Is There A Moral School of Economics? 
The Profundity and Practicality of 
Benedict XVI’s Economic Logos

Gary J. Scott

Pope Benedict XVI’s social encyclical Caritas in Veritate offers insight into the relationship between theology and economics, between moral principles and economic policy. This article highlights potential obstacles to the reception of the emeritus pope’s arguments, identifies the encyclical’s principal lesson in one key sentence, and argues that there are compelling reasons for scholars and policymakers to consider and even appropriate Benedict’s substantial teaching on the enduring social question.

Does secular moral philosophy or Judeo-Christian revelation propose a rival and fully developed economic science? The short and disconcerting answer is no. The question deserves a more developed answer in order to clarify vital linkages.

Philosophy and theology constitute distinct and higher branches of knowledge, to which economic science ultimately answers and from which it benefits. Economics gives expert consultation to philosophy and theology. The distinctiveness of economic science does not render it ethically indeterminate, as if it has nothing to say about locating and securing a higher human good.

Even as Pope Francis begins recapitulating the social teaching of the Church in his own way, it is worthwhile to reflect on the legacy of the previous pontiff, Benedict XVI, concerning the relationship between theology and economic science. His formulation and application of traditional ethical reasoning can enhance economic science, without displacing it or even diluting its analytical and empirical rigor.

The notion of economic science residing within a department of moral philosophy or theology, while not unprecedented or heretical, runs against the grain of even the Church’s intellectual tradition. “The Church,” John Paul II wrote, “accepting the legitimate autonomy of human culture and especially of the sciences, recognizes the academic freedom of scholars in each discipline in accordance with its own principles and proper methods, and within the confines of the truth and the common good.” Yet Bene-
dict’s approach, while not contradictory to such a formulation, suggests the benefit of a more integral understanding of the intellectual life.

Benedict’s object of inquiry in his social encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate* (*CV*), is worldly commerce and worldwide commerce, and this activity is examined through the lenses of moral philosophy (natural law), the recent history of globalization and financial instability, and scriptural theology. It sets up a fascinating contrast between most economists and the pope in their respective understandings of commerce, and their notions of who might be better poised to improve its practice and government oversight. Economists tend to see little relevance for philosophy, morals, or divine revelation when, for example, inverting a data matrix to solve a system of simultaneous equations that illuminate important relationships of demand and supply across many industries and throughout the complex global economy. Benedict’s encyclical challenges economists to reconsider this disconnection.

**ROCKY GROUND INHIBITS RECEPTIVITY**

Benedict’s engagement of economics, as he well recognizes, will not be easy. There are at least three formidable barriers to Benedict’s document receiving the scholarly attention it deserves.

1. **Comprehension Barrier**

   The encyclical deliberates at the border of philosophy, economics, government, theology, finance, biology, scripture, and technology, while the number of university scholars who are familiar with the context of key terms from all of these topical areas are vanishingly few. “To whom then in such a university falls the task of integrating the various disciplines, of considering the bearing of each on the others?” asks Alasdair MacIntyre. “The answer is ‘No one.’ . . . For there is no sense in the contemporary American university that there is such a task, that something that matters is being left undone.”

   Why might the humanities neglect the tradition of academic economics? The late Avery Cardinal Dulles, S.J. observed that American theological faculties have historically focused on seminary teaching, which has steered them away from engaging those more secular branches of knowledge encountered in the wider university, an engagement that would be necessary to match the scholarly excellence of European theologians. He elaborates, “American theological faculties are today challenged to make further advances. In living dialogue with contemporary culture and technology, university theology must bring the full resources of Catholic tra-
2. Ideological Barrier

Joseph Burke identifies a different factor preventing various scholars from more thoroughly studying and understanding commerce: the readily available crutch of ideology.  

“Benedict’s critiques of capitalism and socialism present a challenge to Catholic philosophers, theologians, and economists,” Burke writes. “Benedict’s criticisms suggest that Catholics need to reassert the proper understanding of freedom, distinguishing it from those of Marxism and classical liberalism and relating it to truth.”

Illustrating this danger, Georgetown political scientist and Brookings Institution scholar E. J. Dionne writes in The Washington Post that CV “Places the pope well to Obama’s left on economics. . . . Yet Benedict is more a left-of-center Christian Democrat than a socialist.” Upending this classification, academic economist Tyler Cowen, writes in the Wall Street Journal that, “For all its left-wing rhetoric on economic matters, the encyclical is not quite the ‘progressive’ document that it has been trumpeted to be. . . . This is a fundamentally conservative piece of work.” It would seem that CV either lacks a definite meaning, or somebody misunderstands it, or ideology colors interpretations.

Further corroborating Burke’s concern of ideological interpretations of commerce, recent empirical studies by the Intercollegiate Studies Institute (ISI), among others, demonstrate how the typical American college experience tends to socialize both students and faculties into an ideology, often at the expense of intellectual socialization or learning in the relevant civic subjects. This deficiency in the learning of history, political thought, and economics is not benign; its absence leads to facile applications of ideology when making unavoidable political, moral, and economic judgments.

Economists also seem content to reside within their own methodological and conceptual walls, and to mostly disregard any moral expertise that the humanities might bring to commerce. A 2009 report on the economics profession concluded, “Whereas, previously, thinking like an economist involved significant applied policy thinking, today it is narrower, more technical, thinking. . . . Specifically, moral reasoning, while it was a part of economics education in earlier times, is no longer a focus of economics today.”

Lamenting this trend, Nobel Laureate and Harvard economist Amartya Sen writes that, “Economics, as it has emerged, can be made more productive by paying greater and more explicit attention to the ethical considerations that shape human behaviour and judgment. . . . The distance to bear on major questions regarding belief and conduct raised by other disciplines.”
Gary J. Scott

that has grown between economics and ethics has also been . . . unfortunate for the latter.”¹⁴ The late Milton Friedman, considered the father of positivist or value-neutral economics, seemed inclined to assess both values and techniques when he wrote Good Ends, Bad Means—an extensive commentary on the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Economic Justice for All.¹⁵ Departing from the examples of Sen and Friedman, a more technical trajectory for professional economics will make it harder for economics and the humanities to be intelligible to each other.¹⁶

3. Strategic Avoidance

Even if scholars from the various academic traditions take the time to appreciate CV, they may not accept it. Insofar as Benedict departs from the methods, theory, and policy outlook of any scholarly tradition, those scholars and teachers will be reluctant to publicly engage it and risk their legitimacy.

Economists, for example, would seem to gain little by formally engaging CV. If they assent to its unique and insightful reasoning, it seems to implicate their own teaching and scholarship as somehow deficient. Those economists who do engage the moral or Judeo-Christian intellectual traditions and then outline their bearing on both intellectual economics and commercial activity risk ostracism by their more conventional peers.

Academic life imposes discipline in defining the boundaries of disciplines. Consider the publicized skirmish of Notre Dame’s three economics-related departments jostling over the past decade to be the university’s premier economics department. The publicity about this battle, appearing for example in The Chronicle of Higher Education,¹⁷ omits the key operative question: Do any of Notre Dame’s rival economics departments, including that cluster of economists in its business school, risk their secular prestige and directly engage, in their writings or teaching, the issue of how economics relates to the wider tradition of Western civilization? The media’s omitting this issue cues economists everywhere that it would be perceived as illegitimate.

Nobel Laureate and MIT economist Robert Solow bypassed the media and encouraged Notre Dame’s economics faculties to do distinctive scholarship, by writing in a letter to then-President Fr. Edward Malloy: “Economics, like any discipline, ought to welcome unorthodox ideas, and deal with them intellectually as best it can.”¹⁸ Practicing economic inquiry entirely within Robert Solow’s mainstream economics does not necessarily imply opposition to moral or faith principles, and may even tend toward Benedict’s own method of economic reasoning. An academic department calling itself “economics,” in other words, can be just as ethical as one
calling itself “moral economics.” Benedict elaborates in CV: “The word, ethical, then, should not be used to make ideological distinctions, as if to suggest that initiatives not formally so designated would not be ethical” (n. 45).

Avery Dulles encouraged and emboldened economics and the humanities to risk mutual engagement: “Because there can be no real contradiction between faith and reason, true progress in the academic realm is never a threat to the Church.” Moreover, “Theology can be invigorated and purified by interaction with the human and natural sciences. The scientific community can profit from the comprehensive vision of theology and from theology’s integration of truth with values.”

A SELECTIVE INTELLECTUAL BIOGRAPHY OF BENEDICT XVI

Against these obstacles Pope-emeritus Benedict brings to bear some formidable qualities, including the following:

1. Wide-Ranging Academic Receptivity and Understanding

Benedict is habitually the receptive scholar before the determined teacher. In CV, he declares the Church, “Open to the truth, from whichever branch of knowledge it comes” (n. 9). In the closing lines of his famous Regensburg University lecture in 2006, he summons science faculties, “To this great logos, to this breadth of reason, that we invite our partners in the dialogue of cultures. To rediscover it constantly is the great task of the university.”

Benedict’s scholarly receptivity and non-ideological orientation are on display in a 1986 essay on the Church and economy. Then-Cardinal Ratzinger legitimized the science of academic economics with a qualification: “Today we need a maximum of specialized economic understanding, but also truly ethical powers for ordering economics to the human good.” Later in the essay he wrote more favorably of the independent contribution of economics and its unique, law-like insights, “A morality that believes itself able to dispense with the technical knowledge of economic laws is not morality but moralism. As such it is the antithesis of morality.”

Further noticing the far-reaching implications of economics, Benedict went on to highlight weaknesses of economic theory. He describes Marxist theory, as well as the “tradition inaugurated by Adam Smith,” as both stripping man of his freedom by being overly “deterministic.” Marxism proves more flagrant in this serious defect, according to Benedict, by characterizing religious belief as an inevitable delusion arising from the dialectic of class conflict between workers and owners. Concurring with other
Gary J. Scott

scholars, Benedict further notices that, “There is in Marxism no grain of ethics, but only economic laws.”

In his critique of more traditional economics, Benedict refers to and builds upon the thought of American economist and later Nobel Laureate James Buchanan. Specifically, insofar as businesses and workers must ruthlessly optimize in the marketplace or else face elimination, it raises the question of whether man is truly free in the so-called free market. Compared to Marxist theory, however, the consumer theory of mainstream economics, according to Benedict, “at least recognizes the realm of the subjective and considers it as the place of the ethical.”

In CV, Benedict engages the discipline of economics less explicitly than he did in his 1986 article. The document’s 159 bibliographical references do not contain a single citation of any academic economics literature. Still, Benedict does invite economists to “a serious reflection on the very meaning of the economy and on its purposes (n. 78).”

2. Systematic Ordering of Ideas

One risk of adopting an interdisciplinary outlook is the temptation to draw from other academic traditions only those ideas supporting one’s preconceived thesis or viewpoint (an error that also occurs within intradisciplinary work). Benedict’s long-time intellectual partner John Paul II cautioned against this error of “eclecticism,” or not respecting the context of selected ideas and “their internal coherence, their place within a system.”

Scholars thus need to sort and select ideas from academic branches less familiar to them in a non-opportunistic way, or according to Benedict by “respecting the specific competence of every level of knowledge” (n. 30).

The intellectual tradition from which Benedict writes offers a model for this difficult task. This tradition perceives a hierarchy of ideas ranked by their significance and the level of confidence we may have about their truth. These ideas originate in or emanate from the two fonts of knowledge: “The truth of faith and reason, both in the distinction and also in the convergence of those two cognitive fields.” They give rise to the corresponding and ordering sciences of theology and philosophy.

Interestingly, the Church has found itself recently defending both traditions of knowledge. At the First Vatican Council, convened in 1868, the Church was a particular advocate of revelation against its rationalist critics, with the Church more recently characterizing revelation as, “A knowledge which is peculiar to faith, surpassing the knowledge proper to human reason, which nevertheless by its nature can discover the Creator.” Today, the Church defends reason against postmodern skeptics who tend to see little more than words in texts that manifest authors’ subjective interests.
Is There a Moral School of Economics?

and idiosyncratic, historicist, or ethnocentric perspectives. The Church also upholds the foundational principle of non-contradiction against Jihadists, those few among the otherwise peaceful Islamic faithful who commit violent acts against innocent civilians, and rationalize this violence with the notion that God on occasion suspends his own moral law and acts contrary or capriciously, all at his own ineffable discretion (nos. 29, 55, 56).

Meanwhile, the precise interaction between philosophy (reason) and theology (faith) continues to be interestingly and constructively debated. The more routine and familiar academic branches of knowledge stem most directly from philosophy, with philosophy understood as man’s love for wisdom and knowledge, and his faculties for questioning, observation, inference, and communication. Disciplines like those of economics, psychology, physics, history, and mathematics originate in philosophy and then set out on their own, while theology also generates its own categorical disciplines.

Catholic social doctrine, meanwhile, is not a branch of academic knowledge in the same sense as chemistry, pastoral theology, or political theory. Catholic social doctrine remains more general, suspended below philosophy and theology, but above the more categorical or specific fields. It draws from above and below in formulating how Christian believers are to live morally and in communion with God. Benedict writes in CV that, “The Church’s social doctrine . . . has an important interdisciplinary dimension [and it] . . . is a service to charity, but its locus is truth” (nos. 31, 5). He further characterizes this doctrine as, “Fundamental guidelines offering approaches that are valid even beyond the confines of the Church . . . to be addressed in the context of dialogue with all those seriously concerned for humanity and for the world in which we live.”

The Church has been especially interested in and a patron of the service that universities bring to this dialogue and synthesis, going back to the very origin of universities. Economics answers to its parent, philosophy, and indirectly to theology. This trilateral relation protects economics from having to subordinate itself exclusively to philosophy. Theology, for example, explores the origin and reliability of human reason, a potentially fruitful illumination for an economic science inclined to make so much of rational choice (n. 74). Benedict has long participated in this difficult cross-disciplinary project of questioning economics and being questioned by it.

3. Worldly Attentiveness

The Church teaches that, “No new public revelation is to be expected.” Why, then, would her pastors issue “new” teachings such as Benedict’s
CV? One reason is the reiteration of timeless truths in a way that speaks more directly to the contemporary world. For, “Even if Revelation is already complete, it has not been made completely explicit; it remains for Christian faith gradually to grasp its full significance over the course of the centuries.”

The words used to communicate this teaching also change their meaning from their diverting use in the shifting culture. Or some new theology might deteriorate toward error. Such linguistic and scholarly changes might require new Church pronouncements. Benedict resists the recent fallacy, for example, that devoted religious leave the world to its misery and take refuge in an individualistic and salvific monasticism (contemptus mundi). Benedict contends paradoxically that, “Those who draw near to God do not withdraw from men, but rather become truly close to them.”

The march of worldly historical events prompted the Church to formulate its modern social doctrine, responding especially to the process of industrialization, as workers left their family homesteads for factories. The Church addressed its acceleration in the nineteenth century, while also addressing the Marxist and classical-liberal interpretations of it. In CV Benedict once again addresses industrialization and its “principal new feature” of having become ever more global, technologically intensive, and digital, and he notes as well its current volatility (n. 33).

Even the education of Church leaders like Benedict, involving perhaps the most tradition-based intellectual formation for safeguarding the deposit of faith, needs intermittent update, refinement, and application. The Church’s single social doctrine, according to Benedict, contains a “dynamic faithfulness to a light received.” Education scholar Thomas R. McCambridge observes that, “There is no such thing as liberal education reified and unmodified over the centuries, unaffected by circumstance and personality.” In defense of this dynamism, he turns to John Henry Cardinal Newman, “A great idea changes in order to remain the same. In a higher world it is otherwise, but here below to live is to change, and to be (mature) is to have changed often.”

4. Intellectual Humility without Corrosive Skepticism

Scholars of commerce ideally seek truth and goodness, and boldly follow reason and evidence wherever it leads. But religiously oriented thinkers, like Benedict, see a darker part of this activity, due to the snare of pride. Benedict writes that, “Practical reason . . . must undergo constant purification, since it can never be completely free of the danger of a certain ethical blindness caused by the dazzling effect of power and special interests.”
Is There a Moral School of Economics?

John Paul II argued that academics’ particular temptation to “philosophical pride” inclines them to identify their specialized branch or school of knowledge “as the complete reading of all reality.” The late Cambridge economist Joan Robinson cleverly affirmed this in her famous remark that, “The purpose of studying economics is . . . to learn how to avoid being deceived by economists.” Charles Wilber observes that not much has changed in recent decades: “In light of the [2007] crash of the economy, you would think there would be some humility among economists, some openness to new approaches. There’s not a lot.”

Insofar as scripture correctly equates God and truth, a child-like approach to God proves critical even for scholars. A cultivated faith life, including the sacramental process of reconciliation, can therefore soften the will, helping to let go of faulty presumptions and adjust towards truth and virtue. In the final analysis, and according to the Church, we cannot bear the full truth about ourselves unless mercy and forgiveness await us.

At the same time, the virtue of humility must not fall into an immature and childish skepticism that discourages inquiry. The error of strong skepticism involves an absurdity—trusting and employing one’s reasoning faculty to conclude that one lacks any rational power to understand. Working with a traditional balance that avoids errors of both excessive certainty and skepticism, Benedict advances in *CV* a confident though cautious argument, which has lasting meaning and value beyond the current economic tumult.

**BENEDICT XVI’S OVERARCHING CAUSAL CLAIM**

In *Caritas in Veritate*, Benedict unveils the meaning of success and how to secure it. The terminus of success is development. The external cause moving us forward into this development is love. Hence, *love causes development*. This proposition will strike economists, business managers, and central bankers as vague, eccentric, and unhelpfully sentimental. An investor does not hear anything resembling a tip for where to allocate his funds for optimum social use, and the lawmaker fails to see the regulatory insight or the implications for fiscal and monetary policy.

Benedict concurs that the proposition lacks meaning. For love and development have drifted away from any shared and valid meaning. Benedict digs out of this murkiness by first adding modifiers to these words. Development does not refer to just anything blossoming toward its fruition, such as a business plan or clean-water technology, but more exactly to the development of human persons. This *human* development, moreover, is discovered and not conjured up in our unruly and transitory feelings (nos. 52, 59, 68). Development consists of concrete and objective
outcomes that are universally—if erratically—sought, and which produce a non-superficial happiness (nos. 26, 78).

The cause of this human development—love—suffers from even more confusion. According to Benedict, “‘Love’ has become one of the most frequently used and mis-used of words, a word to which we attach quite different meanings.” Benedict begins recovery of its meaning by delineating love as “truth-filled love,” one of the more novel concepts in Benedict’s encyclical. These modifications make his causal claim: truth-filled love causes human development.

Benedict resists deterministic theories, and thus would not characterize truth-filled love as a panacea, in the sense of a given expansion of truth-filled love always, everywhere, and equally accelerating human development. His overarching causal claim settles in as, it is truth-filled love, primarily, that causes human development.

Good reasons demonstrate that this succinctly formulated causal phrase captures Benedict’s central point. The encyclical’s subtitle approximates it in topical form: “On integral human development in charity and truth.” His opening sentence affirms it more directly: “Charity in truth . . . is the principal driving force behind the authentic development of every person and of all humanity” (n. 1).

Benedict later transforms his provisional cause of “charity in truth” appearing in his first sentence to “truth-filled love” in a key sentence concluding his treatise: “Development needs Christians with their arms raised towards God in prayer, Christians moved by the knowledge that truth-filled love, caritas in veritate, from which authentic development proceeds, is not produced by us, but given to us” (n. 79). In this passage Benedict translates the title of his encyclical, caritas in veritate, into his primary cause of “truth-filled love.” Each section of the encyclical either clarifies the terms in this causal claim or supplies reasons and evidence to believe it.

The distinctiveness and boldness of Benedict’s causal thesis becomes evident by taking note of three things. First, does this thesis surprise given the trajectory of Benedict’s thought? Second, what does Benedict choose not to highlight from those rival schools petitioning him? Finally, what meaning does he give to each of the contested and ambiguous terms in his causal thesis?

1. Benedict’s Long-Developing Social Causation

Benedict’s social thought, carefully tested and refined over decades, seemed headed toward just this conclusion that, truth-filled love primarily causes human development. Months before CV was published, Joseph
Burke summarized Benedict’s previous economic thought and concluded that, “Benedict’s vision of a social order in which reason is united to virtue in the service of moral values is compelling and deserves a broader audience, especially in these times of economic turmoil.”

Burke’s notion of “Reason united to virtue” seems to have become for Benedict, “truth-filled love;” and Burke’s “service of moral values” was extended by Benedict to serving the object of “integral human development.”

Even earlier in a published 1985 interview, the future Benedict telegraphed the importance of the causal ordering in his new conclusion. It seemed to occur to Benedict when he linked the Church’s comparatively new social teaching to its older missionary message (n. 11). More exactly, he noticed this linkage and important causal ordering when assessing liberation theology, a risky admixture of Marxist economics and Gospel teaching. Benedict reasoned that personal conversion—a spiritual, intellectual, and moral awakening in love—would generate more social solidarity and development, and not vice versa as claimed by liberation theology. In the words of Joseph Ratzinger captured in interview, “It is also painful to be confronted with the illusion . . . that a new man and a new world can be created, not by calling each individual to conversion, but only by changing the social and economic structures. . . . Those who really desire a more humane society need to begin with the root, not with the trunk and branches, of the tree of injustice.”

2. Fashionable Themes Benedict Supersedes

What popular notions does Benedict bypass in the formulating of his thesis? The free market school, or economic liberalism, might have counseled him to make his central thesis, Free and global markets advance affluence. Or similarly, Improving incentives achieves more prosperity. The Church has emphasized these previously. In the wake of the Solidarity movement in Poland’s Gdansk shipyards, and later the fall of the Berlin Wall, John Paul II wrote that, “The free market is the most efficient instrument for utilizing resources and effectively responding to needs.” A few years prior, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger wrote that classical economic “presuppositions are not entirely false, as the success of the market economy illustrate.”

Perhaps in light of the recession, Benedict takes a less triumphal tack in CV on free enterprise, but does not discard these free-market commitments, and organizes them under his higher thesis (nos. 35, 36).

Members of the more regulatory or statist school, meanwhile, would petition Benedict to make his thesis something like, Financial regulation and government spending increases employment and justice in an otherwise unstable market. This too has been argued by the Church in America,
and is in popular resurgence. The American bishops wrote in their 1986 economic pastoral letter that, “The most urgent priority for domestic economic policy is the creation of new jobs.” Benedict also aims at financial regulation and more employment opportunities in CV, while not rating them the supreme end, and remaining less strictly committed to the means (n. 65).

This more regulatory or interventionist school of thought would likely add to their Keynesian-inspired, stimulus economics the commitment for more government regulation to protect the natural environment. This school would recommend to the Church the proposition that, An unfettered free economy with unchecked population contaminates the natural environment with potentially lethal pollutants and climate-disturbing greenhouse gases. Both the Vatican and the American bishops continue to emphasize the moral obligation to environmental stewardship, as does Benedict in CV. Benedict’s more general thesis in CV, however, situates the environment inside a wider and more continuous bio-ethic and social causation (nos. 44, 48).

Benedict most vigorously and intellectually resists the Marxist revolutionary school of thought, which “remains an endless source of fascination,” especially in times of financial upheaval. Its radical adherents believe that, A proletarian revolution that nationalizes property and centrally coordinates individual lives through government power will usher in perpetual harmony and security.

Leaving this largest difference of opinion behind, Benedict perhaps comes nearest in CV to advocating the institutional school’s approximate thesis that, Certain cultural norms and adaptive civil institutions uniquely serve economic growth (n. 22). Yet, even here, Benedict more ambitiously seeks the origin of culture and questions whether development is synonymous with growth (nos. 78, 79).

Juxtaposed to all these rival beliefs associated with these various schools of political-economic thought, the notion that truth-filled love primarily causes human development appears very distinctive indeed. “The pope in this document recasts the center of traditional social teaching. . . . Its philosophical and theological depth . . . does not allow us to be superficial.” Benedict correspondingly devotes much of CV to clarifying his terms in his penetrating claim.

3. Recovering the Meaning of Old Words

To secure true development, according to Benedict, we first need to rediscover the meaning of human, a key term in Benedict’s thesis, and a radically urgent “anthropological question” (n. 75). He characterizes man as a
union of matter and spirit, created ultimately by God and in God’s image (n. 76). It gives man—male and female—a high measure of status with God, especially due to the free will and intelligence of man.

But created man suffered a mysterious setback, which needs an intervention, both natural and supernatural. This setback leaves us with a human deficiency that seeks remediation even in this life through development. Paul VI specified this development as, “A fullbodied humanism . . . the fulfillment of the whole man and of every man.”

Benedict extends this understanding of development or “vocation to progress,” to a development that is “authentic [or] integral, that is, it has to promote the good of every man and of the whole man” (nos. 18, 79).

Insofar as it is objective or empirically certifiable, we know that this development has occurred unevenly across man’s varying needs (nos. 4, 23, 33). Development requires that each man advance integrally — economically, socially, and politically—as well as supernaturally or spiritually (nos. 18, 76, 79). Enhancing the economic dimension, for both Benedict and Paul VI, means “active participation, on equal terms, in the international economic process” (nos. 21, 53, 63). Enhancing the social aspect means “evolution into educated societies marked by solidarity” (n. 21). Finally, enhancing the political part of man means “the consolidation of democratic regimes capable of ensuring freedom and peace” (n. 21).

In addition to achieving this integral balancing in each man, these gains must then be diffused across more persons. Benedict never argues for a simple mathematical equality among persons, like that of achieving an exact equality of monetary income—though he does favor more equality especially when it derives from more interpersonal justice in resource markets (nos. 22, 32).

His commitment to a wider sharing of the good of human development, even across international borders, would additionally come, for example, in the form of more stable employment for workers so that they might better plan for their families (nos. 25, 63). More regional self-sufficiency further advances Benedict’s aim of more global equity, achieved by freeing poorer nations from having to depend upon perpetual almsgiving from wealthier nations (nos. 27, 35, 43, 47, 67). Benedict also rates globalization as “a great opportunity” for poorer regions to escape underdevelopment, insofar as they enjoy wider access to markets to sell their goods (n. 33).

To complete the clarification of terms in Benedict’s central thesis, the compound substance of truth-filled love is the most intriguing if most elusive. Benedict’s inaugural encyclical on love, Deus Caritas Est (2005), helps here, for there he characterizes love as a single reality with multiple

CATHOLIC SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW 181
dimensions. Benedict’s notion of love might be roughly summarized as the desire for unity with another person (eros), which is purified and disciplined with gradual learning about the other person and willing and serving his or her long-term good (agape).\textsuperscript{58}

Benedict of course modifies this love with truth, but he is up to something more than simply attempting to make “truth-filled love” mean either true love or love of truth, or both. To clarify truth-filled love, an agreeable definition for truth first needs to impress those skeptics who resist such a presumptuous term. Skeptics admit only to the fact that a person believes something. John Paul II, who philosophically explored this truth of subjectivism, defines truth in the course of writing that, “There are signs of a widespread distrust of universal and absolute statements, especially among those who think that truth is born of consensus and not of a consonance between intellect and objective reality.”\textsuperscript{59}

Benedict somehow aggregates these elements of truth and love to create his critical and compound cause of truth-filled love. A provisional meaning for it, based upon a sweeping roundup of Benedict’s writing, might be: a voluntarily initiated action by a person who wills, understands, and successfully contributes to advancing the genuine good and unity of others, whether through interpersonal relations or through political and economic institutions.

Benedict’s modifying love with truth seems to transform an otherwise vague and good-intentioned sentiment into genuine love, which also advances a more successful and integral development. Benedict seems aware that he is pushing the intellectual frontier here with his new compound cause. “The demands of love do not contradict those of reason. Human knowledge is insufficient and the conclusions of science cannot indicate by themselves the path towards integral human development. There is always a need to push further ahead: this is what is required by charity in truth” (n. 30).

**BENEDICT’S REASONS TO CONFIRM HIS SOCIAL CAUSATION**

Benedict carves out a clearer meaning for his peculiar and overarching notion that it is truth-filled love, primarily, that causes human development. The question now is whether this causality is true, and whether it has any bearing on academic economics or public policy. The following five phrases seem to formulate those reasons that Benedict intends to support the dependability of his overarching causal claim:
1. Deficient Truth Results in Blind Action

Benedict’s first reason to support his causation demonstrates how truth-filled love overcomes a prevalent error of activism. Persons otherwise lovingly-disposed, but who hastily move before ascertaining and assessing the purpose they seek to accomplish and the probable means for arriving there, waste their energy. Stirred-up commotion seems to be the rule in societies; while converting this into constructive motion with freedom proves throughout history a remarkable achievement.

Discovering the meaning of human life or what constitutes the terminus of true fulfillment precedes practical human development (nos. 16,19). Without this metaphysical wisdom, human activity tends to meander experimentally across repeatedly abandoned projects. “In the pursuit of development, there is a need for the deep thought and reflection of wise men in search of a new humanism which will enable modern man to find himself anew” (n. 19).

To complement this metaphysical wisdom, Benedict encourages the acquisition of true scientific knowledge, as well as those derived technologies that facilitate movement toward authentic human advancement (nos. 27, 48, 50, 69). Knowledge of a second type of means, complementing those of technology, further facilitates development. Benedict proposes more understanding of those various civil institutions that either serve or potentially could serve as intermediary links between individual initiative and the higher social goal of unified human development (nos. 35, 38, 41, 46).

The influential writings of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels particularly exasperate Benedict, as they fail to clarify the concrete means and end of the development that they seek through communism, thereby sowing a vague utopian hope among their followers. Complimenting Marx for writing “with great analytical skill,” Benedict argues that he was more articulate in describing what he opposed than in what he favored in his ideal end state, while also presuming that man can be perfected in order to get there. After a proletarian revolution, Marx “did not say how matters should proceed thereafter. . . . He [also] forgot that man always remains man . . . and it is not possible to redeem him purely from the outside by creating a favourable economic environment.”

The Marxist revolutionary fervor was one cause of the worldwide phenomenon of many students leaving their studies to participate in protest demonstrations during the 1960s and 1970s, demonstrations that often posited moral equivalence between free societies and command societies. Benedict’s witnessing this social upheaval firsthand as a professor in
Germany’s Tübingen University may have prompted him in CV to refer to the late 1960s as a period of “cultural weaknesses” (n. 13). Benedict sums up his first reason that resists activism in all its myriad forms as, “Deeds without knowledge are blind” (n. 30).61

2. Deficient Action Leaves Sterile Truth

Benedict also appreciates the insufficiency of truth in securing development. Benedict’s second reason explores and solves the problem of academism. If “Deeds without knowledge are blind,” it is also true that, “Knowledge without love is sterile” (n. 30). Love, for Benedict, almost instantly translates into action.

Suppose a whole human community somehow becomes omniscient in the true end and means of a flourishing human community. Without putting this knowledge into practical action, development never gets off the starting block. True thinking, moreover, “does not always give proper direction to the will” (n. 19).

What sort of loving action does Benedict seek from the more knowledgeable? He wants them to actively, yet prayerfully and smartly, construct and maintain effective and intermediate civil institutions, such as neighborhood associations, businesses, non-profits, foundations, and charitable organizations; and even hybrids of these (nos. 35, 38, 41, 46). For according to Benedict, “Love . . . needs to be organized if it is to be an ordered service to the community.”62 Man’s practical and everyday action would then consist of intermittently serving and being served by these various institutional organizations, including those in the free market, and that address all the various dimensions of man’s needs, including those of providing jobs and supplying those consumer goods and services that promote true well-being (nos. 7, 35, 41, 66).

Even those serving in the vital institution of government are asked to apply the principle of subsidiarity and thereby assist and not absorb these institutions; and to also prevent globalization from snuffing out these local institutions (24, 25). These social institutions of organized love, according to Benedict, would also adhere to the communal principle of solidarity, making this constellation of voluntary social institutions a nested form of non-statist collectivism, very much in the tradition of Alexis De Tocqueville’s nineteenth-century account of American democracy (nos. 11, 25, 38, 39, 47, 55).63

Benedict’s fear of blind activism leads him to place a high premium on action undertaken by those possessing both metaphysical wisdom and technical knowledge. In turn, it makes him supportive of those civil institutions of formal education. Benedict might especially recruit universities
to his development cause, especially those having overcome the “segmentation of knowledge” and achieving a helpful “guiding synthesis” concerning the challenging social question (nos. 30, 31, 61).

3. Technically Competent Action Absent Love Sows Disunity and Destruction

Benedict’s third reason demonstrates how the modern trap of “technological supremacy” forestalls development, and how truth-filled love provides an antidote (nos. 14, 75). The technical mindset tends to discard moral knowledge of the good into the bin of arbitrary feeling and focus exclusively on technical knowledge (nos. 70, 71). The pluralism of ethical belief supposedly demonstrates its indeterminacy and impracticality. Those aspiring to intellectual respectability are advised to turn to scientific research that can lead to commercial application, and to keep their ethical or religious opinions about the nature of human development private.

So Benedict’s third reason in support of his causal thesis addresses an error that others have termed *Machiavellianism* — employing technical competence to serve any goals without regard for their moral character. The most technologically advanced society, in Benedict’s view, can fail culturally and forfeit happiness (nos. 59, 71). A human community might adopt false ends through a metaphysical ignorance, or compromised will, especially given “the rejection of metaphysics by the human sciences” (nos. 29, 31).

A society infatuated by technology begins to adopt technology because it astonishes. “The conscience is simply invited to take note of the technological possibilities” (n. 75). The power obtained from technical competence can then become recruited into serving ends other than serving neighbor. This possible path toward faulty ends might begin with a simple employment of technology to steer others’ behavior toward providing for one’s own preferences. In Benedict’s words, “The sharing of goods and resources, from which authentic development proceeds, is not guaranteed by merely technical progress and relationships of utility” (n. 9).

This mutually-benefiting contracting easily deteriorates into serving oneself through the injuring of others. Benedict provides a long roster of cases that fit this destructive behavior: eugenics or genocide (n. 75), abortion (nos. 15, 28), unjust war (n. 72), euthanasia (nos. 28, 75), environmental pollution (nos. 48, 50, 51), embryo research (n. 75), arms races (nos. 23, 67), terrorism (nos. 29, 72), human trafficking in “sex tourism” (nos. 61, 73), artificial contraception (nos. 15, 28, 75), and narcotics (n. 76). These various actions—while highly competent technologically—vi-
olate the conditions for love inside the composite cause of truth-filled love, and therefore undermine integral development.

Benedict provides several more distinct and notable cases of how technical competence and power can serve a faulty end. A technically competent politician, knowing how to pull the levers of international diplomacy, might secure foreign aid intended for the indigent of his country, but then divert it to more affluent friends (nos. 22, 60). Analogously, business owners might use their power to hoard money by not paying workers in proportion to their contributions to production, prompting some workers to retaliate in the additionally unjust though technically competent action of industrial sabotage or work slow-downs (nos. 32, 37, 40, 62, 63).

Altogether, these real-world examples demonstrate how the most advanced technology, employed in the most energetic manner, not only can prevent integral human development, but subtract from it. “Without truth, without trust and love for what is true, there is no social conscience and responsibility, and social action ends up serving private interests and the logic of power, resulting in social fragmentation” (5). Benedict does not let us off so easily as shifting the blame for our development failures to the free market, exotic financial derivatives, technical know-how, property rights, or government. “It is not the instrument that must be called to account, but individuals, their moral conscience and their personal and social responsibility” (36).

4. Knowledgeable and Good-Willed Action Overwhelms Material Forces

Benedict’s cause of “truth-filled love” is an invisible spiritual force consisting of thought, will, and purpose-guided action. This force identifies and generates those concrete goods that promote a more flourishing human community. Being spiritual, it might escape the notice of strict positivists who claim that we can only know the observable and measurable.

Benedict’s fourth strand of reasoning is sympathetic, however, in noticing and emphasizing those material things that further affect human development. This list includes deposits of oil and natural gas (n. 49), neurons of the brain (n. 76), physical infrastructure of roads and electric lines (n. 27), private and productive physical assets (n. 40), land and soil fertility (nos. 27, 69), lumber, climate, and rainfall (n. 51), fishes in the oceans (n. 51), biological instinct, and Web infrastructure (n. 73).

Benedict describes these material entities as gifts from the creator, and highlights their importance in accounting for important variation in development across persons and nations (n. 48). But for Benedict, physical mat-
ter is not destiny for development. A culture of truth-filled love combined with material factors condition human development (nos. 17, 48).

Benedict strongly declares that the spiritual force of truth-filled love dominates material forces. “The causes of underdevelopment are not primarily of the material order,” and to argue otherwise, Benedict might term the error of materialism (n. 19). While physical matter remains highly influential, it does not have the last word. For example, the agricultural industry and its technologies continue to harvest a remarkable abundance of food, thereby preventing a Malthusian population trap. Benedict blames a spiritual deficiency or political malfunction for the existence of famine: “Hunger is not so much dependent on lack of material things as on a shortage of social resources, the most important of which are institutional” (nos. 27, 44).

Truth-filled love, in other words, enjoys “hegemony” over otherwise good and influential matter. Even in the area of “technology we express and confirm the hegemony of the spirit over matter,” since technology derives from man’s “genius” (n. 69). He further argues that the invisible overwhelms the visible. “In every truth . . . [and] in the love that we receive” there is always a surprise “over and above” the “empirical datum” (n. 77). We do not defeat or extinguish physical matter, but befriend, harness, and transform it through truth-filled love.

Benedict further declares here that, “Knowing is not simply a material act” (n. 77). In support of Benedict’s reasoning, neuroscientists in their research do not seek to transform their colleagues’ minds by intervening surgically or pharmacologically to alter what they might see as a materially-deficient aptitude or g-quotient. They alternatively employ rational and intelligible persuasion. Thus a spiritual force such as truth-filled love is not a construct employed exclusively by religiously-informed scholars. It thereby remains in play to at least influence or possibly to even exercise “hegemony” over matter in the service of integral development.66

5. Speculation Being Void of Truth-Filled Love Caused the Global Economic Contraction

Benedict’s final reason addresses an error that might be characterized as spiritualism, or not giving due attention and respect to the reality and value of concrete matter and flesh. Spiritualism shares some features with financial speculation, which constitutes a dangerous retarding force for prosperity, and which Benedict believes contributed to the global economic crisis: “Economic growth has been and continues to be weighed down by malfunctions and dramatic problems, highlighted even further by the current crisis [including] the damaging effects on the real economy of
badly managed and largely speculative financial dealing” (n. 21, emphasis added).

One way to understand the “spiritualism” associated with “speculative financial dealing” is that speculation involves the acquisition of money without really earning it. Earning money means to justly deserve money (n. 21). One way (not the only way) to deserve money is to contribute to the provisioning of some concrete good or service that genuinely serves the good of a flesh and blood person in his concrete circumstance of time and place. Managers justly compensate an employee with money derived from a product’s sale, and in proportion to each employee’s role in producing and marketing the sold commodity (n. 63). Speculation involves the securing of money without contributing to the production of any “real” good or service. Economists might classify financial speculation as a part of the nominal economy as opposed to the real economy.

An investor or banker, to take prominent recent examples, might secure other people’s money with the promise to pay it back with a dividend or interest income. This investor might then undermine his own ability to return these funds insofar as he fails to invest these funds in an indirect though productive purpose such as capital formation of tools, buildings, or more urgent and new business payrolls. He might deplete the money instead on a consumer binge, exhausting his funds and preventing his paying his clients back. He has acquired and spent money without helping to produce anything for others.

Some complex form of this activity, Benedict believes, helped trigger the current global economic crisis. “Financiers must rediscover the genuinely ethical foundation of their activity, so as not to abuse the sophisticated instruments which can serve to betray the interests of savers” (n. 65). Benedict seems content to let economists elaborate the full causal mechanism for this recent financial and employment downturn, whether government and central banks were complicit, and the degree to which the various actors knew what they were doing.

Seeking money as a final end also reveals a faulty “metaphysical understanding of the relations between persons” (n. 53). Money, though helpful for exchange, is immaterial or “spiritualized” in the sense that it cannot be eaten, used for shelter, or enjoyed as a novel (n. 53). If everybody seeks mere money, no helpful goods are produced. “Once profit becomes the exclusive goal, if it is produced by improper means and without the common good as its ultimate end, it risks destroying wealth and creating poverty” (n. 21). Benedict would likely not reject, however, something like futures markets, for they effectively avoid the present depleting of non-renewable energy resources for the sake of future generations’ benefit.
Is There a Moral School of Economics?

The otherwise failed financial speculation shows the material vacuity of spiritualism, or acquiring money without providing a real service. It also fails the criterion of love for it forfeits the well-being of those defrauded savers in order to advance one’s own and temporarily indulgent end (n. 65). Referring to his 1986 essay on economics, Benedict might also say here that “the competing egoisms” of the savers and investors failed to adequately check each other (n. 65).

Although CV does not settle every difficult question concerning the relation between theology and economics, the foregoing discussion demonstrates that the pope’s reflections offer much of value to the economist, the businessperson, and the policymaker. Benedict challenges us to think more deeply about how our economic system and economic actions may be more fully motivated by what ought to be the motive of all Christian action—truth-filled love, or caritas in veritate—for it is such love that is “the principal driving force behind the authentic development of every person and of all humanity” (n. 1).

Notes


5. Alasdair MacIntyre, *God, Philosophy, Universities* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009), 16. It might be noted here that a small minority of scholars do view this integration task as crucial; many are associated with this publication and its sponsoring organization, the Society of Catholic Social Scientists.


7. The late Harvard economist Joseph A. Schumpeter, for example, considered “ideology” to be a “pre-analytic cognitive act” at best; or worse, a partisan-like “rationalization” favoring one’s personal interests by seeing “what we like
[things] to be rather than with what they are.” While he declared that “ideologies are not lies,” the rationalization might still involve “tampering with facts” or behaving as “Special Pleadings.” Schumpeter saw man’s crude, inescapable, “original vision” of ideology as helpfully promoting more systematic inquiry. For it spurs on, “Factual work and theoretical work, in an endless relation of give and take . . . [which] will eventually produce scientific models . . . with the surviving elements of the original vision.” Joseph A. Schumpeter, History of Economic Analysis (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), 34–47.


Longtime literary theorist, university dean, and New York Times columnist Stanley Fish concludes that this long-accumulating evidence shows, at the least, that university professors, especially in the humanities, overwhelmingly orient themselves around liberalism, with liberalism understood in its modern sense of a political coalition sharing a worldview that maps to a partisan policy program. See Stanley Fish, Save the World on Your Own Time (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 143.


19. Dulles, Church and Society, 9–10. Jacques Maritain similarly summed up in a lecture at Yale University in 1943 all of the mistrust leading to foregone opportunities, “Those students who nurture a bias against theology would be released from attending these courses and allowed to remain incomplete in wisdom at their own pleasure” (Jacques Maritain, Education at the Crossroads [New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1943], 75). Any well-established academic tradition might be substituted for “theology” in Maritain’s statement, effectively describing many academics’ unwillingness and later inability to appreciate the synthesizing document of CV. See Mark Henrie, A Student’s Guide to the Core Curriculum (Wilmington, Del.: ISI Books, 2000).

20. Benedict XVI, Faith, Reason and the University: Memories and Reflections, Address at University of Regensburg, September 12, 2006; English Translation by Zenit.


22. Ibid.

23. Ibid., 202.

24. Ibid., 200–203.


29. Ibid. §91.

30. Benedict XVI, Faith, Reason and the University.

31. MacIntyre, God, Philosophy, Universities, 74–75, 135.


34. John Paul II, Ex Corde Ecclesiae, 1990, §16.


36. For possibly the most advanced work in this area, see, Andrew Yuengert et al., eds., Faith and Economics, the scholarly journal of the Association of Christian Economists, est. 1983.


46. Charles Wilber, quoted in Glenn, “Notre Dame Plans to Dissolve.”
54. While avoiding references to Marx, and in light of the current capitalist crisis, Walter Brueggemann approximates this thinking in his new essay, “From Biblical Narrative to Economic Policy: Economic Crisis and Conversion,” scholarly presentation to Conference on Effective Liturgy, Cincinnati, Ohio, July 30, 2009; the *National Catholic Reporter* published an abridged version of this paper on August 14, 2009, pp. 1, 22–24.
Is There a Moral School of Economics?

68. Ratzinger, “Church and Economy,” 201.