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Integrity for the Common Good: The Missing Link Between Neo-Liberalists and the 'Occupy' Discontents

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Summary

This study analyzes the differences between the neo-liberalist and the Keynesian perspectives used in the debates emerged from the current economic crisis. The common good ethics is presented as a paradigm for recuperating the social, human and moral responsibilities of economic development. The assumption is that neoliberal economic models have produced prosperity but also technocracy, inequality and discontent. Through the examination of the principles of solidarity, subsidiarity, sustainability and synchronicity used in Catholic Social Teaching, the author introduces an integrated model for ethical decision-making beyond ideological divisions and for the common good.

Introduction

Wealth disparities have always been present in human history. Indeed, globalization and free market economies generally increase the ‘wealth of nations’ but also unequally. U.S. and European right-wing advocates often depict the necessary ‘market reality’ that the world will have winners only if it tolerates losers. The opposite view argues that large social safety nets ensure confidence in the future, and allow financial risks and wealth redistributions avoiding extreme poverty. No matter the different economic views and ideologies the fact remains that eight million people around the world die each year because they are too poor to stay alive. This is a central moral dilemma facing our global society. This study examines the ideological divisions and current debates between neoliberal and Keynesian economic models. In light of the current global financial crisis, the growing or persisting inequalities in countries and societies, and the manifestation of dissents of the Occupy movement and other ‘discontents’ of the neo-liberal economic models, we suggest an integrated ethics for the common good as a necessary solution. First, we examine growing societal divisions between ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’ manifested in economic inequalities and human development. Second, we rediscover the common-good purpose of the economy, manifested as social economy, in the humanistic tradition and within its moral foundations. Third, we introduce the ethics for the common good through basic principles of Catholic Social Teaching and economic justice practices shared with other religious traditions. Finally, we suggest an integrated common-good ethical decision-making model along the principles of solidarity, subsidiarity, sustainability and synchronicity. We argue that these moral foundations are

essential for promoting universal common-good economics and for bridging the gaps between ‘neoliberal’ supporters and ‘occupy’ discontents.

The objective of this study is to understand the nature of these growing societal and ideological divisions. The language and practice of the ‘common good’ is presented here as ‘the missing link’ for dialogue between market-driven globalization (Neoliberalism) supporters and the global-local ‘glocal’ (Occupy movement) discontents.

Economic Crisis as Moral Opportunity

The late 2000’s financial crisis, the so-called second great recession, has exacerbated the ideological debate on economic development and inequalities. Indeed, the crisis springs from a combination of technical, structural and ethical factors. The crisis represents an opportunity to find short-term solutions but also for re-discovering the moral foundations and social responsibilities of our economic systems. The United States Senate’s *Levin-Coburn Report* (2011) highlighted the basic problems that caused the financial collapse. It recognized how the free market has been instrumental in making America great, but that it only functions when people deal with each other honestly and transparently. The report stated that at the heart of the financial crisis were unresolved, often undisclosed, conflicts of interests led by Wall Street bankers. In essence, their greedy practices were unchecked by federal regulators who did not enforce the law. Indeed, expert opinions on the number and significance of the causes vary widely. While some experts attribute the cause of the crisis to the lack of adequate political oversight with effective economic and financial policies; others recognize structural weaknesses and ideological distortions of the neo-liberal political, economic and financial systems; still other experts say that the causes were ethical breakdowns of individual and corporate greed over common-social responsibilities.

Short-term patching solutions to the inadequacy of a laissez-faire global capitalism (Neoliberalism) approach of the previous 40 years may be necessary. However, it will not give way to long-term sustainable solutions for an integral and inclusive global development. Efficiency solutions will not be enough. Even a more government-regulated approach to a market economy will be insufficient without the reexamination of the human, social and common-good foundation of our economies.

As Mark Lutz (1999) suggests, “although the very notion of the common good is not easily grasped in an intellectual community with a prevailing individual liberalism [...] the common good is the same as the common interests of members of society. The interest of society goes beyond the traditionally narrowed economic domain to include interests in the quality of social relations” (Lutz 1999, p.2). The common good philosophy has its foundation in the old republican values of Greeks and Romans. In its value-based manifestations in social ethics, social economy and social business, it is based on Immanuel Kant’s ideal of an “ethical commonwealth” in which every individual is treated “always at the same time as an end, never simply as a means” (2011).

The notion of the common good is not new neither in social teaching of the (Catholic) church, nor to the field of business ethics. It reflects central concepts and essential principles in line with the current trends in corporate, business and organizational social responsibility. After enlightenment, modernity and postmodernity, the notion of the common good remains at the center of our attempts to better understand the complex relationship between human individual actions within institutions, organizations and world societies. The future direction depends on our understanding of human (ethical/unethical) actions and their social consequences, especially for civil society. In this age characterized by growing societal disparities and discontents there is an urgent need for new moral perspectives. We need to recuperate a moral framework aimed at strengthening our social and community bonds as an 'ethical commonwealth' (Huesmann 2010).

Societal Dis-integrations and Dis-equalities

Globalization brings both integrations and disintegrations. The current stage of globalization, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, has proven to be a great opportunity for emerging markets but also a contradictory phenomenon has occurred with increased economic inequalities and social disparities between the "haves and have-nots" (Held & Kaya 2007; Held & Kaya 2007). Indeed, globalization continues its march toward more integration of economic, political, and cultural systems through faster and more intense forms of cooperation, communication and action across borders (Collins & Graham 2004; Held & Kaya 2007). However, globalization has also produced unexpectedly severe societal fragmentations (Robertson & White 2003, p.xix). The Human Development Index (HDI), for example, which is reported annually by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) acknowledges how global human development has risen dramatically since 1970, but with strong shortcomings and inequalities across countries, over time and within sectors. As highlighted in the most recent Human Development Report (2011) global progress has significantly deteriorated in the areas of environmental sustainability and income inequality. While international cooperation and relations have increased with globalization, so have the many human rights challenges connected to global productions, natural resource management and human migration (Bacon 2008; Sassen 1998).

The dis-integration trends of globalization are no longer simply visible across the global-North and global-South divide. They are present within countries, societies, communities and organizations causing numerous societal, economic, political and cultural ethical dilemmas. There are many vivid examples of apparent contradictory globalization trends for integration and dis-integration increasingly visible in cultural, political, economic and societal transformations (Ritzer 2008; 2009). These are often classified as 'Balkanization' (the division of a multinational state into smaller ethnically homogeneous entities), 'McDonaldization' (the process by which the principles of the fast-food restaurant are becoming dominant in world societies) or 'Americanization' (the sometimes perceived negative imposition of American values in many countries with the loss of local customs and traditions). Such polarized manifestations are also manifested by clashes of worldviews and civilizations provocatively labeled by Benjamin Barber as "Jihad v. McWorld" (2010).

Indeed, the late-2000s financial crisis exasperated these divisions. After a 30-year process of deregulating markets and the liberalization of the global economy, the American-born speculative bubble in real estate and equities created an even riskier global market (Beck 1999; 2009). Although the global recession affected many, societal discontent and the interpretation of how to correct the market is divided between conservative views—symbolically represented in the United States by the Tea Party movement—and radical views represented by the now global Occupy movement.

Inspired by the Arab Spring protests in Egypt and echoing the Spanish *Indignados* (Outraged), the Occupy movement is one of the voices expressing anger and frustration at a global economic system that has produced uneven development, social dumping issues, and has failed the "99 percent" here in the United States. The ideological assumption that commercial liberalization would bring stability through growing economic interdependence seems to be challenged by the growing disparities and the growing levels of global discontents. The now international *Occupy movement*, which began in September 2011 with Occupy Wall Street in New York City's Zuccotti Park, embodies a growing frustration with economic and social inequality. Occupy movement members protest against the economic and political mechanisms that no longer work to benefit most ordinary (common) citizens (Gelder & Magazine 2011, p.1). From its origins as an organized protest to its rapid development as a global movement, the Occupy movement wanted to call attention to the sources of the current crisis: Wall Street banks and the privileged 1% of people who are benefiting from the government and accumulating world wealth at the expense of the remaining 99%.

Without much organizational capacity or financial support, the Occupy movement rapidly spread to more than 1,500 cities worldwide from Buenos Aires to Hong Kong and from Cape Town to Madrid involving hundreds of thousands of people. The Occupy movement is demanding changes while raising the consciousness of common people; the 99%. Naomi Klein, the Canadian author and social activist known for her political analyses and criticism of corporate globalization, has been an active supporter of the Occupy movement. In an interview during the Occupy Vancouver actions for affordable housing, she explained how the Occupy movement is really about moral dialogue and the recuperation of social and people-centered values and common good principles.

"The Occupy movement has achieved different things. In United States what became really clear is that it changed conversation. If you look at what the national conversation was before the Occupy movement, it was about the budget crisis and austerity and the so-called entitlement cuts—basically passing on the bill for an economic crisis created by the elites, by the 1%, to the people who did the least to create that crisis, who are most vulnerable. It was a like a dam breaking when Occupy came on the scene. It was about the framing 'we are the 99%' that opens up a space to talk about inequality. And I think that, because it was a moral discussion—it was really a discussion about values—some shame was brought to the idea of passing on the bill for the crisis. One of the things that I find so interesting and inspiring in [participating in the movement], was the conversation, often a

silent conversation, between the occupiers holding their signs and the bankers walking by passing was an appeal to values and, in some case, an attempt to bring a sense of shame, to acting without principles, to acting based on greed, acting as if the people don't matter and if there are not consequences to your actions" (MacKenzie 2011).

Neoliberals have a different perspective. Although varied, neoliberalism supporters firmly believe in the values of unregulated trade and market-oriented approaches (Helleiner 2009). They argue that free markets, free trade, and the unrestricted flow of capital will produce the greatest social, political and economic good. They believe the primacy of a free, unregulated market economy will ultimately find a solution to world poverty. Even in these times of crisis the promotion of multinational enterprises (MNEs) investing in the base of the pyramid (BOP) seems to be the solution (Werhane 2010, p.133). In spite of this apparent 'altruistic' mode, little thinking goes into developing a more mature paradigm with appropriate systems for preventing inequalities and appropriate strategies for the promotion of social capital (Mosley & Dowler 2003, pp.144-147). As Prof. Amartya Sen (1995) suggested, unless we re-examine the centrality of inequality focus on social capital parallel to financial capital, we cannot reduce poverty or achieve freedom through development.

There are conflicting popular understandings and literature about how the world's poor benefit from the economic growth fueled by greater economic integration (Collins & Graham 2004, pp.1-4). While pro-globalists argue that liberalization growth is essentially good for the poor (Dollar et al. 2001), anti-globalists view the high level of economic inequalities not just bad for poverty reduction but also for economic efficiency (Lechner & Boli 2004, p.184). During the recent recession globalization has also become more clearly associated with corporate greed and with the lack of integrity of business and political leaders who promoted "freer trade," resulting in more job loss than job creation in Europe and the United States (Brown et al. 2010).

Inequality is a national and international problem fueling societal disintegration and discontents. Clearly linked to poverty and justice, the multifaceted dimensions of inequality encompass wealth inequalities (economic assets, income, salaries, etc.) and social inequalities (racial, gender, housing, education, health care, property rights, etc.).

Comparative studies on the effect of globalization and inequalities have shown that systemic implantation of economic liberalization policies, along with deregulations and the decline of union membership promotes inequality (Dolfsma & Dannreuther 2003, pp.215-232). In an analysis of the effects of intensive Anglo-American neoliberal policies in comparison to continental European neoliberalism, where unions have remained strong, John Schmitt and Ben Zipperer (2007) concluded, "The U.S. economic and social model is associated with substantial levels of social exclusion, including high levels of income inequality, high relative and absolute poverty rates, poor and unequal educational outcomes, poor health outcomes, and high rates of crime and incarceration. At the same time, the available evidence provides little support for the view that U.S.-style labor-market flexibility dramatically improves labor-market

outcomes. Despite popular prejudices to the contrary, the U.S. economy consistently affords a lower level of economic mobility than all the continental European countries for which data is available” (2007, p.15).

Emerging economies like India and China have greatly improved their human development index (HDI) benefiting from in-sourcing, free trade and other neoliberal trends of the flat world (T. L. Friedman 2007)(Nolan 2004; Guthrie 2009). The HDI is a composite index measuring average achievement in three basic dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, knowledge and a decent standard of living. China and India have been classified as ‘medium human development countries’ coming in at 89th and 119th, respectively, among 169 nations in the United Nations’ Human Development Report. They also are among the top movers in HDI between 1970–2010 (Programme 2010, p.29). Although fast in growth, their level of human development has not been so equally distributed. To account for inequalities in human development, the 2010 HDR introduced the Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index (IHDI). The new index which combines HDI values with the GINI coefficient account for inequality in the distribution of health, education and income. It shows the shortcomings of income “growth miracles” such as China, with a twenty one-fold increase in per capita income since 1970 (UNDP 2010, p.42). It has also increased its inequality indexes with a Gini of 41.5 and an IHDI of 0.53. China’s inequality levels substantially differ from Norway with a Gini of 21.8 and IHDI of 0.89, but not so much from the USA with a Gini of 40.8 and an IHDI of 0.79 (UNDP 2010, p.152-154).

Beside the variance in numbers, calculations and interpretations one fact is certain: the rising income inequality within countries is the norm worldwide. The inequality coefficients are much worse than in the 1980s. In addition, as power is more concentrated in the hands of elites, “it is not surprising that economic and political institutions work in their favor” (UNDP 2010, 73). Inequality is not just a moral problem. Rising and extreme levels of inequalities produce national insecurity, societal conflicts and class struggle. Inequality pulls the strata of society so far from each other that society begins to break apart. Hence seeking economic models that favor a common wealth of nations and a common good of society at large is a must. Overcoming ideological and societal fragmentations is a process possible only by reassessing the ‘common’ and ‘societal’ responsibilities of individuals, organizations and institutions. In the words of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace (2011), such a process begins with “the recognition of the inequalities and distortions of capitalist development, often an expression not only of economic liberalism but also of utilitarian thinking, that is, theoretical and practical approaches according to which what is useful for the individual leads to the good of the community. This saying has a core of truth, but it cannot be ignored that individual utility—even where it is legitimate—does not always favour the common good. In many cases a spirit of solidarity is called for that transcends personal utility for the good of the community” (Catholic Church. Pontificium Consilium de Iustitia et Pace 2011, p.2). It requires the recognition that ‘technical’ solutions to economic crises are not sufficient. They require a combined and integrated approach for common-wealth economic systems and common-good ethical principles.

The Common Wealth of Nations

In *Common Wealth*, Prof. Jeffrey D. Sachs (2009) offers a compelling argument to find a new economic paradigm that promotes wealth inclusion along global interconnection, cooperative dialogues and environmental awareness. As we are running against the realities of a crowded planet, achieving a more sustainable and inclusive economy will largely depend on the serious investments of international cooperation and sustainable development programs to alleviate poverty and reduce inequalities. The precarious course of our global and unequal societies can be corrected by investing in the creation of a common ground between rich and poor, among competing ethnic groups, and between society and nature. While criticizing the US and European right-wing ideology that depicts “social spending as a threat to economic efficiency and personal liberties” (Sachs 2009, p.128), Sachs advocates for large social safety nets that promote redistribution of wealth and reduce extreme economic inequalities. “Redistribution of wealth ensures that the most acute inequalities are avoided. While there will still be inequality, there will be no deprived underclass at the low end of the income spectrum nor a wealthy plutocracy at the other” (p. 257).

Many neoliberal proponents and non-Keynesian economists would find these arguments for a common wealth problematic. At the root of the objection is not only economic liberalism but also utilitarian thinking. That is, the notion that what is useful for the individual leads to the good of the community. However, the realities of growing global inequalities and economic crises traced to corporate and individual greed cannot be ignored. Individual utility—even when legally admitted—does not always favor the common good. In many cases only an authentic spirit of solidarity is the essential element for transcending personal utility for the good of the community. An economics for the common good is not only possible—it’s a right and a responsibility for the future of all (Etzioni 2004). The time has come to rediscover the social foundation of economics and the common good ethical legitimacy of business. The neoliberal’s discontents, exemplified in the Occupy movement, represent more than a group of radicals seeking change. They represent a growing critique of the political economic ideology and practice that undermines democracy, human rights, sustainability, and the human dignity of individuals and communities.

Since the 1990s, Neoliberalism has attracted its share of critics (Chomsky 1999; Klein 2007; Harvey 2005). In their view, Neoliberalism is a contemporary political movement that renders citizens almost “powerless” in economic decision-making. This is in contrast to Keynesian economic theory, which argues in favor of enabling the public to influence public policy through democratic initiatives. Until the 2008 economic crisis, most economic policies in the United States followed a neoliberal agenda for private and corporate profit over people’s interests. This is fundamentally antithetical to the notion of the common good (Chomsky et al. 1998).

Currently the ideological resistance to Neoliberalism has found practical economic models and inclusive solutions that benefit the margins (Korten 2010, chap.4). The movement of seeking alternative economics and more human, socially inclusive and less greedy forms of capitalism is rapidly growing (Hart

2007). Mohammad Yunus' model for social business (Yunus & Webber 2011), business partnerships for poverty alleviation (Werhane 2010), and inclusive capitalism benefiting the base of the pyramid are examples of this trend (Prahalad 2010; Hart 2007). However, there is a need to go beyond a patchwork approach and rediscover the common good core for personal, organizational and institutional integrity promoting a more inclusive economy. As Lutz (1999), highlighted in his book *Economics for the Common Good: Two Centuries of Economic Thought in the Humanist Tradition*, the time has come for some fundamental rethinking and reorientation of individualistic economics that do not recognize the human-centered and people-centered foundation of economics. There is a value in the communality of society, beyond individual selfish purposes and private interests.

“A prosperous society, for example, will have a unity of purpose, whereas a fragmented society can be characterized by antagonistic social relations. The nourishing and maintenance of a well-ordered society reinforces both personal and social values. Such holism, being the counterpoint of individualism, not only recognizes but also emphasizes the quality of social relations, as demonstrated by conviviality, fairness, social justice and mutual respect” (Lutz 1999, p.4).

Such arguments for a common good economy clearly contrast with Dr. Milton Friedman, the architect of the neoliberal ideology. He argued that the only social responsibility of businesses is to maximize profits for shareholders (M. Friedman 1970). Friedman's thesis is based on the assumption that only people, not businesses, have social responsibilities.

“The discussions of the ‘social responsibilities’ of businesses are notable for their analytical looseness and lack of rigor. What does it mean to say that ‘business’ has responsibilities? Only people have responsibilities. A corporation is an artificial person and in this sense may have artificial responsibilities, but ‘business’ as a whole cannot be said to have responsibilities, even in this vague sense. The first step toward clarity in examining the doctrine of the social responsibility of business is to ask precisely what it implies for whom” (M. Friedman 1970, p.122).

In his theory of “capitalism as freedom,” Friedman believed that market mechanisms are more appropriate than governments to determine the allocation of scarce resources (M. Friedman & R. D. Friedman 1970). Clearly, Friedman, with his provocative view on business's sole responsibility toward the maximization of profit for its shareholders, wanted to make a statement in favor of capitalism and against socialism and the “free lunch” mentality (M. Friedman 1975). However, Friedman argued that profit maximization must conform to the common “basic rules of society, those embodied in the law and those embodied in the ethical custom” (M. Friedman 1970, p.22). Profit maximization, even in Friedman's neoliberal arguments, cannot happen without some basic ground rules. Such norms are identified as legal norms, ethical customs. Ultimately, the divided debates and views on social responsibilities can find their foundation in the integration of business social responsibility with business moral responsibility

(May et al. 2007, pp.459-474) and shareholder theory with stakeholder theory (Phillips 2011).

The common wealth is a concept that appears to contrast with what we know of Adam Smith, the father of modern political economy. His invisible hand theory seems to confirm the neoliberal notion of a self-regulated free market economy. Yet, Smith had a clear notion that the wealth of nations is made possible by the moral foundations of humankind. The value of individuals, organizations and nations cannot rely solely on their capacity to create surplus. Smith's earlier and lesser known publication, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), indicates a moral foundation for the economy. The following arguments, expressed in the three-volume classic entitled *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776) are based on Smith's moral framework characterized by the realization of human nature. First, Smith views human nature as seeking the selfish passions of grief, joy, self-preservation and pleasure/pain—much more than seeking the social passions of generosity and compassion. Hence, people are bent toward behavior that is not socially constructive. Second, Smith acknowledges (without using a religious or ecclesiastical language) that the creator has endowed humanity with some filters which will check unsocial behavior if given the proper social setting. Third, the ultimate goal (telos) of human existence is the cultivation of virtue. This will fulfill the wishes of the creator and lead to social harmony. In other words, Smith's view is clearly grounded on morality as a foundation and a prerequisite for the enlightenment vision that a free society can prosper and endure. Amartya Sen recognizes how Smith, in publications, is mindful of the powerful role that institutions and non-profit values play in a common wealth economy. "While stating that 'prudence' was 'of all virtues that which is most helpful to the individual,' Smith went on to argue that 'humanity, justice, generosity, and public spirit,' are the qualities most useful to others" (Sen 2009).

Unfortunately, in an attempt to give 'economics' a scientific tone, 18th and 19th century scholars began separating economics and ethics, developing a misinterpretation of Smith as the father of a greedy and selfish economy. A contemporary of Smith's, Swiss economist Jean Charles de Sismondi (1773-1842), claimed that wealth has a humanitarian (social) purpose. In his principal economic work, *Nouveaux Principes d'économie Politique* (1819), he criticized the emerging 'economic science' for centering too much on the means of increasing wealth while failing to study the use of wealth to produce happiness. Sismondi, considered the father of a human-centered social economics, influenced the Catholic social teaching which focused its reflections on the common good doctrine (Lutz 1999, p.ix-xii).

Social economics and the humanistic tradition are central to the understanding of common good doctrine and common wealth economics (Lutz 1999, p.15). However, the humanistic-common good approach, centered on our 'common' human nature, transcends any ideological positions (Figure 1). Although resembling certain values in Keynesian economics and social economics, the common good-common wealth approach maintains its ideological neutrality by reaffirming the well-being of communities, societies and humanity at

large (Dierckxsens 2000, pp.15-18). The common good economics is socially anthropocentric in nature and agnostic in its ideology.

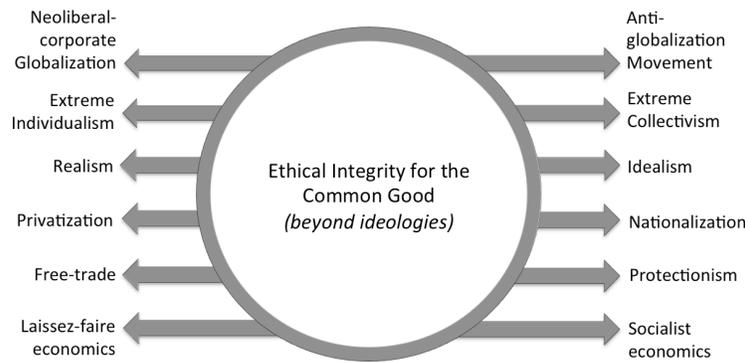


Figure 1: Common Good Position Among Fragmented Views

Ethics for the Common Good

The Common Good doctrine states that the good of each person is intimately related to the good of the whole community. Derived from the thinking of Plato, Aristotle and St. Tomas Aquinas, the ethics for the common good is rooted in the acknowledgement of human nature that characterizes ‘man’ as a rational and a political animal. First, it asserts that the human person is social in nature, born into a fabric of relationships. Life is not lived in isolation but for the formation of social unity. Second, common good asserts that the human person must be surrounded by a set of rights and duties that are guaranteed so that there are minimum standards that support life in society (Sachs 2009). These two predicates are closely related to one another. Human development and human happiness are therefore achieved by a life of rational actions in accordance to virtues, and made possible by a complex set of relationships to other persons. Such relations are often structured as associations, communities, organizations or institutions.

The Catholic social thinking, known as Catholic Social Teaching (or CST), reflects a long tradition defining and promoting the principles and practices for the common good. Although mostly associated with the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, such principles and ethical normative associated with the common good are shared across Christian denominations and religious traditions. The Jewish and Christian concept of Jubilee and Sabbatical year, for example, are Biblical regulations on the ownership and management of land properties. They deal largely with land, property, and property rights, which are still central issues in our global societies, migrant communities and indigenous peoples (Chesters 2009). The Jubilee year, every fifty years, requires proclaiming liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants, including slaves (Leviticus 25:10). That is, all debts were cancelled, and all property returned to the original owners.

Debt cancellation practices are also present in Islam. The Qur'an encourages debt cancellation whenever a debtor is unable, due to his particular circumstances, to repay the debt: "And if [the debtor] is in difficulty, then [there should be] postponement until [he is] at ease, but that you should give it as charity is [even] better for you, if you knew." (Qur'an 2:280).

Some authors have applied the Jubilee and Sabbath concepts for the elaborations of common good ethics, God's economics of justice and distribution, and Sabbath economics (Lowery 2000; R. Kinsler & G. Kinsler 2005; R. Kinsler & G. Kinsler 1999). According to Christian economist Ched Myers (2001), Sabbath economics is a Biblical economic model applicable to modern socioeconomics. "God's people are instructed to dismantle, on a regular basis, the fundamental patterns and structures of stratified wealth and power, so that there is enough for everyone" (Mayer 2001, p. 4).

Catholic Social Teaching is grounded on the Biblical tradition and translated into real contemporary social issues for moral and ethical guidance. It's centered on the Church's perceived social responsibility to guide states and social organizations on matters of poverty and wealth, economics, labor rights and human dignity, rights and responsibilities.

The common good theory of Catholic Social Teaching began with Pope Leo XIII's encyclical letter *Rerum Novarum* (1891) attempting to combat the excesses of both laissez-faire capitalism and communism. In light of the inhumane conditions generated by the industrial revolution, the papal letter asserted the centrality of the common good as the general welfare of people within a nation state. The Pope called upon the state to address the needs of the poor because, he asserted, the state has the duty of watching over the common good and of ensuring every sector of social life contributes to achieving it.

Gaudium et Spes, the Second Vatican Council document describing the role of the Church in the modern world (1965), contributes to the definition of common good ethics in relation to society. Reflecting on the horrors of World War II when good people of faith did nothing to stand against the misuse of power, this document asserts the need for the church (understood as the people of God) to be actively involved in bringing about a more just world order. The document asserts humans were created for life in community, not isolation. Because the person is social by nature the good of each person is bound up with the good of the community. A definition of the common good is given here and includes the social conditions necessary for humans to reach their fulfillment.

"Every day human interdependence grows more tightly drawn and spreads by degrees over the whole world. As a result the common good, that is, the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfillment, today takes on an increasingly universal complexion and consequently involves rights and duties with respect to the whole human race. Every social group must take account of the needs and legitimate aspiration of other groups, and even of the general welfare of the entire human family" (*Gaudium et Spes* #26).

In general, Catholic Social Teaching suggests a series of principles that secure those personal, organizational and institutional conditions for achieving ethical practices for the common good. Such principles are the directions for achieving human and spiritual flourishing. Catholic Social Teaching, in its variety of documents and applications to the modern world, insists that the human community, including its government, must be actively concerned in promoting the health and welfare of every one of its members so that each member can contribute to the common good of all. The overarching doctrine of the common good is encapsulated in four principles: solidarity, subsidiarity, sustainability and synchronicity. According to these principles, the ethics for the common good are instrumental in achieving essential elements and purposes: 1) The respect and recognition of human dignity and human life; 2) The leadership, organizational and institutional responsibility to secure social welfare and human development; 3) The integration and awareness of the interconnectedness of economic, political, social and natural spheres of life and 4) The consciousness and spiritual intelligence to see human actions aligned to a divine plan and a higher purpose in life. These integrated principles and ethics for the common good presupposes social welfare and systemic changes for the construction of infrastructure of society conducive to the social well-being and development of its individual members. In this respect, it is the responsibility of public and private institutions to assure the structural conditions that allow fulfillment of individuals, communities and societies.

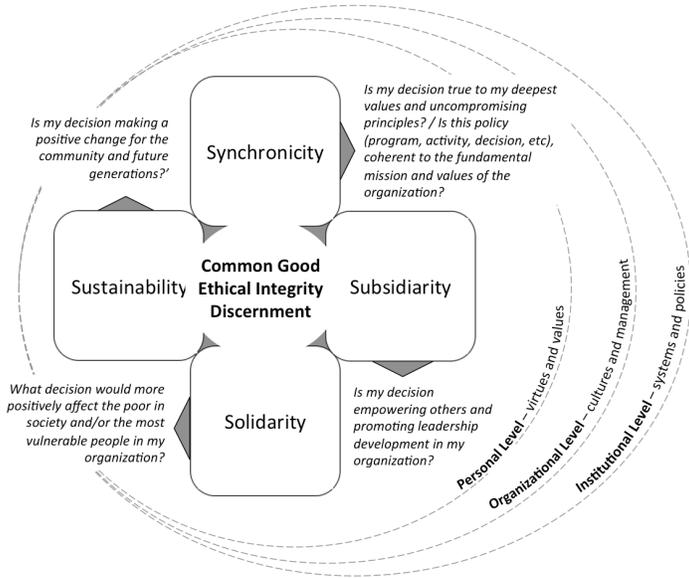


Figure 2: Common Good Map for Ethical Integrity Discernment

More than 25 years ago, in the Pastoral Letter *Economic Justice for All: Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy*, the U.S. Bishops reflected on these conditions and responsibilities that the economy has in

relation to justice and dignity for all: “The common good is the sum of those conditions of social life which allow groups and their individual members ready and thorough access to their own fulfillment. These conditions include the rights to fulfillment of material needs, a guarantee of fundamental freedoms, and the protection of relationships that are essential to participation in the life of society. These rights are bestowed on human beings by God and grounded in the nature and dignity of human persons. They are not created by society. Indeed society has a duty to secure and protect them” (Bishops 1986, p.41).

The Principle of Solidarity

Solidarity is a founding principle in Catholic Social Teaching. Several contemporary ethicists agree that a feasible ethic for today’s globalized society must be relational. It must be an ethic of solidarity. Pope John Paul II was a strong promoter of the solidarity principle and actively supported the Polish Solidarity Union (*Solidarność*). In his letter encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, Pope John Paul II, identifies the concept of solidarity with the poor and marginalized as a constitutive element of the Gospel and human participation in the common good. He describes this virtue as "a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all" (Bishops 1986, p.41). In his encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* he defines the concept of solidarity with the poor and marginalized as a constitutive element for creating a society based on the promotion of the common good and social responsibility. Solidarity is one of the most important Christian virtues and an essential element for building a better world.

He suggested to add “solidarity” to the list of cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, temperance, and fortitude that were central to the Greeks and Romans. The solidarity virtue is not merely an affective sensitivity to the needs of others. It is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good. It is a clear manifestation and recognition that human life is interpersonal and relational in nature. Therefore human life is manifested through the expression of responsibility towards others and the interdependence manifested in a reciprocal affirmation of human dignity. In addition, solidarity is not a virtue to be expressed by individuals alone. It is a central principle for the responsibilities of economic, cultural, political and social institutions toward the common good (Hollenbach 2002, p.187).

The option for the poor and vulnerable in societies and organizations is a fundamental principle in Catholic Social Teaching. In a world characterized by a growing divide between the “haves” and “have-nots,” with accumulated prosperity for few and pervasive and extreme poverty for others, Catholic teaching reminds us about the evangelical preferential option for the poor. In a society marred by unequal opportunities and treatment between rich and poor, Catholic education has a clear mission to instruct us to give our attention to the needs of the poor and devote our talents to changing the root causes of poverty. Solidarity is a principle and virtue that inspires humankind to go beyond itself to total gratuity,

forgiveness, and reconciliation. It leads to a new vision of the unity of humankind, a reflection of God's triune intimate life (Sollicitudo #40).

Solidarity is more than a simple “charity” gesture toward the poor or a purely philanthropic action. A sincere preoccupation for the poor must always be accompanied by a motivation to change the structural causes of poverty. Through his concept of *structural sins* Pope John Paul II invites us to pay more attention to the unjust systems and the systemic causes of poverty and marginalization. A world divided into blocs, in which instead of solidarity imperialism and exploitation hold sway, can only be a world structured in sin. Those structures of sin are rooted in sins committed by individual persons, who introduced these structures and reinforced them again and again. One can blame selfishness, shortsightedness, mistaken political decisions, and imprudent economic decisions; at the root of the evils that afflict the world there is— in one way or another—sin (Sollicitudo #36).

Interdependence must be transformed into solidarity, grounded on the principle that the goods of creation are meant for all. Avoiding every type of imperialism, the stronger nations must feel responsible for the other nations, based on the equality of all peoples and with respect for their differences (Sollicitudo #39). A practical question that helps discern ethical decision-making based on the principle of solidarity and the common good could be formulated as: *‘What decision would more positively affect the poor in society and/or the most vulnerable people in my organization?’* This and other practical questions fostering solidarity help in the analysis of complex ethical dilemmas and provide a methodological ground for doing ethics.

The Principle of Subsidiarity

Subsidiarity is another fundamental principle in Catholic Social Teaching and social ethics. It is the notion that a central authority should perform only those tasks that cannot be performed effectively at a more immediate or local level. Larger and more complex organizations should respect and promote those operations and decisions that can be done as well by a smaller and simpler organization. Any activity that can be performed by a more decentralized entity should be respected and promoted. “According to the logic of subsidiarity, the higher Authority offers its subsidium, that is, its aid, only when individual, social or financial actors are intrinsically deficient in capacity, or cannot manage by themselves to do what is required of them” (Catholic Church. Pontificium Consilium de Iustitia et Pace 2011).

Subsidiarity is a safeguard for limited government and personal freedom. It clearly challenges authoritarianisms, micromanagement and large bureaucracies. Knowing quite well the detrimental effects of the “social assistance state” of communist regimes in Poland and Russia, Pope John Paul II in his 1991 encyclical *Centesimus Annus*, affirmed that the Welfare State was contradicting the principle of subsidiarity by intervening directly and depriving society of its responsibility. This “leads to a loss of human energies and an inordinate increase of public agencies which are dominated more by bureaucratic ways of thinking

than by concern for serving their clients and which are accompanied by an enormous increase in spending” (Centesimus #48).

Subsidiarity is also a central concept in democratic societies, federal political systems and participatory organizations. In this sense, subsidiarity is the refusal of authoritarianism, dictatorship and fascism in favor of sovereignty and self-determination. The 1992 Treaty of Maastricht, which established the European Union (EU), based its agreement on the fundamental principle of subsidiarity—namely that the EU should only act where member states agree that action of individual countries is insufficient (Anon n.d.). In leadership ethics, subsidiarity refers to values of collegiality, transparency, decentralization, and accountability in governance. It refers to the recognition of the rights and duties of the smallest (or the lowest) competent authority (Iber 2010). In society, the subsidiarity principle prohibits official powers or higher levels of authorities from suppressing, avoiding, or excluding the voice and power of popular organizations, grassroots or civil society organizations.

In terms of “positive subsidiarity,” institutions are ethically called to create necessary social conditions and to empower smaller organizations that enhance the full development of the individual. Such development has basic requirements, such as the right to work, decent housing, health care, etc. The principle of subsidiarity refers to the central position that marginalized people and lower levels in organizations have in ethical decision-making. The principle was first articulated in Pope Pius XI’s *Quadragesimo Anno* to prevent “a community of a higher order” from interfering with “the internal life of a community of a lower order” thereby “depriving the latter of its functions” (Pope Pius XI 1942).

In short, the principle operates under the notion that all levels of society (including government and intermediary institutions like family, corporations, and international structures) should be in the service of the human person. Individuals, organizations and institutions should reflect on their common good ethical practice with the following question: *‘Is my decision empowering others and promoting leadership development in my organization?’* While subsidiarity may not be a common concept for some, it is the one that offers the most insight for revisiting personal leadership styles and critically analyzing the authoritarian practices of superiors, government offices and public agencies.

The Principle of Sustainability

The groundbreaking Brundtland Report, *Our Common Future*, defined sustainability as “meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Brundtland & World Commission on Environment and Development 1990). It suggests what leadership works and decisions should take into consideration on three fronts: economic, social, and environmental impacts. Each need must be integrated and equally considered in leadership decision-making and ethical plans of organizations. In business ethics, this increasingly popular notion of three integrated sustainability goals is called the Triple Bottom Line (TBL), where an organization accounts for environmental and social performance in addition to its financial performance (Savitz & Weber 2006). The principle of sustainability is

increasingly becoming a central concept in organizational, urban and international development. Sustainability includes both a geographical and a temporal dimension. Geographically, actions are measured according to their effects on immediate and far away societal contexts. Temporally, actions are measured through a lens of generational justice.

Personal impulses for charity or unorganized collective efforts are not enough to make a sustainable impact in society and on the lives of the poor. In general, today's students must demonstrate awareness of and concern for economic, organizational, societal, and environmental sustainability. A question that often sparks animated debate about the implications and responsibility connected to the principle of sustainability is formulated this way: *'Is my decision making a positive change for the community and future generations?'* Leaders, organizations and institutions striving for the common good will find in this sustainability principle a useful reference to discern their career, planning and policies. The integrity and ethical implications following the principle of sustainability are making decisions combining their aspiration to sustain themselves and their families with the social responsibility to serve society and promote environmentally conscious practices.

The Principle of Synchronicity

This principle is based closely on the notion of working for a higher purpose in life. It is about developing a spiritual intelligence and a humbling awareness that people, leaders, organizations, and institutions are not here forever. It requires adiscernment for vocation to serve and a spiritual intelligence to nurture our values. Synchronicity is about rediscovering the inner path of leadership (Jaworski 2011). Borrowed from Swiss psychologist Carl Jung, the word "synchronicity" describes the so-called "acausal" events that cannot be explained by direct causality (Jung et al. 2010). Jung's notion of synchronicity is that there is an acausal principle that links events having a similar meaning by their coincidence in time rather than sequentially. From a psychological standpoint, acausal events are explained by a synchrony between the mind and the phenomenal world of perception. From a faith standpoint, the principle of synchronicity is expressed by the concept of "providence," which comes from the Latin *providentia* meaning "seeing ahead." For Romans and Greeks "knowledge of the future" was a privilege of the gods, but from a Catholic Social Teaching perspective, synchronicity translates into engaging God's vision for the Kingdom of God by helping "to provide" for the material and spiritual needs of the poor and the broader human community. Synchronicity implies an active and participatory character in collaborating with God's plan for humanity and creation. In the increasingly competitive environment of market economies and education, the principle of synchronicity suggests a powerful, intentional, values-based alternative to a naive, misguided trust in loosely connected patterns of exclusive self-interest. In the classroom, synchronicity suggests the power of collective thinking and that students learn from each other and from a variety of sources and perspectives. Synchronicity encourages leaders to engage others to think and act collectively and intentionally towards audacious values-centered plans. Leaders in organizations and institutions should apply this synchronicity principle in the common good ethical analysis by asking a simple question: *'Is my decision true to my deepest*

values and uncompromising principles?’ A similar question is applied also to institutional and organizational decision-making: ‘Is this policy (program, activity, decision, etc.), coherent to the fundamental mission and values of the organization?’

Conclusions

As effective dialogue starts with listening, ethical decision making starts with discernment. The principles for a common good ethics can direct individuals, organizations and institutions to make decisions that benefit and maximize the common good of society. There is no magic bullet; personal and organizational discernments must follow criteria that promote dialogue, understanding the development at different levels. Hence, an ethics for the common good is more than merely following the ‘primum non nocere’—first, do no harm principle. It is about maximizing the benefit for most people in society and avoiding both absolute situations (like extreme poverty and extreme inequalities) and extreme ideological tendencies (like extreme individualism and extreme collectivism).

The search for the common good is an on-going project, including, but also beyond, individual-utilitarian perspectives and collective-social rights and responsibilities. Although defined by Catholic Social Teaching and inspired by ideological frameworks, emerging movements and economic theories, the common good ethics—in this ever-growing search for a better world—is ideologically agnostic. Similar to Catholic thinking on the ‘kingdom / (or kin-dom) of God’ (Hollenbach 2002, p.135), the idea of common good must be seen as much as an outcome as a process in itself.

The growing disparities of our global and unequal societies require a re-centering of the principles for common good ethics. In the midst of profound debates in the United States and the world on the social net protection of its citizens regarding employment, health care, affordable education, access to financial opportunities and markets, the debate on what constitutes ‘common good’ and what leadership, management and policy decisions best promote ‘common good’ is urgently needed.

We have explored the dynamics of contention between neoliberal perspectives, exemplified in their scholars and supporters, and the discontents of globalization, exemplified in the Occupy movement. The divisions and clashes in civilizations, values and worldview will continue to emerge in the years to come. However, a dialogue is required in order to diminish the negative effects of extreme situations of violence, poverty, inequality and injustice. The common good approach, expressed in the four principles of solidarity, subsidiarity, sustainability and synchronicity, is a key for promoting dialogue between ideological and experiential divisions.

The common good ethics, if rediscovered in its foundation for social relations, human development and economic prosperity, can be instrumental in the promotion of integrity in individuals, organizations and institutions. The ethical integrity for the common good (Daly & Cobb 1994) challenges the assumption of the economic theory of human nature (‘homo economicus’)—that

human wants are insatiable and societal gains are simply individual increases in goods and services. Therefore, the necessary shift is, as Aristotle suggested, going from maximization of short-term monetary gain (cherematistic) to the management of a household aimed at increasing its use value over the long run for the community (oikonomia) (Daly & Cobb 1994, pp.139-159).

These reflections made a case for promoting a common good ethics across divided positions, ideologies and worldviews. The ethics for the common good can inspire new leadership and management practices—comprehensive of a principle-centered approach for individuals, organizations and institutions (Crosby & Bryson 2005). The integrity of the common good is for all socially responsible leaders not only for their own organizations, but also for what Drucker called ‘the community as a whole’ (Crosby & Bryson 2005, p.xv). Ethical integrity for the common good is the key to opening a dialogue between neoliberalism supporters and globalization discontents. It can be the cornerstone for building a new global and local society based on inclusion, tolerance, equality and justice.

The rethinking of our economic paradigms along the ethics of integrity and the principles for the common good can be instrumental for avoiding a technocratic approach to economic development. Neoliberalism can be seen not as an ideology but as an expression of ‘technocracy’ or ‘technocapitalism’ (Suarez-Villa 2012). In this perspective, some would think that the solutions to economic problems are exclusively technical in nature. However, technical economic adjustments not integrated with the systemic implications and moral responsibilities would simply dilute or contain the problem. They will not solve the issue of recurring crises, growing global inequalities and societal violent dissents. Economic development models must ultimately be reconciled with the common good, peace and security, disarmament and arms control, promotion and protection of fundamental human rights, the eradication of extreme poverty, management of migratory flows and food security, and protection of the environment. In all these areas, growing global interdependence demands integrated economic models. They require a sustainable, human and inclusive economics embedded in solidarity and subsidiarity and geared to the universal common good.

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