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# Res novae



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*Ivo Kerže*

GILSONOVO IN KLASIČNO TOMISTIČNO RAZUMEVANJE MOGOČEGA  
PRI SV. TOMAŽU AKVINSKEM

*Anže Tržan*

JEZUITSKA SINTEZA KOT SREDNJA POT MED TRADICIONALNIMI  
IN RAZSVETLJENSKIMI SPOZNAVNI MI TEORI JAMI

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SKRBN I PREGLED VARSTVA ČLOVEKOV I H PRAVIC IN OKOLJA  
V DOBAVNI H VERIGAH NAJVEČJI H GOSPODARSKI H DRUŽB:  
PRIMER NEMŠKEGA ZAKONA O DOBAVNI H VERIGAH

*Balázs Szabó and Zsolt Nemeskéri*

ECONOMIC STRUCTURE FORMATION AND THE ROLE  
OF DEPENDENCE: A CHRISTIAN VIEWPOINT

**Fakulteta za pravo in ekonomijo, Katoliški inštitut**  
**Faculty of Law and Economics, Catholic Institute**

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Economic Structure Formation and the Role of  
Dependence: A Christian Viewpoint

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Balázs Szabó<sup>1</sup> and Zsolt Nemeskéri<sup>2</sup>

## **Economic Structure Formation and the Role of Dependence: A Christian Viewpoint**

**Abstract:** This article examines the relationship between economic structure formation and its dependence from the sociocultural context, taking a Christian perspective, focusing on decision-making motives and the impact of socioeconomic structures. It discusses the interplay between human actions and socioeconomic institutions, emphasizing the role of moral and philosophical foundations. The analysis highlights the importance of ethical norms, arguing that socioeconomic processes cannot be solely attributed to biological characteristics. By incorporating philosophical insights, the study proposes a framework where interpersonal relationships and value systems shape economic structures, advocating for a more humane and ethically grounded approach to economics.

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**Keywords:** economic structure, dependence, Christian perspective, decision-making, socioeconomic institutions, ethical norms, interpersonal relationships

**Izvleček:** Ta študija obravnava razmerje med oblikovanjem gospodarske strukture in njeno odvisnostjo od družbeno-kulturnega konteksta z vidika krščanskega nazora, s poudarkom na motivih za odločanje in vplivu družbeno-gospodarskih struktur. Razpravlja o prepletu med človeškimi dejanji in družbeno-gospodarskimi institucijami ter poudarja vlogo moralnih in filozofskih temeljev. Analiza izpostavlja pomen etičnih norm in ugotavlja, da družbeno-gospodarskih procesov ni mogoče pripisati zgolj biološkim značilnostim. Z vključitvijo filozofskih uvidov študija predlaga okvir, v katerem medosebni odnosi in vrednostni sistemi oblikujejo gospodarske strukture ter zagovarja bolj human in etično utemeljen pristop k ekonomiji.

**Ključne besede:** gospodarska struktura, odvisnost, krščanski pogled, odločanje, družbeno-gospodarske institucije, etične norme, medosebni odnosi

## Introduction

This study explores the intricate relationship between economic structure formation and its dependence from the socio-cultural context, emphasizing a Christian philosophical perspective. The paper highlights the limitations of attributing economic dynamics solely to natural causes. Instead, it underscores the importance of integrating morals and religious foundations into socioeconomic analysis. Central to the discussion is the contrast between two primary orientations – self-love and the love of God (cf. St Augustine) – which shape fundamentally different sociocultural structures.

The analysis reveals that a “vertical” orientation, grounded in transcendence and moral responsibility, fosters stronger interpersonal relationships and, consequently, more efficient and humane organizational structures. Conversely, a “horizontal” approach, dominated by self-interest (which is basically a naturalistic perspective), often leads to alienation, resource conflicts, and exploitative socioeconomic systems.

The paper also advocates for a re-evaluation of the role of cultural and moral dynamics in economic systems, asserting that these elements are critical for addressing systemic crises and promoting the common good. Drawing on insights from St Augustine, Spinoza, and modern thinkers, it argues for a holistic approach to economics that recognizes human agency as central to value formation and the regulation of societal norms.

Ultimately, the study calls for a paradigm shift in economic thought – one that moves beyond reductionist models and embraces the complexity of human existence, rooted in

both individual autonomy and collective responsibility. This approach not only aligns with Christian ethical principles but also provides a pathway toward a more equitable and sustainable socioeconomic order.<sup>3</sup>

In this paper, the relationship between structure formation and dependence is put under scrutiny, as well as certain basic motives of the person making decisions. The relationship between a well-defined type of structure formation and dependence is examined along certain specific aspects and concepts, which are not always formally defined. In our current discussion, we rely heavily on the tools of logic, which is why part of the thought process is analytical. Before we actually delve into this line of thought, however, we would like to briefly outline the context itself. Firstly, we would like to point out why the structure itself is so important for the economy.

A recent approach in social sciences, emerging from economics and now prevalent in political science and sociology, is known by various names. It emphasizes the interaction between human actions and socioeconomic structures, shaped by actors' desires and beliefs. Institutional conditions systematically influence these desires and beliefs. The traditional rational decision model assumes actors pursue self-interest, balancing cost and benefit to make optimal decisions (Szán-tó 2006).

3 We would like to stress that the mentioned approach basically lies outside secular scholarship. Nonetheless, the social teaching and theology of the Catholic Church advocate, moreover, for the mindset in question.



In addition, the quoted author associates some motives with these aspirations, such as self-interest, embodied in various desires, which we consider to be one of the great errors of modernity and which, although we have already touched upon this somewhat in our other writings, we address again in the rest of our paper.

Beyond these critical remarks, however, the passage cited points to the recognition that the study of structures is essential in relation to socioeconomic systems. We join this discourse to some extent in this paper, and we do so in a very fundamental way, guided by the intention of establishing a better understanding.

### **Critique of natural sciences in economics**

The application of natural sciences in economics has historically sought to emulate the methodology of natural sciences, such as physics and mathematics. While this approach has yielded significant insights, particularly in quantitative modelling and predictive analytics, it has also led to several limitations that render it inadequate for addressing the full scope of economic phenomena. These limitations are especially pronounced when considering the moral and interpersonal dimensions of economic structures.

One critical shortcoming of natural science methodologies in economics is their tendency toward reductionism. By focusing exclusively on measurable variables, and in several cases bottom-up thinking (e.g. classifying some processes as emergent phenomena), these methods often neglect the complex interplay of cultural, ethical, and philosophical fac-

tors that shape economic behaviour. For example, the classical rational decision-making model, as critiqued by Amartya Sen (1987), assumes that individuals act solely to maximize utility. This assumption disregards the influence of moral values, social relationships, and cultural contexts, which are central to economic decisions in many settings.

Another example is the reliance on equilibrium-based models, such as those in neoclassical economics, which aim to describe economic systems through mathematical optimization. While these models provide valuable insights into market mechanisms, they often fail to capture the dynamic and non-mechanistic nature of real-world economies. For instance, institutional economists such as Douglass North have emphasized the role of evolving social norms and institutional frameworks, which are difficult to quantify but are nonetheless critical for understanding economic development (1990).

Furthermore, naturalistic and natural science-based approaches often assume a universality that overlooks the diversity of human experiences (phenomenological approach) and morals. This universality is particularly problematic when applied to globalized economies, where cultural and philosophical differences significantly influence economic behaviour. The inability of natural sciences to address such diversity highlights their inadequacy in providing holistic explanations of economic systems.

In the context of this study, the inadequacy of natural science methodologies becomes evident when considering the role of ethical norms, moral responsibility, and some other anthropological aspects in economic structure formation. These ele-

ments cannot be reduced to measurable variables or mathematical functions. Instead, they require an interpretative and interdisciplinary approach that incorporates philosophy, theology, and sociology. As Immanuel Kant argues in his *Critique of Practical Reason* (2015), moral reasoning operates within a framework of autonomy and freedom that transcends deterministic models often employed in natural sciences.

By focusing on interpersonal relationships and value systems, this study aligns with alternative approaches that prioritize qualitative over quantitative analysis. For example, Martin Buber's (1937) personalist philosophy emphasizes the relational nature of human existence, suggesting that economic interactions are deeply embedded in ethical and interpersonal contexts. Similarly, St Augustine's distinction between the "City of God" and the "City of Man" underscores the importance of transcendent values in shaping societal structures.

In summary, while natural sciences have contributed valuable tools for understanding certain aspects of economic systems, their methodologies are fundamentally limited in addressing the ethical and interpersonal dimensions that are central to this study. By adopting a holistic and interdisciplinary perspective, this research seeks to provide a more comprehensive understanding of economic structures, grounded in moral, philosophical, and religious insights.

### **Social philosophical foundations of economy**

In this chapter, we present the first two arguments made by Szántó (2006, 19–20), which the author outlines based

on Olson's 1997 book and Lindenberg's 1985 work. As will be evident, this is particularly remarkable because it points to the relationship between public goods, including the common good, and structures. The course of the first argument looks like this:

- (p1) In terms of the size of a community, the more extensive it is, the lower it is organized. (*premise*)
- (p2) The lower the degree of organization of a community, the less likely it is to be able to provide public goods for itself. (*premise*)
- (C) In terms of size, the larger a community is, the less likely it is to be able to deliver public goods for itself.<sup>4</sup>

He cites the second argument (p1), which is based on Olson's argument and even more fundamental premises:

- (p1) In terms of the size of a community, the larger it is, the higher the cost of organization. (*premise*)
- (p2) In terms of size, the larger a community is, the relatively fewer resources it has in terms of community organizing. (*premise*)
- (p3) The higher the cost of organizing a community and the relatively fewer resources it has at its disposal from a community organizing point of view, the lower the degree of organization. (*premise*)
- (C) In terms of the size of a community, the more extensive it is, the lower its degree of organization.

The above argument may seem convincing; at first glance, perhaps no one would raise objections to either line of rea-

4 Szántó (2006) takes this conclusion from Olson's work used.

soning at the expense of the other. However, it does not take into account that within a given community, there may exist certain common goods, or the concept of the common good may appear in a broader sense, to which this almost purely “horizontal” perspective does not apply. We do not claim that the above considerations can be entirely disregarded in the case of any community; however, we do argue that they are not fully capable of determining the common good arising from the structure of the community. In addition, we would like to present some further perspectives below.

As a first step, I would like to distinguish between two types of social theories. The first argues that the human community, along with all its norms and functions, is induced by some kind of nature, which means it is the result of processes that build up “from below”. The other type refers to a transcendent moment that underpins social structures and their interaction patterns (moral principles). Of course, both categories may also have in common the desire to support their ideas and their vision of reality through philosophical anthropology. In doing so, they may refer to human motives, characteristics, adaptation processes, etc.

Thus, some views attribute to social structures and norms only a practical, essentially regulating role, which seeks to promote and prefer certain patterns of behaviour, regulating the distribution of wealth within a given community and the way in which power is exercised. A particular aspect of this regulated system is the socioeconomic dimension, which transforms and allocates goods according to certain principles.

It would also seem plausible to assume that idiosyncratic social and corporeal entities, and individuals within them,

always aim to survive, to preserve their own existence, which is essentially Spinoza's *conatus*, or quite similar to it:

**P6** Each thing, insofar as it is in itself, endeavors to persist in its own being.

[...]

**P7** The conatus with which each thing endeavors to persist in its own being is nothing but the actual essence of the thing itself.

[...]

**P8** The conatus with which each single thing endeavors to persist in its own being does not involve finite time, but indefinite time.

**Proof** If it involved a limited period of time which would determine the duration of the thing, then solely from the power by which the thing exists it would follow that it could not exist after that limited period of time, but is bound to be destroyed. But [...], this is absurd. Therefore, the conatus with which a thing exists does not involve any definite period of time. On the contrary [...], if it is not destroyed by an external cause, it will always continue to exist by that same power by which it now exists [...] (Spinoza 2006, 66–67).

Individuals strive for balance, driven by survival and self-preservation, constantly seeking to improve their position. This fundamental drive shapes societal norms and rules, influencing both formal and informal relationships, such as those between managers and subordinates or parents and children. These relationships are not uniform in their effects but vary depending on context, power dynamics, and cultural influences. Acknowledging the role of indivi-

dual actors underscores the interconnected nature of society, where identity is shaped both by narrative elements, such as unique histories and traditions, and by regulatory frameworks, such as formal institutions. For instance, companies, once registered and governed by external regulations, adapt to broader conditions, striving to enhance competitiveness and maintain survival within an evolving socioeconomic structure.

When discussing laws in this context, their meaning becomes increasingly complex. Traditionally, laws have been seen as necessary processes that describe social and economic phenomena. However, at higher levels of complexity, such necessity becomes less apparent. Laws may serve a moral function, but without being naturalized, they lack coercive force and fail to compel individuals as if they were predetermined “fates”. This opens the door to considerations of freedom and underdetermination – while natural limits undoubtedly exist, freedom operates within these constraints, allowing for human agency and variability in outcomes. This duality leads us to a broader philosophical approach.

Humans, in contrast to other species, cannot be defined solely by genetic or psychobiological traits. Basic needs are supplemented by uniquely human characteristics that become “humanized” through consciousness and rational insight (Turgonyi 2012). In the absence of fixed instincts, humans rely on culture and tradition to make rational decisions. Through socialization, individuals adopt ethical norms and develop self-control to manage innate urges (*ibid.*). This process demonstrates the interplay of biological and social features, highlighting the inadequacy of

attributing socioeconomic phenomena solely to biological determinism.

Furthermore, ideologues of modern political economy, such as Adam Smith in *The Wealth of Nations* (1976),<sup>5</sup> often reference metaphors such as the “invisible hand” to explain market mechanisms (Montes 2004). However, these explanations overlook the ethical and cultural dimensions critical to economic systems. This study contends that the economy cannot be fully understood through the methods of natural science, even though disciplines such as mathematics and physics were considered scientific ideals during the formative years of political economy. Immanuel Kant alludes to this limitation in *The Critique of Pure Reason* (Kant 1998), noting the success of these sciences but recognizing their boundaries in addressing phenomena that involve human moral and cultural complexity.

By framing economic processes within these broader dynamics, this study highlights the importance of integrating philosophical insights and ethical considerations into socioeconomic analysis, offering a more comprehensive understanding of the forces that shape human behaviour and societal structures.

If, however, culture “overrides” basic biological aspirations, then regulatory principles based directly or indirectly on

5 The context in which that term appears is as follows: “By preferring the support of domestic to that of foreign industry, he intends only his own security; and by directing that industry in such a manner as its produce may be of the greatest value, he intends only his own gain, and he is in this, as in many other cases, led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention.” (Smith 1976, IV.III, 477)



them are very unrealistic. Of course, the motive of *conatus* may manifest itself behind socioeconomic phenomena such as profit or as much participation as possible, but it is the immediate sociocultural environment that will influence the extent to which it can be “heard” in social or interpersonal relations. That is, if the given sociocultural context is supportive, it prevails, but if it is not, it may even wither away altogether.

Furthermore, the question may arise as to what extent the individual in the fabric of interpersonal identity is morally responsible for the direction of socioeconomic processes. In short, the answer to this question is that if the laws governing these supposed processes do not actually exist, then obviously they cannot be consciously and voluntarily implicated, i.e. not to any extent. It is worth noting, however, that even if they existed, responsibility would depend on the precise knowledge of these laws and on the nature of their influence, i.e. on the weight of a given actor in the context of these phenomena. If influence is marginal, then of course accountability and responsibility are comparable.

In order to confirm the above, we would like to emphasize that although abstract, causal relations and laws independent of cultural relations cannot be identified in our view with regard to sociocultural processes, nevertheless, if it is possible to establish a system of norms regarding social value formation and preferences, it is already possible to witness certain laws, which, however, are themselves modified by cultural dynamics. In other words, non-permanent, hard-set relationships can be revealed. Based on this, moral responsibility can actually be grasped in the norm-for-

ming and norm-shaping effect exerted by individual agents or groups, so the social internalization of those ideological lines of force must be considered primarily essential. This does not mean, of course, the complete disappearance of basic needs, but rather their regulation.

In relation to the socioeconomic context, moral responsibility also comes up at the interpersonal level. In other words, even those whose social weight is negligible in sociocultural terms have a responsibility in everyday life in terms of how they relate to the other person, for example whether or not they make a fair exchange.

### **Extending the mainstream narrative based on Christian philosophy**

To summarize the above reflections, it is worth embedding them in a meta-narrative framework that draws attention to even more fundamental aspects. For our part, we turn to St Augustine's *The City of God*. We draw the attention to the following section:

Two loves therefore have given origin to these two cities, self-love in contempt of God unto the earthly, love of God in contempt of one's self to the heavenly. The first seeks the glory of men, and the latter desires God only as the testimony of the conscience the greatest glory. That glories in itself, and this in God. That exalts itself in self-glory: this says to God: 'My glory and the lifter up of my head.' That boasts of the ambitious conquerors led by the lust of sovereignty: in this all serve each other in charity, both the rulers in counselling and the subjects

in obeying. That loves worldly virtue in the potentates: this says unto God: 'I will love Thee, O Lord, my strength.' And the wise men of that follow either the good things of the body, or mind, or both: living according to the flesh; and such as might know God, 'honoured Him not as God, nor were thankful, but became vain in their own imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened; for professing themselves to be wise, that is, extolling themselves proudly in their wisdom, they became fools; changing the glory of the incorruptible God to the likeness of the image of a corruptible man, and of birds and four-footed beasts and serpents': for they were the people's guides or followers unto all those idolatries, and served the creature more than the Creator who is blessed for ever. But in this other, this heavenly city, there is no wisdom of man, but only the piety that serves the true God and expects a reward in the society of the holy angels, and men, 'that God may be all in all' (St Augustine 1947, xiv.xxviii).<sup>6</sup>

Regardless of one's ideological choice, the above quotation highlights two important motives that result in different sociocultural structures. One of these motives is self-love itself, which is nothing more than putting one's own interests before everything and everyone, prioritizing them and completely subordinating to them the interests of the other person. Obviously, if there is such an aspiration, it is certainly marginal. However, these characteristics are only consequences at best, since Augustine considers one of the most important

6 St Augustine also mentions in the work in question that these two cities exist together, at the same time, not as separate realities, but as if intertwined. These are certainly aspects that show the qualitative aspects of human reality.

characteristics of self-love to be that he “expects glory from men”. The latter means that only “horizontal” relations are taken into account. With regard to the love of God, on the other hand, “verticality” is decisive, emphasizing that it is on the divine reality that the agent or person with such motives, who is “the witness of conscience”, is focused. Consequently, there are two types of moral categories, but morality is only the result of primary motives (love of self and love of God). These motives naturally build two radically different structures. The essential characteristic of these structures, therefore, can be grasped not in the concrete modes of operation, but in the orientation of the agents and persons.

Self-love itself can be seen as a “natural” endeavour, the equivalent of *conatus*. One can be convinced of this orientation simply by considering the natural reactions, motives, and history of man. It is self-preservation and preservation, which seeks to ensure survival and conditions for it.<sup>7</sup> Consequently, love of God is not at all “natural” in this sense; in

7 In connection with all this, Hobbes’ simplistic view of the self-preserving, egoistic agent (Copleston 1994; Hobbes 2008) is particularly interesting. Thus Hobbes (2008) is a good example of how the selfishness and self-love of each person really appears as a kind of natural “fact” to which they are fundamentally vulnerable, one might say powerless against it, since it acts as a constraint like a natural law. In fact, on the basis of this worldview, explanations based on purely natural processes, no one can go further. In this framework, the individual desires their own prosperity and conservation, in accordance with what we wrote in the main text, which leads to competition and mistrust (Copleston 1994). Free-competition capitalism is also, although this is not necessarily expressed, based on considerations consistent with Hobbesian philosophy, which, like utilitarian logic, also testifies to an anthropological deficiency of similar severity and approach.

our view it is connected to the deep dimensions and intrinsic freedom of man.

Later in his cited work, Augustine also writes:

But the temporal, earthly city (temporal, for when it is condemned to perpetual pains it shall be no more a city) has all its good here upon earth, and therein takes that joy that such an object can afford. But because it is not a good that acquits the possessors of all troubles, therefore this city is divided in itself into wars, altercations, and appetites of short-lived or destructive victories. For any part of it that wars against another desires to be the world's conqueror, whereas indeed it is vice's slave. And if it conquer, it extols itself and so becomes its own destruction. But if it considers the condition of worldly affairs, and grieves at man's openness to adversity, rather than delights in the events of prosperity, thus is the victory short-lived; for it cannot keep a sovereignty for ever over those whom it has subjugated by conquest. Nor can we rightly call the objects of this city's desires good, since it is only better itself in its own human fashion. It desires an earthly peace for very low ambitions, and seeks it by war, where if it subdue all resistance, it attains peace: which notwithstanding the other side, that fought so unfortunately for the same reasons, lack. This peace they seek by laborious war, and obtain (they think) by a glorious victory. Yet when they conquer that had the juster cause, who will not congratulate their victory, and be glad of their peace? Doubtless those results are good, and God's good gifts. But if the things appertaining to that celestial and supernal city where the victory shall be everlasting, be neglected for those goods, and

those goods desired as the only goods, or loved as if they were better than the others, misery must needs follow and increase that which is inherent before (St Augustine 1947, xv.iv).

Based on the passage cited, therefore, it cannot be said that in the sociocultural and economic formations created by the motive of self-love, there are no goods that agents can value, since they exist. Rather, the problem can be seen primarily in the fact that the attitude directed primarily at itself leads to “altercations” or “wars”, i.e. each agent wants the resources and goods of the other for themselves in order to improve their own situation. This is exactly what happens in capital-accumulating and profit-focused arrangements. As a result, “wars” break out, which can be a simple conflict of interest or a more serious clash. We emphasize that these fault lines appear within the “temporal, earthly city”, which ultimately dismantles the established structures over time, which, of course, leads to the construction of new structures. The problem in these systems is always that the desired goods are considered as “only goods” or, due to a crisis of values, the less valuable good is preferred to the higher good. The latter is, of course, only appropriate if there is an absolute hierarchy of values.

To think about the above further, elaborating on it better, it is worth starting with an illuminating quote:

*[...] [L]'homme religieux s'efforce-t-il de se maintenir le plus de temps possible dans un univers sacré; commente se présente son expérience totale de la vie par rapport à l'expérience de l'homme privé de sentiment religieux, de l'homme qui vit, ou désiré vivre, dans un monde désacralisé (...). Disons tout*

*de suite que le monde profane dans sa totalité, le Cosmos totalement désacralisé, est une découverte récente de l'esprit humain. [...]*

*[...] Il suffira de se rappeler ce que la cité ou la maison, la Nature, les outils ou le travail sont devenus pour l'homme moderne et areligieux pour saisir sur le vif ce qui le distingue d'un homme appartenant aux sociétés archaïques ou même d'un paysan de l'Europe chrétienne. [...]*

*[...] [L]e sacré et le profane constituent deux modalités d'être dans le monde, deux situations existentielles assumées par l'homme au long de son histoire. [...] [L]es modes d'être sacré et profane dépendent des différentes positions que l'homme a conquises dans le Cosmos; ils intéressent aussi bien le philosophe que tout chercheur désireux de connaître les dimensions possibles de l'existence humaine" (Eliade 1965, 18–20).*

And if the above two modes of existence affect all areas of research, then it is also worth considering them when reflecting on socioeconomic processes and structures. Indeed, this motive, which is oriented towards “verticality”, does not merely place before its eyes “horizontal” relations, which, albeit in different language, are essentially identical to what Augustine writes about.

The “vertical” approach, the sacred way of being, gives rise to sociocultural relations and structures which, in our view, are truly capable of promoting the common good and even of dealing with other systemic crises. Through this approach, what is written about structure formation also takes on a fuller meaning, since it is not only that non-physical raw “facts” can be included in the explanation of sociocultural systems,

but rather that the latter “facts” take precedence over the former, since they can determine the qualitative aspect of the system (e.g. its moral quality).

At the end of the subchapter, we would like to write down the following argument analytically, as if in response to the line of thought at the beginning of the unit. The argument reads:

- (p1) The more a community – and thus obviously its members – is “vertically” oriented, the more sacral it is, the more value-oriented it is, and vice versa. (*premise*)
- (p2) The more value-oriented a community is, the stronger the interpersonal and intergroup relationships. (*premise*)
- (p3) In a community, the stronger the interpersonal and intergroup relationships, the more efficiently and harmoniously it is organized. (*premise*)
- (p4) The more efficiently and harmoniously a community is organized, the more public goods it is able to make available to its members. (*premise*)
- (C) The more “vertically” oriented a community – and thus obviously its members – are, the more public goods it is able to place at the disposal of its members.

The first premise is intuitively clear, supported by Mt 6:19-21. The second premise is best illustrated by the *Golden Rule* (Mt 7:12; Lk 6:31-34), revealing its truth through personal interaction. A “vertically” oriented person values others above material goods, seeing the value of resources in the context of interpersonal relationships (Kant 2015; Szombath 2009). The third and fourth premises are also convincing and need no further explanation. In fact, the personal “I” can never



be understood without the “other”, the “you”; that is, the person who prefers exclusive self-reference is actually self-destructive, since it is absolutely true that “I am” attached to the “other” in my existence in my fulfilment (Weissmahr 1978; Szombath 2009; Buber 1937).<sup>8</sup> Therefore, existential distancing from the “other”, i.e. formalizing relationships, actually dehumanizes and depersonalizes, at the same time undermining and employing the system itself.<sup>9</sup> Another consequence is that man no longer becomes master of himself personally, but becomes an almost helpless slave to the impersonal processes that grow and weigh on him. Make no mistake, in our opinion this does not mean, and cannot mean, that the “other” constitutes my person, but merely points out that on the plane of personal existence, persons assume each other in terms of interpretability.

Further elaborating on the reality of sociocultural and eco-

- 8 The system of ethical norms can therefore be derived from a central experience of existence. With regard to structures, this means that if the system of ethical norms is violated, the relationship of dialogue and the resulting social and cultural systems are also distorted. In other words, an economic system that simplifies a person as human capital, a consumer, a customer – or “Thou” in Buber parlance (Buber 1937) – necessarily commits a serious ethical violation. This offence consists in seeking to prevent or interrupt the dialogue relationship. However, since “I” can only unfold more fully through the “other”, I renounce not only the assassination of the dialogue partner, but also the realization of my experiential self in a certain sense (Szombath 2009). It is enough to think that, for example, education that contributes greatly to “integration” into culture is only possible through communication. So, the potential for self-fulfilment lies in being able and willing to “talk” to each other.
- 9 In light of all this, it is worth considering the concept of “das Mann” used by Heidegger (1967).

nomic personal existence, we would like to refer to Ratzinger (2004) on several points. He articulates it straightforwardly – we are paraphrasing: The self, paradoxically my ultimate possession yet not truly owned, emerges in true self-awareness when one realizes its detachment from personal existence, connecting instead to the authentic origin of being.

The “vertical” attitude begins precisely with an awareness of the above, and at the same time eliminates the false image of a utilitarian farmer who seeks to extend their sphere of competence to all areas of society. The solution here is not some kind of transhumanistic “phantasm”, but a person capable of transcending and breaking away from their own monadic reality, who is able to recognize and realize a synthesis of individuality and collectivity (Ratzinger 2004). In other words: The Renaissance-born human archetype, the Cogito-ergo-sum individual, does not exist (Ratzinger 2004). Thus, from the point of view of one’s self-being, one cannot ignore the “whole” as something unnecessary or incidental, one cannot turn one’s back on it and the “other” within it (Ratzinger 2004), but at the same time the moment of autonomy and ontic freedom cannot be forgotten either; therefore, one is independent in person while being dependent and vice versa (Szombath 2009).

In connection with the above, we are aware, of course, that the sociocultural system that makes “capitalist morality” part of the social canon and mediates it is incompatible with this worldview. Nevertheless, we believe that the contrast society “generated” by the sacred environment is capable of initiating such favourable processes in the further arenas of

society. It is our view that all people are inherently receptive to the Golden Rule.

The latter is true in the sense that truth is not merely an abstract and schematic concept, but a life activity committed to a worldview and a value system, especially a moral one (Weissmahr 1978). It is a life activity that is never neutral in its approach to insights or able to recognize what really corresponds to human nature (Weissmahr 1978),<sup>10</sup> which is why we claim that the Golden Rule is fundamentally directed towards people, even if it does not necessarily appear in their daily lives. Every error or discrepancy arises from a distortion of values (Weissmahr 1978), which leads to injustice and a decline in the common good at the social level. In other words, morality, justice – that is, the way in which man must behave and act in reality – is not an arbitrary system but corresponds to and correlates with the whole reality of man (Kocsis 2020). This means, in turn, that morality may have biological and sociocultural aspects, but because of man's ontically free nature, it is not entirely determined by these "external" factors (Kant 2015; Boros 2018). Furthermore, since ontic freedom is a necessity, there is also a necessary aspect of morality, which does not change even when circumstances do. At the same time, given that one

10 According to Mill, "[...] happiness is the sole end of human action, and the promotion of it the test by which to judge of all human conduct; from whence it necessarily follows that it must be the criterion of morality [...]" (Mill 2003, 4.9). However, Mill, like Bentham, also emphasizes pleasures, pleasures, a consideration we have pointed out above about its "horizontal" shallowness, even erroneousness. However, despite this shortcoming, it nevertheless implies something, even if only indirectly, of what we intended to convey by the term "vertical" orientation (Mt 6,19-21).

of the main roles of morality is the “regulation” of human relations, i.e. interpersonal relations, it is sensible to talk about a moral order and about the principles and criteria along which social systems (including the socioeconomic structure itself) should be organized.

The profanized way of being (Eliade 1965) leads to a narrowed, limited perspective and context of existence, which undermines and breaks the fundamental trust that is eminently manifested in interpersonal nature in humans (Weissmahr 1978). Since communities, social structures, sociocultural and economic relations are essentially different forms of interpersonal relations, fault lines and exploitative processes appear in these realities as well. From a phenomenological point of view, the breakdown of narrowness and trust leads to an understanding of existence and, consequently, to the intensification of instinctive self-defence and maintenance motives that lead the agent to excessive accumulation and unjust acquisition of resources in order to eliminate the sense of threat. Thus, the situation in question will inevitably have socioeconomic manifestations. The above line of thought is put into analytical form for easier transparency:

- (p1) Profanity results in a narrowed perspective of existence. (*premise*)
- (p2) A narrowed outlook on existence leads to a loss of trust and a breakdown of fundamental trust. (*premise*)
- (p3) Profanity leads to a loss of trust. ([p1] and [p2], *transitivity*)
- (p4) If there is a loss of trust, interpersonality is violated. (*premise*)

- (p5) The loss of trust resulting from a profane way of being gives rise to a violation of interpersonality. ([p3] and [p4], *modus ponens*)
- (p6) The violation of interpersonality leads to exploitative resource grabbing, in other words, an unfair socio-economic system.
- (C) The loss of trust resulting from profanity gives rise to an unjust socioeconomic system. ([p5] and [p6], *transitivity*)

Here we emphasize that the socioeconomic structures in question are all alienating, since they give rise to erroneous self-identification processes (for example, man is essentially a consumer) that make the experience of ontic freedom less and less possible. Indeed, the more persons identify with the self-identification imposed by the system, the more certainly they become prisoners of this identification. One could say that the process of alienation works against the increase in the degree of “illumination” emphasized by Rahner (1997) – in other words, the unity of the knower and the known, that is, being with oneself – and thus the reduction of distancing from the “other”. That is, self-alienation will undoubtedly lead to the reality we experience becoming increasingly fragmented and increasingly being “controlled” by the “forces” of foreignness. In other words, these systems really give rise to subordination, which can be clearly seen by anyone who observes the operation of commercialized and at the same time self-serving structures. Consequently, the element of “injustice” is present not only in terms of, say, distribution, but also in terms of alienation.

## Conclusion

In this study, we sought to give prominence to Christian-inspired philosophy, particularly drawing on the works of St Augustine's *The City of God*, which repeatedly emphasizes the interplay between structures, anthropology, and interpersonality in human societies. By incorporating these reflections, we highlighted the critical nature of the Golden Rule, a universal principle to which all individuals are ultimately attuned and which underpins a moral foundation for socioeconomic systems.

The study departs significantly from traditional, mainstream economic thought by critiquing the limitations of reductionist models that attribute economic behaviour solely to natural causes. Instead, it advocates for integrating moral and religious foundations into socioeconomic analysis, presenting a perspective that aligns human agency with higher ethical standards. Central to this reflection is the distinction between self-love, which fosters resource conflicts and exploitative systems, and the love of God, which leads to stronger interpersonal relationships and more humane, efficient organizational structures.

Moreover, this research challenges prevailing economic paradigms by emphasizing the need to re-evaluate the role of cultural and moral dynamics. Systemic crises and the erosion of the common good, as argued in the study, are deeply rooted in the absence of a transcendental orientation within economic systems. Drawing on insights from St Augustine, Spinoza, and modern thinkers, the study underscores the importance of fostering a "vertical" orientation in socioeconomic relationships – one that prioritizes

transcendence and moral responsibility over materialistic self-interest.

By advocating for this paradigm shift, the study provides a framework for addressing the profound challenges of contemporary socioeconomic systems. It underscores the complexity of human existence, which cannot be fully captured by reductionist approaches. Instead, it proposes a holistic model of economic thought that integrates autonomy and collective responsibility, aligning with Christian ethical principles. Ultimately, this perspective offers a transformative pathway toward a more equitable and sustainable socioeconomic order, where human dignity and the common good are foundational values.

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## **Oblikovanje gospodarske strukture in vloga odvisnosti: krščanski pogled**

### *Povzetek*

Prispevek obravnava oblikovanje gospodarskih struktur in dinamiko njihove odvisnosti skozi prizmo krščanske filozofije ter izpodbija redukcionistične ekonomske modele, ki dajejo prednost matematičnim metodam pred verskimi, etičnimi in medosebnimi razsežnostmi. S kritiko naravoslovnih metodologij v ekonomiji avtorja poudarjata potrebo po interdisciplinarnem pristopu, ki vključuje moralno filozofijo in krščansko misel.

Osrednji namen prispevka je poudariti omejitve sedanjih ekonomskih paradigem, ki pogosto zanemarjajo etične in kulturne temelje družbeno-ekonomskih sistemov. Opira se na krščanski nauk, zlasti na razlikovanje sv. Avgušтина med »Božjim mestom« in »mestom človeka«, da bi dokazal, da usmerjenost v Božjo ljubezen (*amor Dei*) omogoča močnejše medčloveške vezi in bolj humane organizacijske strukture. Nasprotno pa se pokaže, da sebični interesi in samoljubje (*amor sui*) ter materializem vodijo v odtujenost in sistemske neenakosti.

Članek vključuje tudi spoznanja Spinoze, Kanta in Martina Bubra ter poudarja zgodovinske spremembe etičnih okvirov, ki so oblikovali družbeno-ekonomske sisteme. Kritizira vesplošno uporabo redukcionističnih pristopov in se zavzema za celovitejši model, ki usklajuje posameznikovo avtonomijo s kolektivno odgovornostjo. Poleg tega poudarja pomen »vertikalnosti«, tj. načina delovanja utemeljenega na transcendenci in moralni odgovornosti.

V sodobnem kontekstu predlagana versko motivirana ekonomska paradigma, ki izhaja iz krščanske etike in filozofije, ponuja odgovor na sistemske krize, kot sta neenakost in ekološka trajnost, ter ponuja model, ki spodbuja človekovo dostojanstvo in moralno odgovornost, hkrati pa gospodarske prakse usklajuje z načeli skupnega dobrega. Z uravnoteženjem osebne svobode in družbene odgovornosti ta pristop ponuja nov pogled na to, kako lahko gospodarski sistemi prispevajo k pravični in enakopravni družbi.