

# Trinitarian Stewardship and the Limits of Socialism and Capitalism

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The question of stewardship cannot be separated from the question as to what extent it is appropriate for government to restrict the economic activities of individuals and, collectively, of industry. Consequently, this question points to the more general, and arguably central, question of political philosophy of how to balance individual liberty with “the common good.” Grave risks face any society that emphasizes one of these concerns to the detriment of the other. Philosophers like Plato and Marx, for example, consider that societies based on personal economic advancement tend to at best entrap individuals in lifestyles which undermine human well-being (e.g. Republic, Book 8, 555bff) and at worst lead to complete conflict and estrangement between individuals and their fellow citizens, between individuals and nature, and even within the individuals themselves (e.g. Marx’s *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, ed. by Tucker, 1978 pp.110,118, and 120; see also *Alienated Labor*, ed. by Morgan, 1996, 1144-1147). On the other hand, thinkers such as Aristotle and Locke maintain that private property is woven into the natural order, so that undue government restrictions on wealth and use of land threaten both the development of personal virtue (such as the acquisition of self-discipline and the virtue of generosity) (e.g. Aristotle’s *Politics* Book 2, chap.5, 1263b5-7) and open the doors to tyranny (Locke’s *Second Treatise of Government*, chaps.18-19). Nevertheless, both philosophers acknowledge that the failure to exercise self-discipline and generosity in the acquisition of personal wealth leads to the very dangers described by Plato and Marx.

At its core, then, stewardship in respect to the rights and responsibilities individuals and governments bear to the attainment and use of wealth and natural resources requires that *both* the unique interests of individuals, *and* the relationship between individuals constituting community, be preserved for human flourishing to be achieved. In this work, I will examine how the differing socialist strains of Plato and Marx run the risk of de-valuing the concrete human person in the name of an abstract “collective humanity” (or, in the case of Plato, in the name of contemplation of an impersonal “Good”). Following this, I will explain how Aristotle and Locke’s vision of the free economic society fails to properly account for how such a system inherently works against the virtues of self-control needed to guard against the excesses and alienation prophesied by their counterparts. Both the socialist/communist and “free market” approaches fail to acknowledge, in various ways that will be explained within this work, that the individual *as individual* and the community as the whole of interpersonal relations *between individuals* are equally fundamental to human flourishing within society.

In contrast to both of these approaches (and errors), this work argues that only a view of reality which, paradoxically, recognizes equally the primacy of the individual *and* the collective (i.e. a primacy rooted in the foundations of reality) is adequate as a foundation for such a social order. Specifically, I will argue that the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, which shows the source of the created order itself as being Three Persons who, in their perfect eternal relation to one another, *are* God, provides an excellent foundation for preserving the full integrity of both the person as individual and the person as related to community. At the same time, even God as three-Persons-in-relation remains an abstraction (and thus, in Marx's view, a source of alienation) *to us* unless we are somehow able to participate in the reality of this God, becoming, much as 2 Peter 1:4 says, "Partakers of the divine nature." Consequently, God-as-Triune-Personality serves as the foundation by which both human individuality and community are truly preserved by a human participation which itself is both personal and communal. This, from the Christian perspective, is accomplished through sacrament, giving rise to charity, by which one in physical concreteness (e.g. through washing, eating, laying on of hands, and so on) is connected as a human individual, by a human individual, to both the human and divine communities (the Church and Trinity) through a concrete participation in the one divine-human individual person, Jesus Christ.

Considered in the context mentioned above, this appeal to the Trinity is not intended so much as a rational solution to a philosophical problem, though I would maintain that it does provide a tenable solution to the person-community problem, even in the abstract. Rather, it is rather an invitation, and perhaps even a challenge, to those who claim this participation, or who are open to it, to look to this reality, and not to merely human institutions and abstract ideologies, as the means by which *both* the isolation of individualism, *and* the relegation of the individual to the "collective," are overcome. Accordingly, while this appeal by its very nature does not lend itself to advocating a particular form of government, I do maintain that, because the Trinity is taken to be Three Persons who *freely* and *uncoercively* love another, an encounter with the Trinitarian life can be neither theocratically imposed (as those on the political "right" may attempt), nor politically obstructed (as may be the tendency of the political "left"). Thus, a society emphasizing individual liberty over collectivism is best suited for allowing individual persons the opportunity to enter into this participation. At the same time, because the "free" society is inclined toward excess and estrangement (as foreseen by Plato and Marx), the Christian Church must remain vigilant in calling its followers to a life of asceticism and critical reflection upon values of consumerism which surround them, as the Church struggles to avoid becoming merely another institution shaped by the forces of capitalism. Simply put, while the "free" society may allow it to live, Christians can look neither to this society, nor to socialistic society (or their laws, or customs, or institutions) as the source and sustenance of their lives.

## Section I: Plato and Marx and the Limits of Socialism

### A. Plato

In the *Republic*, Plato lays out his dualistic conception of the human person, whereby the soul grasps the "higher" eternal realities of "the Forms," while the body is "bogged down" by dependency upon ephemeral material goods (e.g. Book 6 485 b, 508a-509a, and 507b). In his ideal society, those who are oriented toward a life of contemplation are best suited to rule, precisely because they are disinterested in economic gain (e.g. 485a). In seeking the highest justice as the soul's control over the appetites of the body, the guardians, aspiring to be philosopher kings, also act with the greatest perceived justice toward the subjects over which they rule. However, because they are focused on contem-

plation, and only on ruling for the sake of protecting their contemplative life, the guardians possess political power without economic advantage, and thus are not opposed in their power by the lower classes.

The guardians, in overcoming the disharmonious yearnings of the body, are trained to detach themselves from a sense of possession even in the case of sexual relationships and the rearing of children (e.g. Book 3, 416d-e, and Book 5, 457d; see also, Book 8, 543a). After all, for Plato, such bonds are products of the inferior body, not the soul. This premise, if taken seriously, is presumably based on Plato's conception of a fundamental distinction between body and soul (Book 4, 435e-439d). Hence, if this dualism turns out to be flawed, the possibility of overcoming emotional attachments to spouse and children, as well as property, must also be questioned.

Plato's ideal society, however, is not strictly socialistic. Private property as well as exclusive sexual partnerships are to be regarded as the norm for the lower laboring classes who, engaged primarily in supporting society through physical labor, are attached more to the enjoyments of body than mind. There is certainly a type of justice achieved by them, to the extent that they continue to perform their tasks well and stay within their appropriate place (Book 5, 433b-434d). In fact, the justice of the city as a whole needs such workers to exist, in order to meet the basic needs of the guardians who must devote themselves wholeheartedly to the task of contemplation and ruling the city. Of course, Plato is aware that anything found within the natural world, including the "ideal city," is subject to eventual corruption and decay. Through obtuse calculations, he explains why over time imperfection in procreation will result in the misplacement of some individuals within the wrong class, slowly contributing to the devolution of society (Book 8, 546a-e).

At first, society will come to be ruled by those with an inordinate need for honor and recognition (timocracy), giving way in time to those who rule by virtue of their economic accomplishment (oligarchy). On the surface, the oligarch appears to have much of the self-restraint of the philosopher-king (as discipline is needed for the acquisition and maintenance of wealth), but beyond appearances he or she lacks true virtue, as this balance is maintained out of fear and not out of love of The Good. However, since the average person will perceive the oligarch to benefit more from his or her self-restraint than the philosopher, wealth-making will come to be praised over contemplation. Consequently, the habits of such restraints are not passed on to the offspring (possibly because the oligarch is more a man of well-disposed habits than true understanding and knowledge), so that his or her children are prone to self-indulgence and excess.

This condition thus gives way to democracy, where every kind of indulgence and experimentation is applauded as the new key to virtue, a willingness to "break down" the restraints of old. But here the democrat becomes a slave to his or her own desires, being unable to achieve lasting satisfaction and caught up in an ever-more-difficult to achieve quest for satisfaction and novelty. Social chaos eventually results, with the rise of a tyrannical ruler being the solution to the impending anarchy. (See all of Books 8 and 9 for the details of this deterioration from higher forms to lower forms of government).

As noted above, Plato's ideal itself is highly suspect, built as it is upon a likely unrealistic distinction between body and soul. Plato himself seems to be aware of the impossibility of preserving this dichotomy as strictly as his ideal society requires, and thus admits that even this society would fall into

increasing degrees of disorder and indulgence. Furthermore, the emergence of this ideal state can only be achieved to the extent that economic, artistic, and religious activities among the classes are strictly regulated (see especially Book 7). Hence, creative personal expression is banned, and the human ideal is to be as indistinct as possible from other members of the guardian class. Though he may well realize this condition to be unachievable, Plato nonetheless paints a picture of collectivism among the guardian class, where personal distinction is rendered virtually irrelevant; in fact, one almost suspects that the ideal of the philosopher is one who as an individual comes as close to resembling the indistinct “Form of Human Being” as much as possible, where all individualizing distinction is downplayed.

## B. Marx

As for Marx’s socialism, it differs significantly from that of Plato in that 1) he, unlike Plato, is utterly materialistic, rejecting completely any notion of a “spiritual” realm, and 2) in denying the notion of soul, he undermines the natural basis for class one finds in Plato in “difference of soul,” found in Book 4 of the *Republic* (445d). At the same time, Marx develops centrally his view that individual *self-consciousness* is necessarily a product of economic *class consciousness* (e.g. *The German Ideology*, ed. by Tucker, 1978, pp.197-199). Specifically, the difference is between those who own the means of production (the “*bourgeois* capitalist”), and those who produce but own neither the means, nor the products, which they produce (the “proletariat”). (These terms occur throughout many of his works.) This difference is at the center of all aspects of what Marx terms “alienation,” which, while it may well have psychological connotations, it is in essence materialistic. As will be discussed next, Marx is careful to argue that rather than subjecting the individual to the “collective,” as many people often characterize communism, on his view communism is the only means by which the individual can be liberated from this alienation (which is also described next), thereby finding authentic “freedom” and “individuality” *in community*.

Marx’s analysis of the “individual” stems from his notion that self-consciousness necessarily includes one’s awareness of *another* which he or she *is not* (see especially *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Tucker, pp.113-118). Thus, in a sense, part of an individual’s identity consists of a nullity, or a negation; that is, it consists of a concrete awareness that he or she *is not* “this other” (i.e. this “object”). In identifying oneself in contrast to “this other”, however, the other, paradoxically, becomes an integral part of one’s positive identity; that is to say, if this “other” did not exist by which the subject contrasts himself or herself, then one’s understanding of himself or herself as being something *other than* this particular object would not occur. Alienation characterizes the human condition when this “other” remains fundamentally “other,” in such a way that one can *only* regard the other as something which is outside, over and above, or beyond oneself. In this case, the other is conceived purely negatively in respect to one’s own self, so that this “nullity,” or “negation” constituted by the other (and all others) remains a permanent feature of one’s own *self-identity*.

For Marx, then, capitalism and religion are both systems of alienation. (This theme and its many implications are explored throughout Marx’s works, but a good sampling of this concept can be found in the excerpt *Alienation and the Social Classes* in Tucker, pp.133-135.) The alienating character of capitalism and religion can be explained as follows:

## 1. Capitalism and Alienation

In capitalism, the worker “puts” his or her labor (life energy) into creating products that do not contribute to that individual’s life (do not “belong” to, or are not used by, him or her). Rather, these products of labor serve only to increase the wealth of the owner, to whom these products are also alien in that they are not linked to the labor of the capitalist himself or herself. As production increases, the worker continues to receive a given wage, even as the owner generates greater and greater wealth from the sale of the products created by the worker. Consequently, the worker contrasts himself or herself with material goods which, though created by his or her labor, become immediately inaccessible to the worker who created them (so the worker is estranged from his or her own creation). These products, therefore, serve as elements of a world of material goods which remain outside of the worker (see, for example, the section entitled “Estranged Labor” in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, pp.71-81).

The capitalist society also undermines stewardship (care for nature) in that it regards nature as something alien to oneself, and thus either to be exploited for one’s own use, or experienced as a cold, external force that remains inaccessible to the laborer. In agrarian society, the worker (e.g. serf) is at least temporarily linked to the land (even though it ultimately serves as a source of alienation, since most of what the laborer produces is for the landowner). In industrial society, however, Marx notes that alienation increases exponentially, as one becomes purely an “appendage of the machine,” deprived not only of the final use and/or ownership of his or her product, but even of temporary connection to such products in the production process itself (*Communist Manifesto*, chap. 1, p.479 in Tucker ed.; for an extensive analysis of the effects of machinery, see *Das Capital, Volume 1*, Part 4, chapter15).

At the same time, the owner is contrasted with these goods that are not his or her own creation. However, while the owner experiences control over this process (as he or she “owns” the means of production, as well as the products themselves, at least prior to sale), the worker experiences the world as something whose power (both in terms of the sum total of produced goods, as well as his or her economic power relative to the owner) over him or her increases. As a result, both the worker and owner are alienated from the products of labor, while they also, through this production, are alienated from one another. Indeed, their self-consciousness fundamentally differs from one another, as the owner experiences the world in terms of power, and the worker in terms of depleting his or her power as he or she “gives” more and more to the owner through his or her labor. Because of this different self-consciousness, one can almost speak of the proletariat and the *bourgeois* as being different kinds of beings; both are human because they possess self-consciousness, but it is a consciousness of how each is fundamentally estranged from one another, as well as from the material world in general.

According to Marx, communism overcomes this alienation by bringing all created goods into use by the actual persons whose labor produces them. This, in turn, eliminates the distinction between the “worker” who surrenders his or her energy in labor to another, and the “owner” who receives it so as to further alienate the laborer. In the communal setting, the producer can appropriate the material goods he or she produces into his or her identity through (shared) use. In this case, one now identifies with the material world through production rather than through contrasting himself or herself fundamentally to it. Anything outside of the producer can become “part” of the producer through his or her use of it, so that harmony between nature and producer results; what is naturally “outside” the producer



is there for being “brought into identity” with the producer rather than regarded as a permanently contrasted “other” existing over and above him or her. Likewise, the producer identifies himself or herself through *interaction with* fellow producers, who are also fellow *sharers* in the use of their mutual products, so that the difference between producers is not fundamental and estranged. In short, in communism one no longer experiences estrangement from material reality itself, so that one recognizes a unity rather than alienation between self-consciousness and nature.

## 2. Religion and Alienation

As for religion, Marx maintains that those who believe in a Creator God must necessarily view God as something fundamentally different from themselves, which remains fundamentally in power over and above them (*Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, p.91). Moreover, because they believe themselves to be created by God, they regard their essence as something defined *for them* apart from their own activity, so that their allegedly “free choices” are contrasted to (distinguished from) what they essentially are. In this case, individuals must regard their activity, or their choices, as being estranged from their own essence, as well as from the God who defines them essentially in creation. (It is easy to understand how Sartre could regard his conviction that persons define themselves through their own actions as being largely compatible with Marx’s view of the world, apart from the latter’s deterministic implications which run counter to the centrality of free will in Sartre’s writings; see, for example, Sartre’s discussions on communism found in his *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, 1959.)

In any case, insofar as God remains absolutely “other,” so that the significance of one’s own activity is supposedly independent of his or her created human essence, for Marx a belief in God requires one to identify himself or herself fundamentally in terms of a nullity (“I am not this,” and “what I do or believe or think is not what I am”). Hence, on Marx’s view, belief in God requires persons to see themselves primarily in terms of a negative, their own “positive essence” remaining for the most part hidden and mysterious to them (“since my consciousness is not my essence, I cannot know positively what I am”). In this case, humans would be something other than their consciousness—which for Marx would be to say that they are not human at all, since humans by definition are those natural beings who are self-aware of their place within nature. For the Marxist, then, “humans as created” are necessarily something non-human.

## 3. Socialism and the De-Valuation of the Individual

Marx’s view is comprehensive and undeniably based on careful reflection of both the historical condition and psychological structure of human beings. Nevertheless, an equally careful analysis demonstrates how the role alienation plays in the relationship between individual and communal consciousness ultimately points to a de-valuation (or even submersion) of individual consciousness within the consciousness of collective humanity. Some statements allude rather plainly to this, though others seem intriguingly close to defending a view remarkably similar to a Trinitarian conception whereby individuals find their value only in their self-understandings as “persons in relation to other persons.”

Statements which seem to preserve the significance of the individual include his remarks, for example, in *The German Ideology*, where he states, “In real community, the individuals retain their freedom in and through their association” (p.197). This statement certainly paints a picture of the indi-

vidual-community relation that is similar to the Trinitarian conception of personhood as being comprised of individuals-in-essential-relation, freely interacting with (and loving) one another. In a similar vein, elsewhere in the same work he declares that the abolition of class, rather than subjugating the individual into a collective, actually allows persons to “assert themselves as individuals” through the overthrowing of “the State” (p.200). The need for such an assertion is posited a few lines prior to this, when he argues that in capitalist society, the individual is internally divided into a “personal individual” and a “class individual,” conflicting with one another in the individual’s need for unified self-consciousness (p.199). Apparently, while the “class individual” is torn between defining himself in terms of a nullity (what he or she *is not*, and that than which he or she is fundamentally different—i.e. those of other classes) and trying to achieve a positive self-identity not based on such negations, the individual of communistic classless society can be defined purely in positive terms, since these contrasts which serve as the source of negation have been eliminated.

As I will show shortly, a careful analysis of Marx’s scheme indicates that this overcoming of conflict, and subsequently of identification-through-negation lacking a whole, positive content, does not occur simply by eliminating the conditions of “otherness” which serve as the source of alienation. Rather, inasmuch as individuals can only be conscious of themselves *as individuals* by consciousness being “demarcated” in *some* way, “otherness” can only be overcome completely by removing this demarcation and merging the individual’s self-consciousness (which as “individual” and as “self” must, by definition, be demarcated) with the *collective* consciousness of *all* individuals.

Marx himself alludes to this when he refers in *The German Ideology* to “society as the subject” where “the consecutive series of interrelated individuals connected with each other can be conceived as a single individual” (p.164). Likewise, in the next line he adds, “. . . individuals make one another, physically and mentally, but do not make themselves . . . in the sense of the ‘Unique,’ of the ‘made,’ man” (p.164).

Put differently, alienation occurs as consciousness of material goods which remain outside of the individual, unable to be appropriated for personal use, as well as the consciousness of other persons who are systematically situated in a fundamentally different economic position. In this case, alienation can only be overcome in Marx’s scheme once the totality of all natural goods become available to each and every individual for appropriation. Insofar as access to the material world is equal, this overcoming of alienation toward nature is concomitant with the overcoming of alienation between individuals (formerly divided by economic class) as well.

The limitation of the above approach, however, is that *in fact* the self-consciousness of a particular individual is limited to a particular set of concrete experiences, as was noted previously. Therefore, in concrete experience, alienation is not completely overcome as long as something material remains outside of an individual’s appropriation of it, even if *in theory* this material is accessible to the individual. Consequently, the individual can overcome this “consciousness of separation” from unappropriated nature only by either 1) identifying with something not-yet concretely experienced, and thus with something that can theoretically be experienced *in the abstract*, or 2) by identifying concretely with other individuals who concretely experience what has not been directly experienced by the individual question (much as when one tells another that he or she “feels what the other feels”). In this second case one thinks, for instance, how often the term “solidarity” is used by representatives of organized labor.

The first option creates a contradiction for Marx, who, in *The German Ideology* for example, decries any account which defines personhood in terms of an abstract ideal rather than a concrete, self-conscious reality (p.154). The second option, though perhaps systematically consistent, is undesirable for anyone who wishes to preserve some fundamental, unique significance for the concrete individual, as it allows alienation to be self-consciously overcome only at the expense of allowing one's self-consciousness to become indistinguishable from the consciousness of the other. In other words, if difference breeds contrast and antagonism (alienation), then alienation can only be overcome by eliminating difference. But if difference is eliminated, then so is authentic individuality. In this case, the individual does not so much find freedom "in and through community" but rather "finds" liberation through a type of self-annihilation—that is, escape from alienation is achieved not by freeing the self from alienation but by eliminating the *self* consciousness of the self that is alienated.

The critique of the second case is supported, for example, in Marx's explicit assertion that the "individual" and "species life" of the person are one and the same, further declaring the collective in its "generality" to be a "thinking being" (*Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, p.86). Here, society itself is taken to be something with a concrete existence, rather than being a concept abstracted from the collection of individuals (p.86). A meager attempt is made to preserve authentic individuality in the claim that "thinking and being are different" so that the individual may be distinct "in being" while remaining one with society in thinking (p.86). He admits that the fact of individual death seems to point to the primacy of the individual over that of the collective species. Nevertheless, he responds to this difficulty by stating that because humanity as a species is by its essence a "determinate being," this determination implies limitation which naturally would be manifest in the finitude of each member of the species (p.86).

This concession regarding the individualizing character of death shows a weakness in Marx's argument for the primacy of collective "species feeling." It is worth noting that, in contrast to the *dialectical* materialism of Marx, the *atomistic* materialism of the 17<sup>th</sup> century thinker Thomas Hobbes demonstrates that society *always* remains an "artificial" being (i.e. an abstraction; *Leviathan*, Part 2, chap.17, sec. 12) rather than a real, "thinking" one (as Marx contends) *precisely because* of the unalterable fact of individual death (e.g. *Leviathan*, Part 1.13, sec. 14, and 1.14,4-5). Whereas Marx claims "species feeling" to be a concrete reality which inevitably arises from an elimination of conflicting material forces achieved through the abolition of private property, Hobbes maintains that the individual's fear of death assures that individuals remain fundamentally self-interested. On the latter's view, "communal feeling" is nothing more than the suppression of individual desires for conquest, which are kept in check by a prevailing "terror of some power" represented in the person(s) of an authoritarian governing figure (Part 2.17,1-2). Consequently, social equilibrium is not self-sustained by the individuals through their "dialectical" transformation into equal (and therefore unestranged) communal beings, but only through the ongoing, and even increasing, difference of power between the ruling class and the ruled. "Communal feeling" is only achieved through the suppressive, and even oppressive, force of government.

In Hobbes' case, alienation between classes ineradicably characterizes the human condition. Here, even the apparent loss of alienation between governed individuals is not accompanied by a utopian "communal feeling," but rather *exemplifies* a feeling of fear—fear not only toward the ruler, but between individuals, which leads to the decision to suppress desires and agree to a condition of govern-



ment in the first place. Simply put, in Hobbes, a feeling of equality is based solely on the fact that individual persons remain aware that, apart from government, all people are more or less equally able to harm one another (1.13, 1ff). Alienation between members of the ruled class is redefined, but not eliminated, according to a radical alienation between the ruler and the ruled.

Thus, Hobbes is able to take the fact of individual death, which is acknowledged but minimized by Marx, and use it to prove, contrary to Marx, that the consciousness of individuality always remains primary.

Given the above insight, it appears that Marx's appeal to "species feeling" over individual consciousness can only be successful if individual fear of death could somehow be subjugated to concern for the well-being of humanity as a whole. Such thinking, of course, supports the notion that the life of the individual itself is worth less than the well-being of the collective of individuals. But in fact, this itself may well point to a logical contradiction: if individuals have no irreducible, absolutely basic value, how can an accumulation of individuals possess an absolute and basic value? Marx could perhaps respond by saying that in the pre-utopian condition, characterized by alienation, individuals *do not* have value as such; rather, the dialectical process is moving toward an "emergence" of value in the realization of the communal human being who exists in a completely equal and unalienated state. In this case, equality alone has value, and "human value" *cannot* have a foundation until communism is achieved. The problem with this response, of course, is that it returns to the first problem raised in this work against Marx: namely, it calls for (as I phrased it previously) defining "personhood in terms of an abstract ideal rather than a concrete, self-conscious reality."

Before moving on to a consideration of the limitations of those philosophers who advocate private property ("capitalism"), it is worth noting that Marx's system logically places the individual in the same position that he denounces in the case of religion. Whereas before Marx declares that "the more man puts into God, the less he retains in himself" (*Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, p.72), now it appears that a similar phenomenon is required of the individual in respect to his or her relation to the "collective consciousness."

Of course, Marx would say that the self-surrender of religion is fundamentally alienating, whereas immersion in the collective consciousness is not. This is true for him, since the latter, unlike religion, does not involve a relationship to that which remains even in principle absolutely "other" (and thus alienating) to the individual, inasmuch as alienation can allegedly be overcome if one is able to achieve a truly communal existence, free even of the authoritarian principles deemed necessary by Hobbes. But this is precisely where the Trinitarian model profoundly overcomes both the alienation bemoaned by Marx, as well as the loss of distinct, authentic self-hood implied in Marx's system as a "solution" to alienation (even if the Hobbesian criticism of Marx, rooted in the primacy of individual death, can be overcome). The world considered from a purely material perspective (such as is presupposed by Marx's dialectical materialism) operates according to the conservation of energy, so that a material gain (or gain in material consciousness) in one place can only occur where there is a loss of energy (or material self-consciousness) somewhere else. The Trinity, on the other hand, is taken to be that which transcends these limitations by permitting real, significant, difference without diminishing community (i.e. without causing alienation) in the least. This will be discussed in greater depth in Section III of this work. Before undertaking a consideration of Trinity, though, it is useful to consider the strengths and

weaknesses of two social systems which give priority to individuality through private property in a way that is precluded in Marx's thought.

## Section II: Aristotle and Locke and the Limits of Capitalism

### A. Aristotle

In contrast to his teacher Plato, Aristotle rejects a dualistic conception of the human person in favor of a view that has later come to be known as "hylomorphism." On the hylomorphic view, creatures are a concrete compound of matter and form (or "soul" in living organisms), where a "species principle" forms matter in such a way as to give the organism specific functions (*On the Soul* 2.1, 412a17-412b, also *Metaphysics* 2.6-8). For Aristotle, while the soul cannot itself be equated with matter, it is in fact inseparable from matter in the same way that one can conceptually distinguish, without being able to separate in fact, the structure (form) of a piece of wax from the "matter" of the wax itself (*On the Soul* 2.1, 412b5-10). Thus, for Aristotle, an attempt to sever our attachments that have a bodily origin, such as spouse and offspring, would be most unnatural.

One could perhaps "convince oneself" to detach oneself psychologically from such natural associations, but this would be a perversion rather than an achievement of virtue, as in the *Republic* (*Politics* 2.3-4, especially 1262b15-17). As Aristotle sees the family as forming the "first society," the goods of hearth and home are needed to supply the family's needs, and thus an argument for private property is formed (*Politics* 1.8). On his view, just as it is unreasonable, per Plato's *Republic*, for one to value children, at least through natural inclinations, that are not one's own offspring as much as he or she would value his or her natural offspring, it is unreasonable to maintain that people will feel the same incentive to care for public property that they have to care for that which is used to serve primarily one's own needs and those of loved ones. Furthermore, in a socialist society, he points out, the virtue of benevolence cannot be developed, since "sharing" is a contradiction-in-terms in a world where everything one produces belongs to the community as a whole, and never to oneself, the moment it is produced (2.5, 1263a12-14).

It is interesting to consider that Aristotle's view of the family shares some insights with Marx's materialism, in that the former agrees that the mutual appropriation of goods within the family is linked to a natural "closeness" (i.e. absence of alienation). At the same time, the order of this connection is reversed. Whereas Marx believes that closeness is a consequence of the mutual appropriation of property, Aristotle maintains that the shared use of goods among family is a consequence of their natural affinity for one another. For Aristotle, human nature manifests itself in the establishment of property, while in Marx, property-relations establish human (class-based) nature. To some extent, the logic of Aristotle's system does entail that we feel less affinity (more alienated?) toward others the further removed they are from us, so that care for family precedes care for the city-state, care for the city-state precedes concern for those of other city-states who share similar language and customs, and care for similar city states precedes concern for altogether foreign peoples. Once again, however, the project envisioned by Marx for creating a universal utopian "species feeling" would require the elimination of diversity which Aristotle believes characterizes the natural order, and is the very basis for societies in the first place (e.g. *Politics* 2.2, 1261a15-23, 2.5, 1263b34-38). Thus, to alter this natural diversity through enforced equality would be to do violence to the natural order, and presumably therefore to individuals.

On the other hand, Aristotle does recognize that “the special business of the legislator is to create in men this benevolent disposition” (2.5, 1263a38-39). The difference here between Aristotle and the socialism of Marx, which operates on deterministic materialistic principles, is that Aristotle believes that this benevolence should emerge as free virtuous action. Indeed, as a hylomorphist, he can appreciate the influence of physical reality on the activity of thought, but would deny that human nature is primarily a bi-product of material forces. Moreover, whatever natural biological and ethnic distance might naturally separate individuals from one another, Aristotle maintains that affinity based on shared virtue overcomes the estrangement of natural differences (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 8.3, 1156b5ff), though presumably not to the exclusion of the natural physical bonds of family and ethnicity. In any case, the emphasis on overcoming alienation through free virtuous activity rather than the manipulation of social structures has much in common with my appeal to the free, uncoerced love of the Three Persons of the Trinity as the basis for maintaining the primacy of both individual and community.

While Aristotle is convinced that the need for private property is essential to human flourishing (at least for “free” men and women; his views on slavery will not be addressed here), he also realizes that the free exchange of goods that arises within such a society has potential for abuse. As he sees it, fending for oneself and one’s family is the most natural concern, though the complexity of living within a larger community makes exchange of goods inevitable. The exchange of goods for goods is thus a normal extension of the natural order.

The situation becomes a bit more complicated once currency enters the picture; now one is not exchanging a consumable good for consumable goods, but something inconsumable for what is consumable. As he explains it, this is a development further removed from nature. However, the furthest removed development of all is the use of money to generate money—something that cannot be consumed, nor used to produce that which can be consumed (*Politics* 1.9). Accordingly, he sees the potential for a life devoted to “wealth-making” as opposed to “home-building” to lead to immoderation, as there is no natural limit of labor or consumption by which to moderate this process (also 1.9). Consequently, he warns that the person of virtue—whose life, not entirely unlike Plato’s philosopher king, devotes a considerable amount of time to the “leisure” of contemplation—must make an effort to not treat wealth as a end-in-itself rather than as a means to a comfortable life consisting primarily of enjoyments of a more natural sort.

In fairness to Aristotle, his view of the relationship between human nature and production may defend private property without promoting *capitalism* as such. However, as will be shown next, capitalism seems to be nevertheless the practical development of the system outlined by Aristotle.

To the point, despite his precautions, what Aristotle fails to properly realize is that if others in society become predominantly “taken up” in the business of wealth-making, the more one resists this excess oneself, the more likely he or she is to regress economically, becoming comparably poorer and poorer. Hence, even the self-restrained person is increasingly pressured to conform to the culture of capital, thereby hindering the higher activity of contemplation. On the other hand, to resist this culture is to fall into trap of poverty, whereby contemplation is also sacrificed. This condition, it should be pointed out, is not far removed from the scheme of alienation developed by Marx. As with Marx, however, the solution may be as bad as the problem: can one prevent this condition of alienating immoderation from occurring without incorporating social measures which, on Aristotle’s view, would

damage the proper natural connection between individual, family, and labor? Can one be protected from larger social alienation only at the cost of surrendering those special associations that are most immediate to one in the natural order?

B. Locke

John Locke paints a picture of society similar to Aristotle, and thereby encounters many of the same difficulties. Interestingly, like Plato, he is a dualist, but his dualism actually lends support to a free economy (*Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, e.g. Book 2, chapter 23,secs.4-5). There are also commonalities between Locke and Marx in that both recognize labor to be an extension of one's body (e.g. Locke's *Second Treatise of Government*, Chapter 5, sec. 27ff). Even so, while Marx as a materialist sees the process of production, buying, and selling to necessarily entail multiple layers of alienation (as one who creates a product for another literally has this "extension of himself" removed from him, as it becomes an "object" of exchange rather than a token of one's own creativity), Locke presumably believes that as long as one voluntarily and rationally surrenders his or her products of labor, no alienation occurs. In such a scheme, mind and reason clearly have some sort of guiding precedence over body. Likewise, as long as consumers enter into the acquisition of such goods freely and rationally, bonding rather than alienation occurs between producer and consumer. On this model, community arises largely from these self-interested economic processes, but in being self-interested they are not other-disregarding, as it is understood that society as a whole is well-served by this operation (e.g. *Second Treatise*, chap. 34-43).

Of course, also like Aristotle, Locke realizes that immoderation and lack of restraint can hinder the benefits of a free economy. As he puts it, there is no liberty without law, with the first law being the law of reason (2.26). In particular, he believes that justice requires avoiding waste (2.26), refraining from taking beyond one's own needs when another's basic needs are not being met (5.31), and caring for humanity as a whole as much as one is able, once his or her own individual needs have been adequately addressed (2.26). Political law helps to enforce these principles as well, though it is best, on Locke's view, to encourage individual self-regulation as much as possible, as an over-involved government can quickly descend into manipulation and tyranny (e.g. chap. 11-13, and 18-19).

Even so, Locke opens the door to systematic immoderation when he defends the unlimited acquisition of "coinage." Since currency is not perishable, the principle of waste does not apply to it, and thus it cannot be hoarded beyond limit (5.47-51). While acquisition of perishable goods has a mechanism of self-restraint built into it (since one must work hard to acquire more), this is not necessarily the case with money, which can be inherited or generated primarily by the labor of another. (It is noteworthy that Aristotle, for all his similarities to Locke, foresees more clearly the possible dangers of currency being introduced into the economic scheme, as does Marx.)

At this point the potential for the estrangement of capitalist and proletariat prophesied by Marx becomes a clear threat. Of course, one can continue to insist that as long as the owner and the workers (as well as the consumers) are "rational," harmony can be maintained. But once again, as confronted Aristotle, it is more and more difficult to remain "rational" and "moderate" when one is stuck in an economy which thrives on immoderation. Certainly, Locke's own appreciation of the importance of education in the development of self-control demonstrates that he realizes the influence

interaction with external world plays in this process. Even so, his dualistic conception of mind and body may prevent him from realizing, as well as a materialist or even a hylomorphist might, the extent to which thinking itself is linked to physical interactions of the brain. Furthermore, these interactions themselves are in part extensions of such interactions in the external world, including its socioeconomic aspects.

This is not to suggest that determinism (i.e. absence of free will) must result from such interactions; I only mention it to emphasize that the social structures which interfere with the rational economic model idealized by Locke may involve both “objective” and “subjective” obstacles, especially to the extent that the subjective psychology of the agent is intertwined with external socioeconomic forces. As Marx foresees, however, in a capitalist society, all social institutions come to be driven by the values of the market, including traditionally “nobler” interests such as education and religion. For him, rather than being potential correctives, these institutions (and religion in particular) serve only to keep citizens in blind service to the capitalist machine.

Another point against Locke, better understood by Marx, is that human beings seem to value equality at least as much as absolute economic benefit. Recent studies in neuroscience, for example, show that in games based on economic exchange, participants generally experience less displeasure in a scenario where neither they or another participant receive any money, than one where both receive some money, but in considerably unequal amounts (e.g. *Newsweek*, July 5, 2004, p.44). A disdain for classism seems to be literally hard-wired into our brains. This is not much different than Marx’s materialistic account of alienation, correctable in his view only by communism. Of course, the study also reveals a problem in Marx similar to the one I have already discussed; namely, people may well achieve this avoidance of alienation by forming social structures which actually work against individual self-interest and self-improvement. Simply put, humans generally seem to prefer an objective self-devaluation over a relative, subjective one.

Having examined the advantages and disadvantages of various conceptions of communism and private property, it is time to move on to the final section of this work. Here, I argue that purely political-systematic solutions, based on social structures formed according to certain conceptions of human nature, are flawed in different ways. Either, as in the case of Plato and Marx, they are built on deterministic principles which inherently undermine individual significance, or, like Locke and Aristotle, they propose economic systems that rely upon unrealistically high degrees of rationality and self-control to be effective. Consequently, I do not attempt to overcome these alternate problems of communal alienation and individual de-valuation primarily through the advocacy of a particular socio-economic system, though I will demonstrate why a free market society like those favored by Aristotle and Locke may be an important prerequisite for achieving a solution. Instead, my aim is to indicate why only a conscious, freely chosen effort on the part of individuals to strenuously move toward a greater awareness of the Trinitarian life of God, through *voluntary* asceticism, worship, and participation in the sacraments is essential in achieving an understanding of how to overcome alienation between persons, while nonetheless appreciating the full unique significance of each and every individual. In this case, one can infer that the only way both individuality and community could be equally valued would be if the foundation of reality itself, which serves as the source of nature, was somehow equally individually personal *and* interpersonally communal. In essence, then, my work is intended to be a call to Christians to live a life consistent with their beliefs, more than a defense of a particular form of government.



### Section III: Toward a Trinitarian Vision of Person and Society

Although the survey of each thinker has been exceedingly brief, there are a few points we can summarize for each. Basically, the dangers of Plato and Marx are that their vision for attaining the ideal society requires substantial social engineering, and a de-emphasis on personal uniqueness. It is the collective which is valued, though presumably in the abstract; the concrete person is served through this collective harmony. But of course, it is difficult to see how liberation in human relationships can ever be achieved through a system which requires the careful coercion of all human activities and institutions leading up to this utopia.

Plato of course was aware of this tension, noting for example the irony of advocating “noble lies” in the interest of forming trustworthy, well-adjusted citizens (*Republic*, Book 3, 414b). Such lies are “opiates” in Marx’s view, but one may well ask how individuals can aspire to the abstract good of “society” without being allowed to think of the abstract good of “The Good” (as that which “stands above” even the Forms, illuminating them), or “God?” Clearly, then, the socialist model tends to suppress the experience of concrete goodness for the individual through the promise of an abstract “goodness for all.” At the same time, to assure that this abstraction does not carry beyond the realm of matter, all religious impulses (or quasi-religious impulses of mystical philosophy) must (on Marx’s view) be prevented, and rooted out.

This brings us to a critique of Marx’s view that belief in God necessarily entails an absolute, fundamental form of human alienation.

#### A. Trinity and Marx’s Critique of Religion

As explained earlier, Marx maintains that a belief in God alienates because it proposes something which is *absolutely other* than the individual. In this case, unlike the difference between individual human beings, the estrangement cannot be overcome by an alteration in the system of labor and production (i.e. by the implementation of communism over capitalism). This is true, because it is not taken to be an alienation *within* the natural order, but rather one *between* a natural and fundamentally different supernatural order.

The flaw in this assessment of religious belief, however, is that it fails to take into account that *if in fact* there are two fundamentally different orders (“natural” and “supernatural,” or as some prefer, “created” and “uncreated”), then the nature of “difference” and “alienation” between these two spheres of reality would be fundamentally different than that experienced within the natural order. Indeed, the question must be asked what alienation would mean in this case, if the concept was comprehensible at all. In examining more closely Marx’s view of alienation, it can be shown that the grounds of alienation in “nullity” and “negation” do not apply where the Other is something infinite, and thereby *intimately present* to all. It is helpful at this time to elaborate on the manner in which one can speak of Three “infinite” Personalities who are in relation to One another, as well as to the created world. Once this is done, it will be easier to understand why Marx’s denunciation of a belief in God on the grounds of “alienation” is misguided.

### 1. Divine Personality and Infinity

Both collectivism and alienating individualism err in that they appeal to an impersonal, or even de-personalizing, view of the human person. The Latin *persona* is translated loosely as “mask,” but to wear a mask is to be appear to others in a certain way. We may think of “mask” in terms of *concealing* something, but it is important to note that, if we understood “person” in this sense, the connotation would be confused. This is true, as “person” is used to name something *fundamental* (much as “individual” suggests that which is fundamental, i.e. cannot be divided). Hence, it would be misleading to think of “person” as conveying a mask which *hides* a true reality. Rather, the *persona*—one’s appearance to the world—*is* what is fundamentally real. This shows that personhood is ultimately *interpersonal*. To be a person is to be acknowledged, recognized—we might even say loved—by other persons, who are persons by virtue of this same process in respect to us. Personality, then, suggests a kind of equality-by-reciprocity. Given this understanding of “person,” one can readily see why the Trinity, as the eternal Love of Three Persons for one another, is an apt image for understanding the equally fundamental nature of the personal as individual, and as a member of a community.

In effect, collectivism treats the collective as a single person (a “thinking being,” in Marx’s words). In so doing, it renders the collective itself as something solitary, and hence *impersonal*, so that all individuals comprising it are also regarded impersonally.

Capitalistic individualism makes the converse mistake of treating each individual alone as a person, with the interpersonal bonds between them being purely a product of “free will” and “choice” (as a “social contract”). Consequently, this places the relationship between individuals in something that is merely a facet of personality (that is, an attribute such as “will” or “choice”), and not in the foundation of personality itself. Put differently, individualism errs in maintaining that persons *choose* to relate to other persons. This cannot be, since one is not truly a person unless one is already interpersonally related to others! Ironically, then, the “personal freedom” celebrated on as the supposed product of capitalist society is actually its own conceptual source of alienation, and hence the *absence* of personal freedom.

Given the above, it is clear that the scheme of alienation between diverse individuals cannot apply to the Trinity. Here, Otherness between divine Persons does not point to a limitation (since each is infinite), but to a perfection of relation. In other words, the distinction between Persons does not indicate a limit in respect to any particular Person. Consequently, one Person does not have to lose His own Self-Identity by eliminating the recognition of difference between the Persons. Rather, the recognition of this difference is a source of celebration between them, each affirming His own uniqueness while equally fully appreciating the uniqueness of the Others as well.

Conceptually, one might challenge the idea that each Person of the Trinity can be infinite, and yet unique. For one thing, “personality” may convey something which is distinguished by particular traits or experiences, and therefore as something which is in some respect finite. How could there be an infinite personality at all, and if there were, how could there be more than one of them? These objections do not seem insurmountable, however. We think even of human persons as undergoing a “development” or “expansion” of their personalities, where this process (theoretically) could continue indefinitely (i.e. infinitely).

As for how there could be more than one eternal infinite personality, we may consider again that human persons are said to “identify” with one another to the extent that they have undergone common, or similar, experiences. Even more, as explained previously, we understand each personality to be in some way a product of his or her interaction with other persons. In this case, one person shares in the personality of others, while retaining a unique position and perspective within this process.

By analogy, the 18<sup>th</sup> century philosopher Leibniz, in his theory of “monads,” asserts that inasmuch as every monad (i.e. irreducible, basic being) relates to every moment and every object in the history of the universe, each monad corresponds to a unique point of perspective in respect to the whole of reality (e.g. *Discourse on Metaphysics*, secs. 9 and 14, and *Monadology*, secs.56-57). While much of Leibniz’s “monadology” does not fit the Trinitarian theme I develop here (such as its substitution of divine predestination—i.e. “pre-established harmony” for real interaction between existent beings; see *Monadology* 78), it is helpful for imagining how one might distinguish three infinite Personalities from each other.

To be sure, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not to be thought of us as *spatially* infinite (though all spatio-temporal things would certainly be under Their Providence). This is important, insofar as one cannot refer to something that is spatially infinite as “occupying” a single unique spatial perspective. Certainly, three spatially infinite realities would occupy all of the same spaces, so that one could not meaningfully distinguish one reality from the others. In the case of the Trinity, however, the Son and Spirit are distinguished from the Father, which is taken to be Their source, as well as from each other by virtue of the manner in which they have Their being from the Father (i.e. the Son by being “begotten,” and the Spirit by “procession”). Accordingly, each of them relates to creation, which is the work of all Three, in a unique way. (Fittingly, perhaps, to this discussion, the Trinity as understood in relation to creation is known as the “economic Trinity,” though of course the term is used equivocally here.)

How precisely “begottenness” and “procession” differ from one another is a matter of conjecture, but what is relevant is that these relationships distinguish Them in Their Personalities. Furthermore, the fact that in Their Love for one another They *freely* choose to create something besides Themselves emphasizes the point made earlier that the difference between God and creation is in no way an alienation, in that it is only through God that all things “Live and move and have [their] being” (Acts 17:26-28). Inasmuch as God, in being uncreated Creator, differs from created human persons, the difference between humanity and God cannot be thought as “alienating” in the sense that God “possesses” something which theoretically could be appropriated to humans. Indeed, if we conceptualize our existence primarily as coming “out of nothingness” (*ex nihilo*) rather than *from* God, we will regard existence itself as alienating. As St. Augustine notes, it is precisely in loving created goods in isolation from our love of God that we *sin*, or are alienated from God (e.g. *On Free Choice of the Will*, Book 2, sec.19, and *City of God*, Book 12, end of sec.6-8). On the other hand, when we love God, we love all things through God, and are alienated from neither God nor any fellow creature. With this in mind, it is helpful to turn now to consider further how the understanding of the Trinity developed here avoids the alienation between God and humanity leveled against religion by Marx. In doing this, it will also be revealed how, contrary to Marx’s denunciations, this teaching overcomes alienation in a way that Marxist collectivism never can, especially in light of his admission of the primacy of individual death.

## 2. Trinity as the Absence of Alienation

In a materialistic scheme such as Marx's, it is impossible to conceive how "self-consciousness" can be preserved without somehow abandoning itself to collective awareness, since the natural world operates according to the principle of conservation of energy. In this sphere, a material gain in one location can only be attained through the loss of energy somewhere else, so that material consciousness ultimately requires a loss of distinct self-consciousness as one identifies increasingly with the collective. However, in the sphere of uncreated infinity, the principles of "loss" and "gain" are inapplicable. One can neither subtract nor add to the infinite. Thus, the manner in which each of the divine Persons contributes to the Others cannot be quantitative, nor qualitative in the sense of distinguishing the perfect from the imperfect. Though each divine Person freely chooses the Others, He does not "need" the Others in the sense that they lack-something-in-themselves. Logically, of course, they cannot "experience" the perfection of relation without being in relation to one another, but such a relation does not perfect them *as individuals*. In fact, it is only because They are already perfect as individual Persons that They are able to perfectly eternally love one another *as other*.

Interestingly, Plato's mind-body dualism in the *Republic* helps to illustrate Marx's error in assuming that all consciousness must operate according to the materialist principles of zero-sum distribution. For instance, every definition of "justice" proposed by Socrates' interlocutors presupposes an *economic* definition of justice, and consequently falls short as a perfect definition (beginning with Book 1). These definitions culminate in Thrasymachus' infamous assertion that just is nothing more than "the advantage of the stronger" (Book 1, 338b). It is noteworthy that Thrasymachus defines justice in relative terms, where the strength for one is understood only in proportion to the weakness of another. Thrasymachus obviously has in mind physical strength ("might makes right"). Nevertheless, as one progresses in the *Republic*, one becomes more aware of Socrates' implicit understanding of "justice" in terms of the acquisition of knowledge (e.g. the philosopher-kings possess wisdom, but not material wealth), whereby an increase in one in no way suggests a diminution of strength/justice/knowledge in others. To the contrary, the Allegory of the Cave (Book 7) actually tells of one who is pulled out of the (intellectual) darkness by an mysterious "force" (515e) and who, after seeing the truth of real things as they exist in the light of the sun, feels inspired to return to the cave and share this knowledge with anyone who will listen. In the analogy, the shadows of the cave represent physical reality, the things outside the cave represent the higher reality of the intelligible Forms, and the sun represents "The Good."

It bears mentioning that the "mysterious force" has almost a connotation of divine selection, or grace. (In contrast to the "force" of Book 7, Book 6, 492e-493a explicitly refers to "divine dispensation" which illuminates the understanding.) This suggests, as in my discussion of the Trinity, that in the divine realm, unlike the physical realm, an advantage of strength for one does not imply a disadvantage or loss for another. Rather, for Plato justice *is* the advantage of the strong, but it is capable of making *everyone* stronger. Those who conceive of reality purely in materialist terms can only think of strength in terms of alienation between "the stronger" and "the weaker." But, both in the case of knowledge (mind) for Plato, and for the uncreated divinity of God, the knowledge (or divinity) of one does not suggest a loss for others. Even less does it constitute a loss in the *material* realm (since it is not material at all), as Marx maintains in his denunciation of Deity.

In relation to the created world, the Persons of the Trinity are said to be both immanent *and* transcendent to this world, so that they may be distinguished from it without being alienated from it. God's infinity (omnipresence) assures that there is no "gap" between His and our existence. Our differentiation from God does not involve a nullity, or a negation, of something which we in principle are capable of appropriating to our own self-identity, but which is removed from us in its possession by "the other," as in the case of capitalist and communist consciousness in Marx. It is true that self-consciousness involves an awareness that "we are not God," but this awareness does not diminish our self-awareness at all. Rather, this awareness allows us to be aware of ourselves *as humans* (who by nature are finite) while at the same time fully appreciating the Otherness of God. To explain this a bit more, we are not alienated from God by virtue of our being human, because we would not will that our humanity be "overcome" so that we might "be" God. *We* cannot be God, because *we* are human, and we value our *human-ness* much as we value our own existence (which even Marx realizes in his comments on the "individualizing" aspect of death).

### 3. Trinity, Incarnation and Alienation

Even more significantly, the Christian teaching of the Trinity maintains that God, in the person of Christ as *Logos*, is able to enter into an actual physical relationship with human beings through the incarnation and, subsequently, through the sacrament of Eucharistic communion. In the words of St. Athanasius, "God became a man so that we might become God" (e.g. *On the Incarnation of the Word*, 54.3), though "God by grace" and not "by nature." In fact, while Marx himself acknowledges, as was noted earlier, that individual death is the basis for affording some sort of primacy to the individual over the collective, sacramental participation in God through Christ is intended to overcome both individual death and, in fact, restore all of the cosmos to its original glory (sometimes referred to as *theosis*). According to Christian teaching, just as death entered the world through the sin of one person (Adam), life and participation in God Himself is restored through one man, Jesus Christ (e.g. Romans 5:12-21; Hebrews 2:9-11).

As explained above, while even apart from the incarnation, the difference between God and humanity does not entail the alienation envisioned by Marx, the appearance of God in the flesh enables humans to achieve an even greater *likeness* to God. (It is sometimes pointed out that humans are created in the *image* of God, sacramental participation in the humanity and divinity of Christ allows them to achieve a *likeness* to God.) Alienation between humanity and God does not arise in our recognition of God as a fundamentally different uncreated and infinite Other. Instead, alienation occurs in our inability or unwillingness to acknowledge the infinitude and eternity of this Other, Who preserves our individual significance even in His transcendent and immanent relation to us.

Put differently, it is only if we errantly consider God to be something finite and limited that we can contrast our self-consciousness to Him in a way that alienates, since in this case we live as though the existence of this Other somehow occupies a place (or possesses power) that theoretically could be appropriated by us. It is telling that, in Plato's Allegory, those who regarded the shadows as real resented the one who returned to the cave with an understanding of a higher order of reality and, by extension, of value and justice which operate according to altogether different principles. From a theological perspective, one might surmise that, in the story of Lucifer's Fall, the angel's sin consisted of choosing to consider reality only in created terms rather than divine ones, where the being of God in no way



“competes with” the value and glory of creation. Lucifer chose to regard God as a rival who possessed power that he could not have, rather than acknowledging God to possess power that was theoretically inaccessible to any created being, except insofar as it was first possessed by God, Who is able to “share it” by grace without depleting it in Himself.

To desire the power and existence of One Who is fundamentally different than oneself is akin to one willing himself or herself to be God rather than a human being. Since we *are* human beings, willing ourselves to “have what God has” or “be what God is” amounts to willing the annihilation of our consciousness of ourselves as human. As beings who only exist as creatures of God, resenting God as the uncreated One Who creates actually amounts to resenting our own creation, emphasizing the *self*-alienation implicit to an attitude of alienation toward God even more. If we accept our reality as created beings, on the other hand, we actually embrace ourselves for what we are (created beings, thereby acknowledging God’s transcendence) while also embracing God as the One Who is immanent to us, even more so through the incarnation. In short, our ability to relate to God as Creator as fundamentally Other than we are as creatures not only does not alienate, it marks a loving invitation for us to enter into an awareness of God, other human beings, and all of creation in a way that would not be possible if our existence were grounded in the purely finite material sphere.

As for the implication that creation is alienating in that it deprives us of the meaning we create for ourselves through our own activity, such a claim falls flat when one considers that God’s creation of the natural order does not preclude human beings from defining their self-significance through their activity. This is true, as this awareness enriches our self-awareness and gives it fuller significance than it could have through the sphere of material relations alone. Simply put, the offer to enter into a loving relationship with the Triune God still allows one the freedom to enter into this relation in unique and creative ways. Nothing is lost either quantitatively or qualitatively from such activity. Activity takes on an eternal significance which allows activity to be just as meaningful in the here and now as it is for Marx, while extending this meaning into everlasting life. In addition, if one notes Marx’s acknowledgement that individual death creates a background of personal negation which ultimately destroys the unification of the personal with the collective consciousness, the opportunity for the collective consciousness to be fully entered into (without losing individuality) would be greatest where individual personal existence was maintained everlastingly.

## B. Trinity and Society

### 1. Trinity and the Problem of Theocracy

It has been explained up to this point how the Christian doctrine of the Trinity provides a model for overcoming both the socialistic subjugation of the individual to the collective, as well as the capitalistic alienation between individuals. What may remain unclear at this point, however, is why this particularly Christian notion is arguably *best* suited for offering a solution to these problems. In answering this question, it will also become clear why the doctrine of the Trinity itself precludes a political order mandating adherence to Trinitarian doctrine and practice. In this case, life lived in commitment to a Trinitarian vision must be a *free* option, presupposing a social order which allows for this commitment but which, at the same time, is challenged and in some sense surpassed (if not abandoned) by those who live according to this commitment.

To begin, one might suggest that Aristotle's understanding of the family, at least, provides a satisfactory non-theological account of how to avoid the excesses of both individualism and collectivism. In respect to the earlier discussion on the interpersonal nature of personhood, one is *a person* from birth because he or she is recognized as part of a family, so that both individuality and community are co-fundamental. But as we saw, Aristotle's scheme encounters the consequences of intemperance when it extends beyond family to a greater economic structure. Moreover, the reality of individual death implies an alienation of sorts even between family and individual, though in some sense the family may be regarded as the "continuation" of the individual's existence.

The teaching of the Trinity, on the other hand, shares Aristotle's insight that the personal must be simultaneously individual and communal, but grounds this relation in eternal existence. In fact, for one who takes the incarnation seriously, all of those in the Church are family through sacramental participation in Christ. Certainly, a Marxist would reject this appeal to sacrament and eternal existence as an abstraction, but it appears to be no more so than Marx's appeal to "the species feeling" of the collective. In fairness to Marx, the Christian can admit that, as a mere conceptual model, these beliefs *are* an abstraction. Nevertheless, to achieve personal relation by *thinking about* relation, or personality, is no more authentically personal than *thinking about* falling in love is compared with *actually* loving, and being loved by, another. Such a discussion can at most point one in a direction, or open one to the possibility that such experiences are possible; it cannot replicate this experience. Ultimately, then, the appeal to Trinity as the means for overcoming the excesses of individualism and collectivism is not intended as a proof, as much as it is an invitation to those who do not believe to enter into this life and "see" by experience, as well as by those who have already been *confirmed* in this belief to strive to live their lives according to their faith in this reality.

While the manner in which alienation among the Three Divine Persons, as well as between human beings and God, has now been explained, the question of how this extends to the social realm of relations among human beings must still be answered. As noted previously, no social system by itself can perfectly facilitate the full significance of both individual and community. Because this mutual perfection is only possible if reality is both ultimately individual and communal (which is impossible where existence is primarily mortal rather than everlasting), it is realizable for us only to the extent that we live and think in a way that brings us into greater awareness of this divine Trinity. Indeed, one might surmise that if people developed this awareness perfectly, *any* or even *no* particular form of government would be needed for them to achieve harmonious relations; the Garden of Eden, we imagine, is an idyllic "state of nature." Nevertheless, because this awareness must be *freely* entered into, just as it is freely chosen by the Divine Persons Themselves, it is both immoral and contradictory to attempt to impose this awareness on another. Hence, while a theocratic society dedicated to the doctrine of the Trinity might seem justified on the surface, in fact it would be self-defeating.

## 2. Free Market Society and the Trinitarian Vision

Having warned against religious imposition, it is nevertheless worth pointing out that inasmuch as *participation* in the Trinitarian life must be freely chosen, a free society such as the one envisioned by Aristotle and Locke comes closer to allowing the *possibility* of this experience, while in no way assuring it. Much as Locke declares a fundamental duty to care for others once one's own needs are met, and as Aristotle suggests that "the special business of the legislator is to create in men [a] a benevolent disposi-

tion,” I argue that it is the foremost the responsibility of the Christian Church, rooted as it is in the Trinitarian vision, to voluntarily enter into a life of asceticism and charity with trust that as others are served, their own *individuality* as Christians, and their *communal* love for those around them, will take on an ever-deeper significance. At the same time, those responding to this call must remain vigilant against the pernicious tendencies toward the self-enslavement of excess in free societies.

From the Christian perspective, Aristotle’s preferred society, ordered according to the design of nature, is limited in part because it is rooted in a purely unitarian conception of God, who not only is not a Community of multiple Persons Himself, but Who does not even create the world by a free choice, or love it (e.g. *Metaphysics* 12.9, 1074b25-28). Locke, while considering himself a Christian, was unclear regarding his views on Trinity. In addition, his apparently undue confidence of the possibility of humans to act primarily rationally may well reflect in part a failure to take the Christian notion of “a Fall” and original sin seriously (Marshall, *John Locke: Religion, Resistance, and Responsibility*, 1994, pp.20, 410-426). In terms of stewardship toward the environment (stewardship in our economic dealings with others having already been addressed), it should not be surprising that nature is misused and insufficiently cared for when the view that we are “entitled” to private property through labor is not balanced with a reverent awareness that we ourselves are not mere “property” of God. Rather, we are persons lovingly invited to enter into the eternal Triune community, especially through our sacramental participation in the incarnate being of God, through which all of nature is restored to its fullest glory.

### Conclusion

Throughout this work, it is clear that various philosophical models of socialism, on the one hand, and free market society, on the other hand, inevitably move toward either the de-valuation of individual persons in the interest of an abstract collective, or the isolation of the individual persons according to an artificial understanding of community. The Christian doctrine of the Trinity, on the other hand, provides a foundation for avoiding these alternate problems, inasmuch as it insists that reality itself is, at its very core, equally individual and communal. Accordingly, from the standpoint of this conviction, society can only escape the de-personalizing excesses of both collectivism and capitalism when its members *freely* commit themselves to this conviction through sacramental participation in the Triune life of God. To succeed in this, however, Christians must devote themselves almost single-mindedly to constantly ask itself, and its members, to resist the values of indulgence of the very society whose lack of restraint, ironically, they depend upon for their free existence as institutions. With this in mind much as Plato’s utopia must be ruled by those least interested in ruling (the philosopher kings), the Christian church must forge a counter-culture of asceticism and charity within a free market society, centered (for better or worse) in ideals of individuality, and characterized in all probability by indulgence and alienation.

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