous method of seeking definitions and concepts while also making use of inductive and dialectical reasoning.<sup>294</sup> Using these theoretical tools as well as a passion for the questions and knowledge, Socrates sought to be of service to his fellow citizens and the polity of Athens.<sup>295</sup> Ellacuría concludes:

The example of Socrates is thus a guide for whoever feels the necessity of doing philosophy, for whoever sees philosophy as a necessity. Socrates thought that without philosophy humanity and the state would not be able to come to know themselves, much less to fulfill themselves as they ought. Therefore, philosophy is necessary. Philosophy—every day we see it better—is not sufficient in itself. But without philosophy humanity would lose one of its greatest chances to know and fulfill itself adequately.<sup>296</sup>

In this excerpt, Ellacuría provides the starting point and motivation for doing philosophy. Philosophy is necessary for human and political flourishing, and philosophical activity is a necessary but insufficient condition for the health of a society. While methodology and other foundational concepts are important, it is this notion of philosophy as necessary for healthy functioning of a society and its citizens that rests at the core of Ellacuría's philosophical thought. The rest of the argument of the essay clarifies how this social

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however, does not rely on the historicity of Socrates' positions. The purpose and method of engaging in philosophical activity is not in dispute as much as particular doctrines, and Ellacuría is more concerned with the former than the latter. For more on the question of historical Socrates and his relationship to Plato's philosophy, see Terry Penner, "Socrates and the Early Dialogues," in *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*, ed. Richard Kraut (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 121-169, and William J. Prior, "The Socratic Problem," in *A Companion to Plato*, ed. Hugh H. Benson (Chichester, West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 25-35.

<sup>294</sup> Ellacuría, "What is the Point of Philosophy?" 6-7. This concept of vocation will be relevant in Ellacuría's theological work as well in the call to prophetic activity. This will be explored in Chapter 3 below.

<sup>295</sup> Ellacuría, "What is the Point of Philosophy?" 7.

<sup>296</sup> Ellacuría, "What is the Point of Philosophy?" 7.

function of philosophy is designed to critique ideologies, which stand in the way of liberation for the peoples such ideologies are used to restrain.<sup>297</sup>

Looking to Ellacuría's 1985 essay "The Liberating Function of Philosophy," it is clear that he develops the elements of the Socratic task discussed above into distinct methodological functions.<sup>298</sup> Setting the stage for this methodological task, Ellacuría offers a brief discussion on the relationship between philosophical reason and freedom, stating that reason can be used to justify an oppressive order, which Ellacuría calls a pseudo-philosophical use of reason, as was often the case in Latin America during Ellacuría's lifetime.<sup>299</sup> Philosophy, writes Ellacuría, has a responsibility to counteract this use of reason. Emphasizing social transformation, he argues that the search for truth that stands as the core of philosophical reason cannot be reduced to a search for truth for its own sake.<sup>300</sup> With such social ends in mind, Ellacuría distinguishes two methodological functions, which have their roots in two Socratic categories: the critical and the maieutic functions of philosophy.

Commenting on the methodological point in Ellacuría's "What is the Point of Philosophy?", theologian Antonio González clarifies these maieutic and critical functions.<sup>301</sup> The maieutic aspect, coming from the Greek *maieuoumai* meaning to help in

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<sup>297</sup> Ellacuría's understanding of ideologization is not thoroughly discussed in this essay, which I speculate is a deliberate choice, as this essay is intended for an audience at the introductory level of philosophical education. Therefore, I will provide a more robust account of ideology critique below, where a further study of Ellacuría's social philosophy will allow ideologization to come to the forefront in an appropriate amount of detail.

<sup>298</sup> Ignacio Ellacuría, "The Liberating Function of Philosophy," in *Ignacio Ellacuría: Essays on History, Liberation, and Salvation*, ed. Michael E. Lee (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2013), 93-119.

<sup>299</sup> Ellacuría, "The Liberating Function of Philosophy," 94.

<sup>300</sup> Ellacuría, "The Liberating Function of Philosophy," 94.

<sup>301</sup> Antonio González, "Assessing the Philosophical Achievement of Ignacio Ellacuría," in *Love that Produces Hope: The Thought of Ignacio Ellacuría*, ed. Kevin F. Burke, S.J., and Robert Lassalle-Klein, (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005), 75.

birthing process, emphasizes the essential role of philosophy in bringing about new ideas that can help overcome terrible circumstances caused by oppressive social and political structures.<sup>302</sup> The critical task, on the other hand, is essential to dismantling the ideologizations that create and sustain the oppression faced by many groups, including the poor in El Salvador.<sup>303</sup> By lining up the philosophical tools of the Socratic task with Ellacuría's context as a philosopher for the people of El Salvador, González argues that Ellacuría serves as a Socratic figure standing against the sophistry of "common majorities."<sup>304</sup>

The critical function of philosophy, according to Ellacuría, confronts the ideological elements of a social structure and shows how they can be driven out through both theoretical mechanisms and social relationships.<sup>305</sup> To fully explain how this de-ideologizing function of philosophy works, Ellacuría goes into detail making distinctions among the pejorative meaning of ideology, the non-pejorative meaning of ideology, and ideologization, the third of which is the object of the critical function of philosophy.<sup>306</sup>

Ellacuría defines the pejorative meaning of ideology as "concealing the social reality." He notes that although this definition provides some insight into the nature of ideology, it is insufficient.<sup>307</sup> The term ideology is ambiguous and is not as exclusively negative as the pejorative meaning would lead one to believe.<sup>308</sup> The important question for Ellacuría is how ideology manages to support the imposition of social power by a

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<sup>302</sup> González, "Assessing the Philosophical Achievement," 75. González is referencing Plato's *Theatetus* 148e, where Socrates describes himself as a midwife of ideas, having learned the trade of midwifery from his mother.

<sup>303</sup> González, "Assessing the Philosophical Achievement," 75.

<sup>304</sup> González, "Assessing the Philosophical Achievement," 75.

<sup>305</sup> Ellacuría, "The Liberating Function of Philosophy," 96.

<sup>306</sup> Ellacuría, "The Liberating Function of Philosophy," 98-9.

<sup>307</sup> Ellacuría, "The Liberating Function of Philosophy," 96.

<sup>308</sup> Ellacuría, "The Liberating Function of Philosophy," 96.

particular class or ruling estate.<sup>309</sup> Ideology would not have such power if it were not appealing even in light of its negative qualities. Ellacuría continues:

Certainly people would not turn to ideology, including its negative aspects, if it did not serve a useful and even necessary purpose. They would not turn to ideology, if it did not have at least the appearance—and in that sense some reality as well—of something positive, behind which so much deformed and deforming reality is often concealed. There will always be ideology in its negative sense; that is why theoretical work is needed to combat it by unmasking and shedding light on it.<sup>310</sup>

In this short excerpt, Ellacuría offers a few important points that help to flesh out the philosophical task in relation to ideology. First, ideology, regardless of its negative qualities, is a useful tool; this appeal and usefulness cannot be ignored since it explains why it is so prevalent in attempts to influence a population. Following from this first point, ideology as a negative tool will always be used because it works so well. Finally, theoretical work, meaning careful philosophical analysis, will always be necessary to properly identify ideology and its workings, making philosophy essential for a healthy society to function.<sup>311</sup>

The nonpejorative meaning of ideology, on the other hand, can have some positive effects. Ellacuría provides a definition of the nonpejorative meaning of ideology:

Ideologies can have a nonpejorative, necessary meaning if we understand ideologies as coherent, comprehensive and evaluative explanation through concepts, symbols, images, references, etc., which goes beyond simple, fragmented observation, both in narrow areas and especially in more general and even all-embracing areas.<sup>312</sup>

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<sup>309</sup> Ellacuría, “The Liberating Function of Philosophy,” 96-7.

<sup>310</sup> Ellacuría, “The Liberating Function of Philosophy,” 97.

<sup>311</sup> This final statement will be explored in detail in both Section 1-C below and in Chapter 4, emphasizing the political philosophy that arises from Ellacuría’s reflections on society and community, especially *el mal común*.

<sup>312</sup> Ellacuría, “The Liberating Function of Philosophy,” 98.

From this definition, an ideology in the nonpejorative sense can be understood as a worldview or even a hermeneutic that can affect anyone, even scientists in regard to their own field of research.<sup>313</sup> The example Ellacuría offers is the question of a value judgment and meaning when applied to a scientific task. Ellacuría claims that science following a positivistic approach will have little to say about the value of a discovery of certainty. To make Ellacuría's point more concrete, consider virologist Jonas Salk's discovery of one of the first polio vaccines in the early 1950s. The discovery of the ability of dead strains of the polio virus to immunize a child from the disease, from the perspective of the pure positivistic science, is simply a discovery of a fact. The positivistic scientist cannot comment on the value of this discovery. Yet, the scientific community rejoiced in this discovery due to an ideology in the nonpejorative sense. An ideology in Ellacuría's nonpejorative sense provides the evaluative explanation that such a vaccine would save countless lives from crippling and even deadly paralysis, meaning it would be considered a good and something to be celebrated. This is all predicated on an ideology that human life and the wellness of human beings have intrinsic value and should be protected. This implementation of an ideology allows one to provide meaning beyond the brute fact of the scientific discovery. The key for Ellacuría, then, is understanding how ideology can serve as "a principle of complementarity and even progress rather than a principle of distortion."<sup>314</sup> This description shows Ellacuría's understanding of the nonpejorative

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<sup>313</sup> Ellacuría, "The Liberating Function of Philosophy," 98. Throughout this section on the nonpejorative meaning of ideology, Ellacuría engages with ideas that parallel remarks made by Edmund Husserl in his later work. Cf. Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Philosophy: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*, trans. David Carr (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 3-18.

<sup>314</sup> Ellacuría, "The Liberating Function of Philosophy," 98. Héctor Samour develops this point, arguing that Ellacuría understands non-pejorative ideology as essential to living in a society, which runs parallel to the

meaning of ideology as a neutral hermeneutic that provides context and establishment of values to one's experience of reality.<sup>315</sup>

The problem for Ellacuría is when ideology ceases to provide context for the experience of reality and begins to warp reality to fit a particular message, replacing truth with fabrications to further an agenda.<sup>316</sup> This phenomenon is what Ellacuría refers to as ideologization. Ellacuría formally defines ideologization as that which “unconsciously and unintentionally expresses visions of reality that, rather than manifesting the reality, hide and deform it with the appearance of truth because of interests shaped by classes or social, ethnic, political, and/or religious groups.”<sup>317</sup> Following this definition, Ellacuría provides five elements that are present in each case of ideologization: 1) a vision of a specific reality that is totalizing, interpretive, and justifying the disguising of elements of falsehood and injustice; 2) the collective or social character of the deformation that works impersonally; 3) an unconscious response from the deformation to collective interests, which determines the presentation of the deformation and how it continues to deform society; 4) the acceptance of the falsehood as true by both those who produce it as well as those who receive it; 5) it is presented as an abstract, universal, and necessary system with some concrete examples, but never fully embodied in historical reality.<sup>318</sup> The key danger of ideologizations is how they can create social realities of oppression that hide their own evils, emphasizing what good such social realities produce, creating a

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idea of non-pejorative ideology as cultural hermeneutic. For more on Samour's point, see Héctor Samour, *Voluntad de liberación: La filosofía de Ignacio Ellacuría* (Granada: Editorial Comares, 2003), 246-9.

<sup>315</sup> This aspect of Ellacuría's understanding of ideology is rooted in his understanding of human beings in relation to historical reality, which will be explored in further detail below.

<sup>316</sup> Ellacuría, “The Liberating Function of Philosophy,” 99.

<sup>317</sup> Ellacuría, “The Liberating Function of Philosophy,” 99.

<sup>318</sup> Ellacuría, “The Liberating Function of Philosophy,” 99. It is this theory of ideologization that will be a central part of providing an Ellacurían analysis of neoliberalism below.

dissonance between the ideal expression of a social reality and the facts of oppression and injustice that actually exist.<sup>319</sup> Without some form of de-ideologization, a society could potentially be locked into a cycle of deformation that allows for the oppressed to continue to suffer while the rest of the populace is so focused on the positive aspects of the ideologization that it blindly ignores the cries of the oppressed.

The critical role of philosophy, then, is to serve as the de-ideologizing tool within a society.<sup>320</sup> Ellacuría sees the opportunity for philosophy, given its critical tools mentioned above, to interrogate the nothingness of ideologization that appears as reality. This critical activity allows one to challenge the unfounded reality of ideologization by means of critical thought and to ask the fundamental question of truth.<sup>321</sup>

Philosophy, however, is not limited only to a critical function. It is capable, according to Ellacuría, of offering solutions to the problems it finds through critique. Ellacuría wants to put forth the kind of maieutic philosophy that, beyond critiquing ideologization, reveals the truth of reality which such ideologization disguises. Philosophy should be able to discover both the positive and negative aspects of reality. The historical nature of the reality which human beings experience and inhabit requires a shift from ahistorical theoretical categories to ones that are able to account for this historical reality. Ellacuría finds that the best way to do this is to explore the richness of

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<sup>319</sup> Ellacuría, "The Liberating Function of Philosophy," 100.

<sup>320</sup> Ellacuría, "The Liberating Function of Philosophy," 101. It is interesting to note here that Ellacuría's formulation of the critical role of philosophy as de-ideologization is intentionally universal in a way that can be appropriated by any context. This fits with Ellacuría's concern for the way that Euro-centric thought has come to dominate the Global South, especially in Latin America that, according to Ellacuría, has yet to produce a philosophy while having produced a theology. Ellacuría discusses this briefly in "The Liberating Function of Philosophy," 94-6.

<sup>321</sup> Ellacuría, "The Liberating Function of Philosophy," 101-2.

historical reality and orient the discoveries made towards a historical praxis.<sup>322</sup> To do this, one must consider philosophical categories not simply as fixed theoretical expressions traditionally used but as “processural.”<sup>323</sup> These processural theoretical expressions allow for this change to happen and allow philosophy to make meaningful contributions to the social realm.

Ellacuría also states that while this creative function is important, the philosopher should also remain humble in recognizing she does not possess as much power for social change as she may think.<sup>324</sup> He points out that while Marxist ideology has its roots in Marx’s historical materialism, the mass social movements of Marxist revolutions that led to regime changes throughout the world are not dependent on Marx’s philosophical work.<sup>325</sup> Although he recognizes the limited degree to which philosophy impacts society, Ellacuría offers a model of philosophy that addresses issues that cannot be handled by the social sciences alone and is able to work in conjunction with these social sciences and powerful social movements to help make necessary societal change.<sup>326</sup>

To perform this creative function that can play a role in social change, Ellacuría, as noted above, identifies five areas in which philosophy can not only offer critique but also embark on the more creative task of providing answers to the questions it raises. The first area is epistemology, which Ellacuría argues is significant because human beings experience reality through an intellectual capacity, which must be studied as the basis for

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<sup>322</sup> Ellacuría, “The Liberating Function of Philosophy,” 101-2.

<sup>323</sup> Ellacuría, “The Liberating Function of Philosophy,” 102.

<sup>324</sup> Ellacuría, “The Liberating Function of Philosophy,” 103.

<sup>325</sup> Ellacuría, “The Liberating Function of Philosophy,” 103.

<sup>326</sup> Ellacuría took this idea to heart in his rectorship of the UCA, publishing the work of sociologists, psychologists, and economists as well as his own philosophical work to critique the ideologization of the Salvadoran government’s narrative during the Salvadoran Civil War in regard to the state of the nation.

providing a substantial theory of knowledge.<sup>327</sup> Next, Ellacuría points to the importance of a general theory of reality, which allows one to make distinctions about general categories, such as the natural and the historical, the objective and the subjective, the social and the personal.<sup>328</sup> Following the general theory of reality, philosophy must have an open and critical theory of the human being, society, and history. Such a critical theory will allow a philosopher to speak to the associated reality of each topic and make further distinctions within the greater schema of general reality.<sup>329</sup> The next area for philosophical commentary is a rational foundation for an adequate evaluation of human beings and their world.<sup>330</sup> This area is significant for Ellacuría because it is the ground for the question of ethics, and therefore essential for historical praxis. The final area to which philosophy must speak is a reflection on what is ultimate and transcendent.<sup>331</sup> It is this area that allows for philosophy not only to have a sense of teleology but also to be open to the reality of God and the possibility of a theology with which to work in concert. By providing creative responses to these five areas of inquiry, Ellacuría argues that philosophy fulfills its critical and maieutic functions and can be a limited force of liberation.<sup>332</sup>

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<sup>327</sup> Ellacuría, "The Liberating Function of Philosophy," 104.

<sup>328</sup> Ellacuría, "The Liberating Function of Philosophy," 105-6.

<sup>329</sup> Ellacuría, "The Liberating Function of Philosophy," 106.

<sup>330</sup> Ellacuría, "The Liberating Function of Philosophy," 106.

<sup>331</sup> Ellacuría, "The Liberating Function of Philosophy," 106.

<sup>332</sup> Ellacuría, "The Liberating Function of Philosophy," 107.

### 2.1.2 Historical Reality: The Metaphysics, Epistemology, and Anthropology of Ellacuría

This section will explore Ellacuría's metaphysical and epistemological theory of historical reality. For Ellacuría, historical reality is the understanding of the world and the human person's relation to the world as a series of dynamic possibilities at the levels of the biological, individual, societal, and historical. Faced with these dynamic possibilities, the human person enters into the midst of reality to make a choice and act, which Ellacuría calls praxis. These actions are, for Ellacuría, the making of history. In the following pages, I will explore how Ellacuría develops this theory through his engagement with his teacher, Xavier Zubiri.<sup>333</sup>

Serving as Ellacuría's metaphysical lexicon of terms and relations, Zubiri's philosophical project is grounded in a critique of the idealistic tendencies of the Western philosophical tradition. Zubiri argues that modern philosophy, taking its cues from the idealistic tendencies in Plato and Aristotle, has not found a way to satisfactorily answer questions about reality, which serves as the condition for the possibility for apprehension of being.<sup>334</sup> Reality, according to Zubiri, is the formalization of two acts: 1) the apprehension of stimulation of the senses and 2) the intellect providing meaning to the

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<sup>333</sup> The following discussion of Zubiri will be extremely limited, focused on only the terms and relations necessary to understand the mechanics of Ellacuría's argument. While I will be relying on the commentaries on Ellacuría by Burke and Samour, I will include references to relevant texts by Zubiri when appropriate.

<sup>334</sup> Burke, "The Ground Beneath the Cross," 45-9.

constellation of stimuli apprehended.<sup>335</sup> To make this more concrete, let us take the example Zubiri provides in the text: a table. When I perceive a table, I am not actually perceiving a table; I am rather perceiving various stimuli of color, weight, density, texture, and so on. When I recognize that constellation of stimuli as having the function or meaning of a table in my life, I can see the reality of the table. This is not to say that the table as a physical object does not exist without my apprehending it; the brown, smooth flat slab of wood standing on four legs in my kitchen does not disappear once I stop perceiving or thinking about it. The material still exists and can stimulate the senses of my cats as they walk across it. In that respect, the wood is a reality-thing, to use Fowler's translation. Yet my cats can only apprehend the stimulation as stimulation; they are, in Zubiri's system, incapable of the human ability to apprehend the apprehension of that particular constellation of stimuli as a table, a meaning-thing.<sup>336</sup> The apprehension of apprehension is the formalization of reality that allows one to understand things *de suyo*, or in their own right.<sup>337</sup> To experience this formalization, a being must not only be sentient, but have the appropriate intellectual structure to be able to experience this formulation.<sup>338</sup> This is why Zubiri understands the human person as a reality animal, which goes on to serve as the groundwork for the role human beings play as historical creatures that are in a historical reality.

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<sup>335</sup> Xavier Zubiri, *Sentient Intelligence*, trans. Thomas B. Fowler (Washington, D.C.: The Xavier Zubiri Foundation of North America, 1999), 58-60.

<sup>336</sup> Zubiri, *Sentient Intelligence*, 60.

<sup>337</sup> Given Zubiri's familiarity with the phenomenological tradition, namely Husserl and Heidegger, I speculate that this language of *de suyo* is Zubiri's method of dialogue with the phenomenological tradition's concept of "the things themselves." Given the literature on Zubiri and Husserl, the connection is probable.

<sup>338</sup> Zubiri, *Sentient Intelligence*, 75-98.

Ellacuría's *Filosofía de la realidad histórica (FRH)*, published posthumously in 1990, dedicates five chapters to his development of Zubiri's metaphysical and epistemological categories.<sup>339</sup> While Zubiri's philosophy is open to the concept of historicity, Ellacuría saw room for development.<sup>340</sup> The first chapter, dedicated to the materiality of history, sets the ground for this expansion.<sup>341</sup> Drawing from Zubiri's understanding of history, Ellacuría begins with what Burke refers to as the grounds of history: the historical is material, spatial, temporal, and biological.<sup>342</sup> Ellacuría's emphasis on the materiality of history comes as part of an inherited rejection of the idealism of the western philosophical tradition which serves as the backdrop to Zubiri's philosophy. The materiality of reality, shown by the point that all things have matter, serves a structural function of both a multiple unity and a unified multiplicity.<sup>343</sup> As Burke notes, this structural tension between multiplicity and unity arises from not only the different ways matter presents itself, but also from the point that matter encompasses both mass and energy.<sup>344</sup> The significance of this statement is that it implies that matter is not static but dynamic, meaning that all of reality is dynamic.<sup>345</sup>

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<sup>339</sup> *FRH* is an extensive text, going well beyond the limits of this dissertation. My discussion of the majority of this work will be in very broad strokes. A full, detailed analysis of this work, untangling the intricate arguments engaging various thinkers throughout the philosophical tradition to understand the argument edited into a cohesive whole after Ellacuría's death, would require its own book-length project.

<sup>340</sup> Burke, *The Ground Beneath the Cross*, 49-50.

<sup>341</sup> Ignacio Ellacuría, *Filosofía de la realidad histórica* (San Salvador: UCA editores, 1990), 49-176.

<sup>342</sup> Burke, *The Ground Beneath the Cross*, 60. The discussion on these four grounds in this chapter will be cursory, given that an in-depth discussion is not necessary to understand Ellacuría's concept of historical reality. For an extended discussion of all four grounds, see Burke, *The Ground Beneath the Cross*, 60-8.

<sup>343</sup> Ellacuría, *FRH*, 52.

<sup>344</sup> Burke, *The Ground Beneath the Cross*, 62.

<sup>345</sup> This point is further supported when considering some basic chemistry. The first law of thermodynamics states that energy cannot be created or destroyed, which implies a dynamism while maintaining a level structural stasis. Likewise, the law of the conservation of matter notes that mass cannot be created or lost in the transition between states, such as boiling water evaporating into steam. The matter is constant

The spatial and temporal grounds of history come out of materiality, given that all matter is extended not only in space, but also in time. Spatiality provides two major features for Ellacuría's thought: 1) spatiality provides a structure for the dynamism of reality that differentiates such dynamism from chaos, and 2) the spatial aspect of reality creates the ability for the human person to develop the concept of place, which has implications for Ellacuría's theological work, which will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3.<sup>346</sup> The temporality of matter, on the other hand, focuses on how matter extends through a succession of moments, drawing on Aristotelian metaphysics.<sup>347</sup> Finally, the biological factor of the materiality of history serves as an argument against a reductionist understanding of matter in history. Opposed to a reduction of history to merely Hegelian idealism on one hand or to an evolutionary process on the other, Ellacuría offers an affirmation of history requiring a specific kind of matter. History requires matter that is capable of connection and continuity, which make up significant aspects of how human beings experience history.<sup>348</sup>

The middle three chapters of *FRH* consider constitutive elements of history that are building blocks for his understanding of historical reality in chapter 5. The second chapter of *FRH* investigates the social dimension of history, engaging with not only the thought of Zubiri, but also that of the classical French philosophical tradition, such as Voltaire and Comte, as well as Hegel and Marx.<sup>349</sup> Ellacuría's most significant point from the discussion of social reality is the way the human person as an individual is

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<sup>346</sup> Burke, *The Ground Beneath the Cross*, 63-4.

<sup>347</sup> Ellacuría, *FRH*, 76-91.

<sup>348</sup> Ellacuría, *FRH*, 91-123.

<sup>349</sup> Ellacuría, *FRH*, 177-314.

confused with the role she plays in society.<sup>350</sup> This means that the human person in and of itself cannot be reduced into simple categories, such as capitalist or landowner.<sup>351</sup> Rather, ideology or collective consciousness impacts and shapes one's reality in ways of which one is not fully aware.<sup>352</sup> While this is the case, says Ellacuría, it does not invalidate the personal component of history.

Following this train of thought, Chapter 3 is dedicated to a study of the personal dimension of history, where, of particular note, Ellacuría discusses his conception of human reality as open essence.<sup>353</sup> In this chapter, Ellacuría sets up Zubiri's distinction between closed essences and open essences.<sup>354</sup> Drawing from Zubiri's attempt to improve upon the Aristotelian definition of the human person, Ellacuría understands the open essence to be one that fits with the dynamism of reality. The open essence of the human being is open to possibilities that reality brings forth, which leads to creativity. While the rest of the chapter explores the various ways Zubiri lays the groundwork for understanding historical reality, Ellacuría's distinction here will become important for his anthropology as will be made clear below.

In Chapter 4, Ellacuría turns to a philosophical discussion of the implications of time for history, engaging thinkers such as Aristotle, Hegel, Marx, Bergson, and Heidegger through the lens of Zubiri's metaphysics.<sup>355</sup> The most significant part of this

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<sup>350</sup> Ellacuría, *FRH*, 305.

<sup>351</sup> Ellacuría, *FRH*, 305.

<sup>352</sup> Ellacuría, *FRH*, 305.

<sup>353</sup> Ellacuría, *FRH*, 328.

<sup>354</sup> Ellacuría, *FRH*, 329. It is important to note here that the concept of open essence in Zubiri's philosophy is exclusively reserved for human beings. Zubiri rejects Aristotle's definition of the human person as rational animal because the definition does not capture the complexity and dynamism that is essential to the human person. For more on this, see Celeste-Marie Weber Moore, "Human Essence: Existential Concerns and Zubiri's Theory of Open Essence," *The Xavier Zubiri Review*, vol. 5 (2003), 87-105.

<sup>355</sup> Ellacuría, *FRH*, 397-487.

discussion for our purposes comes in the concluding remarks of the passage. In the last three paragraphs, Ellacuría offers the quality of *ser tempóreo*, being that has an extension into the past (*el ser como ya*), the present (*estar siendo*), and the future (*el ser como aún*).<sup>356</sup> This approach to beings connected through time, when considered in conjunction with Zubiri's statement that being implies reality, allows one to infer that reality is connected through time. The inference is significant because it sets the ground for the possibility of a historical reality. If being persists through time, creating a historical unity, then there must be a historical reality that allows for that historical being to be sensed and apprehended.

This leads to the ultimate chapter, which deals explicitly with the formal reality of history.<sup>357</sup> To understand the formal reality of history, Ellacuría works through three definitions of history that come to a clearer understanding of what that means then for human beings, the reality animals that are inherently historical: *transmisión tradente*, *actualización de posibilidades*, and *proceso creacional de posibilidades*. For our purposes here, I will only focus on the first and third definitions, as they contribute the most to Ellacuría's understanding of the human person as oriented towards historical praxis.

The first definition Ellacuría works with is history as *transmisión tradente*, which translates roughly to inheritance transmission.<sup>358</sup> In his reflection on this definition, Ellacuría begins with the biological conception of transmission and inheritance, but

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<sup>356</sup> Ellacuría, *FRH*, 486. The literal translations of Ellacuría's terms, much like Heidegger's *Da-sein*, require explanation to fully make sense. *El ser como ya* translates roughly to "Being as already," implying a continuation from the past. *Estar siendo* translates to "Be being," implying the present. Finally, *el ser como aún* translates roughly to "Being as still," suggesting a continuation into the future.

<sup>357</sup> Ellacuría, *FRH*, 491.

<sup>358</sup> Ellacuría, *FRH*, 492.

argues that it is insufficient as human activity requires more than a genetic inheritance to fully understand; human activity is learned through interactions with others in the context of community.<sup>359</sup> It is at this point that Ellacuría shifts his focus to the transmission of tradition and how tradition informs personal biographies, shaping human life from its earliest stages. Pulling again from Zubiri, Ellacuría defines tradition as that which is absorbed from the community into the human person by the very nature of being a human person.<sup>360</sup> Putting the point concisely, Ellacuría writes: “Tradition, when personalized, is the personal reception of the social; what the person receives is something social, even something filial, but something that the person must receive as a person. In this first moment, the march is from the social to the personal.”<sup>361</sup> From this point, Ellacuría follows Zubiri’s logic to show that tradition, and therefore history, is a liminal concept that connects both the social and the personal but does not belong to either one.

The third definition, history as the creational process of capabilities, builds on the significance of tradition for history. Zubiri explicitly states in “The Historical Dimension of the Human Being” that tradition hands over “*a mode of being in reality, but as a principle of possibilities...*” and that history allows for the continuity of that principle.<sup>362</sup> This principle of possibilities leads, following Ellacuría’s reading of Zubiri, to the development of natural capacities that allow those possibilities to be constitutive of one’s

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<sup>359</sup> Ellacuría, *FRH*, 492-500.

<sup>360</sup> Ellacuría, *FRH*, 502. Cf. Xavier Zubiri, “The Historical Dimension of the Human Being,” trans. Manuel Mejido Costoya, [http://www.zubiri.org/works/englishworks/Historical\\_Dimension.htm](http://www.zubiri.org/works/englishworks/Historical_Dimension.htm), III.2.A.

<sup>361</sup> Ellacuría, *FRH*, 502-3. Translation mine. I have chosen to translate the translate *filético* as “filial” as opposed to the literal “phyletic” for two reasons: 1) it connotes human community better in English rather than the biological language would, especially since the taxonomic category of family appears to be a better for the concept Ellacuría is expressing; and 2) it keeps with Costoya’s translation of the term in the sentence Ellacuría quotes from Zubiri immediately prior to this excerpt.

<sup>362</sup> Zubiri, “Historical Dimension,” III.3.D.b.

mode of being.<sup>363</sup> Put another way, history allows for a transmission of a tradition that serves as a social and cultural memory, providing a way for the recipients of the tradition to exist and develop the capacity to act in particular ways. For example, one can look to the way religious traditions are passed down through families, church communities, and even religious institutions such as Catholic universities. Traditions such as retreats based on St. Ignatius of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises* provide a context for students educated at Jesuit institutions to be formed by this tradition, allowing for the capacity to live out Ignatian charisms, namely seeing God at work in the world around them.<sup>364</sup>

The significance of capacities is that in understanding capacities as the actualization of possibilities, capacities are intrinsically linked to the historical. Making this connection, Ellacuría writes:

Actualizing a possibility is already making possible what was not possible before; and to choose one possibility instead of another is to give power to one of them so that, to a certain extent, it can take over one at the same moment that one seizes it. But in the case of capacity there is something more, because with it we attend not to something that simply concerns the exercise of some powers, but rather to what opens up one scope or another of possibilities: more than the actualization of one or the other possibility, in the case of capabilities we find the constitution of the scope of one type of possibility or another. In this sense, not only is something new done, not only is a possibility actualized, but the historical principle of what is humanly possible is constituted.<sup>365</sup>

As Ellacuría argues, when a capacity actualizes a possibility, a historical principle is constituted, developing a way of being in reality. That which is possible is not truly historical until it has been actualized, making it a capacity that exists with in history though a person's choice to act. The key point here is human choice, which is an exercise

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<sup>363</sup> Ellacuría, *FRH*, 547-8.

<sup>364</sup> This example is particularly relevant to Ellacuría given the way Ignatian Spirituality permeates Ellacuría's theology, which will be explored as context for his theology in Chapter 3.

<sup>365</sup> Ellacuría, *FRH*, 560. Translation mine.

in using power to create the historical principle of possibility. It is an exercise in the use of creative power that allow the human person, in a literal sense, to make history.<sup>366</sup> This use of creative power is how the human person responds to the open possibilities discussed by Zubiri. Human choice leads to action, and human action causes change in the flow of history.

This understanding of history and human action comes to bear in Ellacuría's synthesis of Zubiri's various philosophical concepts into the role of praxis in history. Building upon Aristotle's definition of praxis, Ellacuría defines praxis as "the intrusion of human activity, as creation of capacities and appropriation of possibilities, in the dynamic course of history."<sup>367</sup> This statement is the capstone for Ellacuría's metaphysics and epistemology. The human person's situation as a being in reality and the human person's capacities as a sentient intelligence are all oriented towards praxis, the creative intrusion into the dynamism of historical reality. Ellacuría's conclusion to *FRH* explicitly calls for a continuation of this line of thought: human beings must act to make the link between theory and praxis real.<sup>368</sup> This fundamental anthropological principle of human beings as oriented toward praxis shapes not only his understanding of historical soteriology, which will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3, but also his social and political philosophy.<sup>369</sup>

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<sup>366</sup> Ellacuría, *FRH*, 560-1. History in this sense is more akin to the German *Geschichte*, or a living history, as opposed to *Historie*, or the written history one would encounter in a book.

<sup>367</sup> Ellacuría, *FRH*, 594. One particularly interesting aspect of Ellacuría's philosophical formulation is the connection between the social concerns of Socratic philosophy and the praxis drawn from Aristotelian philosophy, while intentionally leaving out Plato out of the concerns for idealism. Given Zubiri's own emphasis on engaging with Aristotelian philosophy, an argument could be made that Ellacuría is as much a student of Aristotle as he is of Socrates. Another potential area of research could be an examination of Ellacuría's political philosophy in dialogue with Aristotle's *Politics*, which could potentially highlight these connections further.

<sup>368</sup> Ellacuría, *FRH*, 599-602.

<sup>369</sup> Another way of categorizing the first principle is that "historicization operationalizes Ellacuría's Christian (or theological) historical realism," which is, as Lassalle-Klein puts it, the opposite of the negative abstraction Ellacuría sought to avoid. Second, historicizing concepts allows one to create validity

### 2.1.3 El Mal Común: Rethinking the Heart of Natural Law Theory

This last subsection laying out Ellacuría's philosophy builds upon the praxis principle by addressing what human beings should be acting against: *el mal común*, or the common evil. This term, coined by Ellacuría,<sup>370</sup> turns the natural law theory of the common good on its head, emphasizing the common problems and suffering that the entire community endures.<sup>371</sup> By tracing the development of this idea from a mention within chapter 5 of *FRH* to notes for a class lecture in June of 1989, the significance of the common evil to Ellacuría's praxis-oriented social philosophy will become clear.

On page 590 of *FRH*, Ellacuría discusses Zubiri's concept of *el pecado histórico*, or historical sin. In this elaboration on the historicity of sin and how it implies sinful social structures, Ellacuría mentions the phrase *maldad histórica*, historical evil, which Samour argues is a common evil as such.<sup>372</sup> The greater point Ellacuría is making, says

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tests for those concepts, adding a level of rigor to how these concepts are analyzed. Related to these validity tests, the third principle of historicization provides a "procedure for testing truth claims," fitting well with the Socratic philosophical task mentioned above. The fourth principle, Ellacuría's historicization of his key theological concepts, is not relevant to our purposes here, but will be revisited in Chapter 3. Lassalle-Klein's fifth principle is Ellacuría's transformation of Zubiri's epistemological principles about intellection and the subject into an ethical challenge with religious implications. These five principles will be useful tools in providing critiques not only of the philosophical discussions of neoliberalism below, but in Chapters 3 and 4, where similar analyses of neoliberalism will take place in theological and politico-economic contexts. For more detail on these principles, see Robert Lassalle-Klein, *Blood and Ink: Ignacio Ellacuría, Jon Sobrino, and The Jesuit Martyrs of the University of Central America* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2014).

<sup>370</sup> Héctor Samour, "The Concept of Common Evil," in *A Grammar of Justice: The Legacy of Ignacio Ellacuría*, ed. J. Matthew Ashley, Kevin F. Burke, S.J., and Rodolfo Cardenal, S.J. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2014), 206.

<sup>371</sup> While there are various forms of natural law theory, one that particularly stands out as placing a heavy emphasis on the common good is that of Germaine Grisez and Russell Shaw, who stand in a traditionalist vein. There are arguments to be made, however, for Ellacuría's philosophical theology as a reconstruction of natural law theory from the perspective of the Global South. For more on the traditionalist natural law theory, see Germaine Grisez and Russell Shaw, *Beyond the New Morality: The Responsibilities of Freedom* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006). For more on Ellacuría and natural law, see Thomas L. Schubeck, S.J., "The Reconstruction of Natural Law Reasoning: Liberation Theology as a Case Study," *The Journal of Religious Ethics* Vol. 20, No. 1 (Spring 1992), 149-78.

<sup>372</sup> Samour, "The Concept of Common Evil," 208.

Samour, is to argue against evil as a problem that can be solved by the natural progress of history.<sup>373</sup> Evil is instead overcome by human praxis, intervening in historical events to alter possibilities, negating the evil in the present moment.<sup>374</sup>

When Ellacuría revisits this idea for his lecture in June 1989, the language changes to make a challenge to the idealized vision of the common good. Ellacuría begins the argument by highlighting the point that the common good cannot be sufficiently achieved if it is expressed only in abstraction.<sup>375</sup> This implies that achieving the common good is not a matter of simply the deduction of abstract principles; it requires a thorough understanding of the material needs and situation of a community whose good one is trying to achieve. This is in part due to Ellacuría's focus on reality, which has a necessary material component, as mentioned above.

Rather than focus only on the common good, which Ellacuría claims is not a concrete reality for the poor majorities, Ellacuría chooses to also focus on the common evil, which he defines as an evil that impacts the majority of a community.<sup>376</sup> Ellacuría's example of malnourished children in both Africa and in El Salvador represents the underlying conditions for defining a common evil.<sup>377</sup> First, this malnutrition impacts a majority of the community, which is what "common" means in this context. Second, there is an explicit evil, in this case innocents deprived of necessary nourishment. What this example also provides is an unenumerated element that, for Ellacuría, undergirds the other two enumerated elements: a systematic, structural injustice. As Ellacuría notes, the

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<sup>373</sup> Samour, "The Concept of Common Evil," 208.

<sup>374</sup> Ellacuría, *Filosofía de realidad histórica*, 446. Cf. Samour, "The Concept of Common Evil," 208.

<sup>375</sup> Ignacio Ellacuría, "El mal común y los derechos humanos," in *Escritos filosóficos III*, ed. Carlos Molinas Velásquez (San Salvador: UCA editores, 2001), 447.

<sup>376</sup> Ellacuría, "El mal común," 448.

<sup>377</sup> Ellacuría, "El mal común," 448.

reason children are malnourished in El Salvador is not because there is no food in the country, but rather because the vital goods that are within the country already are maldistributed.<sup>378</sup> These unjust structures enrich the few while dehumanizing those who are deprived of their daily bread.<sup>379</sup>

This issue of dehumanization is the focal point of Ellacuría's concerns. The common evil, regardless of its form, is a structural injustice that treats the majority as if they lacked inherent dignity as human beings. When a community is divided and the inherent human dignity of part of this community is trampled upon by means of oppression in any form, the common evil is present and must be overcome. The particular system of dehumanizing structures Ellacuría focuses on is that of the civilization of wealth. This concept will play a significant role in the next two chapters.

#### **2.1.4 Following Aquinas: The Relationship Between Philosophy and Theology**

A final point that must be considered regarding Ellacuría's philosophy is its relationship to his theology. This question is important as it shapes how Ellacuría's intellectual project should be understood. Given Ellacuría's training as a seminarian between his entry into formation in 1947 and his ordination to the priesthood in 1961, Ellacuría was formed philosophically in Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition that was expected of seminary instruction prior to the promulgation of *Optatam Totius* at the end

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<sup>378</sup> Ellacuría, "El mal común," 448-9.

<sup>379</sup> Ellacuría, "El mal común," 449. Cf. Samour, "The Concept of Common Evil," 209.

of the Second Vatican Council in 1965.<sup>380</sup> While Ellacuría is by no means a neo-scholastic Thomist, Aquinas' understanding of the relationship between philosophy and theology, especially as it is laid out in Book I of the *Summa Contra Gentiles* (SCG) as the relationship between faith and reason, is helpful in understanding how these two parts of Ellacuría's corpus work together.<sup>381</sup>

The first ten chapters of Book I of SCG are dedicated to sorting out the relationship between faith and reason. Aquinas' relevant arguments can be summarized in the following way: God gave human beings the ability to use reason to seek truth. There are two kinds of truths about God: 1) those that can be determined by human reason and 2) those that are beyond the ability of human reason. Both are fitting as the first allows the human person to use God's gift to have greater knowledge of God, and the second, provided by revelation, are still good because they provide understanding of God but avoid the failings of human reason.<sup>382</sup> Human reason, regardless of its imperfections, still provides a way for God to be known, even if imperfectly, and that alone is a cause of joy.<sup>383</sup> Philosophy, therefore, is a useful tool in the development of theological knowledge, even if that knowledge pales in comparison to knowledge divinely revealed.

It is clear Ellacuría has theological commitments; the majority of his work known to the English-speaking world is theological in nature. His philosophical training provides a different way of understanding those theological commitments, such as providing context for the possibility of transcendence. On the other hand, Ellacuría's most

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<sup>380</sup> Burke, *The Ground Beneath the Cross*, 15-6.

<sup>381</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles, Book I: God*, trans. Anton C. Pegis (New York: Hanover House, 1955).

<sup>382</sup> Aquinas, SCG I.3.

<sup>383</sup> Aquinas, SCG, I.8

important theological contribution, historical soteriology, cannot be fully understood without understanding historical reality. Following Aquinas, Ellacuría does not believe one can deduce one's way to the Resurrection, but philosophy can help one understand the world that was given to us by God and the goodness of creation.

To briefly summarize, Ellacuría's philosophical approach is grounded in the dignity of the human person. The method of philosophical inquiry, metaphysics, epistemology, and social philosophy are all, for Ellacuría, rooted in the human person as oriented toward praxis and the ability to make choices that shape history. This creative tension in Ellacuría's thought provides an alternative approach to critiquing neoliberalism as a philosophical problem that is complimentary to those of the Neo-Marxist and Foucauldian traditions.

## **2.2 SKETCH OF AN ELLACURIÁN PHILOSOPHICAL CRITIQUE OF NEOLIBERAL IDEOLOGY**

In this second section, I will offer an Ellacurían analysis of what is philosophically problematic about neoliberalism. Building on the account of Ellacuría's philosophy offered above, I critique neoliberalism's ideologized deformation of the human person and society in three ways. I argue that neoliberalism 1) reduces the human person to only an economic unit, 2) warps the understanding of reality in a way that corrupts the praxis-

based nature of human beings, and 3) constitutes a common evil by unjustly limiting access to resources necessary for human flourishing. These are examples of a pernicious ideologization which Ellacuría's Socratic form of socially critical philosophy demands that we resist.

The first critique, dealing with the reduction of the human being to an economic unit, which deals with a deformation alluded to in the discussion of *FRH*, is about a confusion of the human person for the role she plays in a particular setting. At the end of chapter 2, Ellacuría builds on a quote from Marx's prologue to *Capital*,<sup>384</sup> concerned for the way particular social categories impact the way individuals think. He writes:

It is clear then that as soon as individuals develop totally or mainly as the personification of certain categories, their very way of thinking is no longer individual, but is the one corresponding to the category it personifies and the interests of which it is the bearer. And it may well happen that the individual confuses his person with the character that he has chosen to be or that he has had to be. Then, his way of thinking and acting will be conditioned by what comes to him through the category that personifies.<sup>385</sup>

As an individual learns to think of herself as an economic unit that only produces, invests, and consumes in the manner Becker describes in *Human Capital*, then she will begin to think and act as if she were only that economic unit. Her humanity, in all of its richness and depth, is reduced to a balance sheet she hopes to balance with net profit for her bottom line. This kind of reasoning and the praxis it inspires are dangerous because they lose the rationale of living in community and the necessity for human relationships

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<sup>384</sup> For context, here is the quote from Marx from the English edition of *Capital*: "I paint the capitalist and the landlord in no sense *couleur de rose*. But here individuals are dealt with only in so far as they are the personifications of economic categories, embodiments of particular class-relations and class-interests. My standpoint, from which the evolution of the economic formation of society is viewed as a process of natural history, can less than any other make the individual responsible for relations whose creature he socially remains, however much he may subjectively raise himself above them." Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I, 21.

<sup>385</sup> Ellacuría, *FRH*, 305. Translation mine.

that are not merely economic. They nurture a praxis of selfishness, which is inherently at odds with the common good and human flourishing.

The second approach to the problem of neoliberalism from the Ellacurían perspective is the warping of reality that corrupts the praxis-oriented nature of the human person. This point is somewhat complex, but central to the core of Ellacuría's philosophical project. For Ellacuría, as discussed above, the philosophy is rooted in the concrete. The human person engages in philosophical activity for the sake of self-understanding and social transformation, which are grounded not only in the transcendent but also in the material conditions of reality. By contrast, a philosophy based on neoliberalism trades the material conditions of reality for an abstract idea of the human person as agent in the market. The person is pressured to think only of investing in herself as a firm seeking profit, as opposed to considering what she and others actually need to thrive as a community. This allows for the human person to not only be truncated but also deformed, turning away from the possibility of holistic development for the sake of something else.

Losing focus on the material conditions of reality corrupts the human orientation towards praxis primarily by corrupting the understanding of what praxis is. From the neoliberal standpoint, based on ideas put forth by Friedman and Becker, action is focused on either exchange or consumption.<sup>386</sup> The cultivating actions of building community, relationships, openness to the transcendent, and authentic self-actualization are nowhere to be found. These fundamental actions that are driven by our ability to understand reality and make judgments about what actions are needed, which are at the core of articulating a

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<sup>386</sup> See Chapter 1 above.

praxis, have no place in the world of the neoliberal *homo oeconomicus*. The neoliberal anthropology, resulting from the warping of reality, leads to a deformed human person.

Finally, building on the previous two points, neoliberalism limits access to resources necessary for human flourishing, resulting in an example of the common evil. One of the implications of the neoliberal focus on competition as a good and the natural state of human relationships is that the possibility of cooperation and community becomes tenuous at best. If one seeks to compete with one's fellow individuals, working with one's competitors is not the most logical way to be victorious in the competition.<sup>387</sup> Following this logic with the premise of finite resources, one must conclude that to win the competition, one must obtain as many resources as possible at the expense of one's competitors to ensure one is victorious.

When this logic is applied to reality of finite resources, such as fertile land, clean water, clothing, shelter, or supply chains that allow for the distribution of these vital goods, the neoliberal logic states that one should obtain as many of these resources as possible, preventing the competition from obtaining them, and, following capitalist principles, selling these resources on the open market at a profit. If multiple individuals act in this way, especially if there are disproportionate access to and ownership of resources, namely different socio-economic statuses that imply some individuals have greater access to capital than others, the situation quickly transforms into a society of haves and have-nots. If the resource in question were some kind of luxury commodity, such as high-end guitars, the problem here would not be as grave. However, when dealing with the aforementioned vital goods, essential for not only basic survival but also

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<sup>387</sup> The logic of competition here is inferred from the centrality of competition among firms stated by Friedman and understanding the human person as a firm as discussed by Becker in Chapter 1 above.

a dignified life that is the condition for the possibility of human flourishing, this maldistribution of vital goods becomes a problem that threatens the inherent right to life and dignity that each human being has. The scarcity or hoarding of these resources produces a common evil, which a philosopher from the Ellacurían tradition must name as such and actively struggle against.

## **2.3 THE PHILOSOPHY OF NEOLIBERALISM AND PHILOSOPHICAL RESPONSES TO NEOLIBERALISM**

In this section, I offer a contrast between four philosophical positions: the philosophy of neoliberalism; the Marxist philosophies offered by Marx, Dumeníl and Lévy, and Harvey; the Foucauldian philosophies offered by Foucault and Brown; and Ellacuría's theological philosophy. These philosophical positions will be contrasted on the five topics described by Ellacuría as a part of the creative function of philosophy: epistemology, metaphysics, socio-historical anthropology, fundamental ethics, and natural theology.

Before beginning this analysis, there are two items that must be addressed. First, a distinction regarding the relationship between the philosophy of neoliberalism and the philosophical critique of neoliberalism must be made. The first concept, the philosophy of neoliberalism, refers to a set of philosophical propositions upon which the political economy of neoliberal intellectuals such as von Hayek, Friedman, and Becker explicitly or implicitly rests. I will be using this set of propositions to articulate how these neoliberal thinkers would respond to the five philosophical areas mentioned above. The

second concept, the philosophical critique of neoliberalism is represented by various philosophical positions offered by the likes of Marx, Harvey, Dumeníl and Lévy, Foucault, and Brown. These thinkers offer philosophical critiques of the neoliberal project as a whole, including its philosophical aspects and other aspects.

The second item that needs to be addressed is how the various critiques of neoliberalism stand in relation to one another. Between the Marxist positions and the Foucauldian positions, there are many philosophical points with which Ellacuría would disagree. In regard to topics such as an openness to transcendence, Ellacuría opposes positions held by both the Marxist and Foucauldian traditions. While these disagreements do exist and are important to understanding the wider scope of each position, they are not as important for this project as the points of agreement among them. The goal is to build a broad coalition of philosophical positions critical of neoliberalism to make a unified stand against the harmful philosophical principles that undergird neoliberal thought.

### **2.3.1 Epistemology**

The topic of epistemology is an area of philosophy on which the philosophy of neoliberalism does not offer an explicit position. However, I will offer a brief outline of assumptions related to knowledge from von Hayek, Friedman, and Becker to establish a preliminary epistemology of neoliberalism. After providing this outline of assumptions, I will offer critiques from Harvey, Foucault, and Ellacuría that will, when considered together, show the preliminary epistemology of neoliberalism to be unable to provide a coherent position.

First, the preliminary epistemology of neoliberalism must be established. Since none of the three neoliberal thinkers with whom I am engaging have written on an explicit epistemology, I need to construct a position based on elements discussed in Chapter 1. The best method for constructing this position is to consider the kinds of knowledge-related questions in which the neoliberal thinkers discussed in Chapter 1 are interested. By constructing this position from at least one of the thinkers discussed, we can gain some sense of how neoliberalism proceeds epistemologically. Philosopher of economic thought Philip Mirowski outlines eight points of von Hayek's position on knowledge in relation to economics that provide an epistemological position for the philosophy of neoliberalism.<sup>388</sup>

I will condense these eight points into three propositions that represent the epistemology of neoliberalism and serve as the foundation for the critiques below: 1) the market is the primary tool for the acquisition and processing of knowledge; 2) knowledge is ahistorical information that requires the market as a hermeneutic framework and cannot be fully understood by the finite human mind; and 3) truth is relative as determined by the interactions and outcomes of the market. All three propositions are problematic according to the philosophical critics of neoliberalism. Each proposition derived from Mirowski's reading of von Hayek has flaws, as will be shown below, and the culmination of those flaws will show the epistemology of neoliberalism to be insufficient for providing a theory of knowledge. Ultimately neoliberalism unhelpfully confines knowledge to the limits of the market.

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<sup>388</sup> Philip Mirowski, "Why There Is (as Yet) No Such Thing as an Economics of Knowledge," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Philosophy of Economics*, ed. Don Ross and Harold Kincaid (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 2009), 99-157.

First, Mirowski argues that, according to von Hayek, one must look for “an equilibrium condition of agreement and coordination between the prospective plans of economic agents.”<sup>389</sup> This means that the market is concerned with understanding the strategies and plans of potential transaction partners, leading Mirowski to use the term of cognitive phenomenon.<sup>390</sup> Mirowski’s definition of the market implies the market is a construct used for trying to understand how different economic agents will interact with one another. In other words, the market is a tool for the acquisition of knowledge. The market as a cognitive phenomenon will also play a significant role in understanding the underlying metaphysics of neoliberalism.

The next epistemological point from Mirowski leads to the synthesis of a single proposition: the market serves as the primary tool for both acquiring and processing knowledge. The first of these points is derived from von Hayek is that the market is a model of the individual human mind on a global scale, which requires a social component. While individualism is a necessary condition for the possibility of economic activity, rationality is social and brought about by the market.<sup>391</sup> Building on the previous point about the market as a tool for the acquisition of knowledge, the market also governs the way the mind orders information and makes inferences from that information.

Three of Mirowski’s points, all of which concern attributes of knowledge, can likewise be synthesized into a single proposition. The three points are as follows: the total sum of human knowledge cannot be known in its entirety due to the weakness of human cognition; knowledge is subordinate to the market; and historical knowledge is a category

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<sup>389</sup> Mirowski, “Why There Is,” 110.

<sup>390</sup> Mirowski, “Why There Is,” 110.

<sup>391</sup> Mirowski, “Why There Is,” 110.

mistake because the past has no relevant information to impact the present.<sup>392</sup> When one considers these three points and how they relate to one another, one can discern the philosophy of neoliberalism's definition of knowledge. Knowledge, according to the philosophy of neoliberalism, is ahistorical information, dependent on the market as hermeneutic tool, which cannot be fully grasped by a single human mind due to inherent cognitive weakness.<sup>393</sup>

Finally, the last point from Mirowski's reading of von Hayek offers not only epistemological claims, but ontological claims that will be examined further below. The relevant element is how von Hayek describes the marketplace not as a place where ideas are verified or critiqued, but rather expressing preferences "and learning to gracefully acquiesce in the acceptance or rejection of your preferences by the marketplace as a whole."<sup>394</sup> The significance here is that, according to Mirowski's reading of von Hayek, there is no definitive line between idea and preference. Truth becomes relative to the outcomes of the preference-driven market, which are understood to always be the most optimal outcomes.<sup>395</sup> Condensed into a single proposition, the philosophy of neoliberalism holds truth to be a relative concept determined by the interactions and outcomes of the market.<sup>396</sup>

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<sup>392</sup> Mirowski, "Why There Is," 110-1.

<sup>393</sup> Mirowski, "Why There Is," 110-1. I understand the term "cognitive weakness" here to mean the finite limits of the human mind.

<sup>394</sup> Mirowski, "Why There Is," 111.

<sup>395</sup> Mirowski, "Why There Is," 111.

<sup>396</sup> A concrete example of this can be found in the differences between social studies textbooks in California and Texas, the two most populous states in the United States, with accordingly the highest demand for textbooks. A particular McGraw-Hill textbook includes an annotated version of the Bill of Rights, the first ten amendments to the United States Constitution. The version of this textbook published for schools in California includes annotations for the Second Amendment. The version of the same textbook published for schools in Texas lacks this commentary for the Second Amendment, omitting information that helps to contextualize this element of the documents. It is important to note that this amendment is a contested topic in United States political circles, with the left-leaning California and the

When considering the first epistemological proposition of neoliberalism, the market as the primary tool for acquiring and processing knowledge, the most direct critique comes from Ellacuría's concept of ideologization.<sup>397</sup> Given Ellacuría's foundations in Zubiri's epistemology, the human mind, engaging with reality, allows for points of data to become knowledge. It is reality that gives data context. To see the market as the model of the human mind, from an Ellacurían perspective, fits with the first element of ideologization discussed in I.A above, a vision of a specific reality that is totalizing, interpretive, and implicating in the concealing of falsehood and injustice. This neoliberal epistemological proposition regarding the market's role in acquiring and processing knowledge is a totalizing vision of reality. When one considers how this totalizing vision of the acquisition and processing of knowledge impacts how knowledge functions within human cognition and the decisions made based on that knowledge, it is clear that neoliberal epistemology colors knowledge with a prejudice from an authority that cannot be sufficiently vetted.<sup>398</sup> The first proposition of the epistemology of neoliberalism, therefore, does not support a theory of knowledge that goes beyond the limits of the market.

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right-leaning Texas on opposite ends of the debate. This means, quite concretely, students in California and Texas are taught different versions of historical truth based on their community's political leanings. For more information on the politicizing of social studies textbooks, see Dana Goldstein, "Two States. Eight Textbooks. Two American Stories," *The New York Times*, January 12, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/01/12/us/texas-vs-california-history-textbooks.html>.

<sup>397</sup> This line of critique from the Ellacurían perspective will persist throughout all three neoliberal epistemological propositions.

<sup>398</sup> The concept of prejudice is not necessarily a negative element in epistemology but rather a factor of human cognition and judgment that needs to be addressed. As hermeneutic philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer describes it, prejudice is the act of pre-judgment that allows one to assume that truth claims from an authority, whether it be a person or a tradition, are valid due to the trust this authority has earned. In this context, the market assumes the role of authority that can supposedly be trusted. Ellacuría's understanding of ideology critique, however, calls that claim to authority into question. For more on Gadamer's understanding of prejudice, see Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Continuum, 2004), 278-85.

The second proposition, the definition of knowledge, focuses on three descriptive elements, which for the ease of critique, I will separate into three declarative sentences as follows: Knowledge is ahistorical. Knowledge requires the market as a hermeneutic framework. And knowledge, in its entirety, is beyond the limits of finite human consciousness. The critique of this section will focus on the claims about knowledge as ahistorical and knowledge as requiring the market as hermeneutic. None of the authors involved in the philosophical critique of neoliberalism would argue that the human mind can contain all knowledge, making von Hayek's claim on this topic uncontroversial.

The first claim in the definition, knowledge is ahistorical, contradicts Ellacuría's conclusions about the historicity of reality and the human person. Returning to the points discussed in section 2.1.2 above, knowledge is contextualized in historical reality, which allows the human person as the historical reality animal to make sense of the constellation of stimuli that results in the act of knowing. Without the historical aspect implicit in all human activity, including the pursuit of knowledge, all that remains is a constellation of stimuli that lacks meaning.

This question of the historical creates a serious problem for the first aspect of the philosophy of neoliberalism's definition of knowledge, but advocates of neoliberalism have a potential basis of response with their use of the market as a hermeneutic framework. The neoliberal philosopher could conceivably argue that the market's interpretative power provides all relevant contextual parameters for the information collected to be considered knowledge. For example, one could be considering contracting a factory to outsource the production of sprockets for clocks. This outsourcing would allow for a lower production cost for the clocks, allowing one to sell the clocks at a lower

cost while maintaining the same profit margin, making these clocks the lowest priced in their category of competition. It also would close a local factory, terminating the employment of several workers in a local community where said factory is one of the largest employers. From these facts, one can make two knowledge claims from a “common sense” approach. One claim would be that since the clocks with outsourced sprockets would be sold at a lower cost, the decision to outsource the sprockets is a profitable one. Another claim would be that closing the factory would have a negative economic impact on the local community, given the factory’s significant role in employment. The neoliberal philosopher would argue that the profit claim would count as knowledge while the economic impact claim would not. The profit claim follows the logic of the market: actors in the market seek to buy products at the lowest price. If one offers a product of equitable quality to her competitors at a lower price, she will sell more than her competitors. One can therefore know, from the neoliberal perspective, that this is a profitable choice. The second claim, the economic impact, is more dubious from the neoliberal perspective. Using the market as the hermeneutic tool, the loss of jobs does not necessarily mean there will be a negative economic impact. The supply of labor that such layoffs would open up could be met by demands from other firms looking for more workers. One cannot make a claim to know that the decision to outsource the factory jobs would have a negative economic impact from the neoliberal perspective.

The neoliberal recourse to such a hermeneutical position can be critiqued at multiple levels by all three perspectives critical of the philosophy of neoliberalism. One of these critiques comes from Harvey, who exposes the logic of the market underlying these knowledge claims. Revisiting Harvey’s epistemological concerns about neoliberal

economists' inability to admit failure in the system, a corollary point would be that the laws the market supposedly follows are not indicative of the effects of an action.<sup>399</sup> This claim seriously weakens the neoliberal position that the market's interpretation yields knowledge.

Another critique, which could be applied more widely to the question of neoliberal epistemology, employs Foucault's understanding of different fields of knowledge to critique the totalizing approach of the market as arbiter of knowledge. As mentioned in Section 1.2.2.1 of Chapter 1 above, Foucault's division of knowledge into different dimensions separates philosophical reflection on knowledge from economic causal science.<sup>400</sup> Given the separation of these two areas of knowledge, it would be impossible for the market to serve as the hermeneutic for all knowledge. From the Foucauldian perspective, economic knowledge cannot make claims about knowledge outside of its construct. Once again, the argument for the market as the hermeneutic for all knowledge is weakened.

The final critique, provided by Ellacuría's reflections on ideologization, targets neoliberalism's totalizing vision of the market. Once again, the philosophy of neoliberalism falls into this totalizing vision of reality that forces knowledge to conform to parameters that ideologically hide the injustices that are caused in part by this very ideologization. This is clear from the neoliberal response to the economic impact claim, where the concern for the overall social impact due to the layoffs is ignored by way of abstracting the problem into one of supply, demand, and ultimately profit. By refusing to acknowledge the very certain consequences of the action, namely that the factory workers

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<sup>399</sup> Harvey, *Madness of Economic Reason*, 174-5.

<sup>400</sup> Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 347.

will be unemployed for at least some time and will not be able to fully engage in economic activity, it is clear that the market as hermeneutic is not able to give a full account of the wider consequences of an act. This concern, in conjunction with those from Harvey and Foucault, makes the claim of the market as hermeneutic tool untenable.

The final epistemological proposition offered by the philosophy of neoliberalism, that truth is relative to the interactions and outcomes of the market, finds its strongest critical rejoinders from Harvey and Ellacuría. Harvey argues strongly against this idea in his discussion of the contradictions of capitalism, particularly the question of finite resources in light of the prospects of infinite profit.<sup>401</sup> The neoliberal capitalist will deny the value of forgoing profit for the sake of the well-being of her workers because the market rewards the most efficient firm; the truth of what is valuable is only determined by the market.<sup>402</sup> Since human lives and meaning have value outside their productivity as workers from Harvey's perspective, this proposition of the market as arbiter of truth does not hold up to scrutiny.

The Ellacurían critique follows in a similar vein as that of Harvey. As has been a constant through the entire epistemological critique, the central issue is the first element of ideologization. The claim that truth is dictated by the market and its outcomes is another totalizing claim that hides the unjust assumption that exploitation of workers is acceptable for the sake of greater profits. Injustice is permitted when more money can be made from it. Between Ellacuría and Harvey's critiques, the final epistemological proposition offered by the philosophy of neoliberalism is shown to be flawed.

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<sup>401</sup> For Harvey's argument, refer to Chapter 1 above.

<sup>402</sup> Cf. Harvey, *Madness of Economic Reason*, 194-9, and Harvey, *Seventeen Contradictions*, 264-5.

To quickly summarize, the neoliberal epistemology offered by von Hayek has two significant problems as shown in the critiques of its three propositions: neoliberal epistemology cannot acknowledge claims as true if they fall outside the scope of the market, and it is unable to account for the flaws of using the market as the primary hermeneutic for knowledge claims. Since this is the case, it becomes very difficult to safely assume knowledge claims made from the perspective of the philosophy of neoliberalism can actually be considered as having a truth value outside of coherence within the context of established laws of the market. If an epistemology cannot consistently affirm truth values outside its own internal coherence, it is insufficient.

### 2.3.2 Metaphysics

The category of metaphysics varies among each philosophical school. We must, therefore, be precise in defining it. Ellacuría, following Zubiri, understands metaphysics as a question of reality. This is a significantly different conception of metaphysics from the Marxist association of metaphysics with capitalism<sup>403</sup> and the Foucauldian association of metaphysics with biopower.<sup>404</sup> It is also important to note that reality is historical for

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<sup>403</sup> Marx's explicit link between capital and power, as described in Chapter 1 above, plays a dual role, explaining not only political power, but a metaphysical power in terms of the subject-object relationship as well. Given Marx's materialist commitments, the power afforded by capital to employ workers, which one then alienates from their labor, expresses relationship of domination between the capitalist and the worker, which fits into Marx's conception of class struggle. This economic power shows the subject seeking to control the object. In the capitalist/worker relationship, the worker is objectified and, once achieving class consciousness, struggles against this objectification. This makes class struggle not only a political phenomenon but also a metaphysical phenomenon.

<sup>404</sup> Foucault's understanding of biopower, as discussed in Chapter 1 above, is centered around control. Again, this theme of domination of an object by the subject takes center stage, in this case through various institutions that inflict a hidden violence, such as prisons and healthcare systems. Following an analogous

Ellacuría. This historical character adds another element of consideration for metaphysics that relates to the concerns about the nature of time and space, which are shown to be significant for metaphysics perhaps most clearly in the introduction to Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. One way to clarify how Ellacuría's understanding of metaphysics-as-historical-reality works in conjunction with the ostensibly anti-metaphysical critiques of Marxist and Foucauldian traditions is to consider Ellacuría's interpretation of the "demands of reality." Ellacuría's understanding of Zubiri's framework of reality is that reality places ethical demands on human beings that individuals can ignore at their own peril.<sup>405</sup> This framing of metaphysical questions in light of the demands put on the human being by reality opens a wider set of questions dealing with the subject-object relationship and the understanding of space and time in the context of history. These three areas of metaphysical inquiry will serve as the areas where implicit metaphysical positions of neoliberalism are decisively challenged by an integration of Ellacurían, Marxist, and Foucauldian approaches to metaphysics.

Before critiquing the metaphysical claims of neoliberalism, there is a significant objection that must be addressed: neither von Hayek nor Friedman intended to develop a metaphysics when he wrote his treatise on political economy. While I acknowledge this fully, it is still very important to recognize the implied metaphysical claims in their work. Since neoliberal thought has become one of modern Western culture's most powerful sets of underlying assumptions about how the world works, the metaphysics implied,

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line of thought to that of Marx, Foucault's analysis of power and its relation to knowledge is a study of metaphysics.

<sup>405</sup> Robert Lassalle-Klein, "Ignacio Ellacuría's Debt to Xavier Zubiri," in *Love That Produces Hope: The Thought of Ignacio Ellacuría*, ed. Kevin F. Burke and Robert Lassalle-Klein (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 2006), 105.

intentionally or unintentionally, must be examined to fully understand the phenomenon and appreciate the significance of these implied claims for how society operates.

The first metaphysical position drawn from the philosophy of neoliberalism is the framing of the subject object relation in terms of the power of transaction. Following recent developments in Marxist critiques of late capitalism, this analysis will focus less on the class struggle aspect of the subject-object relationship and more on control in terms of transactions. The philosophy of neoliberalism understands the subject to be an economic agent, engaged in the commercial activity of the market, as seen in the various descriptions given by the neoliberal thinkers discussed in Chapter 1 above. While one might assume that this subject is a human person, the philosophy of neoliberalism puts that into question. The firm is the assumed subject as it is firms that engage in market activity. While it is true that a firm could be a human person acting as an independent agent in the market, firms can be agents in their own right, echoing the “corporations are people” sentiment of the *Citizens United* decision.<sup>406</sup> Taking this assumption of the firm as subject, the object to which the firm is in relation is the commodity that is bought or sold. The power dynamic here is in the transaction. The subject’s main operation on the object is to buy or sell it, putting the transaction at the core of the subject-object relation. It is important to note here that this formulation is not meant to supplant or contradict earlier Marxist analysis of class struggle. Rather, this commentary on the subject-object relation as transaction serves a complimentary analysis. The capitalist’s control of the worker is mirrored in the firm’s control over the commodities it buys and sells.

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<sup>406</sup> See Chapter 1 above for an overview of the *Citizens United* decision as analyzed by Brown.

The critique of this articulation of the subject-object relationship from the Ellacurían perspective is rooted in the way the emphasis on control and ownership corrupts the praxis-oriented nature of the human person. Placing concepts such as control and ownership at the heart of the subject-object relationship warps the orientation of praxis from one of engagement to one of power over reality. This orientation towards control over reality easily leads to ideologization. The exercise of power over objects in reality also generates a desire for control over the way objects are perceived and experienced. This creates the circumstances where ideologization becomes a likely conclusion. Neoliberalism's implied theory of the subject-object relation warps the way reality is not only managed but also perceived. As discussed above, ideologization leads to a host of other philosophical and cultural problems. It is clear, therefore, that the neoliberal conception of the subject-object relation is deeply problematic.

The second problematic element of the philosophy of neoliberalism's constellation of metaphysical positions is its rejection of the experienced reality of history, understanding time and space as only occurring in the present. As stated in the previous subsection on epistemology, Mirowski succinctly points out that the neoliberal position on historical knowledge is that it is a category mistake. Only the here and now matters.<sup>407</sup> From this position, one can deduce that the neoliberal understanding of space and time collapses reality down to the present. While neoliberal thinkers such as von Hayek and Friedman make references to historical events, it is clear that those events do nothing to undermine the total dominance of present market factors.<sup>408</sup> Perhaps the

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<sup>407</sup> Mirowski, "Why There Is," 110-1.

<sup>408</sup> See von Hayek's discussion of European history as cited in footnote 8 in Chapter 1 above, as well as Friedman's broad strokes of history in *Capitalism and Freedom*, 9-10.

clearest way to make the distinction is to use the one in German between *Historie*, the written history one finds in book, and *Geschichte*, the dynamic course of events that make up a lived history. The philosophy of neoliberalism affirms *Historie* and denies *Geschichte*. From this perspective, the philosophy of neoliberalism emphasizes an ahistorical understanding of space and time.

The Ellacurían critique of this ahistorical description of the market comes from the fifth element of ideologization: the reality of the market is presented as an abstract, universal, and necessary system with some concrete examples, but is never fully embodied in historical reality. As discussed at great length in Section 1.1 in Chapter 1, the free market is at the core of von Hayek and Friedman’s understanding of how humans interact with one another. The framework of the marketplace does not allow for many particular details of reality to be discussed, to the extent that they do not truly impact the market’s function.<sup>409</sup> This lack of historical consciousness, as part of the ideologization, prevents mistakes from being recognized until it is far too late.<sup>410</sup> A lack of awareness of historical consciousness not only creates a problem for metaphysics but also contributes to a problematic anthropology, which will be discussed in the next subsection.

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<sup>409</sup> Marx offers a discussion of this issue in the fetishism of commodities. For details, see Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, 76-9.

<sup>410</sup> The prime example of this is Alan Greenspan’s after the fact admission “I made a mistake,” regarding his market fundamentalism after the financial crisis of 2007-2008. For more commentary, see Mehrsa Baradaran, “The Neoliberal Looting of America,” *The New York Times*, July 2, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/02/opinion/private-equity-inequality.html?searchResultPosition=1>.

### 2.3.3 Sociohistorical Anthropology

The next area of philosophical inquiry to discuss is sociohistorical anthropology. Of the topics discussed so far, the philosophy of neoliberalism has its most explicit position on anthropology, as detailed in Chapter 1. To quickly review, the standard anthropological assertions that the philosophy of neoliberalism begins with is the *homo œconomicus*: the human person as first and foremost an economic agent within the market. This perspective, as discussed above, has been critiqued by both the Marxist and Foucauldian traditions. Becker's particular contribution is the assertion that the human person is capital that is to be invested, turning the *homo œconomicus* into an asset to be spent in whatever way is most profitable. This new take on the *homo œconomicus* presents a new challenge insofar as it presents the human person as a commodity to be traded and spent.

One implication of an anthropological position like that of the *homo œconomicus* is a diminishment of true human freedom. The neoliberal philosophy of freedom, as discussed at length in 1.1 in Chapter 1, centers around the relationship between economic freedom, political freedom, and personal freedom. While a philosopher such as Thomas Aquinas would consider the root of any form of freedom to be personal freedom, specifically the personal freedom given freely as gift from God, von Hayek understands economic freedom as the root of all other freedoms.<sup>411</sup> Without economic freedom, the possibility of personal freedom and political freedom do not exist. If one considers the implications of this statement, one is able to deduce that von Hayek's understanding of

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<sup>411</sup> For Aquinas' view of free will see ST I.82-83.

freedom is grounded in a materialist metaphysics, a point of commonality with Marx and, in a certain respect, Ellacuría—though his materialism is crucially non-reductive, open to transcendence.<sup>412</sup> For the purposes of this section, the main point to note is that the neoliberal account of economic freedom as the foundation for personal and political freedom severely restricts the meaning of human existence. If one’s freedom to make economic choices is prior to other forms of personal or political choices, then economic activity must be at the core of human activity.

The Ellacurían critique of this position is that it presents a distorted understanding of what the human person is and the activity in which she engages. As we saw above, Ellacuría reflects on the human person taking on different roles in society. One such role is that of an economic agent, where one enters into the market to buy whatever commodities she may need. Yet this role of the economic agent is not the core of who the human person is. Once she leaves the market, the human person takes on a different role, whether it be as an artist, a community organizer, or a parent. When this is combined with the human person’s open essence, the claim that the human person is primarily an economic agent ignores the human person’s innate openness to the dynamism of reality and the multitudes of possibilities for her to engage with reality. When this openness is denied, a person will eventually enter into an existential malaise, described by Harvey as universal alienation.<sup>413</sup> From the Ellacurían perspective, supported by Harvey’s neo-Marxist analysis, the philosophy of neoliberalism’s anthropological positions are clearly insufficient.

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<sup>412</sup> Ellacuría’s “materialism” here is a reference to the emphasis on the materiality of historical reality, which allows him to enter into dialogue with thinkers such as Marx and von Hayek in these metaphysical discussions.

<sup>413</sup> For more detail, see Chapter 1 above or Harvey, *Seventeen Contradictions*, 264-81.

### 2.3.4 Fundamental Ethics

The fourth area of philosophical content is the area of fundamental ethics. For our purposes, the term fundamental ethics is defined as the logic and principles upon which a school of thought builds its ethical framework and rationale. This foundation allows one to understand the way ethical decisions are made and thereby evaluate the ethical process. One assumption that I will make in this section is that fundamental ethical principles, such as morals, virtues, and rules, are oriented toward the human good. Going back to Plato's dialogues depicting Socrates's search for the good life and Aristotle's reflections on the human good in Book I of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, the emphasis on the human good stands at the core of fundamental ethical reasoning in the Western philosophical tradition. In keeping with this tradition, the primacy of the human good becomes a litmus test for fundamental ethical reasoning: if a principle comes to deny the primacy of the human good for the sake of some other aim that goes against this good, then it is insufficient fundamental ethical reasoning.<sup>414</sup>

The philosophy of neoliberalism's fundamental ethical principles arise from points discussed in Chapter 1: the emphasis on a competitive individualism, a radically voluntarist conception of freedom, and the concern for how profitability influences ethical decisions. These three foundational concepts, as found in the work of von Hayek and Friedman, provide an ethical framework that is inherently problematic.

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<sup>414</sup> One may object to this formulation when one considers theological ethics, where the question of God as a good that takes precedence over the human good. In response, following the logic of St. Thomas in *Summa Contra Gentiles* III c.37, I would argue the ultimate human good is found in the contemplation of God, making the objection a moot point.

The first foundational concept of the philosophy of neoliberalism's fundamental ethics, the emphasis on competitive individualism, is drawn from von Hayek's markets and morals project. In his epilogue to *Laws, Legislation, and Liberty*, von Hayek makes a sharp critique of morality in a socialist context, claiming that if individual morality dwindles, as it supposedly would in a socialist society, then morality would eventually crumble at the hands of government.<sup>415</sup> This means, for von Hayek, that morals must be a matter for individuals. Developing this point, von Hayek begins to frame morality in terms of competition and exclusivity. He writes:

*Morals presuppose a striving for excellence and the recognition that in this some succeed better than others, without inquiring for the reasons which we can never know. Those who observe the rules are regarded as better in the sense of being of superior value compared with those who do not, and whom in consequence the others may not be willing to admit into their company. Without this morals would not persist.*<sup>416</sup>

This short excerpt unveils von Hayek's understanding of a fundamental ethic: morals exist as a way to make oneself more appealing to exclusive social groups. Morality is a tool for competition, allowing for an ethical framework to be flexible so long as it promotes this competitive nature.

The second foundational concept, a radically voluntarist conception of freedom, is best expressed in Hinkelammert's account of Friedman's discussion of freedom, particularly in relation to violence. Hinkelammert argues that Friedman prizes one's freedom to act over one's freedom to be safe from any given actions.<sup>417</sup> This radically voluntarist conception of freedom, which attempts argumentative gymnastics to show

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<sup>415</sup> Friedrich von Hayek, *Law, Legislation, and Liberty: A New Statement of the Liberal Principles of Justice and Political Economy* (London: Routledge Press, 2012), 502.

<sup>416</sup> von Hayek, *Law, Legislation, and Liberty*, 502-3.

<sup>417</sup> For more on the details on Hinkelammert's critique, see Chapter 1 above.

that one's freedom to murder does not impede on the victim's freedom to live, proves to be another problematic concept for a fundamental ethics. When the question of whether a murder victim's freedom to live is more important than the murderer's freedom to commit murder arises, the conversation reaches the point of absurdity. When added to von Hayek's understanding of morals in relation to competition, the fundamental ethics of the philosophy of neoliberalism begin to show serious signs of strain.

The third and final foundational concept for the fundamental ethics of neoliberalism considers profit as a factor in ethical decision making. This concept is illustrated well by Friedman's discussion of race and capitalism in Chapter 1 above.<sup>418</sup> To quickly restate Friedman's conclusion: a businessman is right to consider profitability for his business over obligations to act in opposition to social ills, such as choosing to employ a white clerk over a black clerk if the community has racist tendencies.<sup>419</sup> This concern for profit, articulated as an act of preserving freedom, highlights the core of ethical reasoning for the philosophy of neoliberalism: any action is acceptable as long as it is in the free pursuit of profit.

The basic principles of the fundamental ethics of the philosophy of neoliberalism are problematic at best and horrifying at worst. Using the philosophical tools provided by the Marxist, Foucauldian, and Ellacurian traditions, a substantial critique of the philosophy of neoliberalism will, at a minimum, show these fundamental ethical principles to be insufficient as a foundation for ethical reasoning.

The Marxist tradition, represented best by Marx and Harvey on this topic, revolves around two concepts: the contradictory nature of particular virtues, such as

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<sup>418</sup> For reference, see Chapter 1 above.

<sup>419</sup> Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*, 112.

saving, and the problem of universal alienation. These two concepts problematize competitive individualism and the primacy of profit. When one considers Marx's concern for the working class as a motivation for his work on political economy and his unmasking of the contradictions of capitalist reason, one begins to gain a sense of his fundamental ethics.<sup>420</sup> Consider the *Grundrisse*, Marx's plan for a critique of political economy.<sup>421</sup> The selection from the *Grundrisse* that is of particular interest is the one that points out a certain contradiction within the virtue of saving. According to Marx, when a worker is paid for her labor, she is paid only enough for subsistence.<sup>422</sup> When the worker is told by the capitalist to "save" for the sake of a financial future, the worker is expected to deny herself what she needs to survive, not simply consume a less expensive form of entertainment.<sup>423</sup> This self-denial, says Marx, does not actually benefit the worker. The interest the worker would make on the savings would be miniscule, while the bank that holds her savings would further its own wealth by lending that same money at a higher interest rate.<sup>424</sup> At the same time, the self-denial the worker experiences to make the small savings would take a toll on her material conditions, potentially making her a less efficient worker. This, in turn, would potentially cause her to receive the minimum possible wage for the maximum amount of work of which she is capable.<sup>425</sup> In short, the capitalist logic of saving one's way to better economic circumstances is, in Marx's view, contradictory.

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<sup>420</sup> Harvey, *Madness of Economic Reason*, 175.

<sup>421</sup> Karl Marx, "Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy," in *The Collected Works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels: Volume 28* (New York: International Publishers, 1975), 213-4.

<sup>422</sup> Marx, "Outlines," 214.

<sup>423</sup> Marx, "Outlines," 214.

<sup>424</sup> Marx, "Outlines," 216.

<sup>425</sup> Marx, "Outlines," 216-7.

This analysis of the contradiction of what one could formulate as the moral principle of saving reveals that it is a virtue that does not lead to flourishing. It shows one example of a neoliberal value, namely austerity, at work on smaller scale. On the level of the individual worker, austerity is not a practice that brings about personal wellbeing. Instead it causes harm and deprives the worker of her good in multiple ways. This example shows that the conception of moral principles as provided by von Hayek fails the test of fundamental ethical reasoning.

The second element of the Marxist critique of the fundamental ethics of the philosophy of neoliberalism comes in Harvey's account of Marx's concept of universal alienation. Alienation, to briefly summarize what was discussed in Chapter 1 above, is a dehumanization of the worker by the impositions of capitalism's contradictions, which confuses a worker's essence with her existence. This dehumanization expresses itself not only in variations of misunderstanding the self but also in a worker's inability to form meaningful relationships with others, further depriving the worker of another element of the human good. Universal alienation is when this experience of alienation is widespread throughout a class or a culture. This widespread experience of alienation is what prevents class solidarity, forcing workers to see each other as competition for jobs, which are their only means of subsistence.<sup>426</sup> In other words, universal alienation eliminates the conditions for the possibility of collaborative community, leaving only competition for survival in its wake. The common good is eradicated.

Von Hayek's presentation of morality as itself a tool for competition further demonstrates the highly problematic nature of his reasoning. If competition is a result of

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<sup>426</sup> Harvey, *Madness of Economic Reason*, 196.

the breakdown of the ability for human beings to be in right relationship to one another, then understanding morality as an arena for competitive struggle directly ties morality to a dehumanizing process. Since dehumanization does not align with the primacy of the human good, von Hayek's conception of morals also does not align with the primacy of the human good and therefore does not pass muster.

The radically voluntarist conception of freedom that Friedman posits is best critiqued by Foucault's understanding of the reciprocal relationship between ethics and freedom. In the interview "The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom," Foucault states that "freedom is the ontological condition for ethics. But ethics is the considered form that freedom takes when it is informed by reflection."<sup>427</sup> According to Foucault, freedom requires ethical reflection in order for it to be articulated and experienced in a meaningful manner. While this is not the only aspect of Foucault's discussion of ethics that is relevant to a critique of Friedman, these two sentences offer an important insight: freedom cannot be left unexamined and be a foundation for ethics. Given that Friedman understands the freedom of an individual will as a first principle that cannot be qualified or constrained, it is questionable how much examination and reflection went into his conception of it.

It is important to understand what Foucault means by the reflection that is supposed to connect freedom and ethics. On this point, Foucault references a tradition of classical philosophy from the early Platonic dialogues to late Stoicism, which emphasizes a way of caring for the self that includes moral reflection.<sup>428</sup> As one example, Foucault

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<sup>427</sup> Michel Foucault, "The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom," in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rainbow (New York: The New Press, 1994), 284.

<sup>428</sup> Foucault, "The Ethics of the Concern for Self," 284.

turns to Aristotle. In the discussion of temperance in Book III of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle recognizes that the human person almost always engages in bodily pleasures of some sort, hence the rarity of the insensible person.<sup>429</sup> How one ought to go about indulging those pleasures or avoiding them is a question of ethics arising from care of the self. Foucault concludes that ancient ethics and the freedom of the subject arose together through such philosophical practices of self-care.<sup>430</sup> In short, Foucault's analysis rehabilitates the classical insight that a positive freedom, a freedom to do something beneficial for the self or oriented toward its good, and thus not merely an abstract capacity for individual choice, is central to the ethical concern.

When one compares the positive freedom of ancient philosophical ethics to neoliberalism's negative freedom—that is, the radically voluntaristic freedom from regulation, oversight, and governmental control—one can only find the negative freedom of neoliberalism to be ethically wanting. Because the idea of freedom in Friedman is an unrestricted license to do as one pleases, without any holistic reflection, it is not conducive to making decisions that involve well-considered distinctions between good and evil. Unlike the positive freedom developed by ancient philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle, which is directed toward the common good,<sup>431</sup> Friedman's empty, unreflective freedom does not come close to providing an adequate basis for an acceptable fundamental ethics.

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<sup>429</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1999), 1107b.

<sup>430</sup> Foucault, "The Ethics of Concern for the Self," 285.

<sup>431</sup> Examples of this can be found in Aristotle's *Politics* and *Nicomachean Ethics*, as well as Plato's *Republic*.

The final element of neoliberalism's implicit fundamental ethics that must be critiqued is the primacy of profit as a consideration for ethical decision making. This element, as described above, stands in contradiction to Ellacuría's understanding of the common evil. As mentioned above, Ellacuría argues that if one is to find the concrete actions that are necessary to further the common good, then one must make oneself aware of the common evil and seek its remedy. When one looks at the example of the clerks from Friedman's *Capitalism and Freedom*, one sees that an Ellacurían analysis takes a radically different approach from that advanced by Friedman. From an Ellacurían perspective, it is clear that the common evil in the scenario is a systemic anti-black racism that influences the everyday actions of the community to the point that the black clerk would be denied the ability to work and thereby survive. Since Ellacuría's emphasis in fundamental ethics is directed to the situation of the oppressed, an Ellacurían analysis would focus on the anti-black racism impacting the black clerk and challenge Friedman's exclusive concern for the businessowner's ability to turn a profit. The common evil of anti-black racism in the example would be Ellacuría's central concern. He would focus on how to put concrete measures into action to resist such anti-black racism since doing so would be working to promote the common good. By contrast, Friedman's fixation on the ability of a business to make a profit leads him to disregard and callously acquiesce to the common evil of anti-black racism. Insofar as the neoliberal priority of profitability encourages one to overlook the common evil in one's society, it follows that it is not a sufficient foundational principle of fundamental ethics.

On all counts, then, neoliberalism fails the test. The philosophical insights of Marx, Harvey, Foucault, and Ellacuría show that the philosophy of neoliberalism does not have a sound theory of fundamental ethics.

### **2.3.5 Natural Theology and Questions of the Transcendent**

The final area of philosophical inquiry is that of understanding what is ultimate.<sup>432</sup> Following Zubiri, Ellacuría seeks a form of teleology, which he asserts is always linked, in one way or another, to the transcendent. Ellacuría interestingly notes that “positivistic minds that would rather circumvent the limits of information by other methods” would not be satisfied with answers to such questions.<sup>433</sup> This statement negatively implicates von Hayek’s positivistic attitude toward society discussed in Chapter 1.<sup>434</sup> It also connects to the earlier critical discussion of the philosophy of neoliberalism’s epistemological positions, which frame information solely in the context of the market. This restriction of knowledge to the market provides strong evidence that philosophy of neoliberalism does not have an understanding of the ultimate and transcendent. Instead, it rests on the assumption of a continuing economic system without an end in sight. As Chapter 1 showed, Harvey critiques neoliberalism in this regard in light of its abuse of resources, but Ellacuría’s affirmation of transcendence goes farther.

However, it is important to note that Ellacuría does not simplistically dismiss or critique philosophies that do not have an openness to transcendent realities.<sup>435</sup> The

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<sup>432</sup> Ellacuría, “The Liberating Function of Philosophy,” 106.

<sup>433</sup> Ellacuría, “The Liberating Function of Philosophy,” 106.

<sup>434</sup> See Chapter 1 above.

<sup>435</sup> Ellacuría, “The Liberating Function of Philosophy,” 106.

Marxist philosophical tradition has an understanding of the ultimate: the resolution of class struggle into a classless, egalitarian society. Ellacuría would argue that this is a kind of ultimacy. While grounded in material conditions, it has an element of the transcendent within it. It provides as complete an answer as possible given the Marxist materialist commitments to the transcendental question.<sup>436</sup> The philosophy of neoliberalism, on the other hand, does not have a point of resolution. The closest answer the philosophy of neoliberalism may offer is the ultimacy of profit, but that profit continues to accumulate with no clear indication as to how much is enough.<sup>437</sup> From this analysis, therefore, the philosophy of neoliberalism does not provide anything approaching an adequate reflection on that which is ultimate and transcendent.

Nevertheless, despite certain broad agreements about the philosophical problems of neoliberalism, Ellacuría would argue that Marxist and Foucauldian responses to these problems could be strengthened by a greater openness to transcendence. Historical reality contains more than a solely philosophical vantage point, whether Marxist or Foucauldian, can clearly see. As noted above, Ellacuría's theological commitments are connected with and build on his philosophy, in a more or less Thomistic fashion. It follows that his philosophy points ahead toward a theology that complements and moves beyond it. In the next chapter, Ellacuría's philosophically supported Christian theology—which takes the form of a soteriologically oriented liberation theology—will address the dangerous political theology of neoliberalism and provide a rigorous alternative to it.

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<sup>436</sup> Ellacuría, "The Liberating Function of Philosophy," 106.

<sup>437</sup> Harvey, *Madness of Economic Reason*, 173.

### 3.0 ELLACURÍA AS THEOLOGIAN: SALVATION IN HISTORY AND NEOLIBERALISM AS FALSE SOTERIOLOGY

*Fundamental aspects of the life of Jesus, like the subordination of the Sabbath to humanity, the unity of the second commandment with the first, the unity of “why did he die” and “why did they kill him,” show how we should look for the unity between what Christian salvation is and what historical salvation is.*  
~Ellacuría, “The Church of the Poor, Historical Sacrament of Liberation”

While Ellacuría was a philosopher by training, the breadth of his thought cannot be contained by the limits of philosophical investigation. Ellacuría’s philosophical training was never an end in itself; it served to build a foundation upon which investigations into other questions could rest. Ellacuría began writing essays contributing to liberation theology in the early 1970s, just as the movement began to form in Latin America.<sup>438</sup> His contributions to Latin American liberation theology continued throughout the rest of his life, concluding with “Utopia and Propheticism from Latin

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<sup>438</sup> Burke, *The Ground Beneath the Cross*, 33. Further context for this comes in Gustavo Gutiérrez’s *A Theology of Liberation*, one of the earliest major texts in Latin American liberation theology was published in 1971. The most important of these essays, as Burke notes, were published in the collection *Teología Política* in 1973. This places Ellacuría at the forefront of Latin American liberation along with figures such as Gutiérrez.

America: A Concrete Essay in Historical Soteriology” prior to his martyrdom in 1989.<sup>439</sup> This suggests while Ellacuría’s philosophical training was a significant part of his thought, it is his theological conclusions built on his philosophy that are at the heart of his intellectual program.

Ellacuría’s theology is focused on questions of salvation and the relationship of salvation to historical reality, which Ellacuría calls historical soteriology. This focus on salvation is what provides the key to understanding neoliberalism as a theological problem. Neoliberalism, from an Ellacurían perspective, offers a false soteriology. By using theological categories provided by Ellacuría’s historical soteriology, I will show that neoliberalism offers an implicit promise of salvation and how this implied soteriology fails to address criteria Ellacuría understands as necessary for a theory of salvation.

This chapter consists of three parts. First, I will offer a brief overview of Ellacuría’s three primary theological influences and how each made an impact on Ellacuría’s work. The second section will explore Ellacuría’s theological priorities, which will focus primarily on his understanding of the question of a historical soteriology.<sup>440</sup> Finally, these theological priorities will serve as the criteria for which the implicit soteriology of neoliberalism, derived from points made in the previous two chapters, is evaluated and shown to be problematic.

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<sup>439</sup> Ignacio Ellacuría, “Utopia and Propheticism from Latin America: A Concrete Essay in Historical Soteriology,” in *A Grammar of Justice: The Legacy of Ignacio Ellacuría*, ed. J. Matthew Ashley, Kevin F. Burke, S.J., and Rodolfo Cardenal, S.J. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2014), 7-55.

<sup>440</sup> These theological priorities will also play a significant role in Chapter 4, where Ellacuría’s political theology allows for the development of a theologically-oriented political economy.

### **3.1 ELLACURÍA'S THEOLOGICAL INFLUENCES: RAHNER, IGNATIUS, ROMERO**

This section will offer a brief overview of three theological figures who had significant influence on Ellacuría's theological views: Karl Rahner, St. Ignatius of Loyola, and St. Óscar Romero. Each of these figures shaped Ellacuría's theology in important ways, as highlighted by the various commentators I will discuss in the following pages. The goal of this section is to show how each figure helped to form Ellacuría's theological priorities that will be discussed in Section II below.<sup>441</sup>

#### **3.1.1 Karl Rahner**

The first influence I will discuss is Ellacuría's teacher at Innsbruck, Karl Rahner. Ellacuría studied at Innsbruck from 1958-1962, studying directly under Rahner himself. In his essay "Karl Rahner: The Teacher of Ignacio Ellacuría," German theologian Martin Maier offers two areas in which Rahner significantly influenced Ellacuría's theological approach: the philosophical foundation of theology and the unity of nature and grace.

The first of these was the importance of philosophy to theological reflection. Rahner, arguing against epistemological limits defined by Kant, claims the human person is radically open to transcendence. She can experience this transcendence through

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<sup>441</sup> The overview given here is in very broad strokes. A proper evaluation of each of these figures' impact on Ellacuría's theology could be book chapters in and of themselves. Given the wealth of scholarship on this topic, I will lean heavily on preexisting scholarship to provide recommendations for further reading.

knowledge of the sensible world, but is not limited to the sensible.<sup>442</sup> It is only with his rigorous philosophical foundations that Rahner is able to make a theological argument that can adequately contend with Kantian arguments. Likewise, Ellacuría uses the philosophical framework of his teacher Zubiri to engage questions of the nature of history as it relates to salvation, as will be discussed below. It is important to note that Ellacuría differed from Rahner not only in terms of philosophical resources but also in terms of the principle of unity between philosophy and theology. Rahner insists on philosophy and theology come together “in the transcendental analysis of the a priori structures of human knowledge and action.”<sup>443</sup> Ellacuría, on the other hand, finds the principle of unity in the human person’s commitment to realizing the Reign of God in history.<sup>444</sup> This shows the centrality of praxis for both Ellacuría’s philosophical and theological work.

The second element of Ellacuría’s theology that was influenced by Rahner is the unity of nature and grace. One of Rahner’s theological achievements was to overcome the dualism of nature and grace by arguing the essence of the human person is open to God. This means, in Maier’s terms, grace is the radicalization of the human person’s essence, not something foreign imposed upon the human person.<sup>445</sup> Ellacuría applies the unity of nature and grace to his understanding of the relationship between natural history and salvation history. In the essay “Salvation History,” Ellacuría explicitly cites Rahner as a source for Ellacuría’s argument for the transcendental openness of human persons in

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<sup>442</sup> Martin Maier, S.J., “Karl Rahner: The Teacher of Ignacio Ellacuría,” in *Love that Produces Hope: The Thought of Ignacio Ellacuría*, ed. Kevin F. Burke, S.J., and Robert Lassalle-Klein (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2006), 134.

<sup>443</sup> Maier, “Karl Rahner,” 134-5.

<sup>444</sup> Maier, “Karl Rahner,” 135. Cf. Ellacuría, “The Liberating Function of Philosophy,” 119.

<sup>445</sup> Maier, “Karl Rahner,” 137-8.

history leading to “the elevated, transcendental openness of a gratuitous historicity.”<sup>446</sup> This relationship requires a great deal more analysis, and will be explored in depth below. For now, however, this description of Ellacuría’s application of the unity of nature and grace, as well as the discussion of the relationship of philosophy to theology, shows the importance of Rahner’s influence on Ellacuría.<sup>447</sup>

### 3.1.2 St. Ignatius of Loyola

The second significant influence on Ellacuría’s theology I will discuss is St. Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Society of Jesus, Ellacuría’s religious order. The practice of Ignatian spirituality had a significant impact on Ellacuría’s theological work, as demonstrated by theologian J. Matthew Ashley in several essays.<sup>448</sup> The key point from Ellacuría’s engagement with Ignatian spirituality is that the practice of discernment within the *Spiritual Exercises* shapes the way Ellacuría understands the intellectual moments leading up to praxis.

The manner in which Ellacuría connects discernment to the intellectual moments leading to praxis comes in Ellacuría’s description of the “*Spiritual Exercises* as the

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<sup>446</sup> Ellacuría, “Salvation History,” in *Ignacio Ellacuría: Essays on History, Liberation, and Salvation*, ed. Michael E. Lee (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2013), 175. Cf. Maier, “Karl Rahner,” 138-9.

<sup>447</sup> One aspect of Rahner’s influence that I have left untouched is the way Rahner, who taught Ellacuría leading up to the Second Vatican Council, taught concepts that would eventually become a part of the council’s documents, such as reading the “signs of the times.” For more on this topic, see Maier, “Karl Rahner,” 135-7.

<sup>448</sup> Ashley’s reading of Ellacuría’s overarching theological project as an outgrowth of a commitment to Ignatian spirituality is articulated best in J. Matthew Ashley, “Ignacio Ellacuría and the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius Loyola,” *Theological Studies* 61.1 (February 2000), 16-39. For Ashley’s more specific reading of Ellacuría’s lectures on the *Spiritual Exercises*, see J. Matthew Ashley, “A Contemplative Under the Standard of Christ: Ellacuría’s Interpretation of Ignatius of Loyola’s *Spiritual Exercises*,” *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality*, volume 10, Number 2 (Fall 2010), 192-204.

theological place of historicization.”<sup>449</sup> This process of historicization, one of the principles of de-ideologization, allows one to concretize abstract concepts to understand their impacts in one’s community. When this activity takes place within the process of discernment in the *Spiritual Exercises*, it becomes a powerful theological tool for framing the intellectual moments leading to action. These actions are performed in light of this discernment would continue the announcement of and preparation for the Reign of God, which is at the core of Ellacuría’s understanding of Christian discipleship.<sup>450</sup> This understanding of discernment for action will be significant for Ellacuría’s understanding of ecclesial and historical praxis below.<sup>451</sup>

### 3.1.3 St. Óscar Romero

The third theological influence upon Ellacuría is perhaps the most important: St. Óscar Romero. Serving as the Archbishop of San Salvador from 1977 to his martyrdom in 1980, Romero actively worked for justice for the poor of El Salvador. According to Ellacuría’s friend and colleague Jon Sobrino, Romero served as a significant influence on Ellacuría’s understanding not only of God and salvation, but also the nature of true Christian discipleship.<sup>452</sup> While the relationship between Romero and Ellacuría could fill

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<sup>449</sup> Ignacio Ellacuría, “A Latin American Reading of the *Spiritual Exercises* of Saint Ignatius,” *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality*, volume 10, Number 2 (Fall 2010), 207. Cf. Ashley, “Ignacio Ellacuría and the *Spiritual Exercises*,” 23.

<sup>450</sup> Ellacuría, “A Latin American Reading of the *Spiritual Exercises*,” 222.

<sup>451</sup> While this very brief discussion is sufficient for the purposes of this chapter, it is important to note that the Ignatian influence on Ellacuría’s life and thought permeates practically all of his theological work. Further research into this would be its own book-length project, and beyond the purview of this dissertation.

<sup>452</sup> Jon Sobrino, S.J., “Monseñor Romero’s Impact on Ignacio Ellacuría,” in *A Grammar of Justice: The Legacy of Ignacio Ellacuría*, ed. J. Matthew Ashley, Kevin F. Burke, S.J., and Rodolfo Cardenal, S.J. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2014), 59-61.

countless pages, I will point out three elements highlighted by Sobrino that are significant for this investigation.

The first element I will discuss is Romero's careful discernment which Ellacuría linked to Ignatian spirituality. In a 1977 letter to Romero, Ellacuría describes this discernment:

You, who are familiar with the *Exercises of Saint Ignatius*, know how difficult it is to discern and make decisions following the spirit of Christ and not the spirit of the world, which can present itself *sub angelo lucis*, as an angel of light. You were able to listen to everyone but ended up deciding for that which seemed most risky to prudent eyes. When it came to the single mass, to the cancellation of all activities in the schools, to your keeping clear distance from every official act, and so on, you discovered how to discern where the will of God was and how to follow the example and the spirit of Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>453</sup>

These three sentences link Romero's decisions, which put him at odds with the status quo promoted by the Salvadoran government, to a discerning action to follow the will of God.<sup>454</sup> As I will discuss below in Section II, this question of discernment, expressed as engaging the weight of reality, is central to Ellacuría's theological priorities.

The second element is Ellacuría's understanding of Romero's role in the salvation of the Salvadoran people. Citing Ellacuría's essay "Monseñor Romero, One Sent From God to Save His People,"<sup>455</sup> Sobrino highlights how Ellacuría saw Romero's actions as

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<sup>453</sup> Ignacio Ellacuría, "Letter from Ignacio Ellacuría to Monseñor Oscar Romero," in *A Grammar of Justice: The Legacy of Ignacio Ellacuría*, ed. J. Matthew Ashley, Kevin F. Burke, S.J., and Rodolfo Cardenal, S.J. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2014), 4-5.

<sup>454</sup> For more detail on Romero's role within Salvadoran politics as Archbishop, see Michael E. Lee, *Revolutionary Saint: The Theological Legacy of Óscar Romero* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2018), 86-132.

<sup>455</sup> Ignacio Ellacuría, "Monseñor Romero, One Sent From God to Save His People," in *Ignacio Ellacuría: Essays on History, Liberation, and Salvation*, ed. Michael E. Lee (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2013), 285-92.

an embodiment of the gospel.<sup>456</sup> According to Ellacuría, writes Sobrino, Romero “brought a *real salvation* of the historical process.”<sup>457</sup> These actions by Romero serve as a concrete example of the historical-soteriological action Ellacuría seeks to describe.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Romero’s life serves as a concrete example of Ellacuría’s theological priorities. Romero’s ministry as archbishop saw God’s love as expressed by the Gospel to be liberative, grounded in the historical reality, called to respond to the ethical demands of reality, and oriented towards praxis. As I will discuss further below, this vision of a liberating theology lived out in a person’s courage and selflessness is concretely embodied by Romero’s life and martyrdom.

By looking at Rahner, Ignatius, and Romero’s influence on Ellacuría’s theological development, one is able to understand the various threads that are woven into Ellacuría’s thought. When considered together, these threads make it possible to see the pattern of the theological priorities that systematize Ellacuría’s understanding of theology as a whole.

### 3.2 ELLACURÍA’S THEOLOGICAL PRIORITIES

In this section, I will explore what I call Ellacuría’s theological priorities: the primary theological ideas that shape Ellacuría’s thought and writing on other theological topics. Ellacuría has four theological priorities: theology as 1) liberative, 2) historical-soteriologically focused, 3) engaged with reality, and 4) oriented toward ecclesial and

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<sup>456</sup> Sobrino’s use of the term embodiment here is significant. As will be discussed below, action in historical reality requires embodiment, emphasizing the importance of the incarnation.

<sup>457</sup> Sobrino, “Romero’s Impact,” 65.

historical praxis. Each of these priorities will be discussed in detail below, as well as a brief exposition of how these four theological priorities were embodied by St. Óscar Romero and his ministry in El Salvador. In highlighting these theological priorities, I will establish the criteria by which I will offer a critique of neoliberalism as false soteriology.

### 3.2.1 Theology as Liberative

The first of Ellacuría's theological priorities I will discuss is his emphasis on theology as intrinsically liberative. Ellacuría's understanding of the concept of liberation is important because while Ellacuría's theology is inherently soteriological, he understands salvation and liberation as linked concepts, creating unity while preserving differences.<sup>458</sup> By starting with a thorough examination of the relationship between salvation and liberation, the liberative character of the rest of Ellacuría's theological priorities will become clear.

Ellacuría defines liberation in the essay "On Liberation" as "a concept that represents the very essence of the revealed message and God's salvific gift to humanity."<sup>459</sup> This clear definition of liberation as essential to God's gift of salvation

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<sup>458</sup> Ellacuría scholar Michael E. Lee points out that the salvation-liberation connection is not unique to Ellacuría; many Latin American liberation theologians make this connection in various ways. Ellacuría's method, however, avoids conceptual separations between God and humanity, faith and praxis, and, most importantly, salvation and liberation. For further details on this topic, see Michael E. Lee, *Bearing the Weight of Salvation: The Soteriology of Ignacio Ellacuría* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2009), 36-8.

<sup>459</sup> Ignacio Ellacuría, "On Liberation," in *Ignacio Ellacuría: Essays on History, Liberation, and Salvation*, ed. Michael E. Lee (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2013), 40. It is important to note that this late essay by Ellacuría, originally published in 1989, is providing an intentionally Catholic understanding of liberation, partially in response to the "Instruction on Certain Aspects of the 'Theology of Liberation,'" published by the Vatican Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) in 1984. While this point is not explicitly important to the argument here, the catholicity of Ellacuría's liberation theology makes him a unique figure

shows the unity of these two topics. It also provides an insight into Ellacuría's understanding of liberation through the lens of salvation. For example, Ellacuría writes in "The Church of the Poor, Historical Sacrament of Liberation," that salvation is always the act of saving someone, and in that person, of something.<sup>460</sup> Since there is no conceptual separation between salvation and liberation, the same concept of the object of salvation can be transposed into terms of liberation.<sup>461</sup> This statement from "The Church of the Poor" would be transposed as: liberation is always the act of liberating someone, and in that person, of something. This transposition holds true, matching themes of the Exodus narrative commonly cited as an example by liberation theologians making a scriptural argument for God as liberator.<sup>462</sup> This unity of salvation and liberation serves as the foundation for the next several points about liberation I will discuss in the following pages: liberation as both theological and sociopolitical concept, the significance of "liberation-for" as well as "liberation-from," his emphasis on the preferential option for the poor in relation to liberation, and liberation as allowing for new understandings of the Christian faith outside of the European paradigm.

The next point central to Ellacuría's understanding of liberation is that liberation is both a theological concept and a sociopolitical concept. Ellacuría points out that many

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in his dedication to maintaining liberation theology as part of the Catholic tradition. For more on the historical notes on this essay, see Burke's opening commentary for "On Liberation," on page 39.

<sup>460</sup> Ignacio Ellacuría, "The Church of the Poor, Historical Sacrament of Liberation," in *Ignacio Ellacuría: Essays on History, Liberation, and Salvation*, ed. Michael E. Lee (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2013), 229.

<sup>461</sup> In the original Spanish text that is translated as "On Liberation," the terms used are *liberación* and *salvífico*, the adjectival form of *salvación*. For the rest of the chapter, the terms liberation and salvation will be used to denote *liberación* and *salvación*, respectively, and their adjectival forms. For the full Spanish text, see Ignacio Ellacuría, "En torno al concepto y a la idea de liberación," in *Escritos teológicos*, vol. 1 (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 2000), 629-57.

<sup>462</sup> One such example in Ellacuría's own corpus is in the unabridged version of "The Historicity of Christian Salvation." For the complete discussion of the Exodus narrative, see Ignacio Ellacuría, "The Historicity of Christian Salvation," in *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology*, ed. Ignacio Ellacuría, S.J. and Jon Sobrino, S.J. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 256-65.

liberation theologians discovered the theme of liberation not in scripture but in the sociopolitical movements calling for justice for the poor and oppressed.<sup>463</sup> This is what Ellacuría refers to as a “first moment.” The first moment catches one’s attention like an unexpected sound and invites one to investigate further.<sup>464</sup> This invitation leads one to observe the injustices, recognize how these injustices are contrary to the teachings of the Christian faith, and act to correct these injustices.<sup>465</sup>

Liberation as theological concept is connected to liberation from sin, death, and the law, as highlighted in the Pauline epistles.<sup>466</sup> Liberation is, first and foremost, liberation from sin. This liberation overcomes sin in three senses: original sin, personal sin, and historical sin.<sup>467</sup> Ellacuría accounts for these three kinds of sin, coming to the following conclusion: “Sin should not be understood primarily as an offense against God that has been made personally, but rather as the real straying from, or real annulment of, the divine plan as it glimpsed in nature and as it manifests itself in salvation history.”<sup>468</sup> The implication here is that liberation does not only free one from sinful acts but also makes one free to fully partake in the divine plan, acting in concert with God’s will. I will return to this implication below in several places, as it becomes central to Ellacuría’s understanding of the human person’s role in salvation history.

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<sup>463</sup> Ellacuría, “On Liberation,” 41. One item worthy of note is, as Ellacuría notes on this page, the Marxist inspiration for the sociopolitical movements mentioned. A fundamental argument of this essay, as well as several other essays Ellacuría wrote between 1984 and 1989, is to prove that theologies of liberation can be rooted in scripture and Christian tradition. These arguments are a response to the CDF’s charge in the 1984 “Instruction” mentioned in footnote 3 above of theologies of liberation are dependent on Marxist ideology. For more on this topic, see Lee, *Bearing the Weight of Salvation*, 21-4.

<sup>464</sup> Ellacuría, “On Liberation,” 41.

<sup>465</sup> This process is developed further by Ellacuría in terms of one’s relationship to reality. This will be discussed further below.

<sup>466</sup> Ellacuría, “On Liberation,” 42-7.

<sup>467</sup> In the text, Ellacuría has two parenthetical notations: original sin is also called natural sin, and historical sin is also called social sin. The latter notation is significant for Ellacuría’s interpretation of the Pauline epistles as will be discussed below.

<sup>468</sup> Ellacuría, “On Liberation,” 44-5.

The other two forms of liberation, liberation from death and liberation from the law, follow from liberation from sin, as Paul articulates in Romans 6 and Galatians 4, respectively. Ellacuría, however, expands them in light of historical/social sin. He reframes liberation from death in terms of the struggle for human life in light of the oppression and repression of various social groups, which cause people to die before their time.<sup>469</sup> Liberation from the law, on the other hand, takes two forms in the context of historical sin. One form is liberation from unjust political orders, which oppressed groups need to fully engage in society. The second is what Ellacuría refers to as an unjust moral order, in which the letter of the law “is imposed upon the spirit, where legality is imposed on justice, where the defense of one’s interests is imposed over solidaristic love.”<sup>470</sup> This form of liberation from the law is perhaps better understood as the freedom for one to stand in solidarity by means of unconditional love. Ellacuría intends this to be a shift away from moral culture of shame to one of love that accepts all and accompanies them in friendship and solidarity.<sup>471</sup> In short, the liberation from death and the law also follow patterns of historical sin that will play an important role in understanding how salvation works within historical reality.

Another aspect of liberation that is important for Ellacuría is the distinction between the phrases “liberation from” and “liberation for.” The difference in prepositions provides an insight into a deeper question about liberation: how and why should a people

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<sup>469</sup> Ellacuría, “On Liberation,” 45. A clear example of this problem in the US context is the lack of universally available clean drinking water. For more details on this, see Khushbu Shah, “The pandemic has exposed America’s clean water crisis,” *Vox*, April 17, 2020, <https://www.vox.com/identities/2020/4/17/21223565/coronavirus-clean-water-crisis-america>.

<sup>470</sup> Ellacuría, “On Liberation,” 46.

<sup>471</sup> One piece of evidence regarding the shift in moral culture comes from Ellacuría’s outline “Moralidad de la sexualidad,” where Ellacuría seeks to shift away from issues of taboo in sexuality towards an integration of values in light of the inherent dignity of the human person. For more, see Ignacio Ellacuría, “Moralidad de la sexualidad,” in *Escritos teológicos III* (San Salvador: UCA editores, 2001), 291-5.

be liberated? Building on the theological concept of liberation, Ellacuría links two ideas that are significant for our purposes. He writes, “for the moment, liberation is a process, a process that is fundamentally a process of conversion in the personal and a process of transformation, if not revolution, in the historical.”<sup>472</sup> When one understands liberation as a process of both conversion and transformation, we understand that liberation is “for” all members of the community. For the oppressed, it is a transformation of both the external and internal conditions that lead to their oppression. Historical transformation and revolution remove the material conditions of external oppression. Conversion, taking the form of a new love of self, in conjunction with love of neighbor and God, overcomes the dehumanizing habituation of internalized oppression. For the oppressors, conversion involves a recognition of the violence they have done to their fellow human beings, exchanging one’s heart of stone for a heart of flesh.<sup>473</sup> Historical transformation and revolution involve the oppressors either giving up or losing their hold over the material conditions that hold the oppressed in bondage. To put succinctly, liberation is for everyone and it liberates them from their own sinful conditions, material and spiritual, and for the possibility of a world that follows the divine plan.

In terms of the material conditions of the oppressed, Ellacuría places an emphasis on liberation as tied to the preferential option for the poor. Ellacuría makes this clear:

Liberation is, above all, liberation from the lack of basic necessities without whose satisfaction one cannot speak of human life, much less the dignified human life deserved by children of God, to whom the creator gave, with a common and communicable world, sufficient for the satisfaction: what should be called liberation from material oppression.<sup>474</sup>

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<sup>472</sup> Ellacuría, “On Liberation,” 48.

<sup>473</sup> Ezekiel 36:26.

<sup>474</sup> Ellacuría, “On Liberation,” 52.

The liberation from material oppression fits within all three categories of the theological concept of liberation. Sin creates the conditions of material oppression, leading to death caused by those conditions. Laws put in place by an unjust society either condone or acquiesce to these sinful conditions. This intensifies the material oppression by denying the oppressed legal recourse. On the other hand, liberation for Ellacuría is tied to the preferential option of the poor. This will help shape Ellacuría's understanding of what it means to shoulder the weight of reality as will discussed below.

Finally, the final relevant aspect of liberation for Ellacuría is a framework for the critique of a Eurocentric Christianity. In "The Christian Challenge of Liberation Theology," Ellacuría discusses the manner in which the history of Christian theology has run predominantly through the Western intellectual tradition and the trappings of an affluent western Europe. Liberation theology, on the other hand, takes another approach. Ellacuría writes:

We say, in order for Christianity to offer all that it can of itself to history, it must be situated where it must be situated. Therefore, liberation theology situates Christianity in the material-historical place where it is most suited, and with that, recovers the subversive potential of the faith. In other words, the material-historical place of Christianity is rooted in situations of poverty and in poor countries.<sup>475</sup>

Part of the critique of Western Christianity is that it has been the dominant religion in Europe for at least 1600 years by the time Ellacuría wrote his essay, making it an integral part of the Western imperial mindset that led to the colonization of Africa and the

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<sup>475</sup> Ignacio Ellacuría, "The Christian Challenge of Liberation Theology," in *Ignacio Ellacuría: Essays on History, Liberation, and Salvation*, ed. Michael E. Lee (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2013), 134.

Americas.<sup>476</sup> Liberation theology divests itself of the privileges gained by association with the dominant cultural forces at work in the world and situates itself with the lowly and oppressed. Through this position, Christianity regains its critical edge, engaging in the prophetic critique the Western world desperately needs.

By way of summary, Ellacuría's description of theology as liberative sets the stage for his soteriological concerns and provides the initial contours of his theological vision. The subsections that follow below all link back to this principle of theology as liberative, making this principle central to Ellacuría's understanding of theology as a whole.

### **3.2.2 Theology as Historical-Soteriologically Focused**

The second of Ellacuría's theological priorities I will discuss is theology as historical-soteriologically focused. Historical soteriology builds upon Ellacuría's theory of historical reality. Ellacuría applies the theory to the Christian doctrine of salvation and works through its implication for contemporary Christians, especially in his concrete context of El Salvador. Lee offers the clearest articulation of this idea: "As a mediation of his central philosophical principles, Ellacuría's historical soteriology takes those insights and grounds them, revealing the transcendent-historical character of Jesus' ministry, the redemption that comes from his crucifixion, and the Christian hope for salvation."<sup>477</sup> The

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<sup>476</sup> Ellacuría has written on this topic elsewhere. For one example in translation, see Ignacio Ellacuría, "The Latin American Quincentenary: Discovery or Cover-up?" in *Ignacio Ellacuría: Essays on History, Liberation, and Salvation*, ed. Michael E. Lee (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2013), 27-38.

<sup>477</sup> Lee, *Bearing the Weight of Salvation*, 75. This point from Lee, articulated more concisely on page 158 as distinct from traditional understandings of soteriology: "Traditionally, soteriology has focused specifically on the redemptive act wrought by Jesus Christ. However, this work suggests that soteriology

most important part of Lee's formulation is the highlighting of traditional soteriological concepts and integrating them with the liberationist points of historical transcendence and Jesus' earthly ministry.<sup>478</sup>

Since Ellacuría's understanding of salvation is linked to liberation, historical soteriology has liberationist themes throughout; it does not, however, contradict the traditional Catholic doctrines on salvation. To support this claim, I must first offer, in broad strokes, the framework of the doctrine of salvation upon which Ellacuría builds his own understanding.<sup>479</sup> In terms of the Catholic theological tradition, the best way to do this is to turn to Thomas Aquinas' teaching on salvation.<sup>480</sup> Aquinas synthesizes the preceding patristic tradition, citing figures such as Augustine, John Chrysostom, Gregory

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refers to a broader *logos* about Christian salvation that that deploys a whole constellation of ideas surrounding the divine-human relationship." Lassalle-Klein critiques Lee on this point, arguing that it ignores the Rahnerian theme to tether soteriology to the single historical event of Christ's death on the cross. Lassalle-Klein's point is important, but it is grounded in a misreading of Lee based on the wording of one sentence. Lee keeps Jesus's death on the cross central to the mystery of salvation but contextualizes Jesus's death in light of Jesus's earthly ministry. This ministry, which is the model of discipleship for Lee, continues through the cooperative work of the universal Church working towards bringing about the Reign of God. The crucifixion still has its place of prominence, but it is placed in continuity with that which serves as the historical condition for the possibility of Jesus's redemptive death.

<sup>478</sup> Other examples of this kind of historization in relation to Christological themes can be found prominently in the work of Sobrino. Specifically, see Jon Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads: A Latin American Approach*, trans. John Drury (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1978); Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator: A Historical-Theological Reading of Jesus of Nazareth*, trans. Paul Burns and Francis McDonagh (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993); Jon Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator: A View from the Victims*, trans. Paul Burns (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001).

<sup>479</sup> Lee, *Bearing the Weight of Salvation*, 74. Lee explicitly states that Ellacuría used traditional sources for his soteriology, such as scriptural exegesis and traditional doctrinal assertions. What Ellacuría adds, writes Lee, is the "explicit attention to the context from which he wrote: the poverty of El Salvador, whose majority population experienced extraordinary violence and repression in response to any attempt to improve their lot."

<sup>480</sup> My reading of Aquinas on salvation is heavily indebted to Bernard Lonergan's reading of Aquinas in the context of Lonergan's Christology course during his tenure at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome and Lonergan's supplement on the Redemption. To see Lonergan's full account, see Bernard Lonergan, *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan, Vol. 9: The Redemption*, ed. Robert M. Doran, H. Daniel Monsour, and Jeremy D. Wilkins (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018). Lonergan's course is particularly helpful as the manual text of *De Verbo Incarnato*, the first version of which appeared in 1960, as it is representative of the neo-scholastic Christology course Ellacuría would have taken during his tenure in seminary between 1948-1953. For more on the history of *De Verbo Incarnato* and the text in general, see Frederick E. Crowe, S.J., *Christ and History: The Christology of Bernard Lonergan from 1935 to 1982* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015), 74-88.

of Nyssa, and John of Damascus, with Anselm's insights on satisfaction. In Aquinas' synthesis, there are five modes of understanding the salvific work of Christ: 1) Christ's merit as earning our salvation, 2) Christ's work as making satisfaction for human sin, 3) Christ's death as sacrificial offering, 4) Christ's work as redemption, or paying the price, and 5) Christ as the efficient cause of salvation.<sup>481</sup> Each mode provides a particular insight into the question of the salvific act.

The problem for Ellacuría is that these classical formulations can lead to an abstract theology that allows one to ignore the current challenges history lays before her.<sup>482</sup> Ellacuría's solution to this problem is to historicize these abstract Christological and soteriological assertions. Historicization provides a context that allows one to understand how these assertions answer particular questions at their respective times. This opens the door for a positive critique of the classical soteriological formulations, calling for the need to address Jesus' historical mission as portrayed in the Gospels.<sup>483</sup> Throughout this section, I will offer, when appropriate, commentary on how specific lines of Ellacuría's argument historicizes the soteriological modes identified above, building upon Aquinas' framework.

The first aspect of historicization of salvation is the transcendent-historical character of Jesus's mission. From Ellacuría's earliest essays, there is a focus on placing the Passion and Resurrection in the context of Jesus's public ministry. In "The Prophetic

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<sup>481</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, trans. Fr. Laurence Shapcote, O.P., ed. John Mortensen and Enrique Alarcón (Lander, Wyoming: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012), III.48.1-6.

<sup>482</sup> Lee, *Bearing the Weight of Salvation*, 77.

<sup>483</sup> It is important to note that Ellacuría, as Lee points out, never developed a separate Christology in the way that contemporaries such as Sobrino and Lonergan did. Ellacuría's soteriological reflections, however, provide a series of reflection on Jesus' life and mission that are emphasized by Ellacuría's philosophical work. For more on this topic, see Lee, *Bearing the Weight of Salvation*, 76-85.

Mission of Jesus,” Ellacuría clearly states that Jesus was condemned to crucifixion for political reasons; Jesus’s sentence was predicated by political actions in his life.<sup>484</sup> To understand the crucifixion properly, one must first understand Jesus’s public ministry, which, according to Ellacuría, was both prophetic and political.<sup>485</sup> At this point, I will focus primarily on the prophetic element, as the political element will be discussed in terms of the crucifixion.

Ellacuría places a great deal of emphasis on Jesus’s public ministry following in the tradition of the prophets of the Old Testament, a tradition familiar to his community of first-century Palestinian Jews.<sup>486</sup> Ellacuría writes:

We can plainly see the features of Jesus’ personality and life which made the people see him as one of the greatest prophets: He displays great freedom in the face of religious traditions and in the face of the established authorities who identify their establishment with correct religious tradition. He lives an austere life and boldly confronts earthly powers. He leads a public life that becomes a decisive moment in the concrete history of his people. The power of words and signs is displayed in an exceptional way. He becomes the definitive proclaimer of the kingdom, declaring it to be already present. He makes the living God present among men in a vital way, promulgating a new morality of the heart above and beyond all legalism.<sup>487</sup>

The prophetic elements mentioned here show a radical rejection of the religious and political hierarchies that existed in Jerusalem as well as the oppressive nature of Roman occupation culture. Put concisely, Jesus spoke truth to power, avoided the trappings of power, and stood with those society had rejected and marginalized. This prophetic judgement, however, does not only come in the form of rebuke. By proclaiming the

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<sup>484</sup> Ignacio Ellacuría, *Freedom Made Flesh: The Mission of Christ and his Church*, trans. John Drury (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1976), 46.

<sup>485</sup> Ellacuría, *Freedom Made Flesh*, 23-4.

<sup>486</sup> Ellacuría offers an extended discussion of the link between Jesus as liberator and Moses as liberator in Ellacuría, “The Historicity of Christian Salvation,” 256-71.

<sup>487</sup> Ellacuría, *Freedom Made Flesh*, 29.

kingdom of God in this manner, Jesus sought to identify the problems so that they may heal. The key for Jesus is that his ministry, the earthly mission of the incarnate Word, serves as a prophetic call to heal the brokenness of the world. Jesus's act of healing is not only the physical maladies of blindness<sup>488</sup>, leprosy<sup>489</sup>, and hemorrhages<sup>490</sup>; it is for healing social ills that lead to those left on the margins to be forgotten or actively oppressed.

When Ellacuría's reading of Jesus's ministry is considered in light of the five modes of salvation drawn from Aquinas's thought, the reading connects to the modes of merit and satisfaction. First, Ellacuría's reading of Jesus's public ministry fulfills part of the mode of merit. In ST III.48.1, Aquinas argues that any person who suffers for the sake of justice while in a state of grace merits her salvation. Since Jesus is always in a state of grace by virtue of his sinlessness, it follows that if he suffers for the sake of justice, then he has merited salvation. The sufficient condition of the conditional statement can be broken into two smaller statements that, if true, fulfill the condition: A) Jesus suffered and B) this suffering was done for the sake of justice. Jesus's public ministry was one calling for social justice as indicated by the prophetic element. Since it is clear that Jesus suffered, as will be discussed below, we can infer that he suffered for justice. Since Jesus did suffer in his Passion, then it is clear that the sufficient condition is fulfilled and Jesus merited our salvation his Passion, the historically necessary consequence of his public ministry.

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<sup>488</sup> John 9:1-12.

<sup>489</sup> Luke 17:11-19.

<sup>490</sup> Luke 8:43-48.

The second mode of salvation to which Ellacuría's reading of Jesus's public ministry connects is the mode of satisfaction or atonement. Aquinas draws his understanding of satisfaction from Anselm of Canterbury's *Cur Deus Homo*, translated as *Why God Became Man*.<sup>491</sup> It is important to note that the satisfaction theory of atonement has traditionally been read in terms of the image of honor debts between a lord and his vassal.<sup>492</sup> Such a reading would not connect to Ellacuría's reading above. Instead, there is a second interpretation of satisfaction in Anselm: satisfaction as restoring a broken order of the universe. When considering Anselm's context as the abbot of a Benedictine monastery as opposed to his station as Archbishop of Canterbury, satisfaction takes on a different form. When a monk disrupts the harmony of the rule of the monastery, he is excommunicated until satisfaction is made.<sup>493</sup> It is with satisfaction that the proper order of the universe, or in this case the microcosm of the monastery, is restored and the offending monk is once again in right relationship with the community. In this context, satisfaction is a matter of reconciliation, healing a relationship and setting right the order of the world.<sup>494</sup>

When this definition of satisfaction is offered as a mode of salvation, Jesus's public ministry as one of healing serves as a historicization of this mode. The ministry concretizes the broken relationship between God and humanity in terms of spiritual

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<sup>491</sup> Anselm of Canterbury, "Why God Became Man," in *The Major Works*, ed. Brian Davies and G.R. Evans (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 260-356.

<sup>492</sup> One such example of this reading of the position and liberationist critique of the honor model is in Nancy Pinead-Madrid, *Suffering and Salvation in Ciudad Juárez* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 69-95.

<sup>493</sup> Benedict, Abbot of Monte Cassino, *The Rule of St. Benedict*, trans. Anthony C. Meisel and M.L. del Mastro (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1975) 84.

<sup>494</sup> Credit is due to Jeremy Wilkins, whose conversation in a doctoral seminar on Redemption and Soteriology highlighted this connection and helped me and my colleagues recontextualize Anselm's thought in light of his monastic life.

ailments and social structures of oppression that leave the poor exposed and exploited. Ellacuría understands Jesus as working to heal these ailments and structures through his ministry, bringing creation back into right relationship with the Creator.<sup>495</sup> Therefore, Ellacuría's reading of Jesus' earthly ministry historicizes the concept of satisfaction as a healing of the relationship between Creator and creature while rejecting the idea of God requiring this satisfaction.

The second aspect of Ellacuría's soteriology highlighted by Lee is the redemption that comes from Jesus's crucifixion. Ellacuría connects the crucifixion to Jesus's public ministry by reframing the question "why did Jesus die?" into "why was Jesus killed?" Ellacuría was critical of the mystical and ahistorical approaches to the Passion that ignored the concrete and radical reality of Jesus's ministry and the death to which it led. In his seminal essay "The Crucified People: An Essay in Historical Soteriology," Ellacuría articulates this critique clearly:

Jesus dies—is killed as the four gospels and Acts so insist—because of the historical life he led, a life of deeds and words that those who represented and held the reins of the religious, socioeconomic, and political situation could not tolerate. That he was regarded as a blasphemer, one who was destroying the traditional religious order, one who upset the social structure, a political agitator, and so forth, is simply to recognize from quite distinct angles that the activity, word, and very person of Jesus in the proclamation of the Reign were so assertive and so against the established order and basic institutions that they had to be punished by death. Dehistoricizing this radical reality leads to mystical approaches to the problem, not by way of deepening, but by way of evading. We cannot simply settle the matter of the "died for our sins" by means of the expiatory victim, thereby leaving the direction of history untouched.<sup>496</sup>

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<sup>495</sup> Ellacuría, *Freedom Made Flesh*, 28.

<sup>496</sup> Ignacio Ellacuría, "The Crucified People: An Essay in Historical Soteriology," in *Ignacio Ellacuría: Essays on History, Liberation, and Salvation*, ed. Michael E. Lee (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2013), 206.

This excerpt from “The Crucified People” highlights the necessity of historicizing the Passion. The context of Jesus’s death as a political event shows that the message of Jesus’s ministry was so radical in its call to attend to the Reign of God that it inevitably led to his death. While Jesus knew his proclamation of the Reign would lead to his death, he did not turn away but engaged in the conflict with the socio-political powers that be. The crucifixion is the culmination of the life Jesus lived, and therefore the entirety of his salvific action cannot be placed on the cross alone.<sup>497</sup>

When one places this historicized reading of the cross in conversation with the mode of sacrifice theorized by Aquinas, one sees that, on Ellacuría’s account, Jesus plays a more active role in the act of sacrifice. Aquinas offers a helpful definition of sacrifice from Augustine: “A true sacrifice is every good work done in order that we may cling to God in holy fellowship, yet referred to that consummation of happiness wherein we can be truly blessed.”<sup>498</sup> While Aquinas narrowly focuses on the good work of Jesus’s free choice to suffer, Ellacuría widens the focus to include events leading to the Passion. Jesus’s ministry that would inevitably lead to his death was carried out as an act of self-giving love for those to whom he ministered.<sup>499</sup> God the Father sent his Son into the world as a gift to humanity to restore human beings to right relationship. Humanity took this gift and killed him for challenging their sinful reality. This historicizes sacrifice not as humanity making an offering to God, but rather God making a peace offering to humanity in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, who humanity proceeded to nail to a tree.

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<sup>497</sup> Ellacuría, “The Crucified People,” 207.

<sup>498</sup> ST III.48.3. In regards to Augustine, Aquinas cites Book X of *City of God*.

<sup>499</sup> Cf. Daly, *Sacrifice Unveiled*, 236-7.

The second soteriological mode tied to Ellacuría's reading of the crucifixion is the mode of redemption, or paying a price for salvation. Aquinas defines the redemptive mode as paying a price to satisfy two different debts: the bondage of sin and the debt of punishment.<sup>500</sup> The bondage of sin is the power that sin holds over the human race because of original sin. The debt of punishment, on the other hand, is also a form of bondage insofar as it forces a person "to suffer what he does not wish."<sup>501</sup> Christ's Passion and death, which he undertook in accordance with the will of the Father, allowed for the Resurrection, breaking the bonds of sin and fulfilling the debt of punishment. When one looks to the issue of the debt of punishment, the Synoptic Gospels provide an insight in their description of Gethsemane. All three depictions of Jesus's agony in the garden have some variation of the following prayer: "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet not my will but yours be done."<sup>502</sup> This shows Jesus, as presented in the scriptures, did not endure the suffering and death of the cross out of a desire for suffering and death, but he instead undertook this suffering in obedience to his heavenly Father and faithfulness his mission. In this obedient death, Christ pays the price for humanity's sins.

When one asks how Ellacuría historicizes this redemptive mode, the answer lies in connecting Jesus's death once again to the earthly ministry and its implications for the contemporary situation of the crucified people. Citing the role of the Suffering Servant,

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<sup>500</sup> Aquinas, ST III.48.4.

<sup>501</sup> ST III.48.4.

<sup>502</sup> Luke 22:42. Cf. Mark 14:36, Matthew 26:39.

Ellacuría offers the following description of how Jesus's Passion continues in history by participation of certain members of the church.<sup>503</sup> He writes:

Therefore, any present-day approximation of the Servant will have to be crucified for the sins of the world; it will have to become what the worldly have cast out, and its appearance will not be human precisely because it has been dehumanized. It will have to have a high degree of universality, since it will have to be a figure that redeems the whole world. It will have to suffer this utter dehumanization, not for its sins, but because it bears the sins of others.<sup>504</sup>

The description provided here fits very closely with the discussion of the redemptive mode of salvation discussed above. When Ellacuría goes on to name the crucified people as the oppressed peoples of the third world, the connection becomes clear: who pays for the sins of the modern world? Sin has consequences that ripple throughout one's community. The abuses of power that take place within the modern world still trample those without sufficient power to defend themselves. Ellacuría places this aspect of reality in the context of Matthew 25:36-41, where Jesus explicitly states that he suffers alongside "the least of these." From this context, it follows that to understand how Jesus paid the price for humanity's redemption, one must understand the suffering of the poor and downtrodden. The marginalized communities in society show the price Jesus paid and highlight the scandal of a Christian community that does not recognize the suffering of the marginalized as participating in Jesus's suffering.<sup>505</sup>

The last aspect of Ellacuría's historical soteriology as laid out by Lee is the hope for Christian salvation. This aspect offers the clearest connection to Ellacuría's

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<sup>503</sup> Ellacuría's understanding of Jesus's Passion as persisting through history will be discussed below as it ties thematically into the question of shouldering the weight of reality.

<sup>504</sup> Ellacuría, "The Crucified People," 221-2.

<sup>505</sup> Ellacuría, "The Crucified People," 198-9. Sobrino highlights this point as well, saying that Ellacuría's idea "put in the language of our day" is that victims save all, even the victimizers, by the victims' suffering as they have borne the inequities of the victimizers' sins. For more, see Jon Sobrino, "The Crucified People and the Civilization of Poverty: Ignacio Ellacuría's 'Taking Hold of Reality,'" in *No Salvation Outside the Poor: Prophetic-Utopian Essays* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 1-18.

philosophy of historical reality of the three discussed in this subsection. As discussed in Chapter 2 above, a possibility must be actualized before it can be constituted as a historical principle. When applied to the question of salvation, the possibility of salvation always existed, even actualized as a historical principle in the deliverance of the Exodus, but in a limited manner, applying exclusively to the Hebrew people escaping the oppression of Egypt. This possibility of salvation from all sin, death, and law had not been actualized prior to the Incarnate Word entering into history. Jesus's life, death, and, ultimately, Resurrection actualizes that possibility, making salvation a way of being in reality. It is this historical life that culminates in the Resurrection, overcoming the finality of death brought about by sin, that allows for human persons to be saved. Salvation enters into history, following the historical necessity of Jesus's into a historical principle of Christian salvation, creating hope for salvation. God loves humanity with such intensity that God is willing to enter into history through God's only son so that human beings may be saved, changing the course of history.

Ellacuría's understanding of the hope of Christian salvation serves as the historicization of the efficient mode of salvation. According to Aquinas, there are two kinds of efficient cause: the principle efficient cause and the instrumental efficient cause. While God is the principle efficient cause of salvation, the efficient mode of salvation centers on understanding all of Christ's actions and sufferings as operating "instrumentally in virtue of His Godhead for the salvation of men [*ad salute humanam*]." <sup>506</sup> Ellacuría historicizes this concept in the actualization of the historical principle of salvation, connecting Jesus's entire earthly life, from nativity to ascension, as

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<sup>506</sup> ST III.48.6

working towards the salvation of the human race, as discussed above. This provides two points of development on Aquinas's thought. First, it highlights God's action of entering into history through the Incarnation, a form of divine praxis creating capacities that previously did not exist, as the principal efficient cause of our salvation. Second, the historicization of efficient causality provides another way in which Jesus's prophetic ministry is central to Christian salvation. The ministry is not a mere prelude to the Passion and Resurrection but rather an integral part of the salvific act that cannot be ignored.

It is clear at this point that Ellacuría's theological project is inherently linked to the question of salvation, and provides an account that builds upon both scripture and the tradition. Historical soteriology contextualizes the abstractions of atonement theory in a way that one's understanding of the reality of the poor and oppressed feed into how one is to understand the religious and political mission of Jesus, the sufferings of his Passion, and the hope provided in his Resurrection. Without this central concept, Ellacuría's understanding of liberation is empty and theology itself loses its core concern for how the human race is to be saved from sin.

### **3.2.3 Theology as Engaged with Reality**

The third theological priority for Ellacuría is theology as engaged with reality. In his essay "Laying the Philosophical Foundations of Latin American Theological Method," Ellacuría offers three aspects of the way intelligence engages with reality that are particularly important for theological investigation. The first is becoming aware of the weight of reality, which Ellacuría explains as being in touch with the "reality of things,"

attentive to the material conditions and not mere abstractions.<sup>507</sup> Citing Sobrino, Lassalle-Klein writes that this aspect of engaging reality can also be framed to say one “must be ‘incarnated in reality.’”<sup>508</sup> This point serves as a complement to Lee’s reading of the text, where Lee claims that Ellacuría understood prophecy as the proper moment of realization of the weight of reality.<sup>509</sup> This is an explicit connection to the prophetic ministry of Jesus, in which Jesus recognizes the weight of the very real injustices in the religious and social structures of Roman occupied Israel and explicitly critiques them.<sup>510</sup>

It is at this point that it is relevant to briefly turn to Ellacuría’s final essay, “Utopia and Propheticism in Latin America,” where he offers the critical questions that highlight this connection between Jesus’s prophetic ministry and the realization of the weight of reality. Ellacuría writes:

Propheticism is understood here to be the critical contrasting of the proclamation of the fullness of the Reign of God with a specific historical situation. Is this contrasting possible? Are not the Reign of God and historical realities with their worldly projects two radically distinct things moving on different planes? The reply to this objection or question, although complex, is clear: the fullness of the reign, without identifying itself with any personal or structural project or any specific process, is in relationship with them.<sup>511</sup>

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<sup>507</sup> Ignacio Ellacuría, “Laying the Philosophical Foundations of Latin American Theological Method,” in *Ignacio Ellacuría: Essays on History, Liberation, and Salvation*, ed. Michael E. Lee (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2013), 80. Cf. Lee, *Bearing the Weight of Salvation*, 48. Lassalle-Klein highlights an earlier essay where Ellacuría notes this concept is “an ‘explicit allusion’ to Heidegger’s claim that humans experience a sense of having been ‘thrown’ into existence (as Dasein).” This connection to Heidegger would serve as an interesting starting point to see how Ellacuría fits within the continental philosophical tradition, but it is beyond the scope of this project. For Lassalle-Klein’s full discussion, see *Blood and Ink*, 224.

<sup>508</sup> Lassalle-Klein, *Blood and Ink*, 224.

<sup>509</sup> Lee, *Bearing the Weight of Salvation*, 48.

<sup>510</sup> Ellacuría, “The Prophetic Mission of Jesus,” 32-3.

<sup>511</sup> Ignacio Ellacuría, “Utopia and Propheticism,” 11-2. This essay will be explored in more detail in Chapter 4, where its commentary on the economic situation in Latin America will serve as an example of Ellacuría’s political economy as a form of political theology.

Ellacuría's point, besides the emphasis on the unity of salvation history and secular history<sup>512</sup>, is that the prophetic task is to highlight the points at which specific historical situations act against the Reign of God proclaimed by Jesus. While the prophetic tradition stretches back into the Hebrew Bible, a Christian propheticism takes its lead from Jesus's prophetic ministry, attending to the material conditions of a historical situation and critiquing the way in which they stand contrary to the Reign of God. This is the core of becoming aware of the weight of reality.

The second aspect of theology as engagement with reality is shouldering the weight of reality. When one shoulders the weight of reality, the ethical character of intelligence arises to drive one to understand what things really are and the demands they make of a person.<sup>513</sup> Lee, in his analysis of this point, emphasizes that shouldering the weight of reality reveals how human beings understand themselves as part of a particular time and place, which both influences and is influenced by the noetic dimension of realizing the weight of reality.<sup>514</sup> This is particularly significant for Ellacuría, as it provides insight into how Ellacuría's theology is shaped by the realities of El Salvador in the second half of the twentieth century.<sup>515</sup>

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<sup>512</sup> I have written on this topic previously, where I provide a full argument for how Ellacuría makes this connection. For more, see Andrew T. Vink, "History from the View of the Cross: An Exploration of Lonergan and Latin American Theologies of Liberation," *Irish Theological Quarterly* vol. 82(3) (2017), 222-243.

<sup>513</sup> Ellacuría, "Philosophical Foundations," 80.

<sup>514</sup> Lee, *Bearing the Weight of Salvation*, 49.

<sup>515</sup> This topic of the impact of the realities of El Salvador between 1967-1989 upon Ellacuría is covered to various degrees in the English commentaries. Teresa Whitfield's *Paying the Price: Ignacio Ellacuría and the Murdered Jesuits of El Salvador* offers a well-researched history with philosophical and theological commentary on certain aspects of Ellacuría's thought. Her contribution will be integrated in Chapter 4 as a resource for discussing Ellacuría's political philosophy, political theology, and political economy. Lassalle-Klein offers an extended discussion, close to half of the monograph, of this history of El Salvador as it relates to Ellacuría and Sobrino. Burke, on the other hand, offers a single chapter overview of Ellacuría's life but emphasizes the significance of the historical situation on Ellacuría's philosophy and theology. Lee, by contrast, attends to Ellacuría's historical situation in El Salvador only when a particular aspect is

Another interpreter of Ellacuría, Jon Sobrino, addresses the impact of the reality of the suffering of the people of El Salvador in multiple places. In one of the most intimate writings, Sobrino describes how the intellectually “inflexible” Ellacuría would change his mind if the tragedy of the poor came into conflict with what he thought was correct, giving deference to the experience and suffering that tragedy brought about.<sup>516</sup> In a more academic mode, Ellacuría’s fundamental motivation, as interpreted by Sobrino, is in a concrete recognition of injustice and the need to correct it. Sobrino writes:

I want to insist, however, that the origin of all this lies neither in a disembodied categorical imperative, nor in an aesthetic attraction to putting some theory into practice. Its origin lies in the fact that Ellacuría, moved to the depths by the sight of a people prostrate, oppressed, deceived, ridiculed—in the forceful terms he always used. He reacted to this, not just by way of lament. Indeed, he never made peace with the pain it implies, as postmodernism tends to do today (even when it does so with a good conscience) when it argues that one must accept fragmentation, or as neoliberalism does when it insists there is no other solution.<sup>517</sup>

It is clear, then, that Ellacuría saw the socio-economic situation in El Salvador and its dehumanization of the poor as the weight of reality that must be borne and engaged. Sobrino’s commentary on this point also highlights another aspect of Ellacuría’s description of this second dimension of the engagement with reality: the ethical character of intelligence. Combined with Sobrino’s insistence that Ellacuría was by no means a sentimentalist, it is clear that Ellacuría’s understands the ethical dimension of thought to

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relevant to Ellacuría’s thought. The consensus among these scholars is that Ellacuría’s theological context of El Salvador is central to the clearest understanding his theological thought.

<sup>516</sup> Jon Sobrino, “Letter to Ignacio Ellacuría,” in *The Principle of Mercy: Taking the Crucified People from the Cross* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994), 187-9.

<sup>517</sup> Jon Sobrino, “Ignacio Ellacuría: The Human Being and the Christian,” in *Love that Produces Hope: The Thought of Ignacio Ellacuría*, ed. Kevin F. Burke, S.J. and Robert Lassalle-Klein (Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 2006), 5. This is, interestingly enough, the only place I have found thus far that Ellacuría and neoliberalism are mentioned together in the same sentence. Sobrino’s contextualization of Ellacuría’s life and engagement with Salvadoran society provides further grounds for the validity of this project as a whole, making it a necessary development of not only scholarship on Ellacuría but also of theological critique of the neoliberal project.

be a logically necessary inference from awareness of reality. The ethical demands of reality are not a sentiment or an outside calculation or law, but rather a necessary structural aspect of historical reality.

This extended discussion shows Ellacuría made a commitment to the location of El Salvador and its people on a theological level. He allowed his thought to be transformed by the people he met and their struggles, choosing to be in this place not only physically but intellectually. Ellacuría could have chosen, as Sobrino notes, to focus on his philosophical manuscripts and the acclaim that work would have gained him in academic philosophy. Instead, Ellacuría threw himself into his own private ministries as well as his public work as a political figure, advocating for the poor that would be caught in the middle of a civil war.<sup>518</sup> This shows an intimate relationship between Ellacuría the servant priest and the place in which he served. Ellacuría's theology, then, is a theology of place; one's historical location, interests, and perspective orients the way one thinks about the transcendent and one's thoughts on the transcendent respond to that historical location. This goes beyond mere context, as context does not account for the historically transcendent. It is seeing the Reign of God in the moment of history one occupies and responding to the reign's call to action.

The third aspect of engagement with reality Ellacuría describes is taking charge of the weight of reality. Emphasizing the action of "taking charge," Ellacuría states that human intelligence moves from attentiveness to ethical judgment to praxis in this final dimension. Engaging with reality involves praxis, which becomes the next theological priority for Ellacuría and will be discussed in the following subsection. One cannot stop

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<sup>518</sup> Sobrino, "A Letter to Ignacio Ellacuría," 187.

at judgement; one must move to action if one's awareness of and shouldering the weight of reality is genuine. The human person, as discussed in Chapter 2, is oriented towards praxis, and that orientation is what pushes the human person to take charge and act, verifying one's judgment through a connection to its referent in reality.

To briefly summarize, theology as engaged with reality helps to orient the theological task from Ellacuría's point of view. The theological task, guided by the historical reality of salvation, must engage with the theologian's reality, namely the systemic injustices that consistently oppress marginalized members of the community and prey upon their vulnerability. The theologian must engage the weight of reality in a prophetic manner, leading to praxis.

### **3.2.4 Theology as Oriented Towards Ecclesial and Historical Praxis**

Ellacuría's final theological priority is theology's orientation towards ecclesial and historical praxis. These points build on the previous point of taking charge of reality and move it into the context of the universal Church. The significance of this priority is that it makes clear that the universal Church must act within history and work to realize the Reign of God.

Ellacuría defines theology as "the ideological moment of ecclesial praxis."<sup>519</sup> To fully understand this claim, we must break the definition down to its two primary

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<sup>519</sup> Ignacio Ellacuría, "Theology as the Ideological Moment of Ecclesial Praxis," in *Ignacio Ellacuría: Essays on History, Liberation, and Salvation*, ed. Michael E. Lee (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2013), 259.

elements: ecclesial praxis and ideological moment. Ellacuría begins with a discussion of ecclesial praxis. He writes:

Ecclesial praxis is taken here in the broad sense, which includes every historical action of the church, understood as a community of human beings that in some way realizes the Reign of God. The phrase “ecclesial praxis” is chosen to underline the aspect of praxis, that is, the transforming action that the church necessarily undertakes on its historical pilgrimage. To situate theology within the framework of ecclesial praxis implies that one consider theology not only in the most general way as being contextualized and determined but also as something essentially subsidiary to a historical praxis.<sup>520</sup>

When looking at this definition, there are two important parts to note. First, Ellacuría is using a very broad definition of church, extending well beyond the Catholic Church. This broad definition of Church appears to be a part of the wider trend for Catholic theology to engage with the modern world that originated with Vatican II and John XXIII’s encyclical during the council, *Pacem in Terris*, which was addressed in part to “all Men of Good Will.” Ellacuría’s phrasing here, which is translated from the Spanish in the volume edited by Lee, implies one could realize the Reign of God without necessarily claiming membership within the Church formally. I speculate this could be drawn from Rahner’s concept of anonymous Christianity, but there may be a far simpler answer. The simpler alternative is that Ellacuría recognized the need for broad coalition of people working together to realize the Reign of God, and that coalition will include people who choose not to formally associate with the Church for whatever reason.

Another important part of the excerpt above is recognizing that Ellacuría is developing a new, distinct position on the topic of praxis. Lee offers the context for three positions on praxis from which Ellacuría seeks to distinguish himself. The first position is a reading of YHWH’s deliverance and protection of Israel in the early writings of the

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<sup>520</sup> Ellacuría, “Ideological Moment of Ecclesial Praxis,” 259.

Hebrew Bible that overemphasizes the political connotations at the expense of the theological aspects. This reading of the Hebrew Bible, while not one with which Ellacuría would necessarily agree, is central to the debate between the two other major figures on the topic of praxis: Feuerbach and Marx.<sup>521</sup> Feuerbach, according to Marx, rejects praxis due to its religious connotations stemming from this reading of the Hebrew Bible. Instead, Feuerbach offers the second position: an emphasis on the contemplation of theory and the interior work it entails. Marx applauds Feuerbach's rejection of the religious elements that praxis in the Hebrew Bible carries with it. Marx is critical, however, of Feuerbach's decision to abandon praxis entirely. Marx presents the third position: the transformative power of praxis is central to what he understands as social progress via revolution. It is these three positions of ancient politicization, interiorization, and Marxist praxis from which Ellacuría seeks to offer a distinct fourth option.<sup>522</sup>

Ellacuría's fourth option, as described by Lee, makes the connection between the Reign of God, humanity's liberation from sin and divinization for life instigated by the divine, and "the church's call to participate in this salvation as its herald and sacramental mediator."<sup>523</sup> Lee offers insightful analysis of Ellacuría's position with a short excerpt from "*Iglesia y realidad histórica*," writing:

As salvific-historical action, ecclesial praxis avoids the error of idle interiorization, while advocating a transformation that is more than a merely intramundane human project. "If the church, then, is capable of constituting itself historically as a historical sign, in its historical conduct [*proceder*], of the Reign of God's presence among human beings, its apparent duality would be overcome: its theological aspect and historical aspect, without being identified, would be

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<sup>521</sup> Lee, *Bearing the Weight of Salvation*, 117. As Lee notes on the same page, Ellacuría would temper this political reading of the early writings of the Hebrew Bible with the prophetic tradition which struck a balance between the political and the religious.

<sup>522</sup> Lee, *Bearing the Weight of Salvation*, 117.

<sup>523</sup> Lee, *Bearing the Weight of Salvation*, 117.

unified.” As a hallmark of his entire theological method, Ellacuría once again argues here for a unity-in-difference in “theological” concepts that views transcendence “in,” not “away from,” history. In this framework, ecclesial praxis represents the principal component of the sacramental character of the church.<sup>524</sup>

Lee argues Ellacuría’s emphasis on a unity-in-difference allows ecclesial praxis to avoid the Feuerbach-Marx dilemma entirely while providing a better balance between the religious and political than the provided reading of the Hebrew Bible. Lee’s emphasis on the sacramental character helps to bolster this balance between the religious and the political, highlighting the church’s role in mediating grace in history in its realization of the Reign of God.

To provide further commentary on this point, Lee’s reading of Ellacuría on this topic can be supplemented by one major inference in the conversation: there cannot be an ahistorical church. Ellacuría and Lee’s commentary place great emphasis on the church’s role in history, and assume the necessity for the church to be in history. The church as the body of Christ is embodied, and therefore is located in history. This placement, as Lee states above, requires the church to be the herald of salvation in history; the church cannot deny its own historicity nor evade the demands historical reality places upon it.<sup>525</sup>

Returning to Ellacuría’s definition, the second aspect that needs to be briefly discussed is the “ideological moment.” As stated in the discussion of ideology in Chapter 2, Ellacuría is clearly using ideology in a nonpejorative manner, meaning in this case that theology provides the hermeneutic which, in turn, provides the context and values for action. As mentioned above, Ellacuría understands praxis as necessary to verify one’s knowledge by connecting that knowledge to reality. In his discussion of this point,

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<sup>524</sup> Lee, *Bearing the Weight of Salvation*, 117-8.

<sup>525</sup> Ellacuría, “Ideological Moment of Ecclesial Praxis,” 263.

Ellacuría alludes to the creative and critical functions of philosophy discussed above, and applies them to this ideological moment of ecclesial praxis.<sup>526</sup> As alluded to in 3.2.2 above, Ellacuría's philosophical work provides the structure that allows theological reflection and praxis to not only function but also maintain a proper awareness of the weight of reality.

### **3.2.5 Liberation Theology Embodied: Óscar Romero as Sainly Witness to Liberation**

Ellacuría's four theological priorities, discussed in the preceding four subsections, are presented in rather abstract terms. To appreciate more fully his embodied, historically oriented theology, it is necessary to provide an example of how these theological priorities are embodied in history. Romero provides the clearest example of Ellacuría's theological priorities, as shown in Ellacuría's writings on Romero as well as aspects of Romero's ministry from 1977 to his martyrdom in 1980.<sup>527</sup>

When considering Ellacuría's first theological priority, theology as liberative, in light of Romero's ministry, one of the connections that arises is how Romero embodies liberation from the law in certain respects. Romero's ministry as archbishop included a shift in the position in the Catholic Church from legitimizing the military dictatorship of President General Humberto Romero (1977-1979) to a critique of the dictatorship's violations of human rights.<sup>528</sup> This matches Ellacuría's understanding of liberation from

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<sup>526</sup> Ellacuría, "Ideological Moment of Ecclesial Praxis," 263-4

<sup>527</sup> There will certainly be many examples of how Romero embodies each of these priorities. For the sake of brevity, I will show only one example of each theological priority embodied by Romero.

<sup>528</sup> Lee, *Revolutionary Saint*, 86-7.

the law, where the law in this case fits both the unjust political order of the military dictatorship and the unjust moral order of the actions performed in the government's name. This example, among many others, provides suitable evidence of Romero embodying the first theological priority.

In one of the clearest articulations of the relationship between Romero and Ellacuría's theological priorities, the essay "Monseñor Romero: One Sent by God to Save His People," provides evidence for Romero embodying the three remaining theological priorities.<sup>529</sup> Romero exemplifies the historical-soteriological priority in his recognition of the oppressed people as the historicized Jesus.<sup>530</sup> Ellacuría describes the change in Romero's ministry as coming to understand "that the announcement and realization of the Reign of God pass inescapably through the proclamation of the good news to the poor and liberation to the oppressed."<sup>531</sup> It is this recognition of the need to continue the realization of the Reign of God in history as a participation in Jesus's salvific mission that motivated Romero to live out a prophetic ministry. This ministry led to the Salvadoran government's decision to assassinate Romero, finding his life and ministry too great a threat to their political power. This recognition of the continuation of Jesus's salvific work and Romero's martyrdom while continuing this salvific work together serve as an example of historical soteriology.

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<sup>529</sup> Ignacio Ellacuría, "Monseñor Romero: One Sent by God to Save His People," in *Ignacio Ellacuría: Essays on History, Liberation, and Salvation*, ed. Michael E. Lee (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2013) 285-92.

<sup>530</sup> A clear example of this can be found in Romero's homily in Aguilares from June 19, 1977, specifically the language here: "All these heroes, the priests and catechists of Aguilares who have died for the name of the Lord, are without doubt participating already in the unfading glory of the resurrection." For more, see Óscar Romero, "A Torch Raised on High," The Archbishop Romero Trust, accessed May 27, 2021, <http://www.romerotrusted.org.uk/homilies-and-writings/homilies/torch-raised-high>.

<sup>531</sup> Ellacuría, "Romero," 289.

Romero's "conversion" provides an example of engaging the weight of reality.<sup>532</sup> Ellacuría argues that Romero, in his conversion, sees something objectively new and this sight transformed him as a person.<sup>533</sup> Alluding to St. Paul's vision of the Resurrected Christ on the road to Damascus, Ellacuría frames Romero's conversion experience as a radical event that reoriented Romero's entire outlook on his ministry.<sup>534</sup> This vision, instead of the drama of a Risen Christ asking why Saul chooses to persecute Christ, is of Romero seeing Jesus in the face of the oppressed. This awareness of the weight of reality led to Romero shouldering the weight of reality, especially after the martyrdom of Rutilio Grande, S.J. Finally, Romero took charge of reality, engaging in praxis to liberate the oppressed of El Salvador and using his authority as archbishop to give his actions more gravitas.<sup>535</sup> This movement within Romero's conversion explicitly follows the engagement with the weight of reality discussed in 3.2.3 above.

Finally, Romero's ministry as archbishop exemplifies one form of ecclesial praxis that shows a member of the hierarchy of the episcopate working in concert with the wider church to realize the Reign of God. Romero's praxis, writes Ellacuría, was never solely political; Romero believed human action in history was never enough. Instead, Romero appealed to transcendence in his homilies, preaching that God breaks through human limitations, leading to a perfection that comes from a God that grows ever closer.<sup>536</sup> It is through this Christian transcendence, rooted in love, justice, solidarity, and a liberative

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<sup>532</sup> The term "conversion" here is a reference to Romero's transformation after the martyrdom of Rutilio Grande, S.J. on March 12, 1977, which led to his mission to serve as the voice of the oppressed masses of El Salvador. For more, see Lee, *Revolutionary Saint*, 44-85.

<sup>533</sup> Ellacuría, "Romero," 288.

<sup>534</sup> Acts 9:1-22.

<sup>535</sup> Ellacuría, "Romero," 288-9.

<sup>536</sup> Ellacuría, "Romero," 291.

freedom, that Romero engaged in praxis with the church of El Salvador, working to liberate the oppressed.

Ellacuría's four theological priorities highlight the link between questions of salvation, the prophetic critique of systemic injustices, and the action necessary to end those injustices while working to bring about the Reign of God as exemplified by the ministry and martyrdom of St. Óscar Romero. These questions will serve as the foundation for the critique of the theological implications of neoliberalism.

### **3.3 NEOLIBERALISM AS FALSE SOTERIOLOGY**

This final section articulates neoliberalism as a soteriological problem, which Ellacuría's theological priorities are well-suited to critique. Neoliberalism offers a false promise of salvation that grounds itself on corrupted variations of Ellacuría's theological priorities. In the pages below, I will explore how neoliberalism, grounded in a libertarian (as opposed to liberationist) conception of freedom, offers a false soteriological position by treating the market as the location of salvation. Each one of Ellacuría's theological priorities will serve as a point of contrast and criticism for the soteriology of neoliberalism, which will be shown to be incompatible with a liberationist reading of Christian soteriology.

In terms of Ellacuría scholarship, this is where I am making a significant contribution. Ashley, Lassalle-Klein, and Lee make brief mention of Ellacuría's critique of capitalism in their works do not employ Ellacuría's soteriology in an explicit confrontation with the false soteriology of neoliberalism. As noted above, Sobrino

mentions neoliberalism briefly in relation to Ellacuría but does not explore the connection further. By using Ellacuría's thought to critique a false soteriology of neoliberalism, I am expanding upon Ellacuría's implicit critique of the neoliberal thought and influence present in El Salvador during lifetime, as well as using the tools Ellacuría left behind to further his prophetic critique with reference to today's historical realities.

One immediate objection to the thesis of this section is that I am offering a straw man argument; neoliberal thinkers such as those discussed in Chapter 1 never claim to offer theological positions. I fully acknowledge that von Hayek, Friedman, and Becker did not intend for their projects to engage theology. This does not mean, however, that their work does not have theological import. As I demonstrated in Chapter 2, neoliberalism has an underlying philosophical position implied by the work of von Hayek et al. In a similar way, it is possible to infer propositions that come together to make theological arguments without holding to an intentional theological vision. I am not trying to reframe von Hayek's work, for example, as theological treatises; he is clearly a political economist and does not operate outside of bounds of politics and economics.<sup>537</sup> I do claim, however, that certain elements of neoliberal thought, when framed in light of how these ideas have been implemented and impacted the wider culture, make claims related to the question of the salvation of human beings.

Another point of clarification in regards to a neoliberal soteriology is that it is explicitly not a Christian soteriology.<sup>538</sup> The Christological components of Christian

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<sup>537</sup> I include legal theory within the bounds of political theory as they are closely related fields. von Hayek's writings on legal theory, primarily found in *Law, Legislation, and Liberty*, is a compliment to his political philosophy.

<sup>538</sup> This statement would be challenged by Max Weber, who argues in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* that capitalism arose from virtues and practices associated with Protestantism, making it, in

soteriology, which are necessary if not sufficient conditions for a Christian doctrine of salvation, are not present in these aspects of neoliberal soteriology. Questions of who is performing the salvific act and from what are people saved are answered by neoliberal soteriology in a very different manner than Christian theories of atonement and salvation. That said, it is important to note that I am not arguing that neoliberal soteriology fails only because it does not center on Christ's saving work. Instead, the argument focuses on how Ellacuría's theological priorities highlight the problematic elements of a neoliberal soteriology, showing that the neoliberal promise of salvation is a false one.

### **3.3.1 Implied Soteriology: Guidance from Ellacuría's Engagement with Marxism**

This brief subsection will offer a foundation of how to understand an implied soteriology using Ellacuría's framework as laid out in one of his earliest engagements with Marxism. The core of this argument comes from a reading of "Salvation History and Salvation in History," the introductory essay of *Teología política*, Ellacuría's first book of collected essays published in 1973.<sup>539</sup>

In the last section of this essay, Ellacuría offers a discussion of Marx in light of the necessity of engagement with political praxis. The goal of *Teología política*, according to Ellacuría, is to "show that it is in and through a new kind of political

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certain respects, a Christian phenomenon. I follow Tanner's interpretation, however, that argues neoliberal, finance-driven late capitalism is radically opposed to Christianity and turns Weber on his head. For more on Weber, see Max Weber, *The Protestant Work Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (London: Routledge Classics, 2001).

<sup>539</sup> I will primarily be citing the English translation, as I have done above, except when needing to refer to the Spanish text. All citations from the Spanish will come from the four volumes of *Escritos teológicos*, where *Teología política* is broken up into its component essays by topic.

experience that a secularized world can obtain the experience of God as Savior.” A new kind of politics, where people find a political approach to their faith, scandalizes rightist groups as well as Marxists.<sup>540</sup>

In his engagement with Marx on the relationship between religious and political praxis, Ellacuría offers a few insightful sentences that help to set the parameters for this analysis. He paraphrases Marx’s critical position on political praxis as practiced by “the Jewish people”:

We cannot flee from praxis, we must retrieve it in its specific immanent essence. We must abandon all reference to transcendence and an alienating God, immanently living, instead, the transforming praxis of nature and history. As Marx sees it, human plenitude or salvation [*la salvación*] lies in fashioning ourselves into a human society, a social humanity.<sup>541</sup>

Ellacuría’s paraphrase of Marx reveals how Ellacuría understands explicitly secular systems of thought to have theological concepts laced throughout them. As mentioned in Chapter 2, Ellacuría would consider Marx’s philosophical system as having a teleology. Likewise, he shows that Marx has a concept of salvation: the social and economic liberation of the proletariat from the systems of oppression by means of a social humanity. In other words, whenever a system of thought sees a fundamental problem with the world that creates a problem for a social group, it seeks salvation in one form or another. The salvific agent can come in many forms, but the core idea remains that an agent performs an act that saves a particular group.

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<sup>540</sup> Ellacuría, *Freedom Made Flesh*, 16.

<sup>541</sup> Ellacuría, *Freedom Made Flesh*, 17. While Ellacuría offers no citation for the work of Marx he is paraphrasing, the argument Ellacuría presents is similar to one offered by Marx towards the end of “On the Jewish Question.” For specific details, see Karl Marx, “On the Jewish Question,” in *Selected Writings*, ed. Lawrence H. Simon (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1994), 24-26.

One possible objection to this thesis is that Ellacuría is imposing religious language onto secular systems, adding religious ideas into contexts where they do not belong. This objection is easily dissipated by the inherent link between liberation and salvation as concepts. Ellacuría acknowledges that liberation comes in various contexts, especially in secular social movements.<sup>542</sup> When figures within these movements use the term liberation, Ellacuría's analysis gains purchase. As discussed in 3.2.1 above, Ellacuría understands liberation to imply salvation. Once this connection is made, it follows that secular positions and intellectual frameworks can imply a soteriological position.

From this point, it is clear that an analysis of an implied soteriological position of a secular intellectual framework is valid. Each of the next four subsections will follow a two-part pattern: first, I will show that the neoliberal intellectual framework presents an element analogous to Ellacuría's soteriological framework in terms of the soteriological priorities discussed in Section 3.2.2 above. Second, I will offer a critique from the Ellacurían perspective as to why these elements offer a false promise of salvation.

### **3.3.2 Liberty as Opposed to Liberation**

The first point of contrast to draw between Ellacuría's historical soteriology and neoliberal soteriology is the difference between two kinds of freedom discussed by these two soteriological positions: freedom in terms of the market for the neoliberal position

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<sup>542</sup> Ellacuría, "On Liberation," 41.

and freedom as liberation for Ellacuría. Each position holds freedom as a central concept to their explicit or implied understanding of salvation. Highlighting the difference in these understandings of freedom provides an insight into how these two soteriological approaches diverge.

As established in both preceding chapters, freedom is a central concept for neoliberal thinkers. To briefly review, von Hayek claims that the condition for the possibility of all freedom is found in economic freedom; a free society cannot exist without a free economy upon which to build the political structure.<sup>543</sup> It is the freedom to make choices in the market that is the true hallmark of freedom. Friedman builds upon this idea, arguing that it is free choices made in the market that combat social ills, thereby expressing the true freedom of individuals in society.<sup>544</sup> It is from these understandings of freedom that I concluded in Chapter 2 that the philosophy of neoliberalism understood economic activity as the primary human activity.<sup>545</sup>

When taking these points into account, in conjunction with Ellacuría's premise that freedom is inherently linked to liberation and salvation, neoliberal thinkers would have to understand salvation in terms of economic activity. Economic activity, while not usually a point of conversation within systematic theology, meets the criteria of religious activity provided by theologian Elizabeth Johnson in *Quest for the Living God*.<sup>546</sup> In the first chapter, Johnson defines religion as the umbrella term used to describe the stories, symbols, and rituals used by people to be in tune with unseen forces that they could not

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<sup>543</sup> For the extended discussion of von Hayek and the relevant citations, see Chapter 1 above.

<sup>544</sup> For more on Friedman, see Chapter 1 above.

<sup>545</sup> See Chapter 2 above.

<sup>546</sup> Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Quest for the Living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 7.

control.<sup>547</sup> When one considers the narratives provided by von Hayek and Friedman, as well as the rituals of economic activity, such as the opening bell, trading, and closing bell on the stock market among other things, it becomes clear that there is a strong case to be made that neoliberalism fits as a religion as Johnson defines it.<sup>548</sup> Therefore, understanding economic activity as the medium of salvation is a valid inference from a religion that understands itself in terms of economic activity.

Another aspect of this neoliberal understanding of freedom as economic activity is that it is highly individualistic. Individual actors interact in the market, making exchanges that both find mutually beneficial at the time. This stands in contrast to Ellacuría's understanding of liberation and freedom as communal efforts; as discussed in 3.2.1 above, liberation is for all members of the community. The neoliberal focus on individualism has no room for community since it compromises the effectiveness of the motivating force of competition.

Another quality of the neoliberal understanding of freedom as distinct from Ellacuría's liberative freedom is what one is being saved or freed from. The neoliberal position does not seek to be free from sin or death, but only from a law that impedes one's ability to act in the marketplace. This is to be expected since the neoliberal position never affirms a concept of sin, and it does not find physical death to be something from which to be saved. The law, however, in the form of regulations, can impede economic activity. Freedom from these regulations allows for the market to operate at optimal

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<sup>547</sup> Johnson, *Quest for the Living God*, 7.

<sup>548</sup> Another source worth considering is the introduction to Goodchild's *Theology of Money*, in which the author provides a more explicit account of the religious structure of capitalist activities, such as the implied faith in bank notes, patterns of credit, and the nature of debt. For more see Philip Goodchild, *Theology of Money* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 1-26.

efficiency, allowing the flow of transactions to determine the landscape of the market. As opposed to liberation, the neoliberal seeks the exercise of individual liberty to make decisions that will hopefully lead to profit. In Chapter 2, I established the combination of individual liberty and the neoliberal transcendental argument regarding freedom denies an openness to the dynamism of reality. This combination creates an anthropological problem.<sup>549</sup> This ‘freedom for’ economic activity furthers this anthropological problem, creating implications for both the function of salvation as well as the weight of reality as will be discussed below.

Looking at the differences between these two approaches to freedom and liberation, which are linked for Ellacuría, there is a stark difference between Ellacuría’s understanding of these terms and the neoliberal position. One of the most important of these differences is recognizing the emphasis on communal liberation as opposed to the exercise of individual liberty. As established in Chapter 2, Ellacuría is not opposed to putting an emphasis on individual choices. This emphasis, however, should never be placed at the expense of the community, especially marginalized populations of the community. The libertarian attitude toward freedom held by the neoliberal position implicitly denies this with its emphasis on freedom for the economic activity of individuals. This point will be a major factor as I examine how neoliberalism’s false promise of salvation distorts Ellacuría’s other three theological priorities below.

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<sup>549</sup> See Chapter 2 above.

### 3.3.3 The Market Saves: A Rejection of Historical Soteriology

The soteriology of neoliberalism serves as a rejection of Ellacuría's historical soteriology. It shifts the functionality of salvation to an impersonal force with actors who are willing to sacrifice others for the sake of profit. As will be made clear below, neoliberalism's implied soteriology is an antithesis of a true historical soteriology oriented towards Jesus's prophetic ministry, death, and Resurrection.

The first point to establish is how to make a set of clear propositions that outline the framework of neoliberal soteriology. Recall von Hayek's position of economic freedom as the condition of the possibility for personal and economic freedom. An interesting connection arises when this position is put in conversation with the idea of salvation as an act of freeing someone or something from bondage, akin to ideas in the redemptive mode of salvation. It is important to ask several questions to help make this point as clear as possible: What is the salvific act? Who is the salvific actor or actors? How is this salvation accomplished? Is the promise of salvation a viable one, namely can the salvific actor or actors accomplish the salvific act? By answering these questions, one can formulate the soteriological propositions necessary to understand the framework implied by the neoliberal project.

The first question to answer is what is the salvific act. The implied soteriology of neoliberalism focuses on the marketplace as a salvific force. This is inferred from the priority the marketplace is given in neoliberal economic thought as well as von Hayek's transcendental argument regarding economic freedom, all of which is discussed in Section 1 of Chapter 1 above. The direction of market forces, or, to use Smith's phrase, the "invisible hand," always guides the market to the most efficient outcomes. The

market must therefore be left unrestrained by outside influence, namely regulation. As mentioned above, this is the freedom from bondage that connects to a kind of redemption, albeit without considering how the possibility of sin plays into the situation. Left unrestrained, market forces will be allowed to let firms succeed and fail based solely on efficiency, the quality of their product, and the price offered to consumers. As strange as it seems, the salvific act is grounded in a lack of action. One does not want the activity of the market impeded in any way; interference would lead to inefficiency and aberrations in market activity. The salvific act, therefore, is to prevent aberrations in the market by eschewing government regulation and outside interference, barring an acute incident that the market cannot handle.<sup>550</sup> By saving the society that exists within the market from government intervention, the market protects individuals from the government.<sup>551</sup>

The second question is to ask who is the salvific actor. Returning to the salvific act of eschewing government regulation, there are two possible groups that could be considered to be salvific actors capable of accomplishing that act. One group is government officials, whether they be elected members of the legislative and executive branches or political appointees, committed to the separation of government and market activity.<sup>552</sup> Governmental figures and intervention, however, are exactly what the neoliberal is trying to avoid. While these individuals working in government may be

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<sup>550</sup> As discussed in Chapter 1, Friedman argues that governments are supposed to serve in relief of cases of “acute misery and distress,” allowing the market to ignore these issues. This point will be discussed further in the next subsection.

<sup>551</sup> Friedman, “Neo-Liberalism and Its Prospects,” 6-7.

<sup>552</sup> In the US context, the group includes congressional delegates, presidents and vice-presidents, members of the various departments of the executive branch, and the board of the Federal Reserve, the central bank of the United States. As discussed in Chapter 1, government administrations, like those of Reagan and Thatcher, can make policy decision that apply neoliberal principles. It is important to note, however, that they are still not operating within the market themselves. They are creating market-friendly executive governments that will not intervene in market activities.

allies to the neoliberal cause to varying degrees, elected representatives and civil servants are salvific actors within the market only in the limited sense that they work to shape the government to favor corporations and profit motives.

The second, and more likely, group are the entrepreneurs and firm executive officers who shape and meet market demands, regardless of their impact on communities other than their shareholders, who they seek to enrich. Calling such individuals saviors can appear to be an outlandish statement but, in reality, there is more than a grain of truth to the idea. These important roles are taken so seriously that some texts make explicit use of imagery from salvation history. Two primary examples come to light: Marshall Ganz's *Why David Sometimes Wins: Leadership, Organization and Strategy in the California Farm Worker's Movement*<sup>553</sup> and Rakesh Khurana's *Searching for a Corporate Savior: The Irrational Quest for Charismatic CEOs*.<sup>554</sup> These may be only two examples, but they betray an unspoken, or perhaps unconscious, idea: neoliberal ideologization allows for one to make connections to figures within salvation history as well as transpose the salvific qualities of those figures onto economic agents. This may not be the case for every person that holds neoliberal positions, but it is clear that these connections are possible and are made by some who hold such positions.

Now that there is an understanding of the salvific act and the salvific actors, the last question to discuss is that of the salvific promise and if it is accomplishable. This concept serves as the linchpin of soteriological thought: who is salvation for and what are they to be saved from? Making inferences from von Hayek and Friedman, salvation is

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<sup>553</sup> Marshall Ganz, *Why David Sometimes Wins: Leadership, Organization and Strategy in the California Farm Worker's Movement* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).

<sup>554</sup> Rakesh Khurana, *Searching for a Corporate Savior: The Irrational Quest for Charismatic CEOs* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

supposed to be for all individuals who invest in the market, which is the focal point of the salvific act. If one is not engaged in the marketplace, then the conditions for salvation cannot be met. In concrete terms, if one does not have the means to invest in a firm, then one is outside the bounds of neoliberal salvation.

The second part of the question requires more explanation. What do the market and the entrepreneurs save individuals from? To answer the question, let us consider the goal of neoliberal capitalist activity: profit and prosperity. This activity, however, is not without risk. Bad investments, inefficient business practices, or other poor choices would lead to ruin and destitution. This threat of abject poverty is that from which individuals need to be saved. This threat, in conjunction with the threat of government oppression feared by von Hayek, serve as the foundation of the salvific promise. Through the wisdom and cunning of the entrepreneurs, corporate executives, and the banking system that funds them, individuals in the marketplace are supposedly saved from abject poverty and government oppression, free to enjoy their prosperity.

The implied neoliberal soteriology described above stands in contrast to the salvation promised by the life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth as Ellacuría understood it. There are four primary points of disagreement that show Ellacuría would reject this neoliberal soteriology beyond the foundational point that neoliberal soteriology does not account for Jesus's mission: the salvation promised does not equally apply to all people, the salvific act does not offer a true hope of salvation that can deliver on its promise, the salvific actor does not offer herself as sacrifice but rather sacrifices others to fulfill the promise of salvation, and the implied neoliberal soteriology is ahistorical in nature.

It is important to note in this description of an implied neoliberal soteriology who is left out of the promise of salvation, which was briefly mentioned above: those who do not have the means to invest in the market. As of February 2018, 84% of all stock ownership in the United States was owned by the wealthiest 10% of households.<sup>555</sup> Providing further context, the economic analysis cited by Cohen claims that “roughly half of all households don’t have a cent invested in stocks, whether through a 401(k) account or shares in General Electric.” Furthering this point, Cohen’s interview with economic analyst Edward N. Wolff reveals that for 90% of United States households, a 10% change in the market would impact their holdings by 2% at the most.<sup>556</sup> In short, the market at the center of the implied neoliberal soteriology, and therefore the promised salvation, does not have a sizable impact for the vast majority of people. This means the promise of salvation does not equally apply to all people, which Ellacuría understands as part of Christ’s mission. In fact, Ellacuría explicitly states that both the wealthy and impoverished must be liberated from their respective conditions of dominated and dominant.<sup>557</sup> This shows the implied neoliberal soteriology to be problematic from Ellacuría’s perspective.

A second problematic aspect of the implied neoliberal soteriology is its false promise of salvation. The neoliberal salvific act holds no hope of riches for the majority who do not own a significant amount of stock, but it does have an impact. The firms that fail in the market may not significantly impact a stock portfolio; the loss of jobs that would come as a result would severely impact many households. Likewise, a firm’s

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<sup>555</sup> Patricia Cohen, “We All Have a Stake in the Stock Market, Right? Guess Again,” *The New York Times*, February 8, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/08/business/economy/stocks-economy.html>.

<sup>556</sup> Cohen, “We All Have a Stake.”

<sup>557</sup> Ellacuría, “The Historicity of Christian Salvation,” 284.

significant profit, enriching shareholders in an equally significant way, has little impact on those who actually provide the labor that led to that profit. It is true that profit allows businesses to continue to employ workers and therefore provide the workers with income. The problem, however, is that such wages are inadequate compensation for workers to live a flourishing, dignified life. This promise of salvation is for a select group while the actions of the salvific actors can lead to the abject poverty of those not invested in the market. In other words, the salvific act can have the opposite of the intended effect on those outside the market. This promise and hope for salvation, therefore, is a false hope.

The last critique of the implied neoliberal soteriology from the Ellacurían perspective concerns the salvific actor as self-interested as opposed to self-sacrificing. When one reflects upon the role of the entrepreneur, executive, or financier, the salvific actors in the neoliberal formulation, these individuals are normally within that 10% who own the vast majority of stock. One reason for this is that those who have significant impact on the market have the means to buy into the market, making themselves members of this group who are promised salvation. These salvific actors are acting in their own self-interest, which fits perfectly with neoliberal ideologization and its focus on individualism.

This presentation of a salvific actor stands in opposition to Ellacuría's understanding of Jesus as salvific actor. The clearest example of this point comes towards the end of "The Crucified People," where Ellacuría offers an interpretation of the fourth Suffering Servant song. In discussing the Servant's acceptance of death, Ellacuría writes:

the Servant accepts this lot, this destiny. He accepts the fact that it is the weight of sins that is bearing him of to death, although he has not committed them. By reason of the sins of others, for the sins of others, he accepts his own death. The Servant will justify so many because he has taken their crimes on himself. Our

punishment has fallen on him, and his scars have healed us. His death, far from being meaningless and ineffective, removes, provisionally, the sins that have been afflicting the world. His death is expiation and intercession for sins.<sup>558</sup>

The Suffering Servant, who Ellacuría interprets to be Jesus, accepts the punishment for sin as an act of self-sacrifice for all human beings.<sup>559</sup> There is no self-interest in this sacrificial and salvific act, only a gift of unselfish love for the human race. No one is excluded from the promise of salvation except those who willfully forsake it, and the salvation offered by this promise is true as shown by the Resurrection.<sup>560</sup>

Finally, the last point of critique is a continuation from the philosophical critique offered in Chapter 2: neoliberalism's ahistorical approach is soteriologically problematic as well as philosophically problematic. In the description of the implied neoliberal soteriology, there is no mention of history or any historical aspect to the activities of the market in the sense of the lived history of *Geschichte*. Neoliberalism acknowledges dates and times, but the greater concept of historical process is irrelevant for the continued accumulation of profit. This ahistorical approach influences the implied soteriology by ignoring the dynamic quality of reality, leading to what Ellacuría describes as "a static interpretation of nature and a naturalistic interpretation of man."<sup>561</sup> Neoliberalism is not concerned with the need to push for transformation in history; If the status quo is profitable, change is unnecessary. As discussed at great length above, history is essential to a robust understanding of salvation. Without the historical element, discussions of

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<sup>558</sup> Ellacuría, "The Crucified People," 217.

<sup>559</sup> The language of punishment Ellacuría uses could be seen as problematic along the same lines of atonement theory from the perspective of many liberation theologians. This seeming inconsistency could be a matter of parity in his word choice, connecting "punishment" with the term "crimes" in the previous sentence of the excerpt.

<sup>560</sup> Assuming Rahner's theory of anonymous Christianity and the fundamental option, this promise of salvation includes those who have not explicitly affirmed the Christian faith. For more, see Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, vol. 6 (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1969), 178-96, 390-398.

<sup>561</sup> Ellacuría, *Freedom Made Flesh*, 12.

salvation are insufficient as they are missing a central aspect of human reality that must necessarily be saved. Neoliberal soteriology cannot account for the historical aspect of human reality, making it unable to offer a full promise of salvation to any human being, regardless of economic status.

To quickly summarize, the implied soteriology of neoliberalism offers a false promise of salvation that only applies to a small group of wealthy individuals who are saved by members of their own group as motivated by self-interest. This view of salvation stands contrary to the Christian understanding of salvation as freely offered to all human beings by a self-sacrificing savior grounded in historical reality. The following two critiques of the implied neoliberal soteriology build on this central critique, which shows the promise of salvation to be empty on all levels.

### **3.3.4 The Market as Sole Reality: Ignoring the Weight of Reality**

Following from the implied neoliberal soteriology's inability to account for historical reality, the next critique involves questions of the weight of reality. As discussed in both Chapter 2 and 3.2.3 above, reality places ethical demands on human beings. For Ellacuría, these demands highlight the suffering of the poor and marginalized within society, calling on each human being to alleviate that suffering.

Neoliberalism, as previously mentioned, focuses solely on the activity within the market, where individuals and firms make transactions in an attempt to turn sufficient profit. If a person is outside of the market, then their situation is irrelevant. This is significant, as mentioned above, because of the large number of people who either do not own stock or own so little stock it barely impacts their overall finances. The implied

salvific work of the market is not done with this majority's interests in mind. If the salvific actors deem it necessary for a firm to be liquidated and the employees to be laid off without severance for the sake of greater profit, then the liquidation will take place and former employees left in the cold.<sup>562</sup> The needs of these employees who have lost their primary source of income are ignored, and the market moves on.

The implication of this approach is that there are no demands placed on these salvific actors outside of the demands of the market. When this is considered in conjunction with the ahistorical aspect of the implied neoliberal soteriology, it would appear, from an Ellacurían perspective, that this implied neoliberal soteriology disregards, if not denies, any reality not relevant to the functioning of the market, allowing the neoliberal salvific actors to avoid engaging with the demands outside the market. If one refuses to accept the dynamism of historical reality in favor of an ideologization that places strict limits on that which is real, then it follows that the ethical demands of reality outside of those ideologized limits can be ignored. A denial such as this stands in stark contrast to the salvific mission of Jesus. During his mission, Jesus attended to the needs of the poor and marginalized and offered severe prophetic critiques of the religious and political powers that allowed for such injustice to occur.

In an attempt to succinctly state the critique from the Ellacurían perspective, the implied neoliberal soteriology offers an ideologized form of reality. This ideologized form of reality articulates that the only reality that is relevant to the concerns of the salvific promise is the reality of the market. This allows salvific actors within the market

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<sup>562</sup> One example of this is in the bankruptcy case of Toys “R” Us and private equity firm Bain Capital. For greater detail, see Bryce Covert, “The Demise of Toys ‘R’ Us Is A Warning,” *The Atlantic*, July/August 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2018/07/toys-r-us-bankruptcy-private-equity/561758/>.

to ignore demands of reality outside the market, which leads to a perpetuation of injustices against those outside the bounds of the market, offering them no salvation. In short, neoliberalism does not bear the weight of reality. It does not shoulder the weight of reality. And it does not take charge of reality.

### **3.3.5 A Failure to Act: Neoliberalism's Privation of Praxis**

The final aspect of the implied soteriology of neoliberalism that must be critiqued from the Ellacurían perspective continues on the line of thought from the preceding discussion of ignoring the demands of reality. In accordance with Ellacuría's theological priorities, engaging with the weight of reality leads to an emphasis on both historical and ecclesial praxis. When a theology does not engage the weight of reality, it is unable to properly orient itself towards the appropriate ecclesial and historical praxis.

When applying this formulation to the implied neoliberal soteriology, there are two distinct problem types that need to be addressed. The first is a problem of categories. Since the implied neoliberal soteriology operates in an ahistorical mode, it will not have an orientation towards historical praxis. This is not surprising, as it is a natural inference from arguments made above. In terms of ecclesial praxis, the most charitable application of this concept is to take Ellacuría's broad definition of church as the community of human beings that in some way realizes the Reign of God and formulate it in terms amenable to the neoliberal framework. The neoliberal "church" would then be a group of human beings that in some way realizes the market. This broad definition would not only include the wealthy who are invested in the market to a significant degree but also the rest of the population who sell and purchase goods and services that powers the engine of

the market. It is worth noting here that the neoliberal “church” includes those who it does not intend to save.

The question now enters the realm of the second problem type: is neoliberal praxis possible? The answer to this question does not need to be inferred through levels of theoretical framework. The question is, in a certain way, addressed by von Hayek directly. In his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, “The Pretense of Knowledge,” von Hayek offers the following points that bear on the question of praxis:

If man is not to do more harm than good in his efforts to improve the social order, he will have to learn that in this, as in all other fields where essential complexity of an organized kind prevails, he cannot acquire the full knowledge which would make mastery of the events possible. He will therefore have to use what knowledge he can achieve, not to shape the results as the craftsman shapes his handiwork, but rather to cultivate a growth by providing the appropriate environment, in the manner in which the gardener does this for his plants.<sup>563</sup>

In this excerpt, von Hayek emphasizes that one never has full knowledge in economic situations. The proper course of action is never to attempt to force a desired result. For von Hayek, it is better to shape circumstances so that preferred situations will naturally arise. When put into terms of praxis, a neoliberal should never engage in praxis. Instead, she should shape the conditions so that any and all problems will sort themselves out without direct intervention. This line of thinking allows for injustices to continue unabated, which is contrary to Ellacuría’s understanding of the role of praxis in realizing the Reign of God. Once again, the implied soteriology of neoliberal thought offers no hope for those in need of salvation, even if it is only salvation from poverty and financial ruin. Neoliberalism’s salvific promise is one that it cannot fulfill.

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<sup>563</sup> Friedrich von Hayek, “The Pretense of Knowledge,” <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/economic-sciences/1974/hayek/lecture/>, accessed September 7, 2020.

### 3.4 CONCLUDING REMARKS

This chapter has offered an overview of Ellacuría's historical soteriology through the lens of theological priorities derived from various essays in his corpus. This framework was then applied to an implied soteriology of neoliberalism, which has its own salvific act, actors, and promise. These salvific elements were found wanting, unable to deliver on a promise of salvation from poverty through an unregulated free market.

The theological critique of neoliberalism from an Ellacurían perspective does not end with questions of salvation. Historical soteriology is the foundation for the rest of Ellacuría's theological project, which builds upon these themes in fruitful ways. For the purposes of this project, Ellacuría's political theology, which concretely utilizes the soteriological thought discussed here, is the aspect of Ellacuría's work that can fully engage neoliberalism as a problem of political economy. The Ellacurían critique, therefore, must move into a discussion of political theology and, most specifically, a critique of neoliberalism as the civilization of wealth and of capital.

#### 4.0 ELLACURÍA AND POLITICAL ECONOMY: TOWARDS DISSENT AND DISCERNMENT

*In a world sinfully shaped by the  
dynamism of capital and wealth, it  
is necessary to stir up a different  
dynamism that will overcome it  
salvifically.*  
~Ellacuría, “Utopia and  
Propheticism”

The final major point in an Ellacurían critique of neoliberalism is an engagement with neoliberalism as a politico-economic theory as articulated in the policies of the Reagan administration and the Thatcher government. Ellacuría’s relationship to neoliberal political economy is best framed by his historical context in El Salvador where he was permanently assigned in 1967 until his martyrdom in 1989.<sup>564</sup> During his two decades in El Salvador, Ellacuría witnessed the economic changes that further highlighted the radical economic inequality that the country experienced going back to the Spanish conquest nearly five centuries prior.<sup>565</sup> The economic and political strife in El Salvador was fueled by the influence of the United States from the late 1970’s through the conclusion of the Salvadoran Civil War in 1992. This timeframe aligns roughly with

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<sup>564</sup> Burke, *The Ground Beneath the Cross*, 16.

<sup>565</sup> El Salvador’s politico-economic issues are rooted in the colonization of Cuzcatlán and the oppression that followed.

the rise of neoliberal political economy in the United States.<sup>566</sup> These facts suggest that Ellacuría's struggle against the oppressive government during the Salvadoran Civil War is at least in part a struggle against the damaging effects of neoliberalism.

In this chapter, I offer an overview of Ellacuría's writings on elements of political economy that show a resistance to neoliberal ideologization as it was realized in El Salvador. This combination of political-economic, historical, and theological writings provides a theologically informed critique of political economy, which rejects a tension among neoliberalism, socialism, and a "third way" between the neoliberalism and socialism as they all can be ideologized. These critiques offer a dissent from the current ideologizations that grow from neoliberalism, socialism and the attempt to mediate between them. Based on these critiques, I offer an alternative theologically informed framework for political economy of discernment that can avoid most of the pitfalls of the three standard political economic systems discussed above.

It is important to note that Ellacuría should not be understood as neither a trained economist nor a social ethicist; as discussed above, his training was in philosophy and theology. That said, Ellacuría's engagement with political economy from a philosophical and theological background is not unwarranted. His various essays on the impoverished population in El Salvador and engagement with the political realities during the Salvadoran Civil War show Ellacuría to be intimately familiar with the concrete realities of political economy. In other words, Ellacuría's experience on the ground in El Salvador serves as a contrast to the privileged positions of von Hayek, Friedman, and Becker at the

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<sup>566</sup> As discussed in Chapter 1, the beginnings of neoliberal ideas in US political economy began with Paul Volcker's tenure as Chairman of the Federal Reserve in 1979 and came to fruition during the Reagan Administration 1981-89. For more, see Chapter 1 above.

University of Chicago. This contrast in positions allows Ellacuría to serve as a verification check as to whether or not the politico-economic ideas of the members of the Chicago School as implemented by Reagan and Thatcher hold up to scrutiny. Ellacuría's argument shows that these ideas do not pass muster.

#### **4.1 CONTEXT FOR A THEOLOGICAL CRITIQUE OF POLITICAL ECONOMY**

This section argues that a theological critique of neoliberal political economy is justifiable by showing how Reagan and Thatcher used their Christian beliefs as a framework to articulate and legitimate their politico-economy philosophies. By examining a significant speech by each politician, their use of this Christian framework will become apparent. Theological critique is justifiable, then, because of the problematic ways that Christian theological concepts are used as planks in their arguments for neoliberal policies.<sup>567</sup>

##### **4.1.1 Reagan, Freedom, and the “Evil Empire”**

Reagan's American formulation of neoliberal political philosophy, as discussed above, focused on the overarching American value of freedom. It comes as no surprise,

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<sup>567</sup> The choice to examine one only one speech by each figure is done for the sake of brevity. A full analysis on the impact and use of Christianity in the Reagan administration and the Thatcher government would each require book-length projects. For the goal of this section, which is to show that the theological critique is justifiable, is a significantly weaker claim and requires far less evidence.

then, that the connection between Christianity and his political philosophy would rest on this topic. The following subsection will discuss this point and how the connection between capitalism and freedom Reagan makes is problematic given the implications from the term freedom, especially given the influence of Reagan's economic advisor Milton Friedman, discussed in Chapter 1 above.<sup>568</sup>

On March 8, 1983, Reagan delivered a speech to the National Association of Evangelicals in which he argued that the United States, with all of its imperfections, was still striving for the Christian values against the godless Soviet Union.<sup>569</sup> Reagan's argument emphasizes a common theme to his neoliberal political philosophy: freedom. His first use of the term comes in paragraph 8, where Reagan claims American principles are based on "a commitment to freedom and personal liberty that, itself are grounded in the much deeper realization that freedom prospers only where the blessings of God are avidly sought and humbly accepted."<sup>570</sup> On the surface, the idea that freedom comes from God is not theologically contentious. The connection between freedom and the necessity of God for that freedom to be fully realized is valid. However, when this statement, along with the rest of the speech's content, is put in the context of the ideologization of neoliberalism discussed in Chapter 1, the problematic elements begin to emerge.

In Reagan's speech, his emphasis on American freedom, which is supposedly a freedom that seeks God's blessings, stands in stark contrast to the totalitarian nature of the Soviet Union. Reagan claims the Soviet Union to be a people in darkness who support the tyranny of the State over individuals and are in need of prayers to overcome this

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<sup>568</sup> For a review of Reagan's political philosophy, see Chapter 1 above.

<sup>569</sup> Ronald Reagan, "Evil Empire Speech," accessed February 13, 2021, <http://voicesofdemocracy.umd.edu/reagan-evil-empire-speech-text/>.

<sup>570</sup> Reagan, "Evil Empire Speech."

darkness.<sup>571</sup> Once again, he offers a statement that emphasizes a Christian virtue of compassion that is in and of itself not problematic. His argument becomes theologically questionable when he suggests that America, as part of “the Western world,” can answer the challenge of Soviet communism with faith in God. Reagan offers the strongest statement of this view in the following excerpt:

I believe we shall rise to the challenge. I believe that communism is another sad, bizarre chapter in human history whose last–last pages even now are being written. I believe this because the source of our strength in the quest for human freedom is not material, but spiritual. And because it knows no limitation, it must terrify and ultimately triumph over those who would enslave their fellow man. For in the words of Isaiah: “He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no...might He increased strength. But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary.”<sup>572</sup>

The imagery from Isaiah 40:29-31 Reagan quotes is on one level an allusion to God’s comfort offered to a people in distress. On another level, however, it implies that those who seek to overcome Soviet communism are doing God’s work. While the liberation of a people from tyranny fits with the idea of a liberating God as discussed by Ellacuría, the implication that it is capitalism that can allow for this liberation is doubtful. It ignores the possibility that unfettered capitalism can create another form of oppression that uses a different ideological framework.

In addition to questioning Reagan’s implication that capitalism is a form of liberation, one must also remember that Reagan’s use of freedom carries with it the premise that economic freedom is the condition for the possibility of personal and

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<sup>571</sup> Reagan, “Evil Empire Speech.”

<sup>572</sup> Reagan, “Evil Empire Speech.”

political freedom, a premise which comes from von Hayek.<sup>573</sup> When one considers this assumed premise in Reagan's argument, the argument begins to read differently. The freedom that America seeks to guarantee is grounded, according to Reagan, in economic freedom. The totalitarianism that dominates citizens of the USSR is, at the core, a lack of freedom to engage in the market. Once these oppressed people are free to engage in the market and make economic decisions without the controlled economy of the communist government, the foundational shackles would be broken, allowing them to throw off the tyrannical government that restricts their freedom.<sup>574</sup>

When one considers the above line of reasoning together with Reagan's assertion that the United States' quest for freedom is rooted in a spiritual strength, it is clear that Reagan is making a questionable theological argument to support his politico-economic policies. A theological critique of the underlying political philosophy that motivate these policies is therefore justifiable.

#### **4.1.2 Thatcher and the Redemptive Power of the Market**

The second figure who must be addressed in this section is Reagan's British counterpart, Thatcher. While Reagan focused on the broader American theme of freedom in his political oratory, Thatcher placed an emphasis on the relationship between moral

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<sup>573</sup> For the full argument, see Chapter 1 above.

<sup>574</sup> I would be remiss not to point out the genuinely positive arguments Reagan makes in this speech. In this address, he made the case to the National Association of Evangelicals to support a nuclear freeze with the USSR. This diplomatic strategy was clearly an attempt to prevent an international crisis that would lead to nuclear holocaust. It does not, however, diminish the neoliberal element of Reagan's political philosophy and that harm that causes.

power and the market, similar to von Hayek's markets and morals project.<sup>575</sup> This emphasis is perhaps best reflected in investigative journalist Claire Berlinski's *There is No Alternative: Why Margaret Thatcher Matters*, in which Berlinski highlights Thatcher's belief in "the morally redemptive power of the free market that goes well beyond standard economic claims."<sup>576</sup> In her analysis of Thatcher's work, Berlinski argues that Thatcher truly saw the free market as creating moral individuals, meaning that the actions she took as Prime Minister were done to allow for the free market to save the citizens and nation she served.<sup>577</sup> From Thatcher's perspective, human dignity is best served by allowing the free market, and therefore individual choice, to take its course.

Thatcher goes a step further with these ideas by tying them to Christian beliefs in her 1988 address to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, referred to as "The Sermon on the Mound," by Thatcher's detractors.<sup>578</sup> While the name may have originated as a political jab, "The Sermon on the Mound" has more than a little truth in reference to the content of the speech. In her speech, Thatcher argues for a connection between her politico-economic convictions and her Christian faith. The core of Thatcher's argument is expressed in the following excerpt:

...personally, I would identify three beliefs in particular: First, that from the beginning man has been endowed by God with the fundamental right to choose between good and evil. And second, that we were made in God's own image and, therefore, we are expected to use all our own power of thought and judgement in exercising that choice; and further, that if we open our hearts to God, He has promised to work within us. And third, that Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, when faced with His terrible choice and lonely vigil *chose* to lay down His

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<sup>575</sup> For a review of von Hayek's markets and morals project, see Chapters 1 and 2 above.

<sup>576</sup> Claire Berlinski, *There is No Alternative: Why Margaret Thatcher Matters* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 115.

<sup>577</sup> Berlinski, *There is No Alternative*, 115-7.

<sup>578</sup> Margaret Thatcher, "Speech to General Assembly of the Church of Scotland," Margaret Thatcher Foundation, accessed December 22, 2020, <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/107246>.

life that our sins may be forgiven. I remember very well a sermon on an Armistice Sunday when our Preacher said, “No one took away the life of Jesus, He chose to lay it down.”<sup>579</sup>

The three beliefs Thatcher offers can be reformulated into the following three premises for her argument: 1) Human beings have the fundamental right to choose between good and evil, as given by God’s gift of free will; 2) Since human beings are made in the image and likeness of God, human beings are expected to use the God-given gifts of intellect and judgment to make the choice between good and evil so that God can work through those choices; 3) Jesus made the personal choice to lay down His life and suffer His Passion. The primary concern for this chapter is the first two premises, but all three have an important point of overlap: the emphasis on personal choice.<sup>580</sup> The emphasis on the choice human beings are provided and the means by which they are able to make a choice places the onus on human freedom; this is the point at which Thatcher’s politico-economic positions intersect with her theological convictions. If our political and theological concerns focus around individual choices, and individual choices are made in the marketplace as discussed in Chapter 1, then our theological and political positions must align.<sup>581</sup> Redemptive power manifests in individual choice, and those choices are best expressed in the market. Thatcher expands on how this line of argumentation applies to her wider political positions, but they are not particularly relevant to this point. For the purposes of the project at hand, it is enough to recognize that Thatcher believes that

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<sup>579</sup> Thatcher, “Speech to the General Assembly to the Church of Scotland.”

<sup>580</sup> The third premise/belief Thatcher offers serves as another formulation of problems discussed in Chapter 3 regarding the failure to consider the salvific meaning of Jesus’s Passion in relation to Jesus’s earthly mission. For more on the connection between Jesus’s earthly mission and His Passion, see Chapter 3 above.

<sup>581</sup> The discussion on individual choices and the market are discussed at length in Section 1.1 of Chapter 1 above.

human dignity rests in the God-given freedom of choice and that it is in the marketplace that one allows God to work through her choices and salvation is made manifest.

Thatcher's statements here have an even clearer theological character than Reagan's speech discussed in the previous subsection. Her theological commitments in relation to her political philosophy regarding the market provide further evidence that a theological critique of said political philosophy is justifiable.

### 4.1.3 Setting the Limits of the Critique

To conclude this section, it is worth noting that policies at the heart of the neoliberal agenda are not as important to this aspect of the investigation as are certain political philosophical underpinnings. Ellacuría makes it quite clear that theology and philosophy cannot replace the social science of economics. In "Liberation Theology and Socio-historical Change in Latin America," Ellacuría makes this explicitly clear:

Therefore, liberation theology is not a sociology or a political science, but a specific mode of knowledge whose sources or principles are revelation, tradition, and the magisterium—at whose service certain mediations are placed. If among these mediations that of the socio-economic-historical-political sciences has a certain importance, that does not necessarily imply that it is transformed into being one of these sciences with theological language, any more than the (previous) classical preference for the mediation of philosophy necessarily made the earlier theology a form of philosophy.<sup>582</sup>

Ellacuría correctly points out that a theology's concern for a certain academic area does not make that theology inherently a master of said field, especially the social sciences.

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<sup>582</sup> Ignacio Ellacuría, "Liberation Theology and Socio-historical Change in Latin America," in *Towards A Society That Serves Its People: The Intellectual Contribution of El Salvador's Murdered Jesuits*, ed. John Hassett and Hugh Lacey (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1991), 20.

There is an entire set of knowledge and methodologies that must be fully understood to do the work of any social science. This will be evident in the necessity to engage the work of Segundo Montes to have a full grasp of the politico-economic situation in El Salvador during Ellacuría's lifetime. This is because Ellacuría's skill set simply does not include the social scientific background to make claims in regard to the relationship between the economic circumstances and the policies that influence these circumstances. These policies, however, are the realization of the political philosophies that underlie them. It is the policies that create the ideologized reality of neoliberalism. This is the core of why a theological critique is not only justifiable but necessary from the perspective of Ellacurían philosophy and theology.

The analysis and arguments in the following sections are focused on offering a critique of neoliberal political philosophical claims in light of Ellacuría's political theology grounded in Latin American Liberation Theology. It is this politico-theological vision, focused on the prophetic call for justice for the poor, specifically those oppressed by the civilizations of wealth, that offers the fullest critique of neoliberal political philosophy's theological claims.

#### **4.2 A THEOLOGICAL RESPONSE TO POLITICAL ECONOMY: A NEW POLITICAL THEOLOGY OF DISSENT**

The following section will explore Ellacuría's political theology and commentary on political economy from a theological perspective. The theology that emerges from this exploration of Ellacuría's politico-theological and politico-economic thought is one of

dissent from regnant politico-economic orders that ignore the needs of the poor in Latin America. This political theology of dissent calls for something beyond neoliberal capitalism and the reactionary Marxism present in Latin America during Ellacuría's lifetime.

Once again, it is important to note at the outset of this discussion that Ellacuría is not an economist by training, but a philosopher and theologian. As addressed briefly above, Ellacuría does not seek to replace the work of economics or any other social science. Instead, Ellacuría's goal in these works engaging questions of political economy is to provide a context for how questions of justice can be addressed in concert with the work of economists and other social scientists. Another point in Ellacuría's favor at this point is that the main economic figures with whom this dissertation engages are political economists. The works of von Hayek, Friedman, and Becker can be engaged in terms of political philosophy, which is well within the realm of Ellacuría's expertise. In setting these limits, the argument built from Ellacuría's thought will not be suspected of reaching beyond the limits of his expertise.

#### **4.2.1 Foundations of an Ellacurían Political Theology: Utopia and Propheticism**

Since the context for a theological critique of political economy has been established, the next question to be addressed is the foundation of that critique. The breadth of Ellacuría's thought allows for various points of departure, but one piece of his corpus stands out as particularly helpful in developing a critique of neoliberal political economy: "Utopia and Propheticism from Latin America: A Concrete Essay in

Historical.” This essay was the final major work Ellacuría completed before his martyrdom on November 16, 1989. In this culmination of his mature thought, Ellacuría’s philosophical rigor and theological passions come to bear on a critique of the politico-economic situation in the concrete reality of Latin America. The following subsection explores how Ellacuría articulates the tension between utopia and propheticism and presents this tension as the ideal foundation for a political theology that engages political economy.

Ellacuría begins the essay with a discussion of the necessary connection between utopia and propheticism to avoid the tendency of each to fall into an idealistic escapism without the other.<sup>583</sup> The connection between utopia and propheticism is expressed explicitly in the following sentence: “The Christian utopia can only be constructed from propheticism, and the Christian propheticism must take into account the necessity and the characteristics of the Christian utopia.”<sup>584</sup> This sentence needs to be unpacked to see the entire argument unfold. As previously mentioned, utopia has a tendency to lead into an idealistic escapism. The reason for this tendency is that utopia, when understood as a lofty ideal, is general and undefined. The historic-transcendent character of Christian utopia helps to concretize the ideal. According to Ellacuría, Christianity is historicized faith, following the history of the people of God to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth and the mission of His church to the eschaton. This understanding of Christianity forces the Christian utopia to have a historical character, which is then further concretized in the specific historico-social terms of a particular place and time in history, meaning laws, institutions, and traditions. It is only when utopia is concretized in

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<sup>583</sup> Ellacuría, “Utopia and Propheticism,” 8.

<sup>584</sup> Ellacuría, “Utopia and Propheticism,” 10.

historico-social terms, taking shape within historical reality, that it can point to the universal future with an eschatological outcome that approximates the reign of God.<sup>585</sup> It is at this point where Ellacuría's theology of the reign of God, and therefore his soteriological thought, is connected to the critique of utopia. The Christian utopia must be an approximation of the reign of God and, therefore, must be concrete. Although mindful that the fullness of God's kingdom is not coterminous with human projects, Ellacuría implicitly argues that God's promises already bear the seeds of this future in the here and now. The historicized reign of God, towards which all Christians are called to be working as participation in the mission of Jesus of Nazareth, is "rendered operational through the setting in motion of a concrete utopia."<sup>586</sup> In short, the concrete Christian utopia is necessary for the reign of God to be realized.

The reign of God serves as the connection to propheticism. Ellacuría defines propheticism as "the critical contrasting of the proclamation of the fullness of the reign of God with a specific historical situation."<sup>587</sup> In other words, propheticism is what allows one to measure the distance between the utopian ideal of the realized reign of God and the concrete reality of a particular historical moment. He continues:

Without an intense and genuine exercise of Christian propheticism, the concretion of Christian utopia cannot be arrived at theoretically, much less practically. Here, too, the law cannot replace grace, the institution cannot replace life, and established tradition cannot replace the radical newness of the Spirit.<sup>588</sup>

Christian propheticism is the necessary condition for the possibility of Christian utopia concretizing into historical reality. Following the model of propheticism described in the

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<sup>585</sup> Ellacuría, "Utopia and Propheticism," 10-11.

<sup>586</sup> Ellacuría, "Utopia and Propheticism," 10.

<sup>587</sup> Ellacuría, "Utopia and Propheticism," 11.

<sup>588</sup> Ellacuría, "Utopia and Propheticism," 11.

Hebrew Bible, Ellacuría argues propheticism is what allows one to see how much a concrete situation negates the reign of God.<sup>589</sup> The contrast between a historicized reign of God and the structures of the reign of death highlights the limitations of a situation and, more importantly, the personal, social, and structural sins that comprise the evils of a society. This contrast is how propheticism is able to discern the concrete steps that need to be taken to move closer to the historicized reign of God.<sup>590</sup>

Ellacuría's understanding of propheticism also emphasizes the significance of the struggles necessary to follow those concrete steps. Following the discussion of the limitations and evils, he writes:

In this manner, which could be called dialectical, reaching beyond the limits and evils of the present, which are historical limits, the desired future is taking shape by way of overcoming [*superación*], a future that is even more in accord with the exigencies and dynamisms of the reign. At the same time, the announced and hoped-for future—precisely something that overcomes the present—helps to overcome those limits and those evils.<sup>591</sup>

These two sentences provide great insight into Ellacuría's understanding of how propheticism sets the stage for concrete action. The emphasis on overcoming limits and evils reveals two aspects: Ellacuría expects conflict, and that conflict must be won so that

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<sup>589</sup> Ellacuría, "Utopia and Propheticism," 12. Biblical scholar John Collins also emphasizes the concrete historical situation of the people of Israel shapes the way the prophetic message is formed; the prophetic message cannot be abstracted but instead must be grounded in the concrete needs of the community. For more on this topic, see John J. Collins, *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 283-6.

<sup>590</sup> Ellacuría, "Utopia and Propheticism," 12. At this point in the text, Ellacuría also says that propheticism is able to predict the future [*predecir el futuro*] through this contrast as well, providing this way forward. This is a rhetorical flourish on the part of Ellacuría, tying back to an earlier comment about the relation of past, present, and future to historicity. Since this concept is discussed in Chapter 2 above and it does not explicitly add to the argument here, I have elected to only make a brief mention here. For the full passage in its original Spanish, see Ignacio Ellacuría, "Utopía y profetismo desde América Latina. Un ensayo concreto de soteriología histórica," in *Escritos teológicos: Tomo II* (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 2000), 238. For my analysis of historicity, see Chapter 2 above.

<sup>591</sup> Ellacuría, "Utopia and Propheticism," 12. The translators offer a footnote on the same page, providing an explanation to translate *superación* as "overcoming." As I find their reasoning sound, I choose to follow their translation.

the dynamisms of the reign can engage and shape the world.<sup>592</sup> This concept of conflict shows that Ellacuría recognizes the dangerous nature of the prophetic call for change, and that rejection is likely.<sup>593</sup> Given the reality of the murder of those engaged in prophetic action, such as Rutillo Grande, S.J., Maryknoll Sisters Muara Clarke and Ita Ford, Urusline Sister Dorothy Kazel, lay missionary Jean Donovan, numerous lay catechists, and Archbishop Óscar Romero, this conflict could very easily end with one's martyrdom, as it did for Ellacuría. Regardless of the dangers involved, propheticism is necessary to reach the Christian utopian ideal.

The concrete situation that guides Ellacuría's propheticism in El Salvador can be articulated in three areas: the dehumanizing poverty experienced by a majority of Salvadorans, the economic systems in place that perpetuate that poverty, and the unstable democratic government in El Salvador that mirrors the economic inequality.<sup>594</sup>

In terms of the dehumanizing poverty that plagues Latin America, both Ellacuría and Sobrino offer concrete data to help provide a clear picture of the situation. In his essay "The Kingdom of God and Unemployment in the Third World," Ellacuría provides data regarding unemployment.<sup>595</sup> According to Ellacuría, writing in 1982, when the unemployment numbers are not "covered up," the systemic unemployment in Latin

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<sup>592</sup> While this phrasing can sound similar to the call for violent revolution demanded by Marx's historical materialism, Ellacuría does not endorse this position. For clarification on Ellacuría's philosophical positions, see Chapter 2 above.

<sup>593</sup> This parallels the concerns in Ezekiel 2:3, where God warns Ezekiel that the prophetic message will not be received by the people of Israel, who are "impudent and stubborn." This expectation of resistance is part of the prophetic vocation to which one is called.

<sup>594</sup> This will be covered in broad strokes. There are certainly more detailed ways in which one could develop each of the overarching elements I describe here. However, given the argument in this chapter requires fewer details regarding Ellacuría's historical situation as opposed to the political theology that arises from them, this overview will suffice.

<sup>595</sup> Ignacio Ellacuría, "The Kingdom of God and Unemployment in the Third World," *Concilium: Unemployment and The Right to Work* (December 1982), 91-6.

America affects approximately half of the working population.<sup>596</sup> Sobrino, writing in 1992, describes a similar situation in his essay “The Crucified Peoples: Yahweh’s Suffering Servant Today.”<sup>597</sup> In the first section of the essay, Sobrino offers horrifying projections: by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was estimated that 170 million Latin Americans would be living in “dire poverty” and another 170 million living “in poverty critical to life.”<sup>598</sup> The difficulty with these numbers offered by Sobrino is that he offers no definition of the levels of poverty, nor any citation as to where these numbers originated. For the sake of having a clear understanding of the current situation in Latin America, the United Nations’ Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean offers more precise numbers. According to the *Social Panorama of Latin America 2019*, the number of people in poverty rose from approximately 185 million with 66 million in extreme poverty in 2018 to 191 million with 72 million in extreme poverty in 2019. When looking at these numbers, one can see that 6 million people who fell into poverty over the course of that year were sorted directly into the extreme poverty category.<sup>599</sup> Although these are not the exact same numbers Ellacuría and Sobrino were looking at, they still support their arguments. Sobrino’s continued emphasis on the same

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<sup>596</sup> Ellacuría, “The Kingdom of God and Unemployment,” 92. I will not spend much time on this topic here as it will be discussed more thoroughly in II.C below.

<sup>597</sup> Jon Sobrino, “The Crucified Peoples: Yahweh’s Suffering Servant Today,” in *The Principle of Mercy: Taking the Crucified People from the Cross* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994), 49-57.

<sup>598</sup> Sobrino, “The Crucified Peoples,” 49.

<sup>599</sup> “ECLAC: The Region Has Underestimated Inequality,” Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, 28 November, 2019, <https://www.cepal.org/en/pressreleases/eclac-region-has-underestimated-inequality>. For the entire report, see <https://www.cepal.org/es/publicaciones/44969-panorama-social-america-latina-2019>. Economists Valentin F. Lan and Hildegard Lingnau offer definitions of income poverty at \$2 USD/day and extreme or absolute income poverty at \$1.25 USD/day using the value of the USD in 2008. Accounting for inflation, those numbers would be \$2.44 USD/day and \$1.53 USD/day in 2021 dollars, respectively. For more, see Valentin F. Lan and Hildegard Lingnau, “Defining and Measuring Poverty and Inequality Post-2015,” *Journal of International Development* 27 (2015), 399-414.

themes and problems Ellacuría spoke out against makes a strong case that the same systemic problem exists.

The second issue at hand for Ellacuría is the understanding the economic structures that are the conditions for the possibility of the poverty experienced in Latin America, specifically El Salvador. The most relevant of these economic structures is the unequal distribution of land in a country whose main resource is agricultural production and the political domination that correlates with this economic domination. To do this properly, one must understand the political history that accompanies centuries of economic strife in El Salvador.<sup>600</sup>

The beginning of the economic oppression in El Salvador began with the Spanish Conquest in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, during which the discovery of cacao and indigo plants led to the development of plantations known as *haciendas*.<sup>601</sup> To find cheap labor for the *haciendas*, Spanish colonists tricked the Pipil people, the indigenous people of Cuzcatlán, into serf-like roles that bound the indigenous people to the *hacienda* by a debt they could not repay.<sup>602</sup> This serves as the first form of politico-economic oppression in what would eventually called El Salvador.

The second major event in the history of politico-economic oppression of the people comes in the third major agricultural product in El Salvador: coffee. According to Montgomery, the indigo owning families were unable to recover from the loss of demand for indigo and from the money spent during the Salvadoran independence movement and

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<sup>600</sup> This overview will be done in very broad strokes. While this history is very important, an in-depth analysis of the impact of this history upon Ellacuría and his thought would be beyond the limits of this dissertation, requiring its own dedicated research project.

<sup>601</sup> Tommie Sue Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador: From Civil Strife to Civil Peace*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995), 26-7.

<sup>602</sup> Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador*, 27-8.

the early national period.<sup>603</sup> New immigrants with the financial means to buy land that was best suited for growing coffee, marrying the daughters of the indigo oligarchy, creating a new oligarchy called the “Fourteen Families.” With the implementation of various laws and policies modeled after the economic themes of liberalism in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the poor of El Salvador were forced to work at low wages on the *haciendas*, now focused on the cultivation and production of coffee.<sup>604</sup> This situation perpetuates stark inequality between a wealthy oligarchy and a poor majority in El Salvador.

The third turning point in El Salvador’s politico-economic history aligns with the 1929 economic crash that threw the global economy into chaos. Between the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the late 1920’s, significant changes had been made in El Salvador with the rise of an ideologically diverse press, unions and renters’ associations, and a lifting of the state of siege during the presidency of Romero Bosque (1927-1931).<sup>605</sup> When the Great Depression negatively impacted the demand for coffee, and therefore the Salvadoran economy, the nation was thrown into civil unrest. This culminated in the military coup lead by General Hernández Martínez in December 1931.<sup>606</sup> The following month, Martínez suppressed a revolutionary rebellion in western El Salvador by massacring 30,000 people, including numerous members of the Pipil people. Of those 30,000 dead, less than 10% were involved in the uprising.<sup>607</sup> Martínez consolidated control of the country and began a series of uninterrupted military dictatorships that would last until the 1960’s.

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<sup>603</sup> Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador*, 29.

<sup>604</sup> Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador*, 30.

<sup>605</sup> Paul D. Almeida, *Waves of Protest: Popular Struggle in El Salvador, 1925-2005* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 37-38.

<sup>606</sup> Almeida, *Waves of Protest*, 49-51.

<sup>607</sup> Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador*, 36-7.

It is in the 1960's that the final inflection point relevant for this discussion occurred: the development of civil society with proportionately representative government.<sup>608</sup> With this change, civil associations began to reemerge as well as the establishment of new universities, including the UCA in San Salvador, pushes for unionization, and increases in the standard of living. While there were positive changes in this new form of civil society, the economic pressures upon the poor, who saw their real wages stagnate combined with an increase in landlessness, continued to rise. It is this question of land ownership that offers further insight.

Ellacuría's colleague and fellow UCA martyr Segundo Montes, who wrote extensively on the political and economic situation in El Salvador from a social sciences perspective, offers a thorough discussion of the topic in his essay, "El Salvador: Its Land, The Epicenter of the Crisis."<sup>609</sup> Enacted in 1980, the Agrarian Reform law originally intended to redistribute land, which is El Salvador's only natural resource, through private ownership requiring loan payments over the course of 30 years.<sup>610</sup> While this at first appeared to have the potential to serve as a genuine redistribution of wealth, three major problems arose. The first of these problems is that the entire law was not enacted, specifically the phase which would distribute the coffee farms.<sup>611</sup> Since coffee exports from El Salvador had the highest demands, the largest source of income stayed in the same hands. The land redistribution problem, therefore, did not have the intended effect.

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<sup>608</sup> Almiada, *Waves of Protest*, 77.

<sup>609</sup> Segundo Montes, "El Salvador: Its Land, The Epicenter of the Crisis," in *Towards A Society That Serves Its People: The Intellectual Contribution of El Salvador's Murdered Jesuits*, ed. John Hassett and Hugh Lacey (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1991), 269-82.

<sup>610</sup> Montes, "El Salvador: Its Land," 273-4.

<sup>611</sup> Montes, "El Salvador: Its Land," 274.

The second problem has to do with the fact that displaced farmers and workers from the reform bill were forced into a new kind of exploitation. University of Oxford geographer David Browning offers the following description three years after the reform:

The population so displaced from its traditional means of livelihood has been obliged to occupy a disadvantaged and dependent position within the new agrarian structure. Those employed or resident on private estates depend on exploitative conditions of wage employment, cash rentals, or *colono* or sharecropper status. For those *descampesinados* obliged to join the increasing number of migrant landless workers, currently estimated at over one-half of the rural population, dependence is in the form of a competitive search for temporary access to a plot of land for subsistence crops or temporary seasonal employment on private farms. It is this displacement of population with no compensating measures to provide for their welfare which has so adversely affected rural society and in particular the village community; an adverse effect compounded by the diversion of the wealth created by agricultural improvement away from rural areas to expenditure in urban areas or overseas.<sup>612</sup>

This situation, which compounds the devastating changes El Salvador had gone through in the decades prior, leaves the poor majority of El Salvador even poorer and without means by which to sustain themselves. By allowing the reforms to go forward on the large and small land plots, the problem of poverty became even worse.

The third and final problem created by agrarian reform is the accrual of agricultural debt. As mentioned above, the purchase of land from the government was financed through a 30-year loan, similar to mortgage payment. The issue that comes into play is the interest rate of the loans was set at 9.5%. To put this into perspective, according to the Federal Housing Finance Agency, the highest average interest rate for

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<sup>612</sup> David Browning, "Agrarian Reform in El Salvador," *Journal of Latin American Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (1983), 405. Ellacuría addresses the fallout from this issue in his reflection on unemployment, which is discussed in 4.2.3 below.

mortgages during the financial crisis of 2007-2008 was under 6.5%.<sup>613</sup> In other words, such an interest rate in itself is a significant burden. When one considers such an interest rate is applied to the total sum of the loans, which was ₡725.8 million (approximately \$82.9 million USD), the amount of money that needs to be repaid becomes astronomical.<sup>614</sup> Finally, when one considers these financial factors in light of the previously mentioned fact that these new landholders did not have access to the best export commodity, coffee, nor the knowledge and technical skills to run a productive farm, the debt becomes insurmountable relative to the potential income. This serves as the key point for our discussion of the economic situation in Ellacuría's El Salvador: the poor are consistently getting poorer, and there is no viable solution to the problem in sight.

The third and final aspect of Ellacuría's concrete situation is the question of political legitimacy that is driven by the severe economic inequality. Once again, Montes provides a helpful social-scientific view of the problem. In the essay "Is Democracy Possible in An Underdeveloped Country?" Montes offers several insights that relate to the overall argument of not only this chapter but the dissertation as a whole.<sup>615</sup> The first of these insights is drawn from an essay written by Gabriel A. González entitled "Democracia aparente, deomcracia de participación limitada o simplemente

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<sup>613</sup> "FHFA Reports Mortgage Interest Rates, April 2009," Federal Housing Finance Agency, May 28, 2009, <https://www.fhfa.gov/Media/PublicAffairs/Pages/FHFA-Reports-Mortgage-Interest-Rates-April-2009.aspx>.

<sup>614</sup> Montes, "El Salvador: Its Land," 279. It is important to note that these amounts vary depending on how many lenders to whom the loan was distributed.

<sup>615</sup> Segundo Montes, "Is Democracy Possible in An Underdeveloped Country?" in *Towards A Society That Serves Its People: The Intellectual Contribution of El Slavador's Murdered Jesuits*, ed. John Hassett and Hugh Lacey (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1991), 141-57.

democracia.”<sup>616</sup> González’s thesis, writes Montes, is that the democracy in El Salvador lacks the very essence of democracy because El Salvador’s social values are structured on power and wealth. This creates a question of legitimacy of any “democratic” election. Montes takes this thesis as a presupposition to his own investigative agenda, asking whether or not it is possible for an underdeveloped country to have democracy at all.<sup>617</sup>

In his investigation, Montes surveys a variety of political theorists on the issue. Most relevant to this project’s focus on the question of neoliberalism, Montes reviews the work of Milton Friedman, focusing on *Capitalism and Freedom*. In his short analysis, Montes highlights Friedman’s main point, which is shared by von Hayek, that economic freedom is the condition for the possibility of political freedom. While acknowledging that Friedman would not say that El Salvador is economically democratic, Montes offers a blistering critique of Friedman’s neoliberal theory. Montes writes:

The reality, however, is quite different, even in countries like the United States, where in fact everyone does not have the same opportunities for education or for accumulating the capital necessary to get ahead, or equal access to credit. Political democracy is indeed connected to economics, as Friedman recognizes, and it is deeply bound up with the hegemonic economic groups. To speak of true economic democracy and effective equality of opportunities in the developed countries is really an illusion, if not a myth.<sup>618</sup>

Montes’s engagement with Friedman offers two important insights into the neoliberal project and the Salvadoran response to it. The first insight highlights the neoliberal understanding of democracy as primarily a political apparatus that allows for the economic agents of the free market to further exercise power; in Ellacuría’s terms, this

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<sup>616</sup> My rough translation of the title is “Apparent Democracy, Democracy of Limited Participation, or Simple Democracy.”

<sup>617</sup> Montes, “Is Democracy Possible,” 141.

<sup>618</sup> Montes, “Is Democracy Possible,” 149.

would be considered an ideologization, which has been covered extensively in Chapter 2 above.<sup>619</sup> The second insight is the acknowledgment that there is a complex relationship between economics and politics with which one must contend. Political issues and economic issues can be distinct, but, as the Salvadoran context shows, they cannot be separated into tidy boxes. A meaningful conversation about politics can take place only after this complex relationship is acknowledged.

With the insights of Ellacuría, Sobrino, and Montes, the general outline of Ellacuría's concrete politico-economic situation in El Salvador is complete.<sup>620</sup> The fuller picture provided by these concrete details set the stage for a discussion of Ellacuría's critique, which is shaped by his utopian-prophetic framework. By situating himself in the concrete reality of El Salvador, Ellacuría is able to see the utopian ideal and its distance from concrete reality. It is only in the tension created by this distance that the prophetic critique can fully emerge.

#### **4.2.2 The Civilization of Wealth and the Civilization of Poverty**

After establishing the importance of the tension between utopia and prophecy, Ellacuría explains that a liberation theology that grows from this tension outlines a new human being that is “at once contemplative and active, one who transcends both leisure and business.”<sup>621</sup> This understanding of the human being embodies the necessary tension

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<sup>619</sup> For full discussion of ideologization and neoliberalism, see Chapter 2 above.

<sup>620</sup> This admittedly does not go into detail about the political turmoil of the Salvadoran Civil War. A properly thorough analysis of Ellacuría's political activity during the war can be found in Whitfield's *Paying the Price*. Any further analysis would require research beyond the scope of this dissertation, and can serve as a further research project.

<sup>621</sup> Ellacuría, “Utopia and Propheticism,” 38.

between theory and praxis, showing that by itself each is insufficient; the human person must both hear and act out the Word of God. The human person engages the Word of God by both paying attention to the concrete reality in which she is active and accomplishing what is offered as promise.<sup>622</sup> In short, the human person outlined by Ellacuría's liberation theology is one that follows the historical mission of Jesus of Nazareth, working to realize the Reign of God.

This new human person, working to realize the Reign of God in cooperation with Jesus's mission, partakes in the creation of a new earth, which implies a new economic order that follows the utopian ideal.<sup>623</sup> Reading a passage from Marx's "A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right" in light of a utopian-prophetic liberation theology, Ellacuría offers the following insight:

The utopian ideal, when it is presented historically as gradually realizable and is assumed by the mass of the people, comes to be a stronger force than the force of arms; it is at once a material and a spiritual force, present and future, hence able to overcome the material-spiritual complexity with which the course of history presents itself.<sup>624</sup>

Ellacuría's assertion emphasizes that the utopian ideal backed with the momentum of the masses can overcome any "complexity" that it may encounter. The "complexity" of which Ellacuría speaks is the ideological tension created by the friction of two discordant ideas. One example is the friction between the utopian concept of true equality for all people in the Reign of God and the construct of meritocracy prided in neoliberal capitalism. Neoliberal ideologization creates a framework in which one is told that hard work allows one to attain one's heart's desires; implicit in this claim is the assumption

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<sup>622</sup> Ellacuría, "Utopia and Propheticism," 38.

<sup>623</sup> Ellacuría, "Utopia and Propheticism," 38-9.

<sup>624</sup> Ellacuría, "Utopia and Propheticism," 39.

that those whose basic needs are not satisfied have not worked hard enough. When this kind of cultural ideologization runs up against the Gospel's message of inherent human dignity and the moral imperative to ensure basic needs are satisfied, friction, and therefore tension, is created. This tension is overcome by the momentum of the masses, as Ellacuría discusses above. In terms of economic order, the utopian ideal calls for the replacement of the current economic order, the civilization of wealth and of capital, with a civilization of poverty and of work.<sup>625</sup>

Ellacuría describes the civilization of wealth as a system that understands the foundation of society as the private accumulation of the maximum amount of capital on the part of a unit, whether it be an individual, family, corporation, or state. The private accumulation of capital grounds concepts of development, security, and consumption thought to be necessary for happiness in this society. Ellacuría notes that this underlying emphasis on the acquisition of capital is not a strictly Western phenomenon. He references state capitalism in the East, showing the civilization of wealth to transcend the western democracy/soviet communism dialectic.<sup>626</sup> While the civilization of wealth has

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<sup>625</sup> Ellacuría, "Utopia and Propheticism," 39. Sobrino offers some brief and helpful clarification here. While most of the commentators in *A Grammar of Justice* refer only to the civilization of wealth, Sobrino reinforces the link to capital. In reference to Ellacuría's "The Challenge of the Poor Majority," Sobrino claims Ellacuría understood the civilization of wealth and the civilization of capital as the same concept. While the connection to capital is important, I will use the term civilization of wealth to maintain continuity with my interlocutors. For more on Sobrino's reading, see Jon Sobrino, "Extra Pauperes Nulla Salus: A Short Utopian-Prophetic Essay," in *No Salvation Outside the Poor: Prophetic-Utopian Essays* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 35-76.

<sup>626</sup> Ellacuría, "Utopia and Propheticism," 40. It is worth noting that according to the editors of *A Grammar of Justice*, Ellacuría wrote this essay in 1989. The Berlin Wall fell on November 9, 1989, a week to the day before Ellacuría was martyred. While this may be speculation, it appears that Ellacuría thought the communism represented by the USSR would inevitably fail, leading to a spread of capitalism that would make the civilization of wealth a global standard. This spread has resulted in the phenomenon of globalization, making Ellacuría's critique relevant 30 years later.

brought about benefits for humanity that must be preserved, the evils it has brought about are more devastating and cannot be self-corrected.<sup>627</sup>

The evils brought about by the civilization of wealth fall into three primary categories: capital as the fundamental basis of development, the failure to meet basic needs, and the dehumanization of the poor. By focusing on these three categories, Ellacuría's critique of the civilization of wealth is clarified and concretized.

The first category of evils is capital as the fundamental basis of development. This category ties together the economic issues at hand with the civilization of wealth and the question of colonialization that is ever present in Latin America. In his lecture "Latin American Quincentenary: Discovery or Cover-up?" Ellacuría develops this concept in the language of the civilization of capital and the civilization of work. The following excerpt provides a very clear outline of the relationships between development and the civilization of capital:

The important thing is that the destiny of humanity not be controlled by the internal laws of capital. Because these laws, though not immoral, are amoral; and they follow a certain dynamic that pulls along everyone involved in it. We can say that capitalists do not create capital, but capital creates capitalists and pushes them to do what they are doing in the West and also in the Soviet Union. Because the defining issue is not the possession of capital in private or in collective hands. That is an important point to distinguish, but it is not the fundamental issue. Fundamentally, they are both civilizations of capital. And we all know that in its very development, capital does many things that are not only useless and deceptive to humanity but that also oblige most of humanity to live in a certain way, in a problematic way.<sup>628</sup>

The main line of argument in this excerpt can be considered in the following way: the dynamic of the amoral laws of capitalism are an engine that pulls all involved in a

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<sup>627</sup> Ellacuría, "Utopia and Propheticism," 40.

<sup>628</sup> Ignacio Ellacuría, "Latin American Quincentenary: Discovery or Cover-up?", 35.

singular direction: towards the accumulation of capital. This pull leads humanity to live in a way that is problematic, opening the door to the occasion of sin and oppression. Put concretely, the reality of capital drives a desire to accumulate it in a way that may be legal if not moral, regardless of who owns the capital.

This occasion of sin and oppression set the stage for the question of development as defined by capital. According to Ellacuría, both Western nations, particularly the United States, and Eastern nations, such as the Soviet Union, live in a way defined by capital. He argues, moreover, that the definition of a “developed” nation is formed by understanding the relationship between a nation’s culture and capital. Following this formula, the two superpowers in Ellacuría’s day, the US and the USSR, are considered the most developed nations, while a nation such as El Salvador, which has a culture not defined by capital, is less developed. In the midst of the Cold War, each superpower sought to extend its influence into other nations, leading to what Ellacuría would call the same effect: the “development” of these nations and their cultures into models of the civilization of capital that entail a problematic way of living. Ellacuría is quick to point out that the US solution offered to El Salvador’s problems is a bad solution, which is worse than the very problems it purports to address.<sup>629</sup> This is because the proposed solution does not actually solve the problems for the Salvadoran people; instead, it compounds these problems with a new problematic way of living.

One aspect of this problematic way of living is the next category of evils, the failure to meet basic needs. This is a concrete example of *el mal común* discussed in Chapter 2 above. To briefly review, *el mal común* is a systemic, structural injustice that

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<sup>629</sup> Ellacuría, “Latin American Quincentenary,” 34.

perpetrates an explicit evil which, in turn, impacts a majority of the community.<sup>630</sup> When basic necessities, such as nutritious food, clean drinking water, housing, primary education, sufficient employment, and basic healthcare, fail to be met, members of the community suffer.<sup>631</sup> A common way this occurs is through the maldistribution of vital goods, the goods by which basic needs are met.<sup>632</sup> Given the logic of the civilization of wealth, where the accumulation of the greatest amount of capital leads to the acquisition of goods, one can infer that the improper distribution of vital goods tends to involve the wealthy accumulating these goods beyond their needs, leaving the poor majorities without adequate resources of their own.

This maldistribution of vital goods has a material dimension and systemic dimension. The material dimension deals with the hoarding of material goods, such as clean drinking water discussed in chapter 2. Clean drinking water can sometimes be difficult to find in communities where there is pollution from manufacturing or another source runs unchecked, making it a scarce resource. When a resource becomes scarce, its value increases, making it likely to be acquired by those with sufficient capital to do so. The logic of the civilization of wealth implies that one who has invested capital into a commodity, in this case clean drinking water, expects to make a profit on the investment. This means that clean drinking water will be sold at a certain percentage above cost, making it difficult for those who lack financial resources to obtain sufficient amounts of water. This example clearly shows how the civilization of wealth automatically preys on

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<sup>630</sup> For my full analysis of *el mal común*, see Chapter 2 above.

<sup>631</sup> Ellacuría, "Utopia and Propheticism," 41.

<sup>632</sup> The language of the maldistribution of vital goods is not from Ellacuría but a phrase from Robert Doran's *Theology and the Dialectics of History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991). Doran's language helps to clarify the structural elements of Ellacuría's concerns with the civilization of wealth, making my argument here clearer.

those below a certain financial threshold, which happens to be a vast majority of the poor in Latin America. This dimension of the maldistribution of vital goods has a direct and clear impact on the material conditions of the poor majority by limiting their access to a basic necessity of life, entailing suffering.

The systemic dimension of the maldistribution of vital goods is highlighted by the privation of structural goods, namely primary education and sufficient employment. In a society that is set up by the civilization of wealth, there is an expectation that adult members will engage in common projects and work. This engagement requires a basic set of skills and a means of applying those skills. Primary education and sufficient employment provide both this set of skills and the means of applying them, allowing for one to be fully part of the community.

When these structural vital goods are not widely available, there is a two-fold impact. One impact is that these structural goods become scarce and are turned into commodities in the same way as the material goods described above. When education and employment become commodities, those without sufficient financial means are left with incomplete educations and jobs that do not provide enough compensation to survive, let alone fully engage in society. The second impact is that those who are deprived of primary education and sufficient employment are marginalized by society, leaving them even more isolated and open to exploitation. These examples of situational poverty become generational poverty, where the condition of parents is continued among their children and their children's children, and so on, making the inequality a persistent

problem.<sup>633</sup> Without means or the ability to break the cycle of poverty, the poor become an underclass of society, ignored by the wealthy minority and denied the basic necessities for a dignified life.

The issue of exploitation leads into the final category of evils brought upon by the civilization of wealth, namely the dehumanization of the poor.<sup>634</sup> Ellacuría says very little explicitly about the question of dehumanization in relation to the civilization of wealth, but he does offer an implicit commentary based on positive statements he makes regarding John Paul II's *Laborem Exercens*. In Ellacuría's integration of *Laborem Exercens* with the demands of liberation theology, he makes a distinction between an economic materialism and humanist materialism. This distinction has two elements germane to the question of dehumanization. First, humanist materialism recognizes the complexity of the material conditions of the human person and avoids idealistic solutions to the real problems people encounter. When read looking for insight into the economic materialism of the civilization of wealth, one can infer that economic materialism does

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<sup>633</sup> In the context of the United States, this set of circumstances was usually dismissed due to upward social mobility, the phenomenon where a person is able to enter a higher socioeconomic class than the one into which she was born through thrift and enterprise. Social mobility, however, is not as common as it once was. According to a 2019 report from The Stanford Center on Poverty and Inequality, social mobility has been on a steady decline since the 1980s, which is when the neoliberal politico-economic policies were put in place by the Reagan administration. The report also cites that millennials, individuals born between 1980-1996, are likely the first generation to experience more downward social mobility than upward social mobility. For more see Michael Hout, *State of the Union: Social Mobility* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Center on Poverty and Inequality, 2019), [https://inequality.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/Pathways\\_SOTU\\_2019\\_SocialMobility.pdf](https://inequality.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/Pathways_SOTU_2019_SocialMobility.pdf).

<sup>634</sup> Jon Sobrino, in "*Extra Pauperes Nulla Sallus: A Short Utopian-Prophetic Essay*," offers a long discussion of dehumanization in relation to contemporary issues of globalization. This essay, among others by Sobrino, will be a helpful commentary throughout this chapter and will be discussed in relation to neoliberal responses to questions of inequality. For the full essay, see Jon Sobrino, "*Extra Pauperes Nulla Sallus*," 35-76.

not take the material complexity of human reality under consideration. This in turn leads to idealistic solutions to human problems that are practically untenable.<sup>635</sup>

To provide a concrete example, take the American capitalist adage of pulling oneself up by one's bootstraps: with enough grit and fiscal self-discipline, a person is supposed to be able to work her way out of any dire socio-economic situation. This fits Ellacuría's implied description, insofar as it is idealistic and ignores the complex reality a human person experiences. To demonstrate this, let us consider the hypothetical case of Amy. If Amy works a 40 hour per week job at the 2021 federal minimum wage (\$7.25 per hour), her weekly wage, prior to tax withholdings, is \$290, or an annual gross salary of \$15,080.<sup>636</sup> As of 2021, the state of Wisconsin follows the federal minimum wage; we will therefore say Amy lives in Milwaukee. The average cost to rent a one-bedroom apartment in the Milwaukee Metro Area, excluding utilities, is \$741 per month, or \$8,892 annually.<sup>637</sup> Amy's rent alone would take up 59% of her income, leaving her with \$6,188 annually. Assuming \$60 per week for groceries, Amy would spend \$3,120 annually on food. With the state of Wisconsin's BadgerCare Plus program, a low-income health insurance program, Amy would pay \$366 annually, or \$30.50 per month, for her health care premium.<sup>638</sup> This leaves Amy with \$2,702 annually, or \$225.67 per month, to pay

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<sup>635</sup> Ellacuría, "Utopia and Propheticism," 40.

<sup>636</sup> For the sake of simplicity of this example, we will not factor in tax withholdings.

<sup>637</sup> "Neighborhood Housing: Average Rent," University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, accessed December 7, 2020, <https://uwm.edu/neighborhoodhousing/average-rent/>.

<sup>638</sup> For more information on the BadgerCare Plus program, see ForwardHealth, *Your Connection to Health Care Coverage and Nutrition Benefits*, March 2021, <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/badgercareplus/publications.htm>. For the BadgerCare Plus poverty line data required to make the calculation for Amy's premium, see <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/badgercareplus/fpl.htm>. Amy's monthly income, \$1256.67 is \$183.34 higher than the federal poverty line of \$1073.33. This difference, when multiplied by .03 as instructed in the ForwardHealth publication, is \$5.50. When one adds the base price of the BadgerCare Plus monthly premium of \$25, her monthly premium comes to the \$30.50 used in the main text.

for any utilities not covered by her rent, clothing needs, transportation costs, and other miscellaneous expenses the average adult incurs. Given that utilities and transportation costs will take up a significant portion of Amy's remaining wages, there is very little in the way of available funds to save. Amy would likely be able to avail herself of the protections of the social safety net, but this lack of self-reliance runs contrary to the ideal solution.<sup>639</sup> The proposed solution of hard work, thrift, and saving as the only necessary factors in escaping financial hardship is idealistic in a detrimental way.

The idealistic solution reduces human struggle into variables in an equation that should balance once all factors are taken into consideration. The idea that in human experienced reality it is possible for ends not to meet, even if one does everything she is supposed to do, is not recognized by such an idealistic perspective. The real problems people face include getting sick, having emergency expenses, and even losing one's employment through layoffs. These setbacks are not taken into account by the idealistic solution. By constructing an answer that ignores these very real and very basic aspects of human life in the civilization of wealth, the human experience is disregarded and the person is dehumanized; she becomes an operation among variables in the economic equation. Her struggles are viewed as irrelevant, and her concerns go unnoticed. This dehumanized person is expected to perform the operations as set forth by the equation or be considered a failure.

Sobrinho adds to this analysis by emphasizing how the idealistic solutions to the poverty of the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries further this dehumanization. He writes:

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<sup>639</sup> It is also worth noting that the neoliberal political economists who would praise this idealistic solution are the same individuals who advocated policies that would significantly weaken the social safety net described in Chapter 1. This would mean the only way, paraphrasing Thatcher, is to force people to accept the idealistic solution, regardless of its probability of success.

The first dehumanizing aspect of the attempts to eliminate poverty is the way they effectively bracket people's dignity, as if it were a matter of principle, as if one thing had nothing to do with the other. It is simply accepted that any means is good as long as it alleviates poverty. This way of thinking is not only unethical, but it is dehumanizing, for we are not talking about feeding a species of wild animal, but about nourishing human beings.<sup>640</sup>

This excerpt highlights the dehumanizing aspect of the sterile, mathematical way of “solving” the problem of poverty. Let us refer back to how the Reagan administration and the Thatcher government handled these issues as discussed in Chapter 1. Both governments attempted to solve problems related to poverty, namely inflation and the impact that has on wages and unemployment, as matters of finding the right variables to balance equations. Ellacuría and Sobrino both acknowledge that the lived historical reality of human beings is never so simple that it can be adequately reduced to such variables.

The neoliberal response, however, argues that these concerns of dehumanization are merely emotional responses to the hard facts of what must be done to ensure economic and civic well-being. The neoliberal understanding of human dignity in terms of freedom of choice is not entirely incorrect, but the application of choice in this concrete example tends, as Sobrino clearly points out, to undercut the same human dignity it tries to support. Sobrino argues that this supposed emotional response is actually a concern for ethics. When this concern for the ethical is divorced from praxis and policy, says Sobrino, there remains only cold-hearted pragmatism and a strong

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<sup>640</sup> Sobrino, “*Extra Pauperes Nulla Salus*,” 41.

potential for brutality.<sup>641</sup> In this way, Sobrino echoes Ellacuría's point that materialist economism is not ethical in its own internal dynamism and its effects.<sup>642</sup>

In addition to the recognition of the complexities of the material conditions of human reality, materialist humanism offers a second element of maintaining the human person as subject in economic relations. The second element presented in relation to materialist economism is found in the following sentence: "This materialist humanism aims to overcome materialist economism, since it would no longer be economic matter that finally determines everything else, as is the case in any type of civilization of capital and wealth, but human material complex and open, which conceives human beings as the limited but real subjects of their own history."<sup>643</sup> Under economic materialism, the human person is reduced to an object in a similar way to the idealistic solution discussed above but to different ends. At its core, economic materialism is based on instrumental thinking. With any kind of tool, it is preferable that the tool be efficient at its task, like a wrench that can provide optimal leverage to secure a bolt. In the case of economic materialism, the human being is a tool and therefore objectified. The objectified human being is in service only to the maximization of profit; she is the means to the accumulation of capital. Again, her human needs, material, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual, are irrelevant in the name of driving the economic engine forward. The economy and the wealthy few who direct its force treat each person as if she were a replaceable cog that is only useful so long as she keeps the machine running efficiently.

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<sup>641</sup> Sobrino, "*Extra Pauperes Nulla Salus*," 42.

<sup>642</sup> Ellacuría, "Utopia and Propheticism," 40.

<sup>643</sup> Ellacuría, "Utopia and Propheticism," 40.

Let us return to the example of Amy above. Pressured by the need for more income to break even, Amy is forced to take on another part-time job, working an additional 20 hours per week for the same minimum wage. This raises her pre-tax income by 50% to \$22,620. This also means Amy is working 60 hours opposed to 40 hour per week, and likely working every day of the week. These 60 hours also do not include commute time and unpaid lunch breaks during her shifts. This burdensome work schedule means that Amy likely has little time and money with which to socialize with friends, pursue hobbies, and engage in other activities that maintain a healthy sense of self. This leads Amy and others in a similar situation to internalize the dehumanizing vision of themselves held by those whose concern extends only as far as the economy remains profitable.

The three evils of the civilization of wealth described above provide a groundwork for a culture in which the production of wealth and capital are the engine of cultural progress. The change in definition of development, maldistribution of vital goods, and dehumanization of the poor show how the civilization of capital creates an unjust society that is both unethical and contrary to a salvific praxis of the reign of God. It is the role of prophetic-utopian thought, as Ellacuría highlights, to propose a better solution.

The better solution, according to Ellacuría, comes in the form of the civilization of poverty. The civilization of poverty and of work is named this way to show its contrast to the civilization of wealth and of capital, not to glorify the dehumanizing poverty that is

sin.<sup>644</sup> The significance of the civilization of poverty for this project comes in Ellacuría's following statement, quoted at the outset of this chapter: "In a world shaped by the dynamism of wealth and of capital, it is necessary to stir up a different dynamism that will overcome it salvifically."<sup>645</sup> In other words, Ellacuría understands questions of society, and by extension political economy, as ones that need to be answered on the level of salvation, among others. In part, Ellacuría means that salvation takes shape through the satisfaction of basic needs, dignity of the human person, freedom from oppression, coming together as family over an approach to humanity as merely a species, and other concrete articulations, as Sobrino says.<sup>646</sup> While Sobrino is correct on this point, a better way to express this point would be to recall Ellacuría's understanding of the task of taking charge of the weight of reality. In taking charge of the weight of reality, specifically in the move from attentiveness to ethical judgement to praxis as described in Chapter 3 above, there is a concerted effort to engage in the collaborative project of realizing the Reign of God that is, as Jesus proclaimed, at hand.<sup>647</sup> In this collaborative effort, the forms of salvation Sobrino describes are integrated into the larger soteriological and eschatological picture Ellacuría envisions.

The three major elements of the civilization of poverty relevant to our discussion of a theologically informed political economy are the primacy of the satisfaction of basic needs, the dignifying of work and the worker, and the increase in shared solidarity. Each element has a salvific quality that must be explored in order to support Ellacuría's claim

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<sup>644</sup> One way in which Ellacuría's civilization of poverty could be interpreted in a positive light is in the spiritual poverty described by the Latin American Bishops Conference document from the General Conference at Puebla in 1968, specifically PXIV: *Probeza de la Iglesia*.

<sup>645</sup> Ellacuría, "Utopia and Propheticism," 41.

<sup>646</sup> Sobrino, "*Extra Pauperes Nulla Salus*," 57.

<sup>647</sup> For more on Ellacuría's emphasis on engagement with reality, see Chapter 3 above.

of a salvific dynamism. In looking at these three elements, we will gain a clearer understanding of what Ellacuría thinks a society oriented towards salvation and justice entails.

The first element I will discuss here, the satisfaction of basic needs, serves as a counterpoint to *el mal común* of the civilization of wealth. The civilization of poverty accomplishes this, according to Ellacuría, by creating “an economic arrangement that relies on and directly and immediately addresses the satisfaction of basic needs of all humans.”<sup>648</sup> Ellacuría, however, is very open-ended in how one is to define basic needs, so as to allow for cultural and individual particularities. The unifying point is that one must look to the reality of extreme poverty to provide the framework for these basic needs. Ellacuría offers an initial list of basic needs, namely proper nutrition, clean drinking water, housing, healthcare, primary education, and sufficient employment. He also admits that this is just a starting point and the list can be expanded as needed to address a particular context.<sup>649</sup>

In the context of the contemporary United States, an important addition to this list is sufficient internet access and the skills necessary to use it.<sup>650</sup> While conversations are had about the other needs Ellacuría mentions, a discussion involving lack of internet access as a form of material poverty does not appear in theological literature as

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<sup>648</sup> Ellacuría, “Utopia and Propheticism,” 41.

<sup>649</sup> Ellacuría, “Utopia and Propheticism,” 41.

<sup>650</sup> It is worth noting another important addition to Ellacuría’s list in the context of the United States: universal healthcare. There are several arguments that conclude that given Catholic Social Teaching’s emphasis on a guarantee of adequate healthcare for all, universal healthcare in the United States is essential. For an example of this form of argumentation rooted in solidarity, see Agnus Sibley, “Health care’s ills: A Catholic diagnosis,” *The Linacre Quarterly* 83.4 (2016), 402-22.

prominently as one might expect.<sup>651</sup> This may be in part because internet access is still seen as a luxury product for consumers to use as opposed to a basic utility, like water, heat, and electricity, which are seen as fundamental services to which an individual should have easy and affordable access. In the case of a modern society, however, two elements linked to internet-based technologies are essential: substantial access and general technological literacy.

Substantial access would be defined as a reliable device with which to access the internet, a reliable network that would allow one to access the internet, and sufficient time to conduct necessary business, such as homework or job applications. Substantial access stands as an assumption for elementary and secondary education, as well as employment. For example, a *New York Times* article from February 2016 cites the case of the Ruiz family of McAllen, TX: Tony and Isabella, two middle school students, are forced to download and do their online homework on the sidewalk outside of their school, barely in range of the school's wireless hotspot, because their family is in a financial position where they cannot afford the internet access necessary to complete the work at home.<sup>652</sup> The assumption that homework can be done online outside of school at the middle school level shows that modern society is moving in a direction where a substantial internet connection is not only an extra benefit for a child's education, but a necessity. This claim is strengthened by the reality of the Covid-19 pandemic, where a substantial internet connection is needed even to attend school in the first place.

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<sup>651</sup> One notable exception is Katherine G. Schmidt, *Virtual Communion: Theology of the Internet and the Catholic Sacramental Imagination* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2020). In the first chapter, Schmidt addresses the question of access as one of the theological concerns that should be considered when reflecting on the internet and its relationship to society. For more, see 9-12.

<sup>652</sup> Cecilia Kang, "Bridging a Digital Divide That Leaves Schoolchildren Behind," *The New York Times*, February 22, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/23/technology/fcc-internet-access-school.html>.

A second example of the necessity of this substantial connection has to do with applying for jobs. According to an article on *The Huffington Post* from 2012, an applicant searching for work, regardless if it is for a substitute teaching position or a sales associate position at the Gap, needed to submit his or her application online.<sup>653</sup> In the case of Jamal Mason of the Bronx, an individual required to use public library computers to apply for jobs, this form of application posed an obstacle. He was forced to race against the clock to fill out applications to stay within his 45-minute time limit.<sup>654</sup> Given that a job application can take anywhere from 20 minutes to 90 minutes to complete, such time restraints make it extremely difficult for someone to make an effective use of his or her time while on the job market. Again, the expectation of unfettered internet access is a bias against those who may need the job most.

The education and employment examples also fit the second criterion of a general technological literacy. General technological literacy can be defined as a group of basic skills needed to effectively do business on the internet, such as access and use email, use word processing, and format pdf files. Younger students, for example, are given such online homework to start developing these skills, but a recently unemployed welder or factory worker who has not needed to use a computer in the two to three decades since entering the workforce may have trouble with these skills. Yet most jobs that pay a living wage in the US context require a knowledge of these skills, making it more difficult for traditionally skilled laborers to make a transition to the new economic situation. These issues primarily stem from the lack of substantial access, but require an effort in

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<sup>653</sup> Gerry Smith, "Without Internet, Urban Poor Fear Being Left Behind In Digital Age," *The Huffington Post*, March 1, 2012, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/03/01/internet-access-digital-age\\_n\\_1285423.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/03/01/internet-access-digital-age_n_1285423.html).

<sup>654</sup> Smith, "Without Internet."

education and training beyond that substantial access. In light of the issues discussed above, it is clear that, in the contemporary US context, substantial internet access and general technological literacy are needs that must be met as part of a dignified life. These needs ensure that human persons have the freedom to pursue a fulfilling life free from domination, which Ellacuría argues is essential to the liberative process.<sup>655</sup>

Freedom from domination serves as the foundational piece of the salvific dynamism of the satisfaction of basic needs. If one returns to Ellacuría's "On Liberation," liberation is in part a transformation of the historical.<sup>656</sup> For Ellacuría, the historical implies the preexistence of a material reality that can be changed.<sup>657</sup> Therefore, when one transforms the historical by ensuring that the basic needs of all persons are satisfied, one is engaging in the collaborative work of realizing the Reign of God.

The next aspect of the civilization of poverty that offers a counterpoint to the civilization of wealth is the dignifying and humanizing effect of work. Work, as Ellacuría writes, is intended to perfect the human person.<sup>658</sup> It is important to be clear how Ellacuría uses the term work in this context. The Spanish text uses the term *trabajo*, which is a common word for work or a job.<sup>659</sup> The concept upon which Ellacuría is reflecting, however, goes beyond the common usage of the term; work, as Ellacuría understands it, is informed by John Paul II's encyclical *Laborem Exercens*.<sup>660</sup> Specifically, Ellacuría is drawing from what John Paul II called work in the subjective

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<sup>655</sup> Ellacuría, "Utopia and Propheticism," 41.

<sup>656</sup> For more on this, see Chapter 3.

<sup>657</sup> For more on this topic, see Chapter 2.

<sup>658</sup> Ellacuría, "Utopia and Propheticism," 41.

<sup>659</sup> All references to the Spanish text are found in Ignacio Ellacuría, "Utopía y profetismo desde América Latina. Un ensayo concreto de soteriología histórica," in *Escritos teológicos*, Vol. II (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 2000), 233-94.

<sup>660</sup> John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens* (Vatican City: Liberia Editrice Vaticana, 1981).

sense. While reflecting on the connection to Genesis 1 and the divine command to “subdue the earth,” John Paul II argues the following:

Man has to subdue the earth and dominate it, because as the “image of God” he is a person, that is to say, a subjective being capable of acting in a planned and rational way, capable of deciding about himself, and with a tendency to self-realization. As a *person*, man is therefore the subject of work. As a person, he performs various actions belonging to the work process; independently of their objective content, these actions must all serve to realize his humanity, to fulfill the calling to be a person that is his by reason of his very humanity.<sup>661</sup>

The above selection shows how John Paul II places an emphasis on work as a way for the human person to become more fully human; through work in the subjective sense, one can understand and fulfill one’s vocation. It is important to note here that work must not be taken as a simple synonym for employment. One can be employed in a way that does not provide this same self-realization.<sup>662</sup> What is more important, however, is that the civilization of poverty seeks to provide all with work in this subjective sense. Work that allows for one to self-realize is inherently dignified, building a community that shares in this realization. Ellacuría frames this subjective sense of work in terms of humanization; this humanizing work is a central aspect of building the community that is the civilization of poverty.

The framework of humanizing work stands, once again, in sharp contrast to the competitive, dehumanizing work of neoliberalism. Ellacuría briefly describes work in the civilization of capital as consisting of exploitations of oneself and others rooted in

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<sup>661</sup> John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, §6.

<sup>662</sup> This can be understood in two ways. First, there are jobs that are dehumanizing in the treatment of workers, dangerous working conditions, and lack of proper compensation. Second, there are jobs that seem to have no purpose beyond than putting a person behind a desk. Anthropologist David Graeber refers to the latter type of job as “bullshit jobs,” which perform a form of spiritual violence upon the worker. For more, see David Graeber, *Bullshit Jobs: A Theory* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2018).

inequalities, which, in turn, cause domination and antagonism. These issues are caused by the dynamics of capital shaping society in a way that, as discussed above, places the accumulation of capital as the highest value. This highest value naturally breeds competition, which, as discussed at length in Chapter 1, is the sign of a healthy economy and society from the neoliberal point of view. The problem, however, is that this competition turns quite easily into an antagonism that alters the way people relate to one another.<sup>663</sup> These alterations, namely seeing other people as either enemies to be dominated or objects to be exploited, inevitably lead to one's exploitation of oneself; one is willing to sacrifice relationships and other non-commercial aspects of oneself for the sake of accumulating capital. Self-exploitation causes misery and isolation, for which the only remedy is the accumulation of more capital from the neoliberal perspective. At this point, a negative feedback loop occurs, restarting the cycle with a further desire to acquire capital. It is clear, then, if a focal point of a society is the accumulation of capital, then Ellacuría's description naturally follows.

This dynamism of capital acquisition will naturally form a very different society than one formed by the dynamisms of humanizing work and the satisfaction of basic needs. According to Ellacuría, the dynamism of the laws of capital, however, have begun to move the marginalized in the direction of creating a different society.<sup>664</sup> The key for

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<sup>663</sup> This line of reasoning is supported by Keri Day's discussion of neoliberalism. For more on Day's position, see Chapter 1 above.

<sup>664</sup> Ellacuría, "Utopia and Propheticism," 41-2. In the contemporary United States, the shift is beginning to move in the direction of questioning neoliberal capitalism, especially among younger Americans. According to a report in *The Washington Post* from April 2016, over half (51%) of survey respondents between 18-29 years of age to a Harvard University poll said they do not support capitalism. Given the stated margin of error of 2.4% and the representative study sample, this translates to anywhere between 48.6% and 53.4% of young adults in the US do not support capitalism. This makes sense as Millennials and Generation Z, who made up the 18-29 age group for the survey, were significantly impacted by the fallout of the 2007-2008 financial crisis. For more details, see Max Ehrenfreund, "A majority of millennials now

Ellacuría, however, is that movement in the direction of dynamisms of humanizing work is not enough. The community cannot simply escape the civilization of wealth and form a new society as a sign of protest. The community must engage and renew the world, transforming it “in the direction of the utopia of the new earth.”<sup>665</sup> Put another way: engaging and transforming the civilization of capital is part of the salvific task of realizing the Reign of God and participating in the mission of Jesus of Nazareth. This is what Ellacuría would understand as taking charge of the weight of reality; the collaborative effort to change the direction of history in a way that is in line with what Jesus call us to do.

The language of community leads us to the third central aspect of the civilization of poverty: shared solidarity. Ellacuría’s discussion of shared solidarity mirrors the critique of competition and antagonism discussed above, but adds a central point of “the common enjoyment of common property.”<sup>666</sup> At its core, Ellacuría understands common property as the rejection of any capitulation to the sin that drives us to consider private ownership driven by greed. He writes:

When the church’s social doctrine, following Saint Thomas, holds that private appropriation of goods is the best practical manner for their primordial common destiny to be fulfilled in an orderly way, it is making a concession to “the hardness of their hearts,” but “in the beginning it was not so.” Only because of greed and selfishness, connatural to original sin, can it be said that private ownership of property is the best guarantee of productive advancement and social order. But if “where sin abounded, grace abounded more” is to have historical verification, it is necessary to proclaim in a utopian way that a new earth with new human beings must be shaped with principles of greater altruism and solidarity.<sup>667</sup>

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reject capitalism, poll shows,” *The Washington Post*, April 26, 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2016/04/26/a-majority-of-millennials-now-reject-capitalism-poll-shows/>.

<sup>665</sup> Ellacuría, “Utopia and Propheticism,” 42.

<sup>666</sup> Ellacuría, “Utopia and Propheticism,” 42.

<sup>667</sup> Ellacuría, “Utopia and Propheticism,” 42. While the editors of the text highlight the explicit scriptural references to Mt 19:8 and Rom 5:20, there is another passage that underlies this idea. In Acts 4:32-37, the

The private accumulation of common property of which Ellacuría speaks can easily be framed in contemporary terms by considering the topic of “privatization.” It is important to note that privatization need not only be contrasted with public ownership, as in the case of a public utility, but can also in some cases be contrasted with the idea that a common resource can be shared among members of the community without involving commercial exchange.

The example Ellacuría provides is that of “the benefits of nature.” He names several natural features and discusses how they can be shared by a community for production, use, and enjoyment without any formal owner.<sup>668</sup> Consider Ellacuría’s example of the seas. One can fish for sustenance, enjoy a swim, or travel by way of seafaring vessel; none of these options require the seas to be owned by an entity, whether a private individual or a state. Ellacuría envisions entering into relationship with others in a community and with creation itself.<sup>669</sup> If a body of water were to be owned by an entity, the options for use would be severely limited due to the expectation of exchange.<sup>670</sup>

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group of believers who are with the apostles forsook private ownership for the sake of communal ownership. As verse 34 puts clearly: “There was not a needy person among them.”

<sup>668</sup> Ellacuría, “Utopia and Propheticism,” 43. This concept is difficult to fully explain in the contemporary American context because, quite simply, the vast majority of the land in the United States is owned by either an individual, a corporation, or a government, whether it be municipal, state, or federal. Even the Boston Common, the oldest public park in the United States, which had originated as common grazing fields, is technically owned by the City of Boston.

<sup>669</sup> Ellacuría’s understanding of the concept common property and its ecological dimension would be able to enter into dialogue with Pope Francis’ encyclical *Laudato ‘Si*, especially given each figure’s concern for the poor. This connection goes beyond the limits of the current project, but it is a worthwhile topic for future research.

<sup>670</sup> One way the issue of private ownership is argued is the question of responsibility. Ownership implies responsibility, which is inherently individualistic from the neoliberal perspective. Given that assumption, the possibility of a shared communal space does not make sense; a community cannot have responsibility. A person can only be expected to be responsible for themselves and not for others, or so the line of neoliberal thought argues. Following from those assumptions, the only way for a “common space” to be properly cared for is for an individual to be responsible for it; private ownership, therefore, is a necessity.

The question of common property holds another central point for Ellacuría. It is part of what makes us truly human, offering an anthropological vision for the human person as communal.<sup>671</sup> Continuing this line of thinking, Ellacuría offers the following:

If a social order were achieved in which basic needs were satisfied in a stable manner and were guaranteed, and the common sources of personal development were made possible, so that the security and the possibilities of personal development were guaranteed, the present order based on the accumulation of private capital and material wealth could be considered as a prehistoric and pre-human stage. The utopian ideal is not that all are to have much by means of private and exclusive appropriation, but that all are to have what is necessary and that the non-acquisitive and nonexclusive use and enjoyment of what is primarily common be open to all. The indispensable dynamism of personal initiative cannot be confused with the natural-original dynamism of private and privatizing initiative. Nor is excluding others as competitors to one's selfhood the only way to work for oneself or to be oneself.<sup>672</sup>

The strength behind Ellacuría's point is that the utopian ideal offers a vision of the human person that does not frame human reality solely in the context of economic terms and relations. The virtues that are rightly associated with capitalism are not exclusive to the framework of the civilization of wealth. Instead, the civilization of poverty allows these virtues too, such as personal initiative and freedom, to integrate with a communal framework. This framework, shaped by common experience and projects, builds solidarity within the community and leaves no one to suffer alone.

The preceding discussion of the civilization of wealth and the civilization of poverty reveals the fruits of the utopian-prophetic framework. The prophetic critique highlights the violence of the civilization of wealth that dehumanizes and alienates

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In other words, it is a question of philosophical and theological anthropology that drives the issue at hand; can human beings be responsible without the impetus of self-interest. The issues of anthropology and responsibility are discussed in Chapters 1 and 2 above.

<sup>671</sup> The roots of this claim can be seen in Ellacuría's adaptation of Zubiri's anthropology of the human person as reality animal to a more historically minded, praxis-oriented creature. For more, see Chapter 2 above.

<sup>672</sup> Ellacuría, "Utopia and Propheticism," 43.

members of a community from one another. The utopian ideal is sought and labored for in the civilization of poverty, which elevates the dignity of the human being and works to realize the Reign of God.

### **4.2.3 Economic Issues as Theological Problems: The Case of Unemployment**

One of Ellacuría's considerable contributions to this topic is the way in which he explicitly connects questions of economics to questions of systematic theology, namely sin, soteriology, and eschatology. In a brief article entitled "The Kingdom of God and Unemployment in the Third World," Ellacuría argues that unemployment is a theological problem and not only an economic one. This text by Ellacuría reveals that questions of economics, such as unemployment, can also be questions that concern not only theological ethics but also systematic theology.

Ellacuría begins the article by outlining the specific situation of unemployment in the Third World, citing it as a defining problem of the majority of the earth's population.<sup>673</sup> The problem of unemployment in the Third World is, according to Ellacuría, "massive and chronic and is bound up with the economic order."<sup>674</sup> Put another way, unemployment in the Third World is a systemic failure of the economic order that goes well beyond what one could consider an acceptable unemployment rate in a healthy

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<sup>673</sup> Ellacuría, "The Kingdom of God and Unemployment," 92. Ellacuría refers to unemployment in first world as a marginal problem, which follows given the significant wealth disparity between the United States and Third World nations such as El Salvador. I would argue, however, that while Ellacuría's point still stands nearly 40 years later, the situation in the United States has worsened due to policies that weaken the social safety net, as discussed in Chapter 1. Given this change, Ellacuría's argument has gained purchase in the context of the United States.

<sup>674</sup> Ellacuría, "The Kingdom of God and Unemployment," 92.

economy.<sup>675</sup> It is a feature of the system, not a fluke that will be corrected by the nature of the business cycle. This problem, Ellacuría points out, is due to the unequal footing between trade partners on the global scale, which leaves Third World nations at the mercy of first world nations, whose only concern is their own profitability and benefit. The first world can make economic demands of the Third World without concern for backlash, and the Third World suffers for it.<sup>676</sup>

Complementing the systemic problem is the lack of widespread relief in the form of a social safety net. According to Ellacuría, only 5% of workers in El Salvador are qualified for social security, leaving the vast majority of the population without any assistance to mitigate the effects of their poverty.<sup>677</sup> It is clear, therefore, that both the state and the economy have failed the majority of the population.

Continuing this train of thought, Ellacuría highlights two groups who are disproportionately impacted by unemployment: people in rural communities and families with dependents, specifically children and young adults. While those in the former category could live with few resources, unemployment leads to mass migrations to cities.<sup>678</sup> This increases the number of people in a given city looking for work, putting pressure on the city's infrastructure to support the larger population with no new source of income via taxes to balance the costs. Such pressure can lead to food shortages and other basic needs going unmet.

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<sup>675</sup> As stated in Chapter 1, a good unemployment rate is generally seen as any number below 5%. As Ellacuría mentions, the United States had an unemployment rate of 10% in 1982, which was the highest unemployment rate since World War II. The situation in the United States in 1982 is not, however, a sign of the systemic imbalance as seen in Third World countries during Ellacuría's lifetime. These numbers also do not reflect the problem of underemployment, which complicates the picture greatly.

<sup>676</sup> Ellacuría, "The Kingdom of God and Unemployment," 92.

<sup>677</sup> Ellacuría, "The Kingdom of God and Unemployment," 92.

<sup>678</sup> Ellacuría, "The Kingdom of God and Unemployment," 92.

The greater impact, however, falls on children and young adults. When the adults in a family are not able to find sufficient work, it falls to the children and young adults in the family to go find work to help make ends meet. To fulfill this task, these children and young adults are expected to drop out of school to work, placing them in a precarious position.<sup>679</sup> Without even a basic education, the opportunities for future employment shrink dramatically, depriving these young women and men of one of the basic necessities discussed above. To make Ellacuría's point concisely, unemployment in the Third World is a constant because it consistently creates situations that force people to forgo the tools to escape poverty so that they can survive. Unemployment leads to generational poverty and a cycle that becomes nearly impossible to escape.

When considering the problem of unemployment in a theological light, Ellacuría places it in the context of the sin of the world. Using language mirroring the *Agnus Dei*, the sin of the world is the sin that Jesus came to take away. The sin of the world is described by Ellacuría in the following way:

The sin of the world is the reality of this world and the people in it in negation and opposition to what God wanted of it when he created it and what he sought for it in the proclamation of the kingdom of God through the mouth of Jesus. A reality which profoundly and universally affects the majority of people in the world and its large-scale ordering, and which is moreover the negation of God among men, can very well be described as the sin of the world.<sup>680</sup>

The central point for Ellacuría is that the sin of the world deals explicitly with the negation of God in reality. From the description given by Ellacuría, the reality created by exploitative economic circumstances is an example of the sin of the world. This fits with

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<sup>679</sup> Ellacuría, "The Kingdom of God and Unemployment," 92.

<sup>680</sup> Ellacuría, "The Kingdom of God and Unemployment," 93. While Ellacuría does not use the language of sin of the world in "Utopia and Propheticism," this concept is a common thread through his theological critique of political economy, as will be discussed below.

Ellacuría's understanding of Jesus's earthly mission, which seeks to realize the Kingdom of God and in turn, "takes away the sin of the world."<sup>681</sup>

Ellacuría's proposed solution in this 1982 essay is an early formulation of the civilization of poverty, focusing on its relationship to unemployment:

Unemployment would not be debasing, if there was a new structuring of society, in which value was set not only or principally upon work called productive but also upon creative work for society. We do not need to return to the Greek world in which those who worked with their hands, or to the medieval world where contemplation and artistic work were regarded as superior to manual work or to incipient commercial work. We need to seek a new balance in which people are not subjected to economic laws but economic laws are subject to people.<sup>682</sup>

This emphasis on the dignity of all work emphasizes that employment is not what endows one with value; rather, it is the person doing work of any kind that endows work with value.<sup>683</sup> The utopian ideal expressed here shows that the civilization of poverty is meant to address the concrete problems identified by the prophetic critique.

In the above section, it has been demonstrated that the civilization of poverty, formulated through the utopian-prophetic critique of the civilization of wealth, is capable of handling the concrete problem of unemployment, a problem important both to Ellacuría and the contemporary North American context. This in turn shows Ellacuría's systematic theology can articulate and address these problems in a way that is not confined to theological ethics. Moving forward, this framework must be applied to the contemporary neoliberal context.

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<sup>681</sup> For more on Jesus's earthly mission and its importance to His salvific work, see Chapter 3 above.

<sup>682</sup> Ellacuría, "The Kingdom of God and Unemployment," 96.

<sup>683</sup> The reading of this text shows an influence of *Laborem Exercens*, which was published a year earlier. While I can offer only speculation, but this shows that the encyclical was a significant point of intellectual for Ellacuría. As it goes beyond the scope of this dissertation, this line of investigation is best reserved for another research project.

#### 4.2.4 A Political Theology of Dissent

Now that we have established the utopian-prophetic concept of the civilization of poverty and its elements that stand in opposition to the civilization of wealth, the next question is what do these concepts look like when realized. This subsection focuses on the outline for a political theology of dissent based on Ellacuría's framework described in the essays described above. Based on Ellacuría's arguments, the underlying critique of the civilization of wealth casts doubt on the value of the contemporary political spectrum for the goal of establishing a more just social order, of which a concrete example is the alleviation of poverty. This is shown in Ellacuría's critique of both capitalist and socialist systems in Latin American, seeing both as inadequate as they stand in his context. Based on Ellacuría's points, I argue for another option: a political theology of dissent, which eschews the traditional spectrum for the sake of prioritizing the praxis that address the concrete reality of poverty.

The starting point to this idea is in Ellacuría's comment that societies in both the East and West are civilizations of wealth and of capital. The only difference between the two is a matter of whether that capital is controlled by private individuals or the state.<sup>684</sup> The implication is that, from Ellacuría's perspective, the contemporary political spectrum oscillating between capitalism and communism is insufficient to address the problems created by the exploitative nature of the civilization of wealth. This insufficiency leads to one of Ellacuría's outright rejection of a third way.<sup>685</sup>

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<sup>684</sup> Ellacuría, "Utopia and Propheticism," 40.

<sup>685</sup> Ellacuría, "Utopia and Propheticism," 48.

Instead, Ellacuría offers “the *new political order*, prophetically sketched within the utopian horizon, is based on the attempt to overcome the political models that are the result and at the same time the support of both liberal capitalism and Marxist collectivism.”<sup>686</sup> One way to expand upon Ellacuría’s thought in this sentence is to see it as the foundation of a political theology of dissent that is the synthesis of the prophetic and the utopian. It is a dissent that rejects the conventional bilateral politico-economic spectrum because it cannot withstand the prophetic critique: neither system adequately provides a preferential option to the poor. This dissent is utopian in its rejection of the current structures because a better way can be imagined. This better way is not the centrism between two extremes, but a rejection that calls for a revolution within the structure of values within the political reality one inhabits.

Ellacuría’s understanding of revolution in this context is not a new presentation of the Marxist revolution resulting from class struggle. He describes the framework of revolution in the following way:

The revolution that is needed, the necessary revolution, will be the one that intends freedom deriving from and leading to justice and justices deriving and leading to freedom. This freedom must come out of liberation and not merely out of liberalization—whether economic or political liberalization—in order to overcome in this way the dominant “common evil” and build a “common good,” a common good understood in contrast to the common evil and sought from a preferential option for the vast majority of people.<sup>687</sup>

In this short discussion of revolution, there is no mention of class struggle or class in general. While Ellacuría does describe the revolution as anti-capitalist and anti-

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<sup>686</sup> Ellacuría, “Utopia and Propheticism,” 47-8.

<sup>687</sup> Ellacuría, “Utopia and Propheticism,” 49.

imperialist, it does not imply the same revolution called for in Marx's work.<sup>688</sup> The key difference is that Ellacuría's understanding of revolution, while having materialist implications, does not focus on seizing the means of production. Ellacuría's revolution comes instead from his understanding of historical soteriology and the need to continue the work of realizing the Reign of God.<sup>689</sup> The concern is focused on overcoming the common evil in whatever form it takes, making the revolution about a fundamental change to reality as opposed to a redistribution of goods. In this establishment of the common good, Ellacuría draws on the tradition of Catholic Social Thought in a way that pushes the tradition forward using the demands of liberation theology situated in the concrete historical reality of Latin America. This revolution is one of shifting the dynamic structures of reality in a way that is oriented for the good of the many and not only for the benefit of the few. The shift of these dynamic structures is not merely a question of who controls the factories; rather, it involves ensure the factories provide good for all who need them without robbing them of their inherent human dignity.

An example of how this can come about is in the form of Ellacuría's understanding of the university. The role of the university is to provide education, and in the Christian university, education takes shape as formation. This formation, in Ellacuría's eyes, must emphasize the necessity to struggle against structural sin. On this topic, Ellacuría writes:

This is not a matter of intentions but of verifiable deeds. If in its activity the university does not proceed by starting from our actual world as institutional sin,

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<sup>688</sup> Ellacuría, "Utopia and Propheticism," 49.

<sup>689</sup> This is particularly fitting given the subtitle for Ellacuría's essay is a "concrete essay in historical soteriology." For a detailed discussion of the structure of historical soteriology, see Chapter 3 above.

it is ignoring the real foundation for salvation history; if it does not struggle against structural evil, it is not in tune with the gospel.<sup>690</sup>

The university, according to Ellacuría, must work against the institutional sin that structures the world in which we live. This is done by faculty engaging in research that combats the ideologization created by institutional sin and forming of their students to recognize and resist the sinful structures they will undoubtedly encounter in their careers and lives outside the classroom. It is through this kind of formation that the possibility of truly just economic relations grounded in respect of human dignity can arise.

In the above selection of text, Ellacuría also provides a rebuke of neoliberal logic that the opening of free markets and the liberal democracies that support them will remedy the social, political, and economic ills of a community. By placing the emphasis on justice as the ground from which freedom grows, Ellacuría argues that freedom without justice is insufficient to remedy the common evil experienced by the vast majority of the Third World, which makes up 75% of the world's population.<sup>691</sup> As discussed in the chapters above, the neoliberal understanding of justice is found in the marketplace; whatever result the market can bear is found to be just as it comes from the free agreement of two autonomous parties. In deriving justice from freedom, the neoliberal position ignores the antagonism and potential for manipulation such an ambiguous understanding of freedom provides. It is necessary, then, that freedom must be derived from justice, allowing for a truly equal footing for members of the community

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<sup>690</sup> Ignacio Ellacuría, "Is A Different Kind of University Possible?" in ed. John Hassett & Hugh Lacey, *Towards a Society That Serves its People: The Intellectual Contribution of El Salvador's Murdered Jesuits* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1991), 207. For more on Ellacuría's understanding of the university, see Ignacio Ellacuría, *Escritos universitarios* (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 1999).

<sup>691</sup> Ellacuría provides this statistic in "Unemployment in the Third World," 92: "If we remember that this phenomenon is massive in the Third World and that the Third World represents easily three-quarters of humanity, radical conclusions follow."

to engage one another. In this paradigm, the common evil can be addressed from the starting point of the common good.

The centrality of the common good as a response to and healing of the common evil, an aspect of the salvific dynamism for which Ellacuría called, is built upon two concepts already discussed above: the satisfaction of basic needs and the dignifying of human work. If a community operates without concern for lacking basic necessities, then the relationships within that community form in a different kind of way. This is not to say that people would not try to take advantage of the situation; the reality of sin will always be a part of the human experience. The lack of scarcity, however, would allow the bonds of community to form under the pretense of cooperation that raises the standard of living for the whole community. It allows for a new way to be human: one grounded in friendship and care for one another. This foundation would allow for the community to overcome an attempt to shift to a dynamic of dominance, or at the very least resist such a shift.

Returning to the concept of scarcity, the satisfaction of basic needs serves as a point of dissent from the capitalist economic model of decisions made under scarcity.<sup>692</sup> It refuses to accept scarcity as the foundational concept of reality that the ideologization of neoliberal capitalism offers. While scarcity is possible, it is not the starting point for all goods, especially the basic necessities of a community.

This leads to the point of dignified work. In dignifying human work, showing that every role in the community matters, the relationships are not formed in the context of

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<sup>692</sup> This position derived from the definition offered by economists Paul Samuelson and William Nordhaus: “Economics is the study of how societies use scarce resources to produce valuable goods and services and distribute them among different individuals.” For more, see Paul A. Samuelson and William D. Nordhaus, *Economics*, 19<sup>th</sup> ed., (Boston: McGraw-Hill Irwin, 2010), 4-5.

adversity or competition. Instead, the bonds are grounded in cooperation, recognizing that everyone does work that has a positive impact on the community, whether it be growing food, repairing machines, educating the community, or keeping the community buildings sanitary. All work is valuable because human beings do the work. No contribution to the community is greater or less than another. This position dissents from the assumed hierarchies of wages that place greater value, and therefore greater compensation, on certain professions while leaving the less desirable positions with wages so low it is impossible to survive on them, as shown above.

When both of these points of dissention are put together, we find that it is a rejection of an assumption within the neoliberal logic that permeates the capitalist form of the civilization of wealth: dehumanizing poverty is a natural part of society and, while unfortunate, it cannot be fixed. The political theology of dissent makes the prophetic call that this assumption is blatantly false. There is enough resources to ensure people are not put in such dehumanizing positions, allowing for their human dignity to be respected. While some level of economic inequality will exist given the reality of sin, the dehumanizing poverty brought about by the civilization of wealth is not necessary. The impacts of poverty can be mitigated, allowing for all persons to have their basic needs satisfied and their work be humanizing.

The political theology of dissent offers a formulation of Ellacuría's utopian-prophetic critique directed at the contemporary political spectrum between poles of capitalism and socialism. Relying upon the framework of the civilization of wealth and the civilization of poverty, a political theology of dissent rejects the underlying assumption of the necessity of dehumanizing poverty. By way of this rejection, it

becomes clear that a new understanding of political economy is required to properly address the situation of dehumanizing poverty created by neoliberal systems.

### **4.3 TOWARDS A POLITICAL ECONOMY OF DISCERNMENT**

One question that arises from this investigation lingers: how should decisions about economic policy be made? It is clear that neoliberal ideology is inherently biased against the poor and marginalized communities, profiting off their exploitation. On the other hand, the concrete reality of globalized capitalist markets prevents one from building a purely socialist economic system that is a wholesale rejection of capitalism. The “middle path” between neoliberal capitalism and socialism is unsustainable as well. Political leaders on either side of the spectrum will inevitably lead to conflict over how heavily the middle skews to one side or the other, creating instability in the body politic that puts the poor at further risk.

Another complication comes from the limits of theology. As discussed at length above, Ellacuría clearly states that theology cannot take the place of social science; one’s mastery of theology does not necessarily imply expertise in other fields. Theology can, however, help to develop and clarify the values that guide political economy. Borrowing from Ellacuría’s own Ignatian tradition, I propose a political economy of discernment as a feasible alternative to neoliberal political economy.

The framework of a political economy of discernment can be broken down into a few separate categories: 1) who is involved, 2) what is the fundamental goal of political economy, 3) what methods of investigation are to be used, and 4) how to best implement

insights from the data to achieve the fundamental goal. By its very nature, this framework will not be able to explore the fine details of how precisely every category will work. To do so would defeat the purpose given the limits of theology. The framework must be flexible as to allow for the expertise of other disciplines to help shape it. It must, on the other hand, maintain the democratic and collaborative elements that animate the project. The following section will explore the aforementioned four categories to highlight how concepts from Ellacuría's liberation theology can help form and inform a political economy that is at the service of the poor and marginalized.<sup>693</sup>

### **4.3.1 Involvement of the Community**

The first point to address is who should be involved in the decision-making process regarding the economy. When reflecting on the current situation, two problems that come to mind: 1) what defines "the economy," and 2) who should be making decisions about the economy. As discussed in various sections above, part of the problem is that in the United States, it is widely assumed that the "economy" is primarily represented by the profits made in the trading on the various stock exchanges. This assumption is incorrect, as shown by the stock market's significant gains in 2020 all the while Covid-19 ravaged the United States, costing jobs, homes, and, most importantly,

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<sup>693</sup> It should be noted at the outset that this is a general framework. The concrete details of logistics and the practical necessities have not been fully thought out or addressed. The goal here is to contribute in a way that speaks to the theological priorities that have been established throughout this chapter and the two preceding chapters.

lives.<sup>694</sup> When one holds this assumption, however, one can easily make the inference that the people who should be making the decisions are the actors in the market, trusting that their decisions will benefit everyone, following neoliberal theory. If, however, one accepts the premise that the economy goes beyond Wall Street, one's perspective on the question of who should be making decisions changes significantly.<sup>695</sup> When one considers the factors of employment, necessities, common projects, and the overall quality of life as considerations for how the economy functions, one's opinion of who should be involved in making those decisions changes significantly.

When addressing the question of who should be involved in this process of discernment that leads to decision-making, a few points from Ellacuría can help set some basic parameters. The first is that this process cannot create what Ellacuría would call a new kind of elitism. In "The Church of the Poor, Historical Sacrament of Liberation," Ellacuría warns against the church of the poor becoming an elitism that rejects those who are imperfect, betraying its mission to be a church that "closes its doors to no one."<sup>696</sup> An analogy can be drawn to the needs of this community of discernment; no one, not even those on Wall Street, can be excluded. What must be the case, therefore, is that this community of discernment is open to all.

Perhaps the most important people to ensure are included in this process are the poor and marginalized. In traditional economic policy debate, whether it be on the

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<sup>694</sup> Hamza Shaban and Heather Long, "The stock market is ending 2020 at record highs, even as the virus surges and millions go hungry," *The Washington Post*, December 31, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2020/12/31/stock-market-record-2020/>.

<sup>695</sup> One such example is Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, who was quoted in *The Washington Post* saying, "The stock market isn't the economy. The economy is production and jobs, and there are shortfalls in every sector." For more, see Heather Boushey, "The stock market is detached from economic reality. A reckoning is coming," *The Washington Post*, September 9, 2020, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/stock-market-unemployment-disconnect/2020/09/09/087374ca-f306-11ea-bc45-e5d48ab44b9f\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/stock-market-unemployment-disconnect/2020/09/09/087374ca-f306-11ea-bc45-e5d48ab44b9f_story.html).

<sup>696</sup> Ellacuría, "The Church of the Poor," 250.

national, state, or local level, the impoverished members of the community never seem to have the opportunity to advocate for themselves. In contrast, this discernment process must include the poor and marginalized *advocating for themselves*. This is not meant to cheapen or discredit those who work on behalf of the poor; such work is important. It would be better, however, if the impoverished and marginalized members of the community had the ability to make their own voices truly heard. By allowing these members of the community to speak with their own voices and articulate their needs as they see them, a certain amount of agency is restored. This reclamation of agency can begin to heal the damage done by pushing these individuals to the margins of society and dehumanized due to their economic status.

#### **4.3.2 The Goal of Political Economy**

The second element of the political economy of discernment that must be considered is the goal of a political economy. This is both a simple and an extremely complicated question to answer. On the side of simplicity, the goal of the economy should be to raise the standard of living of everyone in the community. Returning to “Utopia and Propheticism,” Ellacuría is explicit in his point that the civilization of poverty is dedicated to three things: the satisfaction of basic needs, the dignity of work, and the realization of a human person perfected by means of that dignified work.<sup>697</sup> When one considers these three aspects of the civilization of poverty, perhaps the most concrete way to articulate the goal of a political economy that follows the model of the civilization

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<sup>697</sup> Ellacuría, “Utopia and Propheticism,” 41.

of poverty is to say that it seeks to raise the standard of living for everyone. If the teleology of a political economy is to ensure the entire community can live a dignified life, then the economy must subordinate to human beings and not the converse.<sup>698</sup>

This simple principle is complicated quickly by the concrete situations to which the principle must be applied. Is there set definition of what the dignified standard of living is, or does each community need to define that for itself? Would the application of a universal standard serve as another form of imperialism, which Ellacuría would be very quick to denounce, or are there universal points of interest, such as clean drinking water, nutritious food, and medical care, that can serve as starting points that each community can then build upon based on social component of the formality reality of history that shapes cultural traditions? To put it succinctly, there are many questions that require sufficient answers.

These questions can be answered within the framework of communal discernment. If the community is properly represented, the persons who engage in the deliberative process are able to approximate and balance the needs of the community. With that balance met, communal discernment can begin in earnest. Ellacuría describes the process of discernment in his “A Latin American Reading of the *Spiritual Exercises* of Saint Ignatius” in the following way:

The entire theme of discernment of spirits is also essential for a historical method, above all as a prerequisite for encountering the true Christian praxis, not only by virtue of what is discerned, but because this discernment ought to discover in historical reality the way of following the historical Jesus, this following being the essential key to theology and to Christian praxis in Latin America.<sup>699</sup>

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<sup>698</sup> Ellacuría, “Utopia and Propheticism,” 43.

<sup>699</sup> Ignacio Ellacuría, “A Latin American Reading of the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius,” *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality*, Vol. 10 No. 2 (Fall 2010), 209-10.

The application of this line of reasoning to discernment within the context of a political economy begins with the premise, as discussed above, that the economy must be designed to meet the needs of human beings and not vice versa. The theological orientation that has been added to the framework, namely that we operate with the context of the realizing the Reign of God, meaning we are called to participate in Christ's saving work in our acts of solidarity. Christian praxis, then is following the work of this historical Jesus, which was to lift up the poor, marginalized, and forgotten to be on equal footing as the rest of society, recognizing their inherent dignity as people created in the image and likeness of God.<sup>700</sup> It is necessary, therefore, that a discernment in the context of political economy must ultimately seek to raise the standard of living for everyone. This firmly establishes the goal of political economy towards which the discernment should take direction.

### **4.3.3 The Question of Methods**

The question of methodology is the aspect of this framework that must be left be left unanswered by the theologian. Following Ellacuría's line of reasoning discussed above, the liberation theologian, regardless of her interest in the social sciences, is not a social scientist. The questions of method for each field differ drastically, and the expertise of those trained in those fields must be respected. The goal must be

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<sup>700</sup> It is important to note that Ellacuría is not using the phrase "historical Jesus" in the same way as New Testament scholars undertaking historical-critical research. Instead, Ellacuría is using the phrase to discuss the historical reality of Jesus of Nazareth and his prophetic mission. For further explanation, see Ellacuría, *Freedom Mad Flesh*, 23-7.

collaborative, respecting the limits of one's expertise but still offering assistance in asking questions and aiding in the analysis of data.<sup>701</sup>

While the theologian does not have the standing to challenge empirical methods of social scientists such as economists, the theologian's skill set does enable her to ask questions regarding presumptions in how one interprets the data. This can serve as a check against assumptions that could impact how the goal of the economy is met. For example, if a community's economists are of a school of thought that is influenced by neoliberal presuppositions, such as an opposition to regulation of business that could endanger members of the community, it would be within the theologian's purview to question those assumptions in light of the economy's stated goal. The emphasis here must be in recognizing the difference between questions of method, which must be addressed by those who have expertise in the field, and questions of underlying assumptions. It is only by asking the latter kind of questions and empowering others to do the same that a theologian can contribute positively in this aspect of the discernment process.

#### 4.3.4 Insights and Implications

The final category of this framework of a political theology of discernment is the discussion of insights gained from the social scientific research and how to implement them into policy. I am intentionally leaving the term "policy" vague, as opposed to clearly defining fiscal, monetary, or social policy. This allows for the maximum amount

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<sup>701</sup> The form of cooperation discussed here is, in part, what Bernard Lonergan envisioned for theology in the context of modern science. For a full discussion of these ideas see Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology: Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan, Vol. 14*, ed. Robert M. Doran, S.J., and John D. Dadosky (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017), 341-78. This appendix, "The New Context," is an early version of Chapter 1 of *Method in Theology*, which offers a clear articulation on this point.

of flexibility within the process of communal discernment to act. Once again, however, this is a point where the planning and execution of discerned policies is placed in the hands of experts in law and legislative procedure. As stated above, the theologian is not an expert in public policy and must allow those with the appropriate expertise to do their assigned task. This ensures that the minutiae that goes into the language of a drafted bill do not end up interfering with other laws that could severely impede, if not prevent, the intended effect of a particular policy.

That said, the onus is on the theologian and other members of the community to serve as a check that the implemented policy is having the intended effect. While other members of the community may not have the level of technical expertise to write legislation, they are able to tell if the policies are having their intended results. If the community begins to suffer in an unexpected way after the new policy goes into effect, then members of the community are well within appropriate bounds to vocalize this suffering and begin the discernment process once more. This final line of democratic and communal control is essential to prevent a cycle of damaging policies from starting anew.

The key to making this model of the political economy of discernment work is striking the balance between allowing technical knowledge to perform necessary tasks and ensuring the members of the community are given a substantial role in the development and maintenance of the economy that goes beyond platitudes. One cannot replace the expertise developed through education, practice, and experience, but one can allow for such expertise to be complemented by the lived reality of those who feel the impact of economic policy the most.

In the above chapter, Ellacuría's political theology, focusing on the utopian-prophetic critique developed in the concepts of the civilization of wealth and the civilization of poverty, is explored in relation to the neoliberal political economy. Through this critique, a political theology of dissent, rejecting the contemporary political spectrum, offers the critique of the assumption of the necessity of dehumanizing poverty. The critique emphasizes that dehumanizing poverty goes beyond economic inequality and becomes an expression of the common evil. The healing of this evil, rooted in the common good, can begin in working through a framework of political economy shaped by Ignatian discernment, which offers a method in line with the priorities of the civilization of poverty. This line of argumentation offers an orientation for a political economy that restores and values humanity and dignifies all forms of work.

## 5.0 ALONG WITH LOVE COMES HOPE: A WAY FORWARD

*To be really new, the new human beings  
must be persons of hope and of joy in the  
building of a more just world. They are  
not moved by despair but by hope, because  
despair tends toward suicide and death,  
and hope tends to life and to giving.  
~Ellacuría, "Utopia and Propheticism"*

The previous three chapters have outlined an Ellacurían critique of the three articulations of neoliberalism, namely as a problematic philosophical framework, a false soteriology, and a deadly form of political economy. At this point, the conversation moves beyond Ellacuría's work alone and enters into dialogue with other theological critics of neoliberalism.<sup>702</sup> Recognizing that Ellacuría's work has more points of contact with some interlocutors than others, I will spend the most time engaging with the positions of Keri Day and Kathryn Tanner as these two theologians offer the most fruitful areas of overlap with the critiques developed from Ellacuría's thought. Through these engagements with other theological interlocutors, it becomes clear that Ellacuría's contribution to this conversation is not only beneficial but also distinctive.

The argument of the chapter will proceed in the following way: first, I will offer a streamlined version of the Ellacurían critique developed in Chapters 2, 3, and 4 for ease

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<sup>702</sup> While Ellacuría's philosophical work has a significant role to play in this critique, I choose to focus solely on theological interlocutors for two main reasons. First, this project as a whole is primarily a theological project, and this side of Ellacuría's thought must take precedence in this light. Second, I provide some discussion of Ellacuría in dialogue with philosophical interlocutors in Chapter 2 above.

of reference. Second, I will consider six theological critics of neoliberalism in relation to their historical contexts in order to clarify where they stand in relation to Ellacuría. Finally, I will put each thinker into dialogue with Ellacuría's thought, showing how Ellacuría's distinctive voice engages each project.

## 5.1 THE ELLACURIÁN CRITIQUE

The Ellacurían critique of neoliberalism, which culminates in the political theology of dissent, begins with a set of philosophical debates, discussed in depth in Chapter 2. The philosophically-oriented aspect of the Ellacurían critique engages with neoliberalism as an object of theoretical analysis, and in this way mirrors the work of both neo-Marxist and Foucauldian thinkers. Ellacuría's philosophical insights into the concepts of ideologization and historical reality help develop a distinctive critique of neoliberalism as a philosophical system that corrupts one's ability to engage with reality.

The first aspect of Ellacuría's philosophical critique names neoliberalism as an ideologization. He defines ideologization pejoratively as an ideology that warps reality to fit a particular message and distinguishes it from a more neutral or positive sense of ideology as a perspective that provides context for the experience of reality. The most significant impact of neoliberalism's ideologization is on the way the human person is understood: as an economic unit. Such neoliberal reductionism of the meaning of human existence is not the first variation of turning human lives into commodities, but it is unique in its reframing of human nature. In the neoliberal framework, the human person

is a firm operating in the market and expected to seek profit maximization as the primary goal.

Building on this ideologization, neoliberalism alters the perception of how human beings interact with reality. Ellacuría places an emphasis on historical reality, which is rooted in the concrete, lived experience of the human person. Neoliberalism, on the other hand, focuses on abstract concepts of the human being as a firm in the marketplace. This neoliberal focus on the abstract fundamentally shifts the goal of one's praxis away from the concrete and allows for concrete problems to appear and be ignored. Ellacuría argues that such neoliberal ignorance of concrete problems leads to *el mal común* and the suffering of innocents while all eyes are watching the transactions within the market.

Finally, the set of philosophical positions developed under a neoliberal framework, drawn from readings of von Hayek and his interpreters, is untenable in terms of its epistemology, metaphysics, socio-historical anthropology, fundamental ethics, and natural theology. Ellacuría's epistemology, rooted in the critique of ideologization, anchors itself in a historical reality that runs counter to the neoliberal theory of knowledge, which hinges on a form of ahistorical internal coherence (the "logic" of the market). Building on the epistemological differences, Ellacuría's metaphysics answers the demands of historical reality and thereby rejects the constellation of metaphysical positions that create the neoliberal ideologized deformation of reality, which reduces it to the transactional demands of an ahistorical market. Ellacuría's liberative understanding of freedom that allows for a non-reductive understanding of the human person overcomes the neoliberal position of economic freedom as the condition of the possibility of human freedom. Ellacuría's fundamental ethics, focused on promoting the common good and

healing the common evil, opposes the neoliberal fundamental ethics of individualism, competition, and profitability. Finally, Ellacuría's openness to transcendence by way of teleology stands in stark contrast to the neoliberal project's lack of a point of resolution (while also distinguishing his approach from that of the more secular neo-Marxist and Foucauldian theorists). Ellacuría's philosophical positions on these topics, in conjunction with those of the neo-Marxist and Foucauldian traditions, show that the neoliberal positions are unable to stand under the weight of serious philosophical critique.

The next aspect of the tripartite critique, as discussed in Chapter 3, is rooted in Ellacuría's Christian soteriological thought, which emphasizes how salvation manifests in the dynamism of historical reality. For Ellacuría, understanding the process by which human beings participate in Jesus's mission to realize the reign of God in history is a central point of the Christian faith and its liberative power. To aid in this understanding, Ellacuría's theology has four priorities: he advances a theology that is liberative, historical-soteriologically focused, engaged with reality, and oriented towards ecclesial and historical praxis. These priorities are embodied in the life of St. Óscar Romero.

Neoliberalism stands in stark contrast to Ellacuría's theology through its own implied soteriology, which offers a false promise of salvation grounded in the actions of the market. Using Ellacuría's understanding of an implied soteriology in Marx's work as a formal model, one can construct an account of the implied soteriology of neoliberalism and recognize it as a corruption of Ellacuría's theological priorities. The first of these corrupted priorities is the move from freedom in the liberative sense, which seeks to throw off the chains of oppression, toward freedom in terms of libertarian economics. This move to an individualistic, voluntaristic, economics-focused understanding of

freedom ignores the reality of oppression and instead concerns itself with the freedom to amass private wealth and power.

The Ellacurían analysis of this implied soteriology involves corrupted understandings of the salvific actor(s), the salvific act, and the salvific promise. Contrary to Christian soteriology, Jesus and His salvific mission are not central to the implied soteriology of neoliberalism. From the neoliberal worldview, the salvific actors are the CEOs and entrepreneurs who are able to read the movements of the market and continue to guide their firms towards profit. Their salvific act is to prevent any aberration or regulation that may restrict the movement of the free market; it serves as a nullification of any change to the way the market functions. The neoliberal salvific promise is that of prosperity and wealth for all, but, as the growing inequality in the United States and abroad shows, that promise is left unfulfilled.

This implied soteriology fails because it has a reductionistic view of reality that focuses only on the market as the measure of the world. In Ellacurían terms, neoliberalism ignores the weight of reality, failing to engage its depth and complexity for the relative simplicity of the market. With such a limited understanding of reality, it is impossible for neoliberal soteriology to account for the totality of sin and death from which creation must be saved. With a widened view of reality, one can see that questions of wealth pale in comparison to the gravity of Jesus's salvific mission.

The final aspect of the Ellacurían critique of neoliberalism is the politico-theological critique that culminates in his political theology of dissent. The use of theological concepts and imagery in proponents of neoliberalism, such as Reagan and Thatcher, indicates that politico-theological analysis is not only warranted but necessary

to understand this third aspect of neoliberalism. By recognizing the distinction between the civilization of wealth and the civilization of poverty that Ellacuría presents in “Utopia and Propheticism in Latin America,” one can see that neoliberal political economy builds a civilization of wealth that dehumanizes countless people simply because they do not have sufficient capital to have their basic needs met. This failure to have basic needs met becomes a systemic violence that compounds as time goes on and economic inequality grows without interruption.

A significant part of the issue, as Ellacuría sees it, is that the differing positions on the political spectrum have their own inadequate solutions to the problems facing the poor and oppressed which ultimately support a civilization of wealth. The primary difference between these positions is who holds the wealth: the state or a small number of private individuals. Ellacuría, and by extension this critique, seeks a rejection of this political spectrum altogether. This is the political theology of dissent: a rejection of all options that fail to address the primary issue. Ellacuría seeks, not a middle way, but a better way. He calls for a revolution of the dynamics of reality that reorients them towards the good of the many as opposed to the good of the few. Through this revolution, he believes it is possible to end the dehumanizing poverty that impacts countless lives.

## **5.2 THE ELLACURÍAN CRITIQUE IN DIALOGUE**

With this overview of the Ellacurían critique complete, the next task is to prepare how the critique is situated within the context of other theological critiques of neoliberalism. When looking at how the works of Hinkelammert, Sung, Rieger, Kotsko,

Tanner, and Day each function in relation to Ellacuría, it is important to recognize the distinctive scope of these six thinkers and to categorize them in ways that avoid unhelpful conflations or confusions. These six critics of neoliberalism can be sorted into two groups that have two criteria separating them. The first group, consisting of Hinkelammert and Sung, are the only critics of neoliberalism discussed in Chapter 1 who are from the global South and who wrote prior to the crisis of 2007–2008. Hinkelammert and Sung, therefore, serve as a group that, in these respects, has more in common with Ellacuría than the others. These three theologians come from a worldview grounded in the realities of the global South. While they represent three different national contexts with their own concerns, the common thread of how Ellacuría, Hinkelammert, and Sung all see the results of neoliberal capitalism corrupting their societies and harming the poor and vulnerable bind them together. In terms of their relationship to the crisis of 2007–2008, none of the works considered in this group have taken into account the events surrounding the crisis, which means that their work must be used in conjunction with inferential reasoning in order to develop their ideas in this new context.

The second group of thinkers, including Rieger, Kotsko, Tanner, and Day, are operating in a significantly different context from Ellacuría. All four thinkers are writing from the US context, finding themselves in the midst of a civilization of wealth built upon the foundation of neoliberal ideologization. Also, they are writing after the crisis of 2007–2008 and therefore have seen the concrete failures of the neoliberal system. This provides a different starting point of conversation since Ellacuría's thought must be supplemented and extrapolated to deal with these events. However, the Ellacurian

critique can provide a substantial addition to these projects given its different perspective from someone in the global South and its Catholic theological commitments.<sup>703</sup>

In the following section, I will engage each of the six theologians discussed above with the Ellacurían critique, offering points of agreement as well as places where the critique can offer additional perspectives. The main interlocutors will be Tanner and Day as they have the most potential for engaging the totality of Ellacuría's thought in a new way.

### 5.2.1 Franz Hinkelammert

Hinkelammert's *The Ideological Weapons of Death* is the only theological text discussing neoliberalism discussed in this project that was written during Ellacuría's lifetime; the original Spanish text was published in 1977, a year prior to the publication of Ellacuría's "The Crucified People." This means that Hinkelammert was living through the same dramatic socio-political shifts in Latin and South America as Ellacuría. This shared experience leads to an overlap of concerns, though both thinkers have distinct perspectives on these events.

Hinkelammert's argument in the monograph develops over three parts. First, he discusses Marx's concept of fetishism and uses it as an analytic tool to analyze neoliberal

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<sup>703</sup> The reader will notice one text absent from the list of post-crisis works discussed in the dissertation is the recent publication *Send Lazarus: Catholicism and the Crisis of Neoliberalism* by Matthew T. Eggemeier and Peter Joseph Fritz. As *Send Lazarus* was published half way through the writing of this project, I've chosen to save a full engagement with Eggemeier and Fritz for later date. Their work, focused on the application of the works of mercy as a contrast to mercilessness present in neoliberal culture, adds a distinctive Catholic voice to the post-crisis conversation. For more, see Matthew T. Eggemeier and Peter Joseph Fritz, *Send Lazarus: Catholicism and the Crises of Neoliberalism* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2020).

capitalism as articulated in the work of Friedman and the impact of his work on the policies in Latin America during the 1970s. Hinkelammert follows this analysis with a discussion of the theology of life and death as seen in the Pauline epistles, emphasizing the centrality of the body to Paul's theology. Bringing this theology of life and death into conversation with a Marxist account of the fetishism of neoliberalism, Hinkelammert moves forward with an analysis of how neoliberalism leads to death in a way that is contrary to Christian theology, which is "aimed at life."

One point of agreement between Hinkelammert and Ellacuría is their view that neoliberalism inevitably leads to dehumanization. Hinkelammert's discussion of Christian slavery serves as a starting point. Making use of the conceptions of power and slavery as discussed in the works of Piere Bigo, José Galat and Francisco Ordóñez, and A. López Trujillo, Hinkelammert offers the following conception of freedom in light of those realities:

The human being is free even when in chains. This is true in a potential sense, but freedom comes when the chains are broken. Slaves are slaves because their right to exercise their own will has been taken away. Whether the master is good or bad has nothing to do with it. A good master is preferable to a bad one, but he remains a master. Interior freedom means the readiness to break outward chains, but freedom becomes a fact only when the chains are broken. Inner readiness is necessary but it is activated only when the slave ceases to be a slave. [...] López Trujillo arrives at the conclusion that "when Christian teachings are forgotten, persons fall into the abyss of slavery" (*Liberación*, 197).<sup>704</sup>

This selection from Hinkelammert offers an articulation of the tension between the materialist economism and materialist humanism Ellacuría describes in "Utopia and Propheticism in Latin America."<sup>705</sup> The push for domination is at the heart of materialist

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<sup>704</sup> Hinkelammert, *The Ideological Weapons of Death*, 243.

<sup>705</sup> Ellacuría, "Utopia and Propheticism in Latin America," 40.

economism; a person's free will is rejected and put in chains for the sake of the greater accumulation of capital. Ellacuría's materialist humanism, a concept with which Hinkelammert would be in agreement, is the breaking of those chains through the recognition and satisfaction of basic needs.<sup>706</sup> It is this moment of liberation, conducted through the recognition of basic human dignity, which breaks the first links in the chain and allows that inner readiness to come to fruition.

The second and more significant point of convergence between the thought of Hinkelammert and the Ellacurían critique is that Hinkelammert's articulation of the struggle between life and death that occurs in the implementation of the neoliberal ideologization is at the core of the civilization of wealth and of capital. An important concept from Hinkelammert for this articulation is that of "antiutopian inversions," the neoliberal denials of the possibility of a better world, seeing the capitalist liberal democracies of the 20<sup>th</sup>, and by extension the 21<sup>st</sup>, century as the most perfect form of human society.<sup>707</sup> Hinkelammert emphasizes the way that the supporters of "antiutopian inversions" conflate the holiness of poverty with a dehumanizing poverty; the poor are close to God because they are close to death.<sup>708</sup> This misunderstanding of Christian teaching allows for neoliberal society to continue the contest of accumulating capital

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<sup>706</sup> Hinkelammert's agreement with Ellacuría on this point is expressed in Hinkelammert's concluding discussion on Marx's historical materialism at the end of the monograph. Hinkelammert's reading of historical materialism as a philosophical position that affirms the material nature of "real life," putting him in agreement with Ellacuría's position. For more, see Hinkelammert, *The Ideological Weapons of Death*, 272-3.

<sup>707</sup> José Fernando Castrillón, "Liberation Theology and Its Utopian Crisis," *Theologica Xaveriana* no. 186 (2018), 16-7.

<sup>708</sup> Hinkelammert, *The Ideological Weapons of Death*, 194. Hinkelammert sees this in part as a reading of Thomas à Kempis's *Imitation of Christ* that serves as a spiritual justification of the destruction of the material. Given my lack of expertise in Kempis, I cannot offer a commentary as to whether Hinkelammert's reading of Kempis's text is sound. I can speak to how important this reading of a text like *Imitation of Christ*, as well as the Pauline epistles, are central to how Christian doctrine can be twisted to affirm the dehumanizing poverty that neoliberal society builds upon.

while allowing the poor to exist in squalor as if it were a blessing bestowed upon them. This idea from Hinkelammert, in conjunction with his commentary on Christian slavery as the neglect of material suffering in favor of focusing on spiritual suffering, serves as accurate descriptors of the pain and suffering that the poor undergo in the civilization of wealth.

Hinkelammert's point of departure from the Ellacuría critique comes in Hinkelammert's theology of the cross. As discussed in Chapter 3 above, Ellacuría's soteriological thought emphasizes the centrality of the crucifixion and its implications for the crucified people throughout history. Following his previous line of thought, Hinkelammert argues that the overemphasis on the cross in Christian doctrine is another inversion, which rejects an emphasis on the new life of the resurrection in favor of the material destruction of the crucifixion.<sup>709</sup> This is not to say the spirit of Hinkelammert's critique is out of line. The prime example from the text is Hinkelammert's allusion to Thomas à Kempis's "earthly paradise" as one in which the destruction of the body becomes the ideal.<sup>710</sup> When one idealizes the reality of material suffering as opposed to naming it as injustice, the injustice of material suffering can be easily forgotten. When one emphasizes the cross over the resurrection, according to Hinkelammert, one begins to idealize material suffering.

Ellacuría, however, offers a more holistic understanding of the Christ event, where the public ministry, death, and resurrection must be viewed together to fully grasp the depth of the mystery. The miracle of Easter Sunday cannot be understood properly without the events that led up to and include Good Friday. Emphasizing one piece, for the

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<sup>709</sup> Hinkelammert, *The Ideological Weapons of Death*, 188-90.

<sup>710</sup> Hinkelammert, *The Ideological Weapons of Death*, 194.

good or the bad of the community, over the others leads to a theology that leaves crucial aspects of the historical reality of Jesus behind. This is the key difference that separates the Ellacurían critique from Hinkelammert's concerns: the mission of Jesus plays a very different role in each theological perspective. For Hinkelammert, it is the hope of Jesus's resurrection that allows the oppressed to survive in a society that constantly pushes them towards death. Ellacuría, on the other hand, sees the entirety of the Christ event as that which must radically reorient human action in history through the collaborative effort to work towards the reign of God.

### 5.2.2 Jung Mo Sung

Sung's work, as described in both Chapter 1 and in the introduction to this section above, follows in a similar pattern as that of Hinkelammert: it is focused on the realities of living in the global South under the crushing weight of neoliberal oppression. The essays in *Desire, Market, and Religion* engage with a varied group of interlocutors, ranging from von Hayek to Hinkelammert to René Girard. Throughout these essays, Sung holds to a singular premise from which the topic of each essay stems: theology must be in dialogue with and willing to critique economics because neoliberalism has such a significant impact on society. This impact most negatively effects the poor and their ability to live in a dignified manner, for whom Christian theology must advocate.

Sung's contribution is particularly interesting when put in dialogue with the Ellacurían critique because it helps develop a theological language for articulating the religion of neoliberalism. Specifically, Sung's image of the sacrificing of the poor for the sake of progress fits within the context of neoliberalism as a false soteriology.

This point of convergence begins with the “necessary sacrifices” Sung discusses.<sup>711</sup> These “necessary sacrifices,” which Sung notes are always of the poorer populations, are made for the increased wealth of the upper classes.<sup>712</sup> The poor, then, are sacrificed on the altar of capital to ensure that the wealthy are “saved” from the devaluation of their holdings or some other economic contraction that would cause the wealthy to take a loss. This image fits with a common articulation of atonement soteriology, as seen in Pineda-Madrid’s reading of Anselm.<sup>713</sup> Following the soteriological element of the Ellacurían critique, as outlined both in Section I of this chapter and Chapter 3 above, this formulation of sacrificial atonement at the altar of capital is a natural conjunction with the arguments above. If the market requires sacrifice to maintain the wealth and status of those in power, it is by far preferable, according to neoliberal logic, to put the poor and the marginalized up for sacrifice. It is easy to write off the suffering of the poor as some kind of misfortune due to the unforeseeable changes in the market or, as Sung highlights, necessary for technology to continue moving the wheels of progress forward. The flawed reasoning Sung describes reinforces a logic of salvation through the market, which the Ellacurían critique seeks to dismantle. This makes Sung’s project a particularly productive partner for dialogue with the Ellacurían critique.

The Ellacurían critique is distinctive from Sung’s project as presented in *Desire, Market, and Religion* in a few important ways. The most significant of these is the tripartite element of the Ellacurían critique. While Sung’s work does offer insights into

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<sup>711</sup> For a full analysis of his points, see Chapter 1 above.

<sup>712</sup> Sung, *Desire, Market, and Religion*, 18.

<sup>713</sup> For more on this, see Chapter 3 above.

the soteriological and politico-theological elements of the critique, it does not offer the same level of attention to philosophical elements. Sung's discussion of philosophy is primarily limited to von Hayek and various references to Marx and Marxism; he does not delve into the intricacies of a metaphysical and epistemological system like that of historical reality, such as understanding the human person's role in altering the dynamics of reality and therefore creating history. While this kind of engagement is not necessary for Sung's project as such, it does show a distinctive element of the Ellacurían critique and the elements that it can offer beyond the other theological projects critical of neoliberalism.

### **5.2.3 Joerg Rieger**

Writing in the immediate aftermath of the financial crisis of 2007–2008, Rieger's argument in *No Rising Tide* is a response to the failure of the neoliberal logic of infinite growth that has run rampant in the United States. Using concepts from Marxist class analysis, Rieger offers an alternative in the logic of downturn, which provides insight into the way free-market economics has impacted American religious consciousness. Specifically, neoliberalism has influenced the creation of a corrupted vision of God and how God should be worshipped by way of the accumulation of wealth. Rieger's argument concludes with an emphasis on the necessity of ending economic exploitation in order to create an alternative way of life to neoliberalism.

Rieger's theological critique of neoliberalism, which focuses on the reintegration of the poor into society, has a great deal in common with Ellacuría's motivations.<sup>714</sup> The recognition that the poor are marginalized by modern society is a central aspect to both Rieger and the Ellacurían tripartite critique's diagnosis of the problem.<sup>715</sup> Also, Ellacuría would agree with Rieger's assertion that the conversations between economics and religion is filled with dead ends. If Ellacuría was a part of the conversations regarding economics and Christianity in the three decades since his martyrdom, he would argue these dead ends are in large part due to the emphasis on the civilization of wealth as the foundation of society. This concept fits with Rieger's critique of the logic of infinite growth, where economic projections and decisions are built around the focal point of ever-growing profits as the only goal.

The major point of difference between these two thinkers comes in Rieger's two theoretical structures: the logic of economic downturn and Rieger's commitment to democratic socialism.<sup>716</sup> The logic of economic downturn, from the Ellacurían position, is still operating within the flawed conception of the civilization of wealth. Rieger insists on working within a Marxian framework of class analysis and struggle, which can be as limiting as it is insightful. There is no question that class analysis is important work, but it can lose sight of the anthropological questions which Ellacuría finds essential to understanding the problem. The proposals Rieger offers lack any discussion of what changes to one's understanding of what it means to be a person living in a society, and by

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<sup>714</sup> For my summary of Rieger's analysis and critique of neoliberalism, see Chapter 1 above.

<sup>715</sup> This problem is not unique to neoliberalism, as every form of society has some element of this kind of marginalization. It is perhaps better to understand this concern as a universal principle derived from both the Hebrew Bible, as seen in Deuteronomy 15:11, and in the New Testament, where Jesus alludes to the aforementioned passage from Deuteronomy in Mark 14:7, Matthew 26:11, and John 12:8.

<sup>716</sup> This commitment is not only present in his scholarly research, but also his position on the advisory board for the Institute for Christian Socialism. For more, see <https://christiansocialism.com/people/>.

extension a member of a socio-economic class, are required to make the required socioeconomic changes possible.

Although Rieger's commitment to democratic socialist ideas does not put him at odds with the Ellacurían position in terms of goals, it misses a nuance of Ellacuría's discussion of the civilization of wealth. The issue at hand is that Rieger's understanding of democratic socialism, while rightly recognizing the creation of surplus value that comes at the expense of the workers, does not fix the fundamental problem of the civilization of wealth. It becomes another question of who is holding the capital. The Ellacurían response, rooted in the civilization of poverty, would emphasize the importance of reforming the way we live as human beings in community, not only the economic mechanisms that are performing the work of oppression. It is Ellacuría's holistic view of the problem that makes his position distinct from, but complementary to, that of Rieger.

#### **5.2.4 Adam Kotsko**

*Neoliberalism's Demons* investigates neoliberalism through the lens of political theology as articulated by Carl Schmitt, asking questions of how "the neoliberal order justifies and reproduces itself as a structure of meaning and legitimacy."<sup>717</sup> Kotsko argues that neoliberalism accomplishes this justification and reproduction through presenting free market competition as the purest actualization of human freedom. Kotsko then uses this interpretive point to offer commentary on how neoliberalism's populist expressions

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<sup>717</sup> Kotsko, *Neoliberalism's Demons*, 19.

coming out of the Tea Party movement, the Trump presidency, and the Brexit vote in the United Kingdom cast doubt on the legitimacy of the neoliberal system that birthed them, leading to a destructive tension. This tension, according to Kotsko, allows one to peek behind the curtain and see the truth: neoliberalism is not inevitable, but an alternative way of life has yet to present itself.

The differences between the Ellacurían critique and Kotsko's project outnumber the points of agreement. This is primarily because, as mentioned above, Kotsko is operating outside of traditional Christian theological sources and concepts.<sup>718</sup> As discussed in Chapter 1, the most relevant aspect of Kotsko's argument in *Neoliberalism's Demons* is its thesis that neoliberalism is a political theology in the general conception of the term.<sup>719</sup>

The Ellacurían critique comes to a similar conclusion, but with a very different nuance that cannot be reduced down to the different frameworks of Christian theology and post-secular continental philosophy of religion. The significant difference is that Ellacuría's political theology stands on the foundation of his liberationist philosophy and theology, focusing on his concern for the crucified peoples. As shown in the preceding chapters, this concern motivates the entire project. Ellacuría's political theology is centered around bringing justice to the oppressed, which can only come through the collaborative effort of working towards the reign of God. This is in contrast to Kotsko, whose project is more focused on questions of structures of meaning. This does not mean

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<sup>718</sup> In a certain respect, this opens an interesting opportunity to emphasize the philosophical aspect of the critique while the other five interlocutors emphasize the theological aspect. While a philosophical conversation between Ellacuría and Kotsko would be a worthwhile project, it does not necessarily further the argument of the current project. Such an investigation would require its own separate research project.

<sup>719</sup> For my full analysis of this point, see Chapter 1 above.

that Kotsko is indifferent to the concerns of the oppressed; rather, the structures of meaning integral to one's understanding of the difference between oppression and liberation under neoliberalism would need to be interrogated to get to the core of injustice.<sup>720</sup> The issue of meaning-making does have its place in light of the failures of neoliberal political theology, but it is perhaps best realized in the context of working in tandem with other theological perspectives.

It is also worth mentioning the context of Kotsko's book. His concern lies with the structures upon which contemporary Western society rests. While he addresses important social issues such as those discussed in Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow*, the central concern of his project is that of legitimacy, following Schmitt.<sup>721</sup> This primary concern does not address the central problems highlighted by the Ellacurían critique.

There is, however, one relevant link between Kotsko's emphasis on legitimacy and the political theology of dissent. While Kotsko's iteration of political theology offers questions regarding the legitimacy of governing powers, the political theology of dissent critiques legitimacy in a different way. The political theology of dissent, as discussed in Chapter 4, rejects the legitimacy of the entire political spectrum as it never leaves the framework of the civilization of wealth. Neither side of the spectrum rejects the accumulation of capital as the undergirding premise of society. This, from the Ellacurían perspective, is illegitimate as it fails to prioritize the dignified living of all people, regardless of economic status. To summarize, the Ellacurían critique of neoliberalism has

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<sup>720</sup> Kotsko, *Neoliberalism's Demons*, 139-44.

<sup>721</sup> Kotsko, *Neoliberalism's Demons*, 89-96, 128. For Alexander's full argument, see Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2010).

some points of agreement with Kotsko's critique, but the Ellacurían critique emphasizes the oppression of the crucified peoples while Kotsko's questions stay primarily in the realm of theories of legitimacy.

### **5.2.5 Kathryn Tanner**

Tanner's project offers two significant points of analysis that allow for a productive engagement with the Ellacurían critique: her discussions of salvation and its relation to neoliberal capitalism and the anthropological problems created by neoliberal social structures. Each of these points of similarity will be addressed before moving to a major point of divergence between Tanner's work and the Ellacurían critique.

Tanner's project engages the cultural deformation of neoliberalism, which she calls finance-driven capitalism, specifically as it impacts the human person and her ability to function in society. Tanner focuses particularly on how this type of capitalism traps the human person in a system that promises a form of salvation that can never be fulfilled. As Tanner explores the various aspects of neoliberal culture, she argues that neoliberalism creates a skewed understanding of time, value, and history that creates a social structure that prevents one from being in right relationship with God. It is this recognition that neoliberal capitalism keeps human beings from fully understanding themselves as made in the image and likeness of God and loved enough to be offered salvation that allows Tanner to conclude that another world is not only necessary but also possible.

Chapter 1 above discusses Tanner's argument that neoliberalism's promise of infinite growth is contradictory to the salvific promise offered by Christianity.<sup>722</sup> While Tanner describes this economic salvation in Calvinist terms, namely in her allusion to a category of the economic elect, her point runs parallel to the Ellacurían critique's analysis using Catholic terms: neoliberalism reduces the promise of salvation to a matter of wealth and maintaining one's elite status. Instead of the fruits of one's dedicated labor showing one has the disposition to be worthy of salvation, it is the economic success itself that is considered the salvation. This is the same line of reasoning with which the Ellacurían critique takes issue: the framing of the salvific act and actors within the context of the market. Tanner's perspective adds to the Ellacurían critique a framework of diametrically opposed groups: the saved/economically successful and the damned/economically downtrodden. These categories provide a further way of understanding this neoliberal corruption of the concept of salvation.

Tanner's second point of analysis that runs parallel to the Ellacurían critique is the highlighting of the various ways the human person is dehumanized by neoliberal social structures, particularly the way one's psyche is deformed by the pressure for the aforementioned economic success. The structure of this neoliberal/finance-driven capitalist mode of cognition eliminates the ability to think of anything but the present and whatever emergency is currently calling for one's attention. Tanner elaborates in the following excerpt:

Preoccupation with the present emergency shrinks down past and future dimension of the present, leaving nothing but the present, a bare present, to which one's consciousness is captive. One simply does not have the time or energy, for example, to think about tomorrow—say, the future consequences of actions taken

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<sup>722</sup> For more, see Chapter 1 above.

now to address the immediate problem, or the likely next task needing to be addressed at work. Doing any of that would simply prove an unwanted distraction from what one needs to be totally focused on now. One does not in fact have any unused cognitive capacity to give to such thoughts about the future; one's cognitive bandwidth is completely absorbed in the present task, with no unused capacities left over for deployment elsewhere.<sup>723</sup>

When looking at the description provided by Tanner, one finds several elements that the Ellacurían critique would pull out in agreement as important considerations. The first of these is that the elimination of one's ability to think about the past or the future is inherently dehumanizing, insofar as the human being is a historical creature. Humans experience reality as historical reality, and our praxis is best understood as becoming involved with the dynamisms of reality and making changes. If one is unable to have consideration of the past and the future, even in the bare minimum example provided by Tanner, then it is impossible to engage in that praxis properly. To be forced to attend to only one aspect of the present moment is to exist as a mere animal or worse: living without the ability to truly consider one's past or the possibility of one's future. This is precisely the kind of dehumanization that Ellacuría warns of in his critique of the civilization of wealth and against which the political theology of dissent protests.

The Ellacurían critique builds upon the concern for the future and links it to the possibility of hope. When a person is unable to consider something outside a present emergency, the possibility of one's ability to hope is put in jeopardy. Hope requires the ability to think about the future and see the possibility of something greater, something better. In terms of a liberationist Catholic approach, it is a hope for the coming of the reign of God, and that one's own contribution can be in genuine solidarity with those

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<sup>723</sup> Tanner, *Christianity and the New Spirit of Capitalism*, 105.

suffering. It is the hope of liberation and salvation that is freely offered. When one can only look at the present emergency, that ability to hope disappears. By straining a person's cognitive bandwidth to the point where the ability to hope is questioned, the ideologization created by neoliberalism further takes a person's dignity away from her, forcing a person to act as if she were merely a gear in a machine.

A point of difference between the Ellacuría critique and Tanner's analysis stems from Ellacuría's focus on the mechanics of a change in material reality. To some extent, this difference has to do with Tanner's more Protestant way of understanding the nature-grace relationship. In *God, Evil and the Limits of Theology*, Karen Kilby offers an overview of how Tanner's systematic theological commitments stand in contrast to the Catholic perspective, which Ellacuría also holds.<sup>724</sup> Kilby argues that Tanner's approach to the nature-grace debate is one in which the sanctification of a human person can happen without any discernable change to the life and experience of that person.<sup>725</sup> To clarify Kilby's point, let us use an example. Glen is an average Bostonian who goes about his daily activities in a normal pattern: he buys coffee on his way to work at the brewery, works his shift with care and diligence, comes home to his family every night, and so on. One day, Glen is blessed with the presence of the Holy Spirit and becomes a recipient of sanctifying grace. Following Kilby's reading of Tanner, Tanner would not necessarily expect a discernable change in Glen's pattern of experience of his day-to-day life; he would not necessarily have some new understanding of the love for his family or the friendship with his coworkers. The way he interacts with his friends and acquaintances could appear quite similar to the way he acted before. In other words, the mechanics of

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<sup>724</sup> Karen Kilby, *God, Evil and the Limits of Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2020).

<sup>725</sup> Kilby, *God, Evil and the Limits of Theology*, 107.

sanctification may function primarily on a level that transcends the material. When one's life is impacted by grace, according to Tanner, a radical change does occur: one is invited to share in the trinitarian life. The question is only whether or not this change necessarily manifests as material change.<sup>726</sup> In short, Tanner suggests that the material conditions of reality need not be changed by the process of sanctification.

Tanner's suggestion regarding the material changes brought about by grace runs counter to a central concern of the Ellacurían critique: the need for adequate consideration of the material conditions of the people of God and a realistic hope in their transformation. Ellacuría's theological concerns always runs parallel to the reality of what Sobrino calls "the tragedy of the poor."<sup>727</sup> In the final chapter of *Christianity and the New Spirit of Capitalism*, Tanner offers the following overview of the way the finance-dominated work ethic is radically individualized:

Finance-dominated capitalism uses a variety of institutional means to single out individuals and render them accountable for their own fortunes, the bearers of either praise or blame. Economic success or failure becomes one's individual responsibility, revelatory of who one is as a person. Moralized evaluation of individual success or failure figured prominently in the old Protestant work ethic and now reappears in exaggerated form within a finance-dominated work ethic.<sup>728</sup>

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<sup>726</sup> Kilby, *God, Evil and the Limits*, 107. Cf. Kathryn Tanner, *Christ the Key* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 68.

<sup>727</sup> Sobrino remarks on this characteristic of Ellacuría in his 1990 "A Letter to Ignacio Ellacuría." Referencing Ellacuría's unfinished *Filosofía de la realidad histórica*, Sobrino writes: "You didn't even finish it when you came back to El Salvador. You had other things to do—more important things—from helping solve some national problem, to attending to the personal troubles of someone who'd asked you for help. For me the conclusion is really clear: Service was more important to you than the cultivation of your intelligence and the recognition it could have meant for you." This focus on service Sobrino highlights is reflected in Ellacuría's theological work. If the work could not be oriented to highlighting or alleviating the suffering of the poor, Ellacuría did not find it to be a priority in his life. For more, see Jon Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy*, 187-9.

<sup>728</sup> Tanner, *Christianity and the New Spirit of Capitalism*, 168.

This analysis offered by Tanner is astute, and offers a framework for understanding this transformation of a person's worth as pinned to their performance in the market. The problem Kilby highlights comes toward the end of that same chapter when Tanner offers an anti-work ethic informed by the recognition of one's dependence on God and the cooperative nature of the religious project.<sup>729</sup> While the idea of an anti-work ethic fits well with the Ellacurían critique, Tanner fails to provide a concrete explanation as to how this anti-work ethic creates a world that looks materially different from the world she critiques. There is no descriptive element that would suggest a material change. Similar to her articulation of the nature-grace problem, Tanner fails to explain how someone who has been judged via this finance-dominated work ethic will have a different experience when working within the context of the anti-work ethic.

The answer, however, could be easily given from a variety of sources within the Christian social tradition, especially the work of Ellacuría. Ellacuría's reflections on the common good, the differing standards between the civilization of wealth and the civilization of poverty, and the integration of *Laborem Exercens* into liberationist thought all could provide the examples that would concretize Tanner's point. The issue is not that Tanner's Protestant approach is without merit or would necessarily be unable to support meaningful change in society. The key point is simply that Tanner's analysis can work in concert with theologies such as the Ellacurían critique that place an emphasis on the material elements of social change.

The explicitly liberationist mode of theological discourse in which the Ellacurían critique engages complements Tanner's less explicitly liberationist critique of

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<sup>729</sup> Tanner, *Christianity and the New Spirit of Capitalism*, 210.

neoliberalism. Liberation theologies, regardless of the context from which they come, are primarily concerned with the material conditions of the oppressed and how to change them. As Gutiérrez put it, the irruption of the poor and their anguish led to a breakthrough in Latin American philosophical and theological thought.<sup>730</sup> It is the tragedy of the poor mentioned above that motivated Ellacuría's work. By discussing the concrete details of the material conditions of poverty brought about by neoliberalism and understanding Christian salvation as a historical hope of changing these conditions, the Ellacurían critique can help theologians envision the needed social transformations that Tanner's theoretically-focused work advocates in a less direct way.

### 5.2.6 Keri Day

Day's *Religious Resistance to Neoliberalism* develops a theological critique of neoliberal cultural deformation by interpreting neoliberalism as something that goes beyond mere capitalism, in a narrow economic sense. For Day, neoliberalism is the rationality and governmentality that foster "alienated, individualistic, and hyper-competitive modes of being."<sup>731</sup> Using a variety of sources, ranging from Walter Benjamin to Alice Walker to Søren Kierkegaard, Day presents an argument that critiques neoliberal rationality and governmentality in favor of communities rooted in love. Day's work promotes community and the social practices of hope that make a new way of life possible.

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<sup>730</sup> Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, ed. Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), xx.

<sup>731</sup> Day, *Religious Resistance to Neoliberalism*, 6.

The theological ideas Day puts forth in *Religious Resistance to Neoliberalism* provide the most interesting concepts to put into dialogue with the Ellacurían critique among those presented by the post-crisis thinkers. Her emphasis on the necessity of the erotic, love as a revolution against neoliberal society, and hope as social practice serve as theological projects that fit with the various priorities Ellacuría has. Each of these points will be explored after a brief discussion of the primary differences in approach between Day and the Ellacurían critique.

Day and Ellacuría have two main differences in context and theological methodology that must be addressed before one can fully appreciate the ways their ideas and arguments complement one another. The first difference, namely in context, partly forms their methodologies. Day comes from the womanist and black feminist tradition, drawing from significantly different sources than Ellacuría and the other authors discussed above. This womanist perspective is what provides Day with insights into the intersection of the various layers of oppression that neoliberal social structures create. Day's work reflects her embodied reality as a black woman living in the United States in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. This context is radically different from Ellacuría's life as a male, Jesuit, Basque-born, naturalized citizen of El Salvador living through a civil war. The particular concerns of each thinker are significantly distinct due to this difference. While this difference in context is important, the motivation of the concern for the oppressed in a society that seeks to dominate them as well as the ideas that are formed by this motivation are two elements Day and Ellacuría share. These common elements allow for a dialogue between these sets of theological ideas. The key point is that while their contexts are radically different and essential to their theologies, each thinker can

contribute ideas informed by her or his own context to provide a more robust theological picture.

The second main difference between Day and Ellacuría has to do with methodology. Besides drawing from a variety of theological and philosophical thinkers, Day makes significant use of literature, film, and other forms of narrative to develop concepts relevant to her critique of neoliberalism. Ellacuría's thought as it has been presented throughout this project, and by extension the critique developed from it, primarily uses philosophical, theological, and politico-economic frameworks. This does not mean, however, that Ellacuría's thought does not have an appreciation for the arts. In the mid-to-late 1950's, Ellacuría wrote on and had a correspondence with the Jesuit poet Angel Martínez Baigorri. These reflections on the connections between philosophy, theology, and poetry show Ellacuría as open to the way literary arts can engage formal philosophy and theology.<sup>732</sup> In turn, the Ellacurían critique must be open to the truths brought forth by literature and other forms of art.

The first aspect of Day's work that lends itself to engagement with the Ellacurían critique is the necessity of the erotic to overcome the denigration of love that neoliberalism instills through its social structures of competition. In contrast to the acquisitive desire, eros is a desire grounded in a desire for union with the sacred. Day further describes it in the following way: "The sacred is uncovered and found in those whom we love passionately, in the work we do, in the ways we dance and cook, as well as in Creation that loves us back in all its beauty."<sup>733</sup> What Day describes is not

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<sup>732</sup> For more on Ellacuría's engagement with Angel Martínez Baigorri, see *Escritos filosóficos*, Vol. 1, 127-213.

<sup>733</sup> Day, *Religious Resistance to Neoliberalism*, 81.

ownership and control, which stand at the foundations of the neoliberal acquisitive desire, but a desire to love and be loved in return. This image of the erotic implies the foundations of relationship and community are in a dignified act of love and a desire for unity; community stands on the ground of a desire to be together and a passionate bond that maintains the feeling of belonging, genuine care, and love. When this sort of eros is paired with the self-giving love of agape, the communal life reaches a point where growth and flourishing are possible, allowing this care and love not only to be acted upon but reciprocated in a way that benefits all.

The discussion of Day's emphasis on the necessity of eros to overcome acquisitive desire and the possibility of community stands at the heart of what Ellacuría meant by the civilization of poverty. Returning to the definition of the civilization of wealth discussed in "Utopia and Propheticism in Latin America," we can say that it is the acquisition and accumulation of capital that stands at the heart of development and basic security for that society.<sup>734</sup> The civilization of poverty, a rebuke of a society built on the accumulation of capital, instead looks to build a society based on the satisfaction of basic needs, the dignifying of work, and a communal life of shared solidarity. This is only possible through the kind of love Day discusses in the reclamation of eros. A love motivated by the desire for unity is the only way to stand in prophetic protest against the acquisitive desire for capital that dominates and motivates neoliberal society.

The second piece of Day's response to neoliberalism that serves as a point of convergence with the Ellacurían critique is her emphasis on love as a concrete revolutionary practice. In her chapter discussing this topic, Day describes this

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<sup>734</sup> Ellacuría, "Utopia and Propheticism," 40.

revolutionary practice of love as one “that integrates the ways in which *eros* enables an ‘enfleshment’ of *agape* and even *philia*.”<sup>735</sup> This description strengthens the idea that Day’s understanding of *eros* serves as the foundation for the civilization of poverty. If love as a concrete revolutionary practice helps give material form to the forms of love necessary to maintain a society that is committed to the dignity of all persons, then it serves as an essential part of the civilization of poverty for which the Ellacurían critique calls.

Building on this emphasis on enfleshment, Day, drawing on the work of Jewish scholar Abraham Heschel, focuses on an important lesson about love from the Hebrew Bible: love is not an abstract concept. Connecting this idea with Christian theological concerns, she writes:

Instead, love is *a history* of practices between God and humanity (and among human beings within community). Christian traditions also disclose love as a history of God relating to humanity through concrete actions and practice. Mercy, forgiveness, justice, and reconciliation in Christian thought are not just formal ideas but are concrete practices that point to what *love requires*. Love is actualized in and through these concrete actions and ways of being.<sup>736</sup>

There are multiple points in this passage that highlight connections with the Ellacurían critique. The first among them is Day’s choice to emphasize the historical reality of love by way of salvation history. Given Ellacuría’s emphasis on history and its relationship to salvation, this would at least be an easy connection to make. Day’s specific choice of words, however, shows that it goes much deeper. The phrase “history of practices” connects to Ellacuría’s anthropology of the human person as a historical creature oriented towards praxis. The way Day chooses to emphasize love as concrete acts that exist in

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<sup>735</sup> Day, *Religious Resistance to Neoliberalism*, 105.

<sup>736</sup> Day, *Religious Resistance to Neoliberalism*, 107-8.

history shows her work to be a way to help transpose elements of Ellacuría's thought that are rooted in his Salvadoran context into that of the contemporary United States. This articulation of love describes a theological anthropology that is at home in Ellacuría's understanding of human beings entering into the cooperative effort of working towards the reign of God.

The second aspect of the above excerpt that works with the Ellacurían critique is the specific concrete practices Day enumerates. While all four practices are essential requirements of love, the discussion of justice stands out as particularly important from the perspective of the Ellacurían critique. While mercy, forgiveness, and reconciliation are necessary to fulfill the requirements of love, justice is the heart of the other three; mercy, forgiveness, and reconciliation are incomplete without meeting the demands of justice. Put concretely, forgiveness is always possible for those who commit injustice, but that forgiveness cannot be understood outside the demands of justice through a genuine willingness and attempt to make amends. This is because forgiveness, mercy, justice and reconciliation cannot exist outside of God's grace.<sup>737</sup> The Ellacurían critique would emphasize Day's inclusion of justice as an integral aspect of love, and therefore allow for the emphasis of the need to end injustices such as those perpetuated by the civilization of wealth.<sup>738</sup>

The third and final aspect of Day's work that is of particular interest to the Ellacurían critique is her reflections on hope as a social practice. While Day offers a great

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<sup>737</sup> Jon Sobrino, "Personal Sin, Forgiveness, and Liberation," in *The Principle of Mercy: Taking the Crucified People from the Cross* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992), 86.

<sup>738</sup> Day goes further with developing her concept of love as concrete revolutionary practice into a political reality. While this is very interesting and offers more opportunities for a connection with the civilization of poverty, the analysis required to do the topic justice is beyond what the limits of what this project would allow. This topic is best reserved for its own research project in which the details of Day's politico-theological theory can be given the proper analysis.

deal to this topic that is worthy of discussion, two sentences stand out as central to understanding what Day means by hope. Continuing her emphasis on the concrete manifestation of theological commitments, Day offers the following on the practices of hope:

In this instance, hope is not about metaphysical propositions concerning Divine life. Rather, hope is about *how people employ rituals and practices in exercising faith* as they fashion new possibilities toward love, justice and freedom (which may or may not include how people employ overarching metaphysical religious propositions in order to flourish).<sup>739</sup>

This definition of hope, with its possible, parenthetical affirmation of metaphysical religious propositions necessary to flourish, fits within Ellacuría's understanding of prophetic action. Looking to his writings on prophetic action, Ellacuría emphasizes the struggle of prophetic action and the historical commitment to overcome injustice by way of direct engagement as opposed to evasion.<sup>740</sup> The practices Day describes in this definition fit the prophetic action for which Ellacuría calls. In short, the concrete practices of hope are what drive prophetic action, allowing a community to move forward and overcome the realities of injustice. It is this connection, in conjunction with the other connections discussed above, that shows Day's work as well suited to dialogue with the Ellacurían critique.

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<sup>739</sup> Day, *Religious Resistance to Neoliberalism*, 132-3.

<sup>740</sup> Ellacuría, "Utopia and Propheticism in Latin America," 12-3.

### 5.3 HOPE FOR A NEW WAY OF BEING HUMAN

Over the course of this project, neoliberalism has been explored as a corrupting force politically, philosophically, and theologically. While various critics have offered their own approaches to understanding neoliberalism, a critique developed from the thought of Ellacuría has been shown to be the strongest formulation. Ellacuría's philosophical, theological, and politico-theological acumen, connected with his commitments to foundational premises of Latin American liberation theology, offers a unified critique that addresses the various problems that arise from neoliberal ideologization. With that critique offered and situated within the current theological discourse on neoliberalism, it is important to begin considering the next steps beyond this project towards a greater research agenda: now that the problem of neoliberalism has been named, what can be done to solve it? In this final section, I offer three proposals arising from an Ellacurian theology: the role of university education, a new theological engagement with the body politic, and a liberating reflection on a new way of being human. All three of these proposals are grounded in a hope that tends toward life and giving and is grounded in the vocation to build the reign of God.<sup>741</sup>

The first of these proposals is recognizing the role of university education in pushing back against the ideologization of neoliberalism. A university education provides a unique opportunity for both students and educators. In the context of the United States, most students enter university-level studies at a formative point in their development. When one considers that an education from a Catholic perspective is intended to be

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<sup>741</sup> Ellacuría, "Utopia and Propheticism in Latin America," 37.

formation, this is an opportunity to highlight the ideologization that has been built into students' lives and provide them with a different option moving forward. Ellacuría points out this kind of formation must include a university's dedication to standing with the oppressed majority, which can be difficult in the context of the United States.<sup>742</sup> It would require dedication from university faculty, emphasizing the call to solidarity and preferential option for the poor that stands at the heart of Latin American liberation theology. This kind of intention is difficult given the impact of neoliberal reasoning on the administrative and funding activities required of a university. Nevertheless, there is hope that, at the very least, a dedicated faculty is willing to challenge the neoliberal mindset instilled in their students and provide these students with another way of seeing the world.

The second proposal is developing a new theological engagement with the body politic. The U.S. context is filled with religiously motivated political engagement on various issues. At their best, these political engagements seek to correct an issue that is on some level unjust. The problem is that these various engagements do not seek to challenge the underlying neoliberal logic that stands at the heart of the contemporary politics in the U.S. This is where the political theology of dissent comes into play. By grounding political engagement in a hope that tends towards life and giving, it is possible to dissent from the political spectrum that requires any form of political engagement to fit with a binary that simply perpetuates the oppression and death fostered by civilization of wealth. It is only through this form of concerted prophetic action that justice can actually be served. Whether it is by communities banding together to take action or those who are

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<sup>742</sup> Ignacio Ellacuría, "Is a Different Kind of University Possible?", 198-9.

called to political leadership bringing this form of engagement to halls of power on local, state, or national levels, it is through this rejection of the civilization of wealth's political spectrum that genuine change becomes possible. This new form of engagement is driven by the hope for a better way of living in community, one that emphasizes the life and dignity of all members of the community.

Admittedly, both the educational and political engagement proposals cannot stand by themselves. Both of these proposals need a fundamental change to occur to operate as presented: a new way of being human. The civilization of poverty as Ellacuría describes it requires a change in the way we understand human beings and how we relate to ourselves, one another, and the social structures we create. The current way of being human has been shaped by the civilization of wealth and the neoliberal ideologization that supports it. This is a civilization that, as Ellacuría articulates it, leads to despair and suicide. The new way of being human must be grounded in a hope that gives life. All human connection must be grounded in interactions that give life. This hope, then, is grounded in God's love and the dignity that is communicated in that love. It is only in that love, the liberation it provides, and the dignity that God's love endows that hope and, therefore, life are possible.

To borrow a phrase from theologian Bryan Massingale, neoliberalism is a sickness of the soul that permeates society. While multiple remedies are necessary to deal with the various permutations of this soul sickness, all must be rooted in life-giving hope. On the importance of this hope, Ellacuría offers the following:

It is said that in cultures that have grown old there is no longer a place for propheticism and utopia, but only for pragmatism and selfishness, for the countable verification of results, for the scientific calculation of input and output—or, at best, for institutionalizing, legalizing, and ritualizing the spirit that

renews all things. Whether this situation is inevitable or not, there are nonetheless still places where hope is not simply the cynical adding up of infinitesimal calculations; they are places to hope and “to give hope” against all the dogmatic verdicts that shut the door on the future of the project and the struggle.<sup>743</sup>

Without this hope, it will be impossible to overcome this sickness and restore our friendship with God as the core of who we are as human beings. It is only in this friendship that true hope, justice, and liberation can come to fruition.

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<sup>743</sup> Ellacuría, “Utopia and Propheticism,” 9.

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