



Saint Catherine and the Free Market System: The (Historic) Roots of the Current Crisis

Gerald Gutenschwager

Emeritus Professor, School of Architecture, Washington University, St. Louis;
Scientific Fellow, University of Thessaly, Volos, Greece;
Fellow, World Academy of Art & Science

Abstract

The current crisis is rooted in the past, and is related to the ability of empires to ground their conquests in legitimizing icons that are, at the same time, their own creations. The stories of St. Catherine and the 'free market' are compared in order to illustrate their common human heritage, embedded as they are in the problem of reification, which is the abiding tendency of humans to assign 'extraterrestrial' origins to their very own thoughts, ideas, and theories, presenting them as deterministic laws of God or of nature. Reification and determinism serve to legitimate these ideas and to give them greater authority, with the unfortunate side effect of excusing their authors and followers from any moral responsibility for their long term consequences, intended or not. Since the free market icon and its attendant man-made laws govern, to a large extent, our thoughts about the current crisis-ridden society, it is important to trace their origins and, especially their ontological assumptions, to see if we are, indeed, bound by these laws, or whether we might actually be free to imagine and develop a more humane socioeconomic system without all the deterministic baggage.

1. Introduction - the 'Two Cultures' of C.P. Snow

C.P. Snow's (2013) classic article has led us to believe that there is little connection between art and science, and, indeed, there is much to his argument. However, scientists are also human beings, though their claim to objectivity might seem at times to exclude them from this category. Art in human society, including especially dramatic art, as so many, including Shakespeare, have claimed, is the essence of being human: "All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players..." or, "Life is but a walking shadow, a poor player who struts and frets his hour upon the stage. . .", thoughts that Kenneth Burke and others have turned into a sociological (sociodramatic) theory complete with the technical terms that give it the needed precision (Rueckert 1969, Duncan 1969, Lentricchia 1983). Science appears to have something in common with religion in this respect. First, one must presuppose that science and religion are social enterprises as they both constitute a part of culture, in spite of references to the supernatural, including references to the laws of God and/or of nature. Science, of course, has had greater success in verifying explanations of the material world, the quantum enigma notwithstanding (Rosenblum and Kuttner 2011), at least as far as the gravitational field is concerned. But this may be to get ahead of the story: a comparison of St. Catherine and the 'Free Market'.

2. St. Catherine

One of the early complete references to St. Catherine of Alexandria appears in a collection of legends named “Monologium Basilianum”, written by an artist working for the Emperor Basil II in Constantinople between 976 and 1025 A.D. By the twelfth century her remains had been enshrined and highly venerated at the Monastery of Mount Sinai. The word ‘Catherine’ has the same root as ‘catharsis’ or cleansing, and here would refer to the purity or virginity of Catherine. She is reported to have lived in Alexandria as a princess of the royal house in the Fourth Century A.D. and to have been extremely well educated in many fields, including Christian theology and philosophy, a rare exception in the male-dominated world extending from the domestication of plants and animals until sometime into the 22nd Century (or beyond?)! She is reported to have met the challenge of, and subdued, intellectually, many, many male ‘pagan’ philosophers, all of whom were put to death by the emperor of Alexandria for their rhetorical shortcomings. She, herself, was finally put to death by the pagan emperor, Maxentius, by being beheaded, after the Wheel of Torture fell apart in a vain attempt to subdue her. At her death, no blood, but only milk is said to have flowed from her veins. Following her death in Alexandria, legend tells us that angels carried her body to Mt. Sinai.

In spite of this elaborate legend, historians have found no evidence of her existence, except, allegedly, for some remains, as reported above. She could have been little more than a figment of the imagination of the monks at Mount Sinai, four hundred years later. In fact, her story is amazingly similar to that of Hypatia, a much more carefully documented female Greek philosopher of Alexandria in the late 4th and early 5th century A.D., celebrated in the recent film, *Agora*, and in many books, including Maria Dzielska’s (1996), *Hypatia of Alexandria*. Hypatia was an accomplished philosopher and mathematician who had similar success in demolishing the arguments of, in this case, Christian male challengers. She was also put to death in a cruel fashion by some fanatic Christians of Alexandria during the reign of Theodosius, the Emperor who was determined to solidify Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire at the end of the 4th Century. Now, either Alexandria was a hotbed of hitherto, and yet to be ever seen again (until they are finally liberated) female philosophers, or we are witnessing some literary or rather ‘legendary’ liberties being taken with history. Not the first or last time, one must suppose.

With such a shaky curriculum vitae how could Catherine have become so important a personage in the Christian church, in fact, how could she have become a person at all? Here is where art plays such an important role: her image was painted on the walls of churches throughout the Middle Ages and, voila!, she existed (Stollhans 2014). In one sense, it doesn’t even matter if she were real or not. Once people believed she existed, she did, as Bruce Lipton (2008) also might claim, based on his recent book, *The Biology of Belief*, published more than twelve hundred years later. Reality is to a large extent what we make it to be. In the case of Catherine, she was (is) a symbol of altruism, a person who sacrificed herself for her faith and for her church, a necessary ideal if the hierarchical society built on religion were to survive. This, of course, is quite separate from the value of altruism to human existence, which redeems her existence, however fabricated it might be, and would appear to set her apart from the ideals of rational science, which has had much less concern with such things, at least up until now.

3. The Free Market System

The free market, too, is a virtual reality, not much different from Saint Catherine in that respect. They are both forms of rhetoric – as is all communication – designed to persuade people to see the world in a certain way, seeking to “create the world in their own image”, as the Bible, Nietzsche and Kuhn, among others would say. As far as the free market is concerned, there are again some rather unrealistic assumptions that one must make, specifically about the ability of the actors in the market to fulfill the requirements necessary for its portrait to be valid (perhaps not unlike some of the assumptions about altruism that would be necessary if St. Catherine were to be taken seriously). These were (are) presuppositions about the time it would take to gather the necessary information to make rational decisions, the ability to process this information when available, the supposed disconnectedness of all the actors from each other in society, etc. In fact, the likelihood of errors in judgment and unintended consequences in the marketplace is so enormous in this respect that whole industries have grown up to estimate and insure against the risk of these occurrences (Giarini 2010).

Another questionable assumption has to do with the ability of the market to remain truly competitive over time. This is because competition always leads to winners and losers, with losers in the long run being absorbed by the winners, thus leading to a substantially less free market and a more monopoly form of capitalism (Baran and Sweezy 1966, Foster 2014). Thus, we no longer see ‘Mom and Pop’ stores in the U.S., no more corner drugstores or grocery stores. Everything is now part of a ‘chain’ of nationally or regionally controlled enterprises, all of which are miles away from most people’s homes, *thus shifting much of the expense of distribution onto the consumers*. The dozen or so automobile companies in the U.S. are down to the ‘big three’, or perhaps two-and-a-half, if Chrysler’s not so brilliant history is taken into account, etc. In spite of these reservations, one could hardly say that the ‘paint is chipping away’ from the portraits of the free market, any more than unrealistic assumptions about St. Catherine have diminished her religious qualities. Nevertheless, the icon in both cases has been both symbolic and instrumental, to the religious hierarchy in the case of Catherine and to the modern sociopolitical hierarchy in the case of the free market icon.

This is exactly what one must expect in a social world that is theater, a theater or sociodrama, in which there are to be found both religious and scientific aspects, especially at the large scale, but whose mechanisms are for the most part under the control of society’s playwrights, i.e., those who write the ‘laws’ and determine how society’s resources are to be allocated, and the stage directors, i.e., the politicians, priests and academics who carry out and justify the script given to them by the ruling class. In this sense, the social world is not an autonomous and deterministic entity as science and religion would claim.

What this refers to is the danger of reification, i.e., that we will take our metaphors literally (Berger and Pullberg 1966). For economics as a rational science, it would be good always to keep in mind that our ‘grandmother’ has not, nor ever will, actually have ‘wheels’. This is quite apart from the question of whether, even with ‘wheels’, the free market could ever provide ‘optimal’ solutions at the system level, given its indifference to the colossal human, social and environmental costs of modern enterprises, which, if included, would deny viability even at the level of the enterprises themselves (Kapp 1988, Korten 1995, Polanyi 2001).

Along with these reservations about the ‘free market’, and given the importance of assumptions about the individual to its mathematical iconography, it might be well to examine what has happened to the image of the human being, ideologically, that is, since the Middle Ages. At the time of the Renaissance, there was a substantial interest in what the Greeks had written 2000 years earlier. Thanks in great part to the Arabs, what little had survived from that period was available to the Italians and others during this subsequent period. Meanwhile, the Protestant reformation also brought a reformation in the Holy Roman church, the closest thing to a State at that time. Thus, during this period there was great interest in Greek philosophy, including both its scientific as well as its humanistic aspects.

The importance of Aristotle to the scientific and subsequent industrial revolution is well known. Less well appreciated is the number of renaissance philosophers who were interested in the humanism expressed in Greek philosophy (Cassirer 1948, Gundersheimer 1965). This phase of Neo-Platonism lasted from the early 14th century until the early 17th century, excluding a 50-year interruption caused by the ‘Black Plague’. After a brief Catholic ‘Reformation’, inspired in part by the Protestant Reformation in the early 16th century, the Counter-Reformation in the Roman church took hold and humanist ideas were once again suppressed.

Subsequently, the spirit of humanism was hijacked by the concept of individualism, an idea much more compatible with the mathematical formulations and the mechanistic philosophy that has dominated western thought up to the present. Humanism is complicated by a subjective and dialectic view of reality and by references to emotion and morality, dimensions common in art, but less at home with rationality and logic. Indeed, in current discourse, ‘rational’ is usually contrasted with ‘irrational’, and the category of ‘non-rational’ is essentially forgotten, hence the division between the humanities and the sciences in Snow’s dichotomy. Individualism was, of course, a liberating idea in its time, inspired by references to humanism, and as contrasted to feudalism, of course. But we are, as always, confronted with the problem of keeping our ‘liberating ideas’ at one moment in history from turning into ‘suffocating straightjackets’ at the next, as the dialectic moves through time (Berlin 1962).

By the time that Adam Smith (1998 [1776]) appeared on the scene, as it were, it was already clear that the locus of political power in the church and landed nobility was a serious obstacle to the potential for the economic growth and the accumulation of wealth that was embodied in the rise of mercantilism and the growing industrial and technological revolution. The idea of growth was and is realized in the process of increasing production, profiting therefrom and reinvesting that surplus profit in further increases in production, and so on into infinity – or so one is led to believe according to the script operating in both capitalist and socialist economic systems till now. A necessary accompaniment of this idea was the spirit of *frugality* as embodied in the Protestant Ethic (Weber 1958), rather than the spirit of (often conspicuous) consumption, as was, for the most part, the case with surpluses up to and including the Renaissance. This transition involved a change in the actors and their scriptwriters in charge of society at that time. In short, religion and its symbolism had to be replaced by rational science and its symbolism, if the potential for economic growth were to be realized **and a new ruling class to be installed.**

Adam Smith and his followers described society as a **deterministic mechanism** in the spirit of the Newtonian science of their time – so much for the idea of ‘freedom’ embodied

in their rhetoric! This rhetoric, incidentally, allowed Adam Smith and his followers the *freedom* to imagine a socioeconomic system to their liking, but not the freedom for anyone else subsequently to imagine an alternate, indeed, possibly more humane system, without being branded heretics, idealists, utopianists, planners or whatever... Underlying Newton's mechanism was Democritus' idea of atomism, the idea of otherwise unconnected individual elements moving according to the causal laws of the mechanism of which they were a part. In social terms the actions of individual elements, human beings, would also need to be defined according to the laws of the social mechanism. In Adam Smith's mind this accorded well with the need for the potential of the economic mechanism, i.e., the 'free market', to be realized by the individuals who were struggling against the structure of the former social order, laden as it was with localism, tradition and loyalty to outmoded social hierarchies. Individuals had to be freed from this oppressive social formation; they had to be given a new form of consciousness and a form of motivation that would govern their actions. In keeping with the scientific ethos of the time, 'consciousness' was to be perceived as 'rationality', and in a neat psychological move, 'motive' was defined as a desire for **wealth as a means to immediate 'personal satisfaction'** (as opposed to the postponed gratification of everlasting salvation).

However, since at least the time of Epicurus, and even before, we have known that personal satisfaction is a complex psychosocial and philosophical problem, not particularly suited to the instrumental vocabulary of Newtonian science and technology (Maslow 1970, Cloninger 2004, Edwards 2010). Yet, for the free market icon to succeed, satisfaction had to be transformed or 'symbolized' into a quantifiable form. In the spirit of the market the obvious symbol would be 'money', though it was also assumed by Smith at the time that money would bring respect and esteem, thus satisfying deeper emotional needs along the way.

The idea of wealth satisfying the need for esteem and respect has in some ways been a curse placed upon humankind probably since the origins of private property, and even referred to as such in the Bible: something about camels and the eyes of needles! Even before that, Sophocles in *Antigone* had claimed that:

"There has never been a worse discovery in the world than money. It destroys cities, creates homeless people, and seduces prudent minds to search for shameful projects. It has even shown people how to commit fraud and to become associated with every form of ungodly behavior. And for whomever carries out such acts using bribery, there will come the time when they will receive their just desserts (Alexandrou 2009, p. 101)."

Or Plato,

"There, where wealth enjoys honor; citizens abandon virtue and their only concern is becoming rich. The rich are carried away, the poor prepare demonstrations, and everyone ignores the interests of the citizens. What prevails is the spirit of advantage, which drives away virtue. There develops an ever greater spirit of greed, and wealth becomes the only measure of political rights (Alexandrou 2009, p. 92)."

This is especially true even for those who have great wealth, something often obtained at the *expense of* deeper moral, emotional and spiritual instincts. Thus, ironically, wealth is often not accompanied by emotional satisfaction. **Respect, as an emotional and social phenomenon** is not to be confused with envy and fear, which are the usual emotions involved when wealth is defined as the sole measure of satisfaction. But this is equally true for those poorer people who envy wealth, thinking that it would be able to satisfy those deeper emotional needs (Gutenschwager 2004, Ch. 10). Needless to say, this is not a black-and-white issue, where no wealth, nor even property, might be seen as the only alternative. We are obviously looking for Aristotle's 'golden mean' here. Also, needless to say, the problem here is not money, itself. It is the abuse of what money symbolizes. Money was designed to symbolize the value of goods and services in order to facilitate their exchange, something for which it is admirably well suited. But by the time of the ancient Greeks it had already become a symbol of social status and now a whole science, economics, uses it to symbolize happiness. This is obviously now a vastly 'overloaded' symbol and a grotesquely oversimplified understanding of a complex socio-psychological phenomenon.

Meanwhile, these newly defined individuals had to be free to break familial and community ties at whatever emotional costs and to move to where economic opportunities would take them, where they could make money, the symbol of social and individual 'satisfaction'. The merchants and industrialists had to be free to maximize profit, thus adding to the surplus that could be reinvested in further production and trade to the benefit of all, in a cycle of continuous growth. And the place where this magic would take place was the market, the locus of free (almost exclusively) men exchanging their goods and services without the heavy hand of the old landed nobility and its "House of Lords", who would seek to turn the benefits towards their gentry friends.

The new theater was thus to be one of (predatory) individuals seeking profit in any way possible, and returning that profit into the system of production and exchange for their own increasing future 'satisfaction', with everyone, theoretically at least, benefiting. What we are talking about here is a profound psychological and cultural transformation, not just a change in the economic system, though as both Marx and Polanyi would point out later, it was the changes in the economic system that strongly influenced the new culture. This new **culture of capitalism** (Macfarlane 1989) grew up in close association with the new science and technology. Little did those participating in this cultural transformation at that time realize, as Erich Fromm (1961) would point out in an afterword to George Orwell's, 1984, that,

"... one of the most characteristic and destructive developments of our own society [is] that man, becoming more and more of an instrument, transforms reality more and more into something relative to his own interests and functions."

This would ultimately lead to a society dominated by **fear and greed**, to say nothing of **loneliness** (Riesman 1950, Slater 1990), something that was apparently not imagined in the small-scale society of that time. But how else could one be expected to act when surrounded by other predatory individuals? Would this not lead to fear for one's own survival? Would this not lead to the desire to accumulate as much wealth as possible so as to insulate one's self and one's family against the threats posed by such an environment? Is this not the prevailing

psychosocial environment characterizing the last several hundred years? Would this not lead to a society characterized by both predatory and defensive aggression, systems of behavior traced, in today's world, to genetic, psychopharmacological and developmental pathologies by Jordan Peterson and Mathew Shane (2004)?

If we think of society as consisting of both a subjective and objective reality, we might ponder how this dialectic might play itself out in the real world of positive science. Subjective reality is defined as the set of images, theories, values, etc. which comprise the thoughts, both individual and collective, that characterize a given society or culture. Objective reality is defined as the actual concrete reality created by these individual and collective thoughts, in relation to environmental constraints as played out in the real world, consisting of all the observable and measured elements of that world (Berger and Luckmann 1966, Gutenschwager 2013).

For economics, the subjective reality consists of a mathematically defined rationality leading to a sort of robotic behavior by the human players on the environmental scene, bolstered by certain biological beliefs about genetic determination, e.g., the 'selfish gene', the naturalness of human aggression, etc., something that is now being increasingly questioned by research in a whole range of scientific disciplines (Sahlins 2008), all of which point to the conclusion that cooperation is more normal than competition. Indeed,

“. . . pleasure centers in the brain are activated when people cooperate, except in individuals who, in independent measures show characteristics of psychopathy (Sussman and Cloninger 2011, p. 5)”.

If this is true, could it be that economics is in some way related to the study (and promotion) of psychopathology? Assuming that most economists would not like to be a part of such a story, even unintentionally, they will most likely need to search for a new philosophical paradigm outside the Newtonian one used until now. To find such a new paradigm they will need to reexamine their ontological and epistemological assumptions. They will need to reject the outdated stereotypes they have inherited from the past and begin to learn how human beings actually can and do live and work together. There are many books reporting research on this topic, but they are all outside the accepted dogma of conventional economics. The challenge is there, but the emotional cost will be high, though not unsatisfying, and in the long run, all of humanity will benefit greatly.

The objective reality of current economic science consists by and large of a mechanism that operates according to the causal laws that govern its presumed existence. Notably missing from this picture is any human content. There is no spiritual dimension, no place for human emotion or for moral judgment. In fact, in this **deterministic** world there is no need for human actors to feel anything; they are freed from all human responsibility for what might occur as a result of what is assumed to be true, including the resulting behaviors and outcomes that follow from these assumptions. Obviously, there is no need for moral concerns in such a world; things just happen as a result of accidental mutations and adaptations, much as they might if we were all 'in the hands of an angry God' (or machine)!

Meanwhile, this culture of capitalism would experience at least two other important transformations before arriving at its current state. The first of these occurred during the latter

part of the 19th and throughout the 20th century. As capital accumulated and was reinvested in increased production, the **one-sided distribution of the benefits** of the new system into the capitalist class led to problems of overproduction and the need to stimulate more consumption. Thus, the culture of frugality, which Adam Smith knew and admired and which Weber described so well, had to give way to the culture of waste and consumerism; a new culture, a new society was born, one unimagined by Smith. This should have been a red flag to any economist who believed that society could be imagined to be a deterministic system. The cornerstone of Smith's theory of the free market – frugality and the investment of surplus for the benefit of all – was superseded, leaving its rather more irrational and predatory character in full sight for any thinking person to see (Veblen 2009). Growth would no longer be a 'natural' characteristic of the economic system; it would have to be artificially stimulated by human intervention. This also should have been a warning that the ontological assumptions about human nature and about the idea of using 'natural laws' to explain the system were for the most part a grand illusion. Indeed, the subsequent creation of the consumer society was, as Stuart Ewen (1976, 1988) has illustrated so clearly, **pure theater**, including its staging in the appropriate architecture (Duncan 1965), having little, if anything, to do with the mechanistic world theorized by economics.

And yet, in the long run even this was not enough to preserve the evolving market system, and some economists, most notably Maynard Keynes, realized that while portrayed as a giant mechanism, the economic system might, in fact, still need to be regulated (in new ways, that is) by the government. In fact, Polanyi (2001, [1944]) has described in great detail how government intervention has always been a necessary prerequisite to the creation and maintenance of the free market economic system, given, especially, its destructive impact on human society as a whole. Thus, in the early 20th century the culture of **welfare capitalism** was created, whose purpose was to fulfill some of the basic human needs that the market was incapable of doing. This, however, created a source of conflict, both ideological and practical, between the capitalist class and the welfare governments who had to supply the less profitable, but socially necessary goods and services such as education, health care, physical infrastructure, environmental cleanup, etc. in order for the society itself to function. Here we can also include President Eisenhower's 50,000 miles of national defense highways, necessary to 'defend' the profits of the all-important automobile industry, one must suppose.

Meanwhile, this has also created a long-running ideological conflict among the economists whose (socio-dramatic) task has always been not only to explain, scientifically, but also to **justify, ideologically**, the free market system, both in the academy and beyond. This conflict pits those still wedded to the old theater of an autonomous, deterministic and self-equilibrating 'free market', against those who believe in a new theater where conscious human intervention should be used to protect the system from the vicissitudes of its crisis-ridden history. The actual Keynesian 'intervention' lasted from the early part of the 20th century in Europe and North America until the mid 1970s, two bloody world wars notwithstanding, or perhaps 'withstanding', when we consider the shift to military Keynesianism after WWII.

In the developed countries of the West we find ourselves in a phase at the end of the post-war boom with an increasing maldistribution of the rewards of the system, as witnessed by the fact that, in the U.S. at least, median family income has not increased at all over the

past 40 years or so. This maldistribution, by diminishing purchasing power, has necessarily placed limitations on profitable investment, with the exception of certain high-tech industries, including especially, military weaponry, which, of course, isn't related to the free market at all. These limitations have, in turn, led to an explosion in financial capitalism along with a scramble to open up investment opportunities by privatizing every possible segment of human activity, including, especially, those activities that had come to be the domain of the welfare oriented governments until now (Frank 2008). Alongside this, there has been an increase in the use of science and its newest technology to seek out and create opportunities to **gamble** on ever more risky and meaningless investments, simply to use up the excess capital that the imbalance in distribution has created. In mainstream economics, this has entailed an abandonment of the theory and ideas of the welfare state and a return to the old culture of the magical, autonomous 'free market'. Ironically, this free market, in its recent financial attire, is now leading us tragically into a new feudalism. Wealth is becoming more and more concentrated in a few hands, while the mass of people, whose property is gradually being confiscated from them by the seemingly autonomous workings of the free market, are being led into a new form of serfdom.

In spite of these changes in the market system, what has not apparently changed over these several hundred years, and especially now, and in spite of recent questioning in many quarters, is the abiding emphasis placed on individualism. As argued above, in the context of the theory and ideology of the system, this individualism is necessarily instrumental and ultimately 'predatory', though MacPherson (1962), in somewhat kinder language, has called it simply 'possessive'. This ideology continues to be deeply embedded in the culture of the West. Ironically enough it was considered to be a serious problem up until the late 18th century, originating, as it was believed for over 2,000 years, in the savage beast that was the human being, and a problem that could only be solved by something like the agora or a Congress in which the competing interests could balance each other out, or by a strong authoritarian leader or oligarchy that would keep the savage beasts in line. It was only in Adam Smith's time that this savagery was portrayed in a totally different light as 'resource' that could be used to foster economic development, and as something that government not only did not need to control, but would do well to leave alone and not 'interfere' with, hence the current slogans to that effect (Sahlins 2008).

Thus, given its importance to his argument at the time, Adam Smith **could** have called the new system he was describing in the late 18th century, 'predatory individualism'. But this would not have been very aesthetic. Like Saint Catherine in the beginning, this new reality wasn't really very well defined as yet. Its name would give it its identity. If Adam Smith and his followers had called it 'predatory individualism', surely they would not have found many followers. On the other hand, both the words 'free' and 'market' had a nice ring to them. Everyone would like to be free. Indeed, the fate of most humans since the domestication of plants and animals and the subsequent establishment of 'private property' has been one of slavery (or the domestication of humans, as it were) of one kind or another. And, who could not recall the enjoyment of visits to the market? So there it was: in an artistic (rhetorical) move, 'predatory individualism' was out and 'free market' was in (and, surely, only milk could flow from such veins!).

4. The Institutionalization of the Free Market System

Now we turn to the establishment, or institutionalization, to use the technical term, of this new belief, this new reified reality. The iconography of the culture of science is not, of course, frescoes and painting, as in the case of St. Catherine; it is mathematics. If the new reality could be expressed in mathematical terms, it would, therefore, have to be real. So, with the help of Ricardo and many other ‘scientist-artists’, the mathematics of the free market system was ‘painted’, not on the walls of the churches, but on the blackboards of the universities, the new places of worship. As with St. Catherine, the free market had become not only an ideal, an icon, but also a reality **imposed** upon society through various forms of government regulation such as tax laws and property laws that favored the rising wealthy class, through tariff policies that favored commercial and industrial interests over domestic agriculture, etc., all creating a ‘mechanistic’ reality whose ‘laws’ could be ‘discovered’ by the new science of economics. As with St. Catherine, the economics icon would then be free to work its magic over time.

“The history of humankind has been a search for a manner to regulate society, including its economy, in ways that would best preserve it.”

Or would it? The problem with all art (and artful science) is that it can be upset by subsequent interpretations. Art is more likely to be dialectic, hence much less likely to be dogmatic. Its role is, indeed, to experiment with reality. Meanwhile, many books, as well as the film, *Agora*, have exposed the reality of Hypatia and by implication St. Catherine; the examples can be multiplied.

Likewise, the current crisis in the capitalist system has brought forth many criticisms of the not so ‘free’ market during the current phase of monopoly capitalism. And many economists are questioning the ideological underpinnings of their science, e.g. the World Economics Association (WEA), with its thousands of economists and other members.* Basic to this questioning, however, must be a confrontation with some of the basic presuppositions of social science itself. Is this science, especially economic science, outside society? Or is it playing an active role in **constructing** society, as most humanists and now, perhaps, followers of Heisenberg would claim? Is society a giant mechanism, or are there aspects that cannot be captured with the metaphor of the machine? Does the uncertainty principle hold true for society, as well as for nature? Are the laws that social scientists are discovering truly objective or are they influenced by paradigmatic assumptions (Kuhn 1970), or by the power of suggestion (Michael, et al 2012), or by an indifference to the Null Hypothesis, or by the difficulty of publishing research that merely replicates previous research, etc.

Whether or not human society is a giant mechanism, there is no such thing as an unregulated (free market) society. Indeed, the history of humankind has been a search for a manner to regulate society, including its economy, in ways that would best preserve it. The biological

* www.worldeconomicsassociation.org/

demand for survival and reproduction is moved to a new social scale as the population grows and its connections expand over space and time. Instinct is supplemented by human thought and intention, as is necessary to manage this new scale. Philosophy, religion, art and science are part of a continuous effort to comprehend, organize and regulate an ever-changing social reality. The idea of natural laws or an ‘unseen hand’, proven mathematically, is not ultimately very far from the conventional belief among many, even today, in a God that oversees and controls everything. This apparently was also Newton’s belief, as he sought God’s laws embodied in nature (though with a much stricter methodology, of course).

“Insofar as individualism becomes predatory, we must ask to what extent it is, or, even more, encourages, socio-pathology.”

Meanwhile, the idea of a social world free from government regulation leaves open the question of how, in fact, this world is to be regulated. In a socioeconomic world dominated by the idea (and reality) of predatory individualism we shouldn’t be far off in supposing that regulation would be carried out by the predators, themselves. Does that not seem to characterize today’s world, even if the starring roles have recently changed, shifting all the best lines from the industrialists to the bankers? We must also suppose that those predators are working, as always, in their own interest, as the theory of the ‘free market’ proclaims that they should.

A recent book by John Weeks (2014) offers a thoughtful discussion of how (a different approach to) economic theory could be used to resolve the current finance-generated crisis, that is, largely through renewed government regulation within a Keynesian framework. This government regulation would have to ‘interfere’ with the workings of the ‘free market system’, making it less free, one would suppose. But if the term free market is but a cover for the reality of predatory individualism, we must imagine that it would only be a matter of time before the predators would regain their ‘rightful’ (powerful) place in society, as, indeed, they did after more than forty years of Keynesian regulation before, during and after the Second World War. A St. Catherine icon provided a symbol of altruism, as means of legitimating a social hierarchy dominated by the church; so also has a cleverly crafted ‘free market’ icon legitimated a new social hierarchy dominated by a plutocratic class.

What I am arguing is that, call it what you might, the ideology of individualism cannot by itself be a basis for a healthy society, unseen hand or not, any more than it is for the cells in the human body or the elements of nature. Nor, for that matter, of course, were the slavery and serfdom that preceded individualism a healthy basis for society. What we need are new liberating ideas, while always recognizing in the dialectical spirit that they too, may in time, be turned into suffocating straightjackets (Berlin 1962). To change the social world it is not sufficient to change the way the ‘mechanism’ is regulated; we must change the very idea of what society is: Is it a mechanism or is it theater, (or, at least, some synthesis of the two, if unintended, often mechanistic, consequences of human actions that may be discovered by science are taken into account)? This goes to the heart of the choice between C.P.Snow’s two worlds. Do we go with Sophocles and Shakespeare or with Adam Smith and Thomas Hobbes and their many descendants in the modern world of positivist social science? If we see our

social world as theater, we must ask who are the playwrights, the directors and the main actors, and what are their motives? We must examine the rhetoric, the ruling ideas that govern the consciousness and intentions of the “poor players who strut and fret their hour upon the stage”. Insofar as individualism becomes predatory, we must ask to what extent it is, or, even more, encourages, sociopathology.

According to a recent study by Martha Stout (2005), something like an (rather modest) estimated 4% of the American population is classed as sociopathic. A sociopath is defined as one who has no conscience, no moral values, no sense of right or wrong, no emotional depth or the ability to relate emotionally to others, no concern about the fate of others, whether they, themselves, are involved in creating that fate or not. Sociopaths are deceitful, manipulative and irresponsible. They may also be charming and parasitic, with a “grandiose sense of self-worth” (Stout, pp. 6-7). Her research suggests that from 35-50% of sociopathic behavior is inherited; it is found in our genes, which as Lipton would argue is not the product of a deterministic system but may well be the product of prior environmental influences on a given generation’s progenitors. Whether it will be expressed in current behavior has a great deal to do with the kind of culture in which we are raised. If a culture emphasizes the interconnectedness of all things, with or without quantum theory, it will dampen sociopathic tendencies among its people. If it emphasizes the separateness and individuality of persons, as in Social Darwinism, it will encourage those with sociopathic predispositions to act them out in their behavior.

From the Wild West of the past to the corporate outlaws of the present, American society seems to allow and even encourage me-first attitudes devoted to the pursuit of domination . . . North American culture, which holds individualism as a central value, tends to foster the development of anti-social behavior, and also to disguise it. In other words, in America, the guiltless manipulation of other people ‘blends’ with social expectations to a much greater degree than it would in . . . other more group-centered societies” (Stout, pp. 136-7).

As a further insight into this problem, we may also ponder the following quotation:

Robert Oppenheimer, when he found himself reflecting on how he and his people made decisions said: ‘When you see something that is technically sweet, you go ahead and do it and argue about what to do about it only after you’ve had your technical success. That’s the way it was with the Atomic bomb’ (Jacobs, 2014).

Predatory individualism and its attendant ‘free market’ is an ideology, almost a religion for many economists and others following in the footsteps of Adam Smith and Milton Friedman. It is deeply embedded in western culture where it appears under the mantel of a deterministic science, wearing the vestments of ‘freedom’, rationality and objectivity. It is mightily defended in the citadels of higher learning, and, along with the mechanistic view of society, is **probably the current, single most important obstacle to a more cooperative and humane society**. Indeed, its influence is felt well beyond academia, creating a form of alienated environment for entire cultures. It is not that sociopathic behavior has been unknown, especially among ruling classes in the history of human kind over the past 10,000

years, and perhaps before; but hunters and gathers would and still do recognize immediately the dangers to their very existence of such behavior. Here we can also refer to the human body with its 50-70 trillion cells where predatory individualism is unknown and where organs do not attempt to dominate or go to war with one another. Yet, social legitimation today under the ideological influence of science creates ironies and contradictions that the insights of art could well help to reveal.

What we are referring to here is the danger of dominance by the more successful among the predatory individualists (what today we might call ‘bullying’), and the resulting development of a nondemocratic hierarchical sociopolitical order, not one designed to rein in the ‘savage’ humans as was the vision up to the 18th century, but one actually beholden to the most cunning of them. Christopher Boehm (2000) argues, with a great deal of anthropological and ethological evidence that the danger of such developments had contributed to the development of a moral consciousness even before Homo sapiens appeared on the scene. That is, the distaste for being dominated had led even prehuman species to develop a consciousness of and means for dealing with the bullies who could potentially upset the egalitarian harmony of their bands. They would be controlled through ostracism, through punishment and even through execution, if thought necessary, as has also been found in more recent studies of hunting and gathering societies existent today.

“Science and art must find ways to work together and not simply pretend that they occupy ‘different worlds’.”

5. A New Role for Social Science

Mechanistic Newtonian science has its repertoire of terms used to conceive the social world. Some of these terms are being questioned by quantum physics, especially beyond the realm of the five senses. The humanities have always questioned the capability of the mechanistic metaphor to fully comprehend the social world. Quantum reality offers an opening for a more humanistic approach to social reality, one that may allow human beings to be seen as emotional and moral beings not circumscribed in their thoughts and actions by narrow definitions of rationality and by only instrumental needs that don’t allow extension beyond the materialistic (Capra 1982, Rosenblum and Kuttner 2011, Gutenschwager 2004, Ch. 10). Again, it’s important to emphasize that this is not a call to do away with rationalism; it’s a call to recognize that there are also other dimensions to human existence that must be taken into account if a holistic understanding is to prevail: science and art must find ways to work together and not simply pretend that they occupy ‘different worlds’.

Can social science theory accommodate itself to this non-material extension? Certainly not, within the reified and deterministic framework of conventional positivistic thought. The mechanistic metaphor and the mathematics that accompany it will have to be seen as just that, as metaphors that capture certain often unseen and maybe unintended aspects of social reality, **not as ‘laws’ that govern it**. Once these (sometimes unintended) aspects of social reality are uncovered, they should become the subject of discussion and debate, a discussion that would raise the question about their **desirability**, not about their law-like **naturalness or inevitability**. These are terms in the deterministic framework that guide conventional

economic thought, but that, as we have seen, tend to obscure profound philosophical assumptions about the nature of the conscious universe we inhabit.

Can economists and other positivist social scientists accept their (diminished) social role as discoverers of temporary regularities that they and others must evaluate as to their desirability? It's not that these discussions are not going on now among concerned scientists. See the work on altruism in nature by W.D. Hamilton (Seegerstrale 2013), for example, or the mathematics of cooperation (Nowak 2011), or work on morality, itself (Hauser 2006, Boehm 2012). However, many scientists are still handicapped by beliefs in 'determinism'. They prefer a "handful of certainty to a whole cartload of beautiful possibilities", as Nietzsche has said (1997 [1886], p. 6). The conventional economists who work within the current establishment's 'theater of power' are allowed to believe that they are simply doing their science, much like the operators of drones who are simply 'following orders', whatever the moral consequences of their actions. Scientists and engineers who are simply 'following the orders' of their 'deterministic' science may be able to live in society free from guilt and self-doubt, but they are doing so in a grand pattern of self-deception, something which art has proven so well suited to expose, one might add. It is not that self-deception has not been a force in human history, especially during the past 10,000 years, but we must keep in mind that the survival of hunters and gatherers left little leeway for such things in the evolutionary years before that time. Was this self-deception not involved when St. Catherine's religious fanatics were carving up Hypatia in the 'agora', or later murdering and pillaging their way across the Third World during the age of exploration and the subsequent rise of imperialism, to say nothing of the social scientists who have legitimized this imperialism under the guise of modernization, globalization, the division of labor, the free market at work, etc. in the years that followed?

Ultimately, social scientists must and, indeed, are more and more recognizing that they are not just studying society **but are also creating it**. If we trace the evolution of the idea of individualism we might gain an appreciation of the way in which a social reality can be constructed, often through unintended consequences of meaningful ideas. Individualism evolved under the aegis of economic science into possessive individualism, then quite naturally into predatory individualism, as active and passive forms of aggression, aggression being a form of bullying, which when institutionalized, as we have seen all too often in the 20th century and beyond, becomes fascism. This may explain the emphasis on **cooperation** in some recent avant-garde scientific literature, as the social dialectic between subjective and objective reality seeks to rebalance itself, i.e., as people seek to close the gap between what they are actually doing and what they think they are doing!

In this light, we are also now once again beginning to confront our ultimate dependence on nature, much as did the hunters and gatherers in earlier times. Our culture of science along with its technology (without philosophy) appears to be endangering our very existence. We have little time left for self-deception. We need new scriptwriters and new actors, before we end up writing ourselves completely out of play!

Author Contact Information

Email: g.gutenschwager@gmail.com

Bibliography

1. Alexandrou, Haralambros Con. (2009), *The Current Economic Crisis and Globalization; Marketism: The latest Ideological Irrationality of the 20th Century*. Athens: Haralambros Alexandrou Publications (in Greek)
2. Baran, Paul and Paul Sweezy (1966), *Monopoly Capitalism: An Essay on the American Economic and Social Order*. New York: Monthly Review Press
3. Berger, Peter and Thomas Luckmann (1966), *The Social Construction of Reality*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co.
4. Berger, Peter and Pullberg, S. (1966), "Reification and the Sociological Critique of Consciousness," in *New Left Review*, No. 35, pp. 56-77
5. Berlin, Isaiah (1962), "Does Political Theory Still Exist?," in *Philosophy, Politics and Society*, Second Series. Oxford: Basil Blackwell
6. Boehm, Christopher (2000), "Conflict and the Evolution of Social Control", in *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 1-2, pp. 79-101
7. _____ (2012), *Moral Origins; the Evolution of Virtue, Altruism, and Shame*. New York: Basic Books
8. Capra, Fritjof (1982), *The Turning Point; Science, Society, and the Rising Culture*. New York: Simon and Schuster
9. Cassirer, Ernst, et al (1948), *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press
10. Cloninger, C. Robert (2004), *Feeling Good; The Science of Well-Being*. New York: Oxford University Press
11. Duncan, Hugh D. (1965), *Culture and Democracy: the Struggle for Form in Society and Architecture in the Middle West During the Life and Times of Louis H. Sullivan*. Totowa, N.J.: Bedminster Press
12. Duncan, Hugh D. (1969), *Symbols and Social Theory*. New York: Oxford Univ. Press
13. Dzielska, Maria (1995), *Hypatia of Alexandria*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press
14. Edwards, Gill (2010), *Conscious Medicine; Creating Health and Well-Being in a Conscious Universe*. London: Piatkus
15. Ewen, Stuart (1976), *Captains of Consciousness; Advertising and the Social Roots of the Consumer Culture*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company
16. _____ (1988), *All Consuming Images: the Politics of Style in Contemporary Culture*. New York: Basic Books
17. Foster, John Bellamy (2014), *The Theory of Monopoly Capitalism*. New York: Monthly Review Press
18. Frank, Thomas (2008), *The Wrecking Crew; How Conservatives Ruined Government, Enriched Themselves, and Beggared the Nation*. New York: Henry Holt and Co.
19. Fromm, Eric (1961), Afterword to George Orwell's, *1984*. New York: New American Library, Inc., pp. 263-64
20. Giardini, Orio (2010), *Itinerary to the Third Age*. Introduction by Garry Jacobs & Ivo Šlaus. Geneva, Switzerland: The Risk Institute, Special Edition of the "European Papers on the New Welfare", No. 18, 2013
21. Gundersheimer, Werner L. Ed (1965), *The Italian Renaissance*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall
22. Gutenschwager Gerald (2004), *Planning and Social Science; A Humanistic Approach*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America
23. _____ (2013), "From Epicurus to Maslow; Happiness Then and Now and the Place of the Human Being in Social Theory", in *Cadmus*, Vol.1, Issue 6, Part 2, May, pp. 66-90
24. _____ (2013), "The Dialectic of Change", in *Eruditio, The e-Journal of the World Academy of Art and Science*, Vol. 1, Issue 3, Sept., pp. 79-93
25. Hauser, Marc D. (2006), *Moral Minds; the Nature of Right and Wrong*. New York: HarperCollins
26. Jacobs, Alan (2014), "The Two Cultures, Then and Now; The Sciences, the Humanities and their Common Enemy", in *Books & Culture: A Christian Review*, March/April
27. Kapp, Karl William, 2nd Revised Edition (1988), *Social Costs of Private Enterprise*. NY: Schocken
28. Korten, David (1995), *When Corporations Rule the World: The Case Against Free Trade*. West Hampton Conn: Kumarian Press
29. Lentricchia, Frank (1983), *Criticism and Social Change*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press
30. Lipton, Bruce (2008), *The Biology of Belief; Unleashing the Power of Consciousness, Matter & Miracles*. N.Y.: Hay House, Inc.
31. Macfarlane, Alan (1989), *The Culture of Capitalism*. New York: Blackwell
32. MacPherson, C.B. (1962), *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke*. London: Oxford University Press
33. Maslow, A.H. (1970), *Motivation and Personality*. 2nd Edition. New York: Harper and Row
34. Michael, Robert B., Maryanne Gary and Irving Kirsch (2012), "Suggestion, Cognition and Behavior", in *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, Vol. 21, No. 3, (June), pp. 151-56

35. Nietzsche, Friedrich (1997 [1886]), *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*. Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications
36. Nowak, Martin, with Roger Highfield (2011), *Super Cooperators; Evolution, Altruism and Human Behaviour or Why We Need Each Other to Succeed*. Edinburgh: Canongate Books, Ltd.
37. Peterson, J.B. & Shane, M. (2004), "The Functional Neuroanatomy and Psychopharmacology of Predatory and Defensive Aggression". In J. McCord (Ed). *Beyond Empiricism: Institutions and Intentions in the Study of Crime*. (Advances in Criminological Theory, Vol. 13) (pp. 107-146). Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Books
38. Polanyi, Karl (2001 [1944]), *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*. Boston: Beacon Press
39. Riesman, David (1950), *The Lonely Crowd: a Study of the Changing American Character*. New Haven, CN: Yale University Press
40. Rosenblum, Bruce and Fred Kuttner, 2nd edition (2011), *Quantum Enigma; Physics Encounters Consciousness*. London: Duckworth Overlook
41. Rueckert, William H. (1969), *Critical Responses to Kenneth Burke*. Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press
42. Sahlins, Marshall (2008), *The Western Illusion of Human Nature: With Reflections on the Long History of Hierarchy, Equality, and the Sublimation of Anarchy in the West, and Comparative Notes on Other Conceptions of the Human Condition*. Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press
43. Segerstrale, Ullica (2013), *Nature's Oracle; The Life and Work of W.D. Hamilton*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
44. Slater, Philip E. (1990 [1970]), *The Pursuit of Loneliness: American Culture at the Breaking Point*, with a new introduction by Todd Gitlin. Boston: Beacon Press
45. Smith, Adam (1999 [1776]), *The Wealth of Nations, Books I-III*. London: Penguin Books
46. Snow, C.P. (2013 [1959]), *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution*. Eastford, CT: Martino Fine Books
47. Stolphans, Cynthia (2014), *St. Catherine of Alexandria in Renaissance Roman Art*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Press
48. Sussman, Robert K. and C. Robert Cloninger (Eds.), *Origins of Altruism and Cooperation*. New York: Springer
49. Stout, Martha, PhD (2005), *The Sociopath Next Door; the Ruthless Versus the Rest of Us*. New York: MJF Books
50. Svoronos, Nikos G. (1976), *A Survey of Modern Greek History*. Athens: Themelio Publishers (in Greek). Originally published in French as: *Histoire de la Grèce Moderne*. Presses Universitaires de France (1972)
51. Veblen, Thorstein (2009 [1899]), *The Theory of the Leisure Class*. Oxford University Press