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The Economics of Anthropology: *Imago Dei* as a Source for Economic Principles

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Abstract: Economics is one of the most contentious issues in modern societal and academic thought. In this paper, I wish to argue that human anthropology, specifically the theological doctrine of the *imago Dei*, serves as a source for basic economic principles which provides an understanding of how economics should be exemplified in creation. First, I outline the doctrine of the *imago Dei*. Second, I tie this doctrine to the philosophical theory of universals particularly as it is understood in a Christian context. Third, I note the connection these two positions have with the concept of natural law. Finally, I note some areas where the biblical conception of natural law implies certain economic principles that guide the existence and flourishing of human beings.

There is little doubt that the field of economics has great influence over human beings and their existence. Humanity simply cannot subsist without some sort of economic system to provide their needs and wants. There is also little doubt these days that the field of economics is one of the most contentious issues in modern society both academically and socially. Hardly a day goes by without some politician, bureaucrat, or special interest group railing on some perceived economic malady that needs correcting or lauding themselves over positive economic outcomes because of “their” policies. Since economics is so closely related to anthropology, it behooves Christians to explore theology to see what economic principles are expressed in that theology. In this paper, I wish to argue that human anthropology, specifically the theological doctrine of the *imago Dei*, serves as a source for basic economic principles which provide an understanding of how economics should be exemplified in creation. First, I outline the doctrine of the *imago Dei*. Second, I tie this doctrine to the philosophical theory of universals particularly as it is understood in a Christian context.

Third, I note the connection these two positions have with the concept of natural law. Finally, I note some areas where the natural law of the *imago Dei* implies certain basic economic principles that guide the existence of human beings and their flourishing. I do not intend any fleshed out economic theory but merely to lay a foundation for further reflection.

The *Imago Dei*

Since economics is heavily connected to anthropology, then theological anthropology is where this task should begin. The doctrine of the *imago Dei* claims that all human beings have a special likeness to and connection with God. This likeness sets humanity apart from everything else in nature.¹ Humanity, consequently, is a part of creation but is also placed above the plane of nature to some degree because of this connection. The *imago Dei* is universal to all of humanity, and it is still present in sinful man.² There has been much debate of exactly what the doctrine encompasses. As a result, three major views regarding the doctrine of the *imago Dei* have surfaced.

The first is the substantive view which locates the image in one or more qualities of human nature. This view typically equates the divine image with the possession of properties like reason and the ability to think, and it is seen in every Christian writer up to Aquinas and can also be found in the work of John Calvin.³ A second and more contemporary view of the *imago Dei* is defined as the ability to have a relationship with God (and also with other human beings). Via the revelation of the life of Christ, human beings are shown how to enter a dynamic relationship with God in spite of their sinfulness and regardless of what qualities they possess.⁴ The emphasis on revelation downplays if not rejects the substantive view.

¹ Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), 518.

² Erickson, 519-20; David Cairns, *The Image of God in Man* (London: SCM Press, 1952), 19-21; Anthony Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), 13-17, 19-20. The notion that mankind still possesses the image is also claimed in James 3 where cursing a man is said to be heinous because of the image of God.

³ Erickson, 521; Cairns, 112-13; Hoekema, 36-37. For a fully developed expression of this view, see Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Blackfriars (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1964), 1a.93.1-5, and John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 1, trans. John Allen (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Education, 1928), 1.XV.2-4 and 8.

⁴ Erickson, 524-27. For perspectives of this view, see Emile Brunner, *Man in Revolt: A Christian Anthropology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1947), 60-65, 98, and 105-06, and *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption* (London: Lutterworth, 1952), 55-57, along with Karl Bart, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1958), 3.1-2.

A third view on the doctrine of the *imago Dei* is the functional view where the divine image is neither a quality nor a relationship but a function that human beings perform. This function is typically identified as humanity's dominion over nature which reflects God's lordship over all things and is exercised by all human beings whereas reason and relationship to God are not.⁵

The substantive view appears to be primary to understanding the doctrine of the *imago Dei* for several reasons. First, the divine image is universal to the human race and has not been (nor can be) lost like function or a relationship. Second, the divine image is not present to a greater degree in some persons nor variable in its existence like a relationship or a function. Third, the image must be (primarily if not exclusively) a property or set of properties that allow for relationship and function to take place. The other views focus on the consequences of exemplifying the image rather than the image itself.⁶ As a result, the substantive view must be the primary theory regarding the *imago Dei*.

Imago Dei and Universals

The substantive view has a particular philosophical implication not just for the *imago Dei* but theology in general. It requires embracing the philosophical theory of universals.⁷ Universals are suggested as a way of explaining the existence and sharing of properties among objects. Objects exemplify these entities in order to give object's structure. They also explain the predication of one property to two different objects, the resemblance of properties between objects, and reference to properties that are necessary but might not be material in nature. They help explain the way that reality is structured as well as our perception and knowledge of it.⁸ It should be easy to see how the substantive view of the *imago Dei* requires the theory of universals. Since the *imago Dei* is a property or set of properties (i.e. an essence) shared amongst all human beings, then theological anthropology needs a metaphysical and epistemological framework by which to understand this shared human nature.

⁵ See G. C. Berkouwer, *Man: the Image of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 70; Leonard Verduin, *Somewhat Less Than God: the Biblical View of Man* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 27; Norman Snaith, "The Image of God." *Expository Times* 86(1) (1974): 24.

⁶ Erickson, 532-33; Hoekema, 69-70.

⁷ I have extensively argued for this position elsewhere. See Graham Floyd, "*Imago Dei*: Why Christians Should Believe in Abstract Entities," Evangelical Philosophical Society. <http://www.epsociety.org/userfiles/Graham%20Floyd-imago%20dei%20note%20final.pdf>; accessed May 23, 2019.

⁸ J. P. Moreland, *Universals* (Chesham, UK: Acumen Publishing Limited, 2001), 1, 4-6.

The theory of universals comes directly from Plato who had a major impact on the early church. Plato states that reality is divided into two realms. First, there is the eternal realm of the Forms (i.e. universals) that are known by reason and act as blueprints for all possible objects. They provide shape, function, and structure to reality. Second, there is the realm of the physical universe and its objects both of which must have a cause of their existence (since they are changeable, finite things) as well as their natures so that they may exist in the first place. A divine being, therefore, who uses the Forms as his pattern to create the world and give it structure and order is necessary.⁹ Given Plato's appeal to the religious, it is not surprising that Augustine claims that Plato's philosophy is the closest to the true understanding and worship of God.¹⁰ Plato's theory, however, was considered incompatible with biblical doctrine (namely divine aseity) and in need of revision.¹¹

Out of this revising was born the theory of divine ideas, which is most famously tied to Augustine but flourishes in the hands of Thomas Aquinas.¹²

⁹ Plato, *Timaean and Critias*, trans. Desmond Lee (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), 27d-30b. See also Plato's *Phaedo*, trans. David Gallop (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 78b-80b, 72e-77a, and 100b-105c; M. R. Wright, *Introducing Greek Philosophy* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2010), 63-64; Alasdair MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), 32.

¹⁰ Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. Marcus Dodd (New York: Random House, 2000), VIII.5-6.

¹¹ See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, vol. 1, trans. Anton Pegis (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), 1.16.1-7, 1.51.4-6; William Lane Craig, *God Over All: Divine Aseity and the Challenge of Platonism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017) 12-43; Brian Leftow, "Is God an Abstract Object?" *Nous* 24(4) (1990): 581-98 and *God and Necessity* (New York: Oxford, 2012), 234-35; Michael Bergmann and Jeffery Brower, "A Theistic Argument Against Platonism (and in Support of Truthmakers and Divine Simplicity). In *The Oxford Studies in Metaphysics*, ed. Dean Zimmerman, vol. 2 (New York: University of Oxford Press, 2006), 357-86; Matthew Davidson, "A Demonstration Against Theistic Activism," *Religious Studies* 35 (1999): 277-90; Scott Davison, "Could Abstract Objects Depend Upon God?" *Religious Studies* 27 (1991): 485-97.

¹² See Augustine, *Eighty-Three Questions, The Fathers of the Church*, vol. 70, trans. David Mosher (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1982), 79-81; Augustine's *De Trinitate*, in *The Fathers of the Church*, vol. 18, trans. Stephen McKenna (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1963), 9.6.9-11, 12.14.22-3, 12.15.24; Augustine, *On Free Choice of the Will*, trans. Anna Benjamin and L. H. Hackstaff (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1964), 2.8, 2.13; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Blackfriars (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1964), 1a.15.1-2; 1a.16.1-8; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, 1.60-62; Thomas Aquinas, *Truth*, vol. 1, trans. Robert Mulligan (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1952), 1.2; 1.4; 1.7-8; 3.1-2. For other Christian positions on universals, see Nathan A. Jacobs, "On the Metaphysics of God and Creatures in the Eastern Pro-Nicenes," *Philosophy & Theology* 28(1) (2016): 3-42; Richard Cross, "Gregory of Nyssa on Universals," *Vigiliae Christianae* 56 (2002): 372-410; Anna Zhyrkova, "John Damascene's

As divine ideas, the Forms (i.e. universals) are a part of the divine being rather than separate from it in Plato's theory. They exist *a se* within the divine being like God's other properties. Like Plato's Forms, these ideas are the exemplars or blueprints for all aspects of reality both possible and actual and are the formal causes by which God creates leading Augustine to call them eternal, uncreated reasons.¹³ Modern philosophers, such as Alvin Plantinga, Greg Welty, and Stephen Parrish, have continued to defend this tradition.¹⁴ A modern sister theory to the divine ideas is Theistic Activism which argues that universals are necessary creations of God that exist separate from the divine being and that God is an Aristotelian substance who does not depend on universals to exemplify his being.¹⁵ As a result, Theistic Activism avoids the theological problems of Plato's view while keeping its strengths; therefore, Theistic Activism is theologically comparable the theory of divine ideas.

Notion of Being: Essence vs. Hypostical Existence," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 54 (2010): 85-105; Anselm, *St. Anselm: Basic Writings, The Monologion*, trans. S. N. Deane (LaSalle, IL: Open Court Publishing, 1968), IX-X, XII-XIV. For a short history of the position see Craig, *God Over All*, 12-43.

¹³ Augustine, *Eighty-Three Questions*, 79-81; Joseph Koterski, *An Introduction to Medieval Philosophy* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 67, 74; Pseudo-Dionysius, *Divine Names*, trans. C. E. Holt (New York: Macmillan Company, 1940), 5.1-10; Anthony Kenny, *God of the Philosophers* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1979), 15-16.

¹⁴ Alvin Plantinga, "How to be an Anti-Realist," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 56 (1) 1982: 68-70, and "Augustinian Christian Philosophy," *The Monist* 75 (3) (1992): 291-320; Greg Welty, "Truth as Divine Ideas: A Theistic Theory of the Property 'Truth'," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 47(1) (2004): 55-69; and Greg Welty, "Theistic Conceptual Realism," in *Beyond the Control of God?: Six Views on the Problem of God and Abstract Objects*, ed. Paul Gould (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 81-96; Stephen Parrish, "Defending Theistic Conceptualism," *Philosophia Christi* 20(1) (2018): 101-118.

¹⁵ See Paul Gould and Richard Davis. See Paul Gould, "The Problem of God and Abstract Objects," *Philosophia Christi* 13(2) (2011): 255-274, "Theistic Activism: A New Problem and a New Solution," *Philosophia Christi* 13(1) (2011): 127-39, "Can God Create Abstract Objects? A Reply to Van Inwagen," *Sophia* 53(1) (2014): 99-112, and "Theistic Activism and the Doctrine of Creation," *Philosophia Christi* 16(2) (2014): 283-96; Richard Davis, "God and the Platonic Horde: a Defense of Limited Conceptualism," *Philosophia Christi* 13(2) (2011): 289-303; Richard Davis, *The Metaphysics of Theism and Modality*. NY: Peter Land, 2001; Paul Gould and Richard Davis, "Modified Theistic Activism." In *Beyond the Control of God?: Six Views on the Problem of God and Abstract Objects*, ed. Paul Gould, p. 51-64. New York: Bloomsbury, 2014; Paul Gould and Richard Davis, "Where the Bootstrapping Problem Really Lies: A Neo-Aristotelian Reply to Panchuk," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 57(4) (2017): 415-28.

Imago Dei and Natural Law

Out of this combination of the doctrine of the *imago Dei* and the theory of universals comes the notion of natural law all of which is tied heavily to the doctrine of creation. Given these theological and philosophical positions, the notions of structure and order pervade the doctrine of creation, and there is only one source of that structure and order: the divine mind and will, which indicates the knowledge and wisdom of God as well as his skill as a craftsman.¹⁶ As a result, creation and its objects have specific ends and purposes (i.e. *telos*) that they seek to exemplify. In other words, there is a natural law that structures and orders existence. This theory primarily proposes to identify conditions and principles of correct thinking, feeling, and acting particularly in human conduct. These principles indicate the basic form of human nature and establish flourishing as a *telos* to be pursued, realized, and utilized by all people. As a result, one gets a set of basic moral standards.¹⁷

The main idea behind natural law is the concept of function established by properties of human nature that are connected to humanity's flourishing.¹⁸ This theory first appears in Greek philosophy and trickled down into Christian thought. Greek philosophy is based on two crucial principles. First, there is a basic structure to the universe embodied in the law of nature. Second, this structure is accessible to human reason.¹⁹ These principles have already been seen in Plato's philosophy. The universe has natural law, the Forms are the source of that law, and the Forms are known via reason. Plato also influenced Aristotle. Aristotle defines the term "nature" in a variety of ways, one of which is to reference an object's primary being, or its form.²⁰ Aristotle, however, rejects Plato's notion of Forms existing independent of objects. Rather, objects are a combination of form and matter that naturally come into existence. The Forms reside within the object making a synthesis of primary being and matter that describes and structures an object.²¹ As a result, the Forms impose a kind of law upon all objects regarding how they are to function. Since human beings are composed of form and matter, then they have a nature by which they

¹⁶ See Ps 104:24, Prov 8:22-31, and Jer 10:12.

¹⁷ John Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 18, 23.

¹⁸ Mark Murphy, *Natural Law and Practical Rationality* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 21-30, 32, 40.

¹⁹ M. R. Wright, *Introducing Greek Philosophy* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2010), 63-64.

²⁰ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. Richard Hope (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1960), V.4, VII.7.

²¹ *Ibid.*, VII.8 and 14-15, and VIII.2.

function. This nature ultimately determines morality for human beings by giving humanity a *telos*, which is happiness by practicing virtue. As result, there is a universal morality that is natural and has the same force everywhere for all people.²²

Given the connection between the doctrine of the *imago Dei* connection and Plato's philosophy, it is no surprise that natural law theory spilled over into Christianity just as the theory of universals did. Christianity is committed to a universal morality for all people. If morality is grounded in human nature (i.e. *imago Dei*) and all human beings possess this nature, then morality is the same for all humanity and is accessible by all of them in some manner though it may be marred by sin. This natural law is grounded in God's intellect (i.e. divine ideas) and flows from his will.²³ Further, natural law is an important theological category since God is conceived as ordering and controlling nature. This conception of the divine leads to three further reasons for natural law's theological popularity. First, nature is a structured divine creation. Second, natural law is in line with not only the doctrine of creation but also Pauline thought. Third, natural law is more readily adaptable to a changing society. Thus, the concept of natural law is seen to bring together nature, reason, and Scripture.²⁴

For the Patristics and the Scholastics, the natural law was mediated through the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle. Nature is grounded in a transcendent reality rather than confined to a self-contained material world making natural law an expression of divine will.²⁵ As Augustine claims, God's wisdom (i.e. divine ideas) by which all things were made was present at the creation to give creation form. Further, the world provides a testimony to God's existence and creative act by its well-ordered nature. Sin, however, is contrary to nature as it is a defect and is not from God.²⁶ In synthesizing Plato

²² Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. David Ross (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), I.1-2, 7, and 9, II.1, and V.1 and 7; Aristotle, *The Rhetoric*, trans. Lane Cooper (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1932), I.13. See also Monte Ranscombe Johnson, *Aristotle on Teleology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 86, 90-91.

²³ Jean Porter, *Natural and Divine Law* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 29-30; Craig Boyd, *A Shared Morality* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2007), 59-60.

²⁴ Porter, *Natural and Divine Law*, 32, 49-51, 90-91, 97, 176; J. Budziszewski, *Written on the Heart: The Case for Natural Law* (Downer Grove, IL: Intervaristy Press, 1997), 180-81; Boyd, 48-51.

²⁵ Jean Porter, *Nature as Reason* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), 8-9; Porter, *Natural and Divine Law*, 68-69.

²⁶ Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. Marcus Dodd (New York: Random House, 2000), XI.2 and 17, XII.3 and 7, XI.24, and XII.5. See also Augustine, *The Enchiridion on Faith, Hope,*

and Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas argues that there is an eternal law that resides as part of the being of God (i.e. divine natural law) and governs all reality. Creation shares in this eternal law, which provides a creature's function and end (i.e. *telos*), via the natural law. Even human law is ultimately based on the natural law, though not all human precepts can be found therein.²⁷ As a result, moral virtue is part of the natural law and is dictated by reason, man's proper form. Goodness and flourishing, therefore, is fullness of being in accordance with a thing's form and is displayed by virtuous actions and characteristics whereas badness is an absence of this form and its characteristics. This natural law is the same for everyone when it comes to common basic principles. Further, this natural law cannot be abolished from human nature, though sin can mar it to some extent.²⁸ All of these ideas are found within the doctrine of the *imago Dei* and the theory of universals: a shared nature consisting of a set of properties that establish how human beings ought to exist so that they may flourish with both man and God. These positions, therefore, provide a foundation for moral thinking and action in theological anthropology.

Natural Law and Economic Principles

Since the *imago Dei* involves a shared human nature that establishes morality as well as human flourishing, there should be no surprise that theological anthropology is intimately connected to the field of economics. Since economics involves human beings seeking to flourish, the natural law of the *imago Dei* will have something to say about how economics should be conceived and practiced. The natural law, however, is marred by sin; therefore, God gives more specific clarifications of the natural law in Scripture. For example, the Decalogue speaks of humanity's social nature and the behaviors that ought to be exercised in humanity's relationships with both people and God.²⁹ Since economic activity is based in human social relationships, the Decalogue is a prime place to sketch out some basic economic principles expressed by the natural law.

Before proceeding to the Decalogue, it should be noted that humanity's creation implies some basic economic principles as well. As bearers of the *imago Dei*, human beings can be said to share in the creative aspect of God. Human beings can see and create new possibilities for products and devices to help

and Love, ed. Henry Paolucci, trans. J. F. Shaw (Washington: Regnery Gateway, 1961), XI, and Augustine, *On Free Choice of the Will*, I.VI.

²⁷ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Ia2ae.91.1-3, Ia2ae.93.1-3; Budziszewski, 56.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, Ia2ae.94.3-6; Murphy, *Natural Law and Practical Rationality*, 43-44; Budziszewski, 61.

²⁹ Boyd, 48-51.

grow a strong economy, and each person adds their own variety to the mix. This creative power is worked out in the human function and divine mandate to exercise dominion over the earth. Humanity is to develop the world rather than just occupy it.³⁰ This authority, however, appears to emphasize harnessing and preserving over controlling. Humanity has a responsibility to care for nature, not to use nature in any manner that it pleases. Further, Gen 2:15 states that mankind is created to work with an emphasis on the need for periodic rest (which is attested in the fourth commandment). This claim suggests that humanity has both the desire and the need to work due to the *imago Dei* and that leisure is not humanity's ultimate end. Work is not a consequence of the Fall even though it has been marred by the Fall. Humanity, therefore, is created to rule creation by utilizing the resources of the world and responsibly creating wealth with these resources.³¹ Ultimately, humanity is a steward of what God has created and given to each individual.

When diving into the Decalogue itself, it can be argued that the first two commandments lay down fundamental truths about how one's wealth is obtained as well as wealth's status in one's life. It is tempting for people to believe that they in their intelligence are the source of all their good fortune. Some even look to their wealth as their ultimate happiness (i.e. their *telos*). Scripture, however, is against both views. As the first commandment states, there is only one God and no other who is to be worshipped and obeyed. The Lord created the world by his wisdom and established the natural law on which all justice (even economic justice) is grounded, not human beings. God gives the power to obtain wealth through the order that he has established, and people have economic confidence because of it.³² Further, the second commandment warns against allowing anything to become an idol, and wealth is one such idol to which many people bow. Human beings are physical being with physical needs; therefore, it is easy for people to value, prioritize, and seek material wealth above God and his kingdom. Wealth has the tendency to give rise to the spiritual hazards of arrogance, possessiveness, extravagance, indifference, and false security.³³ While wealth is a good and important thing in human existence, it should not be idolized, and one can expect harm by not perceiving themselves or wealth properly. As Christ says one cannot worship

³⁰ John Jefferson Davis, *Your Wealth in God's World* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1984), 4-6.

³¹ Brian Griffiths, *The Creation of Wealth: A Christian's Case for Capitalism* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1984), 51-52. It also suggests that work shall be a part of the eschatological kingdom as well.

³² Gary North, *The Sinai Strategy: Economics and the Ten Commandments* (Tyler, TX: The Institute of Christian Economics, 1986), 21-23; Davis, 13, 21. See Deut 8:17-18.

³³ Griffiths, 46-48, North, *Sinai Strategy*, 49-50.

both God and mammon (Matt 6:24). As a result, correct participation in economic activity can be seen as a form of obedience to and worship of God.

Another area of economics that the Decalogue touches on is the notion of property rights. What an economic theory believes regarding property rights defines how that economic system will both produce and distribute goods and service. Property rights, it can be argued, begin with individuals themselves and then it extends to material things.³⁴ The cornerstone of property rights in the Old Testament is the fact that the earth and all in it belongs to God.³⁵ Any claim of ownership by human beings is secondary and subordinate to God's ownership. All material possessions and the ability to obtain those possessions come from God who has the sovereign right of disposal. Property rights, therefore, is the norm in the Old Testament and safeguarded in the Mosaic Law.³⁶

The fundamental statement of property rights for humanity can be found in the eighth and tenth commandment which prohibit the theft and coveting of another's property.³⁷ In the Old Testament, the ownership of property was the tangible symbol of an Israelite's share in the inheritance from God and his relationship with God along with the economic support it provided. Theft undermined not just this economic support but also the broader relationship the individual had with the community and with God. It was a diminution of the individual's blessing and enjoyment thereof, a threat to his family, and a direct affront to God's will in his rightful distribution of the land.³⁸ The tenth commandment on covetousness forbids the deeper sin behind theft: envy. Envy is an illicit form of discontentment, jealousy, and resentment, that is often the foundation of unjust economic actions. One does not necessarily deserve something someone else has simply because he wants or needs it nor can he take it by legal force on such grounds. Further, one's desire to help the poor is not to cloud his judgment against the wealthy nor is one's esteem of the wealthy to cloud his judgment against the poor. This commandment, it can be argued, establishes a principle by which each

³⁴ Harold Lindsell, *Free Enterprise: A Judeo-Christian Defense* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1982), 14-18, 53.

³⁵ See Deut 10:14-15, Ps 24:1, Ps 50:10-12, and 1 Cor 10:26.

³⁶ Griffiths, 56; Lindsell, 56; Christopher Wright, *God's People in God's Land: Family, Land, and Property in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 115-16; Gary North, *Inherit the Earth* (Fort Worth: Dominion Press, 1987), 10-11.

³⁷ Other biblical expressions of property rights can be found in Ex 22, Matt 19:18, Matt 20:1-16, Matt 21:33-46, Mark 12:1-12, Luke 18:19, 19:11-27, Luke 20:9-19. See Lindsell, 59-62, and Griffiths, 43, 58.

³⁸ Wright, 135-37.

individual knows what is his, to what he is or is not entitled, and that his rights to property will be protected. It allows people to plan for the future, prevents the waste of resources that might be unjustly seized, protects people from mistreatment because of what they own, maintains the economic value of goods and services so that people seek them rather than shun them out of fear, and encourages investment of those goods and services rather than merely securing their safety.³⁹ As a result, any legitimate economic theory has the moral responsibility to recognize and protect people's right to their wealth and property where feasible since it a source of a person's flourishing.⁴⁰

The emphasis on private property also suggests a fundamental precept to any successful economic system: the notion of trust. No economy can survive if people cannot trust each other to deal fairly or trust the government to rule righteously. It seems that the notion of trust is represented in the third, fifth, seventh, and ninth commandments. The third commandment warns against the improper use of God's name particularly in the use of oaths and promises. Covenants taken in the name of God invoke the power of God as a witness to uphold those covenants.⁴¹ In other words, human beings should not make foolish promises that cannot be kept. This claim is true particularly in economic activity. From an economic standpoint, people should honor their business contracts whether it is to work, pay, or repay. Foolish economic promises can bring about ill effects for both the individual as well as the whole of society; therefore, economic activity cannot proceed without mutual trust between parties.

³⁹ Gary North, "Free Market Capitalism," in *Wealth and Poverty: Four Christian Views on Economics*, ed. Robert Clouse (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1984), 37; North, *Sinai Strategy*, 141, 144-52, 195-96. Passages, such as Ex 12:49, Ex 23:3, Lev 19:15, Deut 1:17, state that one is not to respect poor or rich in their judgments, even economic judgment. Further, 1 Cor 7:21-22, Phil 4:11, 1 Tim 6:6-8, James 3:14-16 all extol contentment with what one has and where they are in life while also condemning envy as a source of social disorder. The effects of such covetousness can be clearly seen in the story of Ahab and Naboth where Ahab's desire of Naboth's vineyard ultimately leads to Naboth's murder and the illegal seizure of his property.

⁴⁰ Lindsell, 54-55; North, *Inherit the Earth*, 74-79. By feasible, I mean that there are some situations where an individual's property rights may be justifiably violated. For example, a young child is trapped in a burning building, and your car is blocking the fire hydrant. It is reasonable that the life of the child takes precedent in this situation, and the fire crew can justifiably mangle your car in order to access the hydrant even though this act harms your property and negatively affects you.

⁴¹ North, *Sinai Strategy*, 51-71. Given the seriousness of oaths, it is not surprising that Jesus exhorted in Mat 5:33-37 and James exhorted in James 5:12 to not swear oaths at all but let one's "yes" mean yes and one's "no" mean no.

In the fifth and seventh commandment, there is the protection of trust in the familial covenant which also has economic impact. Each member of the family has responsibilities towards the others along with economic obligations to care for each other in various ways. It is the family that is to control wealth and oversee the care of its members.⁴² Adultery is the destruction of this economic arrangement by bringing distrust into the familial economic system.⁴³ One could say that adultery is a form of theft as it breaks the boundary of the family and marriage covenant and steals the goods that are promised in that covenant. Further, it can be argued that an attack on the family is an attack on the economic prosperity of society as a whole since the family is the basic unit of society.⁴⁴ The dissolution of families also brings all sorts of social and economic problems as resources are diverted from other places in order to address this situation. Again, trust is an integral part of an individual's, a family's, and a society's road to economic prosperity. While divorce might sometimes be justified due to the sinfulness of humanity, it should be mitigated as much as possible for the benefit of all society.

Lastly, the ninth commandment forbids the false witness or slander of a person or family name. Such false witness can be seen as striking at the person or family's character as well as all that they own or represent, like a business. As a result, a person or family's economic status can be greatly harmed by false witness. Like adultery, it can be argued that false witness is also a form of theft and an attack on the family as it steals the individual-family's good name and inhibits the economic potential of the individual-family.⁴⁵ If one cannot trust others to speak truthfully about him or his family, then his and other's economic status can suffer. People will be unwilling to do business with anyone they believe to be untrustworthy whether it is because one is slandered or because one is a slanderer. False witness undermines a person's, a family's, or an organization's ability to participate in the economy. A slanderous society is a society built on suspicion and mistrust which does not promote economic

⁴² North, *Sinai Strategy*, 96-97, 111-15; Wright, 53-58, 63, 98-99. See Prov 13:22, 2 Cor 12:14, Eph 5:22-33, and Col 3:18-4:1. This idea is also represented in Christ's condemnation of the religious leaders in Mark 7:1-13 for allowing individuals to dodge their economic responsibility to their elderly parents by declaring their property "Corban."

⁴³ North, *Sinai Strategy*, 128-30, 133.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 137-38. For arguments on the family as the basic unit of society, see Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. Benjamin Jowett (New York: Random House Modern Library, 1943), I.1-2; Thomas Aquinas, *On Kingship or The Governance of Rulers*, in *St. Thomas Aquinas On Politics and Ethics*, ed. and trans. Paul Sigmund (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1988), 14-15; Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle's Politics*, trans. Richard Regan (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2007), Chapter I, Comments 1-23.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 179-80, 186-87.

growth but promotes secrecy, lack of investment, and hoarding as people seek to protect themselves.

Conclusion

These basic economic principles regarding work, stewardship, property, trust, and worship can arguably be derived from theological anthropology. By creating a universally shared human nature (i.e. *imago Dei* and universals) that provides a basic moral framework for humanity (i.e. natural law), God established a foundation of basic economic principles for proper economic theory and activity. As a result, human flourishing is vitally connected to following these basic economic principles. While not a fleshed out economic theory, these principles do suggest a path that the correct theory must take.⁴⁶ Any theory that violates the economic principles that God has established is sure to bring ruin to people and nations. As to what that economic theory is, I leave for others to discuss.

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⁴⁶ One could even argue that God created the universe according to the correct economic theory. This theory and its laws, therefore, would be every bit a part of reality as is the theory of gravity and its laws.