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THE PERSON IN THE MARKET: THREATS AND POSSIBILITIES

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INTRODUCTION

The market, after a long yet undisturbed evolution, has finally become an imposing superstructure that does not simply connote a place of production, exchange and purchase but transcends the non-economic spheres of human life, even its moral-cultural order. At the core of this evolution is the human person, no more an agent but more like its slave. Everything has become commodified—literally: from goods produced by human labor and ingenuity to even the body of the producer him/herself.

Worse, the human person in all his or her integrity and wholeness can now be purchased, bargained, and exchanged. Even the sphere of interpersonal relations is limited by the increase of formal and impersonal interactions. The trends of social networking, online selling and marketing, text messaging—among others—have now become the system of relations, however provisional and short-term.

What then is the value of personhood? The reduction of human beings by market capitalism to units of productive power demands therefore a greater need for a philosophical position that can challenge these dehumanizing elements and structures.

Conceptual Framework

Citing Talcott Parsons' "Social Structure and Personality"¹ espousing the interplay between Sigmund Freud's theory of internalizing individual and Emile Durkheim's theory of constraining society, we see that the person develops discourse and behavior consistent with the conditions set forth by the social structures. The

interaction is not simply a case of society imposing its dominance on individuals but rather a case of tolerant ‘subjects’ validating the system. “As ideology is internalized by human persons, the operational structures are legitimized by ideologies.”² (See Figure 1)

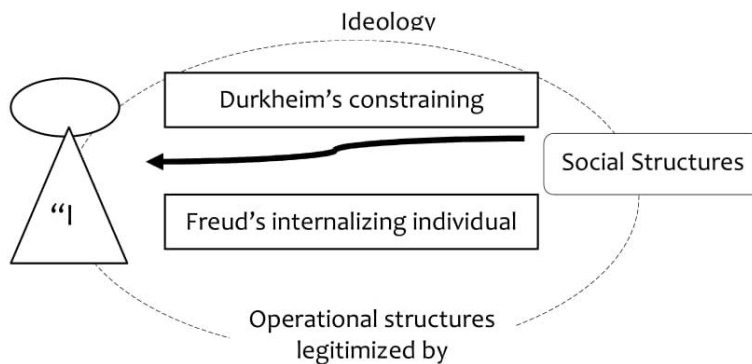


Figure 1: Parson's Interplay between the Individual and the Social Structure

Figure 2 posits various concepts acting as substructures and implications of the dominance of the market that ultimately result to various effects. The market owes its deep foundation from the ways it has been actually created – through reification³ and commodification. “Commodification is what happens to things in capitalism, whereas reification is what simultaneously happens to persons.”⁴ Ultimately resulting to alienations, deprivation, and oppression, it has objectified the person as a commodity in the market that is constantly sustained and even bolstered by the offer of instant gratification⁵ and Albert Moreira's so-called “industry of oblivion” which masks false reconciliation between individuals and the system that oppresses them.⁶ (See Figure 2).

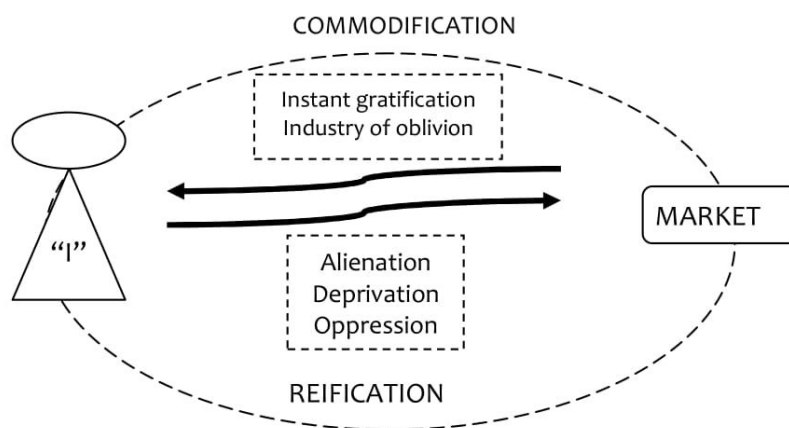


Figure 2: The Market, its Substructures and its Implications

Drawing from Parson's framework on the interplay of Freud's individual and Durkheim's society, the author believes that creating a culture to replace the imposed values of the market, reinforced by commodification and reification that result to oppression and self-alienation of the individual, is feasible if we hope for an authentic human life in the market world. Embracing significant features of JP II-inspired economic personalism, the person is referred as a "subject" with worth, dignity, and rights. Through intersubjectivity, this cycle of positive values will create hopefully a moral market that enjoys material affluence anchored not on selfish wealth accumulation but on solidarity, compassion and sharing. (See Figure 3)

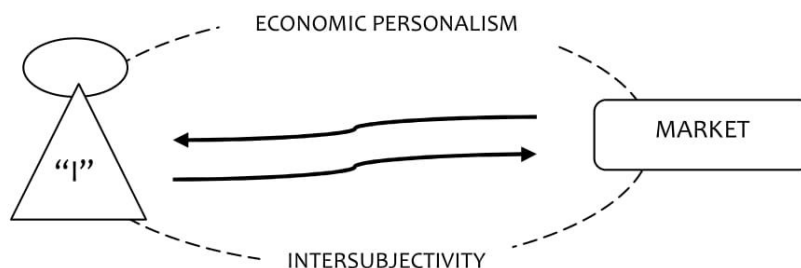


Figure 3: The Proposed Feasibility of Authentic Human Life in the Market World: Economic Personalism

This is the paper's fundamental goal: if the market world of today and its implications towards oppression is a structure that is created, sustained, and maintained by the tolerant individuals, so too the control and power to change rests on the hands of the same individuals. If only a moral culture proposing cultivation of human values is to be carried out, it is feasible.

The Market: Its Structuration and Implications

The social environment changes from a community to society.⁷ The perpetuity of change and its constancy in the realm of almost everything around provides for the apparent instability and insecurity of constants and absolutes – held previously however as divine and all-encompassing. Implications brought about by modern historical exigencies from Enlightenment to Industrial Revolution had created The Market – a social structure⁸ that is both powerful and inevitable.

The market produces everything for its “subjects” on the basis of gratification that is both instant and immediate, however, episodic, provisional, and short-term. For Ferdinand Dagmang, even the “existence of instant gratification could also mean the presence of oppression.”⁹ People are at the receiving end of the imposing influence and control of the producers and owners.

The simplicity of the pre-modern social world was replaced by a complex totality of countless subsystems of which even the parts were difficult to understand. The stability, timelessness and immutability of the social milieu, as disturbed by change, collapsed with the rise of everything that is short-term and provisional.¹⁰ What has become available to people nowadays offer the same goal for instant gratification however masked in varied forms. Plurality of options is not only externally and tangibly manifested as in the variety of products made, commodities produced and goods sold; it has also conditioned fragmentation¹¹ of conventions, truths, habits and attitudes.

The fact that this market dynamics has stood for so long validates its depth and structuration in both personal and societal spheres. It has become deep-rooted and its power is legitimized by its origin and formation—from the individuals themselves; that is, through collective cooperation among themselves, it gives birth to that which oppresses them – the market. Parson takes note of this by highlighting the case of interaction between Freud’s individual and Durkheim’s society; the former internalizes systems of the constraining society to the point of molding oneself with the culture of the bigger society. The persons embedded in a capitalist society will necessarily be fashioned according to the very character and limitations of the system itself, inevitably developing discourse and behavior consistent with such conditions.¹²

With reification and commodification, the market functions by its structures designed primarily to label everything as commodity—an object for purchase, exchange and trade until it has also commodified the individual person—a reified commodity understood with a price tag or label. Impelled by collective behavior or *habitus*¹³ of individuals who are not necessarily the entire population but the mere dominant ones, it brings obvious oppression to the public, alienation to the individual and deprivation to many. The market’s resiliency is bolstered by what Alberto Moreira has called the “industry of oblivion.” Masking the oppression with the goal to entertain people, pleasure overturns pain.

The market endures and will stay to last. The paper does not espouse to eradicate the market *per se*. There is an urgent need to

inject a new system, culture, and values to the market, something that will at least minimize oppression while maintaining the fundamental purpose of material affluence, bounty and self-determination. While it is true that the market has manifested oppressive character, the paper believes it is rather a case of individuals abusing the market, veering away from its inherent goodness. The equation is simple. If we blame the collective individuals for the market's oppressive structures, the solution is in the same set of individuals acting out collectively with a new paradigm for moral culture that cultivate values that are radically opposite to the parameters of oppressive conditions. Ultimately, the old blood will be flushed out of the system as the new and fresh blood circulates in the market system helping breathe a new situation for a person in the market world.

Parson's Interplay Framework between the Individual and the Society:

Drawing out from the findings of both psychology and sociology, Parson highlights the theories on Freud's psychoanalysis¹⁴ and Durkheim's sociology¹⁵ proposing that the interplay between them can explain the formation of structures inherent in a society and the behavior of the individual as well.

In itself, Freud's discovery of the internalization of moral values as an essential part of the structure of personality itself constituted such a crucial landmark in the development of the sciences of human behavior and so is Durkheim's. What is remarkable about Parson's theory is that he is able to link the two and find that their interplay can provide a theory of action.

How does the interplay work? Freud believes that an individual, in the course of his/her personality formation, is capable of internalizing not only the moral values of the social structure through a series and network of interactions with other personalities. Durkheim believes that an individual, as a member of society, is not wholly free to make his/her own moral decisions and is quite "constrained" by orientations common to the society of which he is a member. This constant and perpetual interaction among individuals, trying to form one's own personality while somehow constrained by

the society itself, creates the social systems and structures. Henceforth, the market as it is today is borne out of the interaction of individuals and its dominance and power is possible due to the ability of society to constrain the not-so-free individuals.

This is a very important discovery as it places the individuals, interacting together and collectively, in control of whatever social system and structure will be created to reciprocally “constrain” its own progenitors. What oppresses the people today is basically what the same people have created through their interaction. What can change then in today’s system and structure depends on the collective efforts of all. The society is what we make of it.

If only a moral order is proposed and lived out in a culture of sharing, solidarity and compassion, then it is feasible. A person in the market world is practicable and so its threats can actually be opportunities understood from a shifted paradigm.

Economic Personalism: An Offer of Paradigm Shift

John Paul II’s personalism, reflected in his social encyclicals, has inspired the birth of a relatively new school of thought – “economic personalism”¹⁶ - that offers to provide a synthesis of the Christian moral philosophy and mainstream economics in the light of Christian anthropology. Briefly, economic personalism aims to promote human economic order that benefits from market activity but does not reduce the human person to just another element of economic phenomena. Housed in Acton Institute Michigan USA, this new paradigm is particularly developed by its research unit, the Center for Economic Personalism.

Economic personalism approaches the free market as a ready and willing partner of promoting Christian morality and authentic human values. It neither sees oneself isolated among others nor sees the market as antithetical to a person’s life. The Christian, more than anything else, is a person who does not stand on his/her own and develops out of nowhere. He/She is a person with others and a person in context. In the circle of phenomenology, this is called “intersubjectivity”.

It has the following tenets to which this paper adheres as a possible moral paradigm for the problem of the person in the market

world: *centrality of the person, subjectivity and autonomy, human dignity, person within a community, and participation and solidarity.*

In the market world, individuals are presented with a multitude of situations from which they must choose various options. Which good or service to select? With whom to engage trade? Where to buy necessary items? The economic life is complex as social structures have developed around simple exchange. The average individual of today is faced with a plethora of complex economic transactions. Despite this, however, human freedom remains the fundamental operating principle of this vast economic network.¹⁷

While economic personalists support economic liberty and private property as congruent to human dignity, they also acknowledge the need to restrain the market to avoid exploitation and abuses. However, as to what form of restraints should there be, they call for *moral* restraints.

A persuasive moral code that encourages self-regulation and socially cooperative behavior is most successfully promoted through voluntary associations such as the family, church, general educational institutions, and local community structures... A morally healthy culture would ultimately encourage a morally healthy marketplace.¹⁸

The market world is therefore here to stay. Its necessity is evident; its sinful effects however are contingent upon human persons. It is a matter of forming a culture juxtaposed on the notions of human dignity, love and solidarity that a moral market is born. "It is not enough to be a member of one or more community; we are also called upon to be neighbors."¹⁹ Indeed, the need to create a moral market starts with the individual's commitment to integral transformation.

CONCLUSION

While individuals are born in a world of social facts that precede them, and probably will persist for long after they have died, they themselves both create and maintain the social structures. The complexity of the market is something that has accumulated in the events of the past by which today's generation apparently does not have control of. Actions and practices have formed habits; individual

habits, collectively practiced, have created the systems and structures. From this is traced the birth of the market with its implications. The complexity of its activities offers alternatives beyond the usual choices of good or evil. Shades of gray add ambiguity and confusion, thereby, affecting patterns of actions, behavior, and perspectives. Ultimately, this has resulted to fragmentation and pluralism. Human freedom is not anymore a choice between good and evil. While it may ultimately be between the two, the manner and way of identifying which is has become more difficult and obscured. Eventually, this situation also conditions the rise of oppression in various kinds and levels. In all these, philosophy and its discourses are never exempted.

Philosophy looks for its relevance in the market world. It inquires about the person and his/her meaning in this market world and traces its rich deposit and evolving interpretations to at least offer few answers.

The market *per se* is not to be seen as inimical and hostile to the values of the ideal person. The person's ideals can exist in the market as long as the culture that will form the market embrace the values of that ideal and that cultivation of personal virtues of each and everyone in the community may upset the sinful structures. The person in the market world never despairs. While arduous, it is a hopeful situation.

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Endnotes

¹ Talcott Parsons, *Social Structure and Personality*, (London: Free Press of Glencoe, 1964), 18-19.

² Ferdinand Dagmang, "Structures and Structural Sin," *Hapag* 2, no. 1 (2005): 80.

³ "Reification is the apprehension of human phenomena as if they were things, that is, non-human or possibly supra-human terms. Another way of saying this is that reification is the apprehension of the products of human activity as if they were something else than human products – such as facts of nature, results of cosmic laws, or manifestations of divine will." Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*, (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 89.

"Reification is *Verdinglichung* for Marx." John R. Schneider, "Christian Theology and the Human Ontology of Market Capitalism," *Journal of Markets & Morality* 10, no. 2 (2007): 284-285.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 285.

⁵ “The market’s offer of instant gratification may come in two ways: first, in the availability of products; second, in their functionality or effectiveness.” Dagmang, “Instant Gratification and Liberation,” *Concilium*, no. 3 (1997): 52.

⁶ “The very society that produces suffering and exclusion develops mechanism to make people forget them. It is of the essence that domination to prevent recognition of the suffering produces itself. His would basically constitute the function of the industry of culture: to entertain in order to make people forget.” Alberto Moreira, “The Dangerous Memory of Jesus Christ in a Post-Traditional Society,” *Concilium*, no. 3 (1997): 41.

⁷ Miklos Tomka, “Individualism: A Change in Values,” *Concilium*, no. 4 (1999): 27.

⁸ “The English word 'structure' derives from the Latin word *struere*, to build. The -ure ending is used in English to form nouns that denote an action or a process, or that refer to the result or outcome of a process. Hence, 'structure' can mean 'building' in both of its principal senses. It can mean the act of building something, and it can mean the end product of a building process.” Jose Lopez and John Scott, *Social Structure* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2000), 7.

“Structure is to be understood as the mutual relations of elements within a whole, and such relations determine (fundamentally) the character of the whole.” Dagmang, “Structures and Structural Sin,” 91.

⁹ Dagmang, “Instant Gratification and Liberation,” 50.

¹⁰ Tomka, “Individualism: A Change in Values,” 26.

¹¹ “Little did Paul Tillich realize when he titled his sermons in 1946 “The Shaking of the Foundations” that the following fifty years would witness increasingly the haunting experience that the 'centre does not hold', that great pillars of certainty would tumble with the loss of great meta-narratives.” Mary Grey, “From Shaken Foundations to a Different Integrity: Spirituality as Response to Fragmentation,” *Concilium*, no. 2 (2006): 79.

¹² Dagmang, “Systems, Habitus and Ethics,” *Hapag* 4, no. 1-2 (2007): 102.

¹³ “*Habitus* refers to the generalized and habitual schemes of thought, appreciation and action. It points to the habitual dispositions of a society which every individual would internalize to the point that it becomes part of oneself as a second-nature ability.” Dagmang, “Structures and Structural Sin,” 82.

¹⁴ “Psychoanalysis, in common with other traditions of psychological thought, has naturally concentrated on the study of the personality of the individual as the focus of its frame of reference.” Parsons, *Social Structure and Personality*, 18.

¹⁵“Sociology, on the other hand, has equally naturally been primarily concerned with the patterning of the behavior of a plurality of individuals as constituting what, increasingly, we tend to call a social system.” Ibid.

¹⁶ “Economic personalism is a science of the morality of markets—an attempt to analyze the moral ramifications of economic activity in light of theological vision of the human person. This includes a detailed exploration of economic theory, history, and methodology, as well as actual market practices, all viewed from the perspective of the Christian faith, particularly its recognition of the dignity of the human person and the concern for justice that stems from this recognition.” Gregory M. A. Gronbacher, “The Need for Economic Personalism.” *The Journal of Markets & Morality* 1, no. 1 (1998): 1.

¹⁷ Ibid., 13.

¹⁸ Ibid., 15.

¹⁹ Tharcus Britto, “Intersubjectivity in the Ethical Personalism of Max Scheler and Karol Wojtyla” (PhD diss., University of Santo Tomas, 2003), 96.