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By applying Alasdair MacIntyre’s framework of rival traditions of rationality analogically to Catholic theologians and economists, this paper argues that these two groups can greatly benefit from a reexamination and appropriation of John A. Ryan’s insights when engaging debate on wage justice today: first by understanding the tradition out of which the Catholic Church established its rationale for justice regarding wages, and second by applying Ryan’s innovation of six “canons of distributive justice” for establishing commensurability of concepts in discourse between the traditions of moral theology and economic science. This paper argues that Ryan’s distinctive experience and character allowed him to enter into conversation with a non-native tradition of enquiry to draw forth commensurate concepts that improved the coherence of his native Catholic theological understanding and afforded greater opportunities to discourse with social scientists in meaningful argument for the sake of human welfare.

AMERICA, RYAN, AND THE LIVING WAGE—THEN

On an exploratory trip to the American Catholic History Research Center and University Archives at The Catholic University of America, I rummaged through clippings from newspapers and magazines that the Rt. Rev. John A. Ryan had ostensibly kept for further reflection, research, or comment. Among the hundreds, one which caught my particular attention was a March 22, 1930, article from America magazine entitled “The Limited-Price Chain Stores,” in which Paul Blakely, S.J., criticized the failure of store owners to pay a “living wage” despite significant increases in revenue and profits sustained over a period of years. Images of 1930s 5-and 10-cent stores juxtaposed themselves in my mind with those of twenty-first-century Walmart stores. Given the urgency of Blakely’s call for wage justice in his time of grave economic insecurity then, I had to ask myself, in a time of economic uncertainty now, “What advances have we made toward ‘economic justice for all?’ What does ‘justice’ mean to us today?”

Debates over wage justice in the United States today continue to center heavily around the pros and cons of minimum wage legislation, and even among Catholics, there is much disagreement over what constitutes just wage levels and whether it is within the state’s competency or interest to rule on and mandate those wages of employers for their contracted employees. In today’s liberal society, justice seems to be commensurate with the free entrance into and obligation to follow through on contracts bargained by parties outside of conditions of coercion. At the same time, appeals to teleological reasoning in Catholic social teaching want to require more of justice in serving both greater personal and social ends that fulfill criteria for integral human development and flourishing. Thinking about the parallels between the context and challenges of John A. Ryan’s times and the present, I argue that there is merit in revisiting his work and investigating the ways in which his conceptual frame for understanding distributive justice can be illuminative for understanding what is proposed by competing claims for justice in economic relationships in our times.

As a method for proving the value of Ryan’s contribution to this endeavor I will argue that Alasdair MacIntyre’s work on contested traditions of rationality and justice elaborated in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality* is of great use here. As theologians and economists adhere to different traditions of enquiry with their own distinctive criteria for rational judgment, any engagement between these traditions requires some ground for translatability of their beliefs and values for intelligible discourse and self-critique. I posit that John A. Ryan’s deep understanding of distributive justice comprehensively attends to and translates prevailing criteria of justice arising both out of Catholic theology and economic science through the enumeration of six “principal canons of distributive justice.” By utilizing the framework Ryan bequeaths to us in his precise canons when making arguments for justice, particularly that of wage justice in Ryan’s thought, theologians and economists can appreciate the goals and limits of wage justice in prescriptions to policymakers.

Catholic bishops, theologians, and economists are greatly indebted to Ryan and his conceptual framework, but all too often they use his ideas without the same precision and deliberate attention to the exigencies of what he meant when he spoke of justice. In building contemporary arguments for economic justice in American society, the thought of John A. Ryan might be faithfully renovated so that it yet may serve to frame discourse on relevant, productive programs for human welfare.
Distributive Justice through a Living Wage

CANONIZING RELEVANT TERMS IN RIVAL TRADITIONS

Among the many contributions that Ryan made to the growing social doctrine of the Catholic Church, perhaps his greatest was the definition and distinction among relevant terms used in arguments surrounding economic justice. As the product of the reigning Neo-Scholastic method of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Ryan never lost touch with the deepest roots of the Catholic philosophical and theological tradition. At the same time, however, he was known to admire the social gospelers, even if he did not share their ingenuous optimism (Gaillardetz 1990: 109–10). In an effort to be both comprehensive and relevant to the concerns and challenges of his day, he staked out a kind of via media between the individualist and collectivist currents of his day through the synthesis of classical theological authorities and modern English, German, French, and American social scientists (Broderick 1963: 91). The result is a lucid blueprint of economic structures in industrial societies with a detailed key for deciphering the relationships among the important agents and institutions that are the substance of social justice.

Before Pope Pius XI's landmark encyclical Quadragesimo Anno initiated and popularized the use of the term “social justice” in Catholic thought, the classical taxonomy of justice borne through the work of St. Thomas Aquinas circumscribed Catholic conversations of justice. Synthesizing insights from biblical revelation, Aristotle, and the Roman jurists, St. Thomas's work handed over to Neo-Scholasticism the familiar divisions of general, or legal, justice and particular justice, as well as the subdivision of particular justice into commutative justice and distributive justice. In the Thomistic sense, distributive justice encompasses all discussions of how the goods of a community correspond to the good of each individual person, commensurate with proportional equality. However, Ryan restricts his investigation of distributive justice to the point of asserting that it is “primarily a problem of incomes rather than of possessions” and “it deals only with those incomes that are derived from participation in production” (Ryan 1942a: 3).

Eschewing the potential quagmire of grappling with the redistribution of private property, Ryan turns more directly for the remainder of his study to the problem of distributive justice surrounding incomes, as he states in the final sentence of his introduction to Distributive Justice: “Where the factors of production are owned by distinct groups of persons, the problem is to determine whether each group is properly remunerated for the function it has performed” (Ryan 1942a: 5–6). The determination
of what constitutes proper remuneration is for him the purview not of a commutative, contractual justice, but rather of distributive justice. As an aid to his arguments, particularly as it affects the incomes of businessmen and their wage-earning laborers, he introduces six canons, or “chief rules of justice that have been or might be adopted in distributing the product of industry among those who participate actively in the productive process” (Ryan 1942a: 180). He raises the discussion in section three of Distributive Justice on the moral aspect of profits because of the important bearing which the profits of businessmen will have on the wages of the laborers in their employ. Ryan’s vision of wages is roundly personal and social, taking into account a myriad of relationships between the worker and various other persons and social groups that go beyond that of his relationship to his employer. At the same time, however, in the enumeration of his six canons, he adverts to aporias and incoherencies in his moral theological tradition of justice that insufficiently grapple with physical and social facts that limit the practicability of certain canons as guides for policies in his day and age.

The first canon of distributive justice is the canon of equality, which abides by rules of arithmetical equality such that any person who contributes anything at all to the production of a good or service should receive an equal portion of its benefits. Although appealing to justice on the basis of “equality,” the kind of equality provided in this canon is commensurate only to the human dignity of each of the agents involved, not to the human welfare of each. To treat all agents equally in the distribution of benefits would do injustice to all, as economic productivity is production of external goods according to the result of factors including human capacities, skills, and efforts. The distribution of those material products equally is also not necessarily congruent with each individual’s needs. Because human beings are material, emotional, and spiritual complexes that cannot be comprehensively given their due through arithmetical, material equality alone, the first canon is an insufficient rule for distributive justice.

The second canon is based on needs and would account for apportioning economic goods based on the capacity of the recipient to use those goods. Ryan notes that this rule would be “ideal” if distribution were entirely independent of the process of production (Ryan 1942a: 181). It would treat unequals—in the respects in which they were unequal—in accordance with the proper proportion to which each is due according to the potential to use what is received well. However, when accounting for the moral claims of the producer rather than the recipient of the goods allocated, recognizing the varying degrees to which effort and sacrifices are made by the productive agent, needs alone are insufficient for making a
fair distribution, yet still more nuanced than the pure arithmetical equality of the first canon. Along with the first canon, Ryan warns of not only the ethical incompleteness of this canon, but the social impracticability and impossibility, where such a distribution would injure social welfare in the long run.

Third, the canon of efforts and sacrifices would ideally be just if one ignored the former canon of need and the following canon of productivity. This rule rewards the agent’s moral character as applied to provision of his or her factor of production, but does not account for the differing needs of each agent’s human welfare, as well as the absolute amount of product his or her efforts render. Taken together, the first three canons are “formally ethical, inasmuch as they are directly based upon the dignity and claims of personality” in each agent/recipient (Ryan 1942a: 183). Necessary as each is in its own sphere of concern, together they must be supplemented by canons that attend not only to ethics, but to the economic and social realities through which they are realized.

Before turning to the fourth and fifth canons, which Ryan identifies as “primarily physical and social” (Ryan 1942a: 183), it may be helpful to take stock of what has been presented in these first three canons, which he identifies as having a “formally ethical” character. First, from Ryan’s perspective, arising out of the Catholic tradition of Thomism, the three canons of equality, needs, and efforts/sacrifices address what are accounted for otherwise in earlier traditional moral authorities. Second, however, Ryan notes the insufficiency of these canons in his native tradition to deal with the practical and real social and material limits of the communities in which they are to be applied. Ryan is forced, by engaging with the rival tradition of economics, to confirm or disconfirm his initial views, drawn from his own tradition, in light of those of the rival tradition, “placing [himself] imaginatively within the scheme of belief inhabited by those whose allegiance is to the rival tradition, so as to perceive and conceive the natural and social worlds as they perceive and conceive them” (MacIntyre 1989: 394–95). Thus, one can conceive of the next two canons of distributive justice as the fruit of Ryan’s engagement with the rival tradition to render his own tradition, that of properly moral enquiry, more coherent and practically rational under the existing framework inherited from Thomism and his contemporary Catholic magisterial deposit.

The fourth and fifth canons concern productivity and scarcity respectively, and as mentioned, are primarily rules derived from positive economic analysis. Productivity ignores moral claims of need and effort, focusing solely on the quantitative result of labor. In many ways, productivity is able to account, in part, for the third canon of needs and sacrifice,
as increased effort often returns increasing productivity to scale, on average, *ceteris paribus*. However, it ignores the advantage of persons who have increased or diminished native capacities due only to accidental factors. Additionally, because of the incommensurability of valuing the particular products of laborers, such as the road-builder, banker, and surgeon, even through the medium of currency, it is practically impossible to assure comparative justice with regard to respective production. This follows as well for distribution based on scarcity, where the skills and access to available equipment often differentiate value without attention to an agent’s moral desert. Although scarce employment is often attained through effort and sacrifice, like the opportunity cost of foregone wages to pursue higher education or training, native capacities and accidents of life play too great a role to base distribution on scarcity alone.

Here, Ryan has attempted in his thoroughgoing analysis of justice to enter into the conceptual imagination of his non-native tradition, that of economic science, to draw forth principles of justice based on sufficient rationales commensurate, or translatable enough to render them commensurate, for meaningful discourse between these rival traditions. It is worth noting that Ryan does not discard the fourth and fifth canons arising out of the economics as superfluous to the first three derived from his native theological/philosophical tradition, nor does he discount their value to a secondary or subordinate priority. They are deserving of sincere regard as valid canons of true justice. Though essentially insufficient in and of themselves to render both a practicable and morally satisfactory account of wage justice, they are essentially necessary for the construction of the sixth, comprehensive canon of justice which follows.

The sixth canon of justice, *human welfare*, is the summation and synthesis of all that concerns the previous five canons, distributing according to that which promotes the well-being of all persons considered individually as well as collectively. It is not to be synonymous with a collectivist notion of total social, or merely aggregate, welfare, which is why he qualifies this type of welfare as “human.” He further goes onto elaborate the fullness of its individual aspect:

It requires that all human beings be treated as persons, as possessed of natural rights: this is equality. It demands that all industrial persons receive at least that amount of income which is necessary for a decent living and reasonable self-development: this is a recognition of needs. The canon of human welfare declares that some consideration must be accorded manifestations of good will by those who take part in the processes of industry: this is a recognition of efforts and sacrifices.
And it gives reasonable recognition to the canons of productivity and scarcity. (Ryan 1942a: 187–88)

Seemingly compatible with economic definitions of welfare noting the advantage of a producer’s investment in labor and capital to evoke maximum net product to the point where diminishing returns to scale set in, human welfare, with its ethical emphasis on the dignity of the human person, becomes for Ryan the touchstone for any determination of distributive justice.

Ryan’s definition of distributive justice according to the sixth canon of human welfare, though originally penned in 1916, greatly resembles the concept of “social justice” elaborated in 1931 by Pope Pius XI in his encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*. Although he himself had no direct influence on the drafting of the pope’s letter, its addressing of many of Ryan’s concerns in somewhat parallel language was seen as a vindication of his thought by himself and his peers (Broderick 1963, 196). The third edition of *Distributive Justice* makes note of the striking parallels between his and the pope’s terms and concepts in an appended paragraph at the end of chapter 14 on the six canons. Ryan admits:

Since the foregoing paragraphs first appeared, Pope Pius XI gave much attention and wide currency to the concept and the phrase *social justice*. It is a better and more accurate expression than “human welfare.” Here is a statement of its function: Social justice impels both individuals and public officials to promote the common good; that is, the common welfare, taken distributively as well as collectively; the good of the community, not only as a unified entity, but as composed of social groups and individuals. (Ryan 1942a: 188)

The principal canon of distributive justice is what Pope Pius XI called in *Quadragesimo Anno*, n. 58, “the norms of the common good”—social justice. Although Ryan was only able to add the precise language of “social justice” in subsequent editions of *Distributive Justice*, it should not be seen as ancillary or auxiliary, but rather the heart of all discussions of distributive justice, as his sixth canon redefined.

What then is gained by the use of Ryan’s canons of distributive justice that is not already present in the foundational work of thinkers like St. Thomas Aquinas, the Catholic philosophical and theological tradition, and the work of the social scientists? I contend that Ryan’s ability as a figure seated in the traditional Catholic theological framework to take seriously and integrate the insights of the rival tradition of economic science into a comprehensive concept like “human welfare,” or as Catholics prefer today, “social justice,” renders intelligible the insights of economists into the practical possibility of the achievement of human welfare given the *quaes-
tiones facti that require a prudential decision on the quaestiones iuris. It is not that moral theologians are to compromise the commitments that they have to fundamental notions of right canonized in the justice based on equality, needs, and efforts/sacrifice. Rather, it is critical that they are able to render intelligible to their own tradition the necessity of limiting, for the present time given external circumstances, the pursuit of fullness of these moral canons of justice given the prudential just judgments of the social and physical canons that may render attempts to fulfill the moral canons injurious to human welfare and the common good. At the same time, the engagement of Ryan with his non-native tradition of enquiry can help to explicate to those in the economic sciences the fundamental vision and commitment of moral theologians and Catholic pastors to the moral canons that reflect the teleological understanding of human persons and society that aim at the full realization of human dignity in social and economic relationships in the context of their relationship with God.

**AMERICA, RYAN, AND THE LIVING WAGE—NOW**

Now, in 2015, over one hundred years after the publication of Ryan’s *A Living Wage* and ninety-nine years after *Distributive Justice*, *America* magazine once again was the locus of another piece on the fight for a living wage. This time the article, written by the magazine’s senior editor Kevin Clarke, directly addressed the February 19th announcement by Walmart that new employees will receive $9/hour beginning in April 2015 and $10/hour in 2016, figures above many state and federal minimum wage levels. Citing business analysts on the reasons for such a change after years of resistance by corporate executives, Clarke notes that, “The new wage schedule should help with employee retention and would allow the company to unify wage standards that have become complicated by successful local and statewide campaigns to raise minimum wages around the country” (Clarke 2015). There is a sense that Walmart’s executives, operating out of canons of productivity and scarcity, do not wish to see inefficiencies in business operations that would jeopardize the enterprise and the justice of relationships for all who depend on Walmart for its products and labor, among other important factors. Citing Rev. Sinclair Oubre of the Catholic Labor Network, as well, Clarke also notes that, “This very positive action should not distract [U.S. Catholics] from the larger goal, which is twofold . . . [that] employers have a responsibility to pay a living wage to employees, and we as consumers have a responsibility to be willing to pay a premium so that our fellow workers have a just wage” (Clarke 2015). Here a broader vision invoking canons of need and human welfare calls for further discourse to continue efforts by all members of society, such as
individuals and intermediate groups including unions, corporations, and the state as well, to work out preliminary just outcomes that are consonant with Catholic social teaching while grounded in the prudential judgment of economic realities that set the social and material limits of potential outcomes. Catholic economists providing relevant business analysis along with theologians and pastors attending to the anthropological and moral vision of the Church might work together to articulate better the rationale of their tradition’s wage “justice” in an article like this, through the use of Ryan’s six canons.

Near the end of his life, Ryan gave an address that was redacted in a short article for the *Review of Social Economy* in which he set forth two objectives for Catholic economists. The first was to give a complete account of economic phenomena, adding a moral evaluation of practices described therein with possible remedies for bad practices. The second was the “formulation and support of particular economic reforms and of a general scheme of social reconstruction” (Ryan 1942b: 4). It is this second aim which can help guide the necessary further steps toward distributive economic justice today, guided by Ryan’s painstaking, comprehensive approach that attends to both normative demands of Catholic social teaching and the positive principles of economic theory and its analytics. Catholic economists, in dialogue with Church leaders and moral theologians, have much to contribute, guiding the work of the academy, business and labor institutions, and the government on this critical issue. Much of Ryan’s thought can be found in more contemporary documents, like the 1986 U.S. bishops’ pastoral letter *Economic Justice for All.* However, a fuller recovery of his discrete terminology in the canons of distributive justice applied to the vision of Catholic social teaching can help update and adapt principles by which Catholic economists and policymakers can engage technical problems facing the economy in conversation with Catholic bishops, theologians, and philosophers who, though members of the same Church, are guided in their respective vocations by two rival traditions of enquiry and rationality.

Solid portions of both A Living Wage and *Distributive Justice* were given over to the quantitative applications of Ryan’s ethical and economic commitments in theory. Here we see his attempt at the first objective he enjoined on Catholic economists. Clearly there were limits to the possibility of wholesale adoption and application of Ryan’s work on economic justice both in his own time and now in the twenty-first century. First, and not unique to our present context alone, Ryan does not deal with the historical injustices that give rise to the disparity seen in the gross wealth inequality in the United States today. Although his approach to dealing
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with problems of distributive justice through income alone does not require immediate, revolutionary redistribution of wealth, but does promote a long-term redistribution through greater income equality over generations, one must ask, “What about those suffering now from the wealth disparity?” Many other thinkers engaged with Catholic social teaching do attend to that issue more directly and should be viewed as critical dialogue partners with proponents of Ryan’s approach. Second, despite his prescient understanding of the evolving society and economy of the twentieth century, Ryan wrote in a context very different from the democratic, post-industrial, service-based economy of the United States today and it must be noted clearly that he himself is neither a political nor economic liberal by any means. Nevertheless, there still is much to be drawn from his work and one can take inspiration and guidance from his prolific work. As Richard Gaillardetz concludes, “Ryan also anticipated the ‘signs of the times’ theology in his conviction that the Church must enter into public discourse on a much broader range of socio-economic issues and must be unafraid to make concrete proposals, defending them in terms to which all people of good will might assent” (Gaillardetz 1990: 119). He becomes the kind of man MacIntyre sees as necessary in the face of the failure of the Enlightenment project, to “turn his or her own initial incoherencies to argumentative advantage by requiring of each tradition that it supply an account of how these incoherencies are best to be characterized, explained, and transcended” (MacIntyre 1989: 398). By reclaiming and applying his canons of distributive justice to contemporary theories of income, Ryan brings the rationality of properly moral concerns from one tradition to the attention and consideration of the properly material and social concerns in positive economic analysis of distribution, critically testing each for a new coherence and synthesis satisfactory to his Catholic tradition while seriously noting the challenges of the rival tradition of liberalism. By reintroducing the advocates of Catholic social teaching to their fountainhead, one might instill in them, both theologians and economists alike, an appreciation for the utility of social science in seeking moral ends. Neither a typical traditionalist nor combative revolutionary, John A. Ryan’s deep commitment to both his Catholic faith and American socio-economic development grounded his hope that our nation could not only sustain a vibrant and productive economy, but also that such an economy would engender true distributive justice and a living wage for all.
### APPENDIX

#### Six Principal Canons of Distributive Justice

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<tr>
<td><strong>1. [Arithmetic] Equality</strong></td>
<td><strong>4. Productivity</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. All who contribute receive same amount</td>
<td>a. Reward in proportion to productive contribution</td>
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<tr>
<td>b. Recognizes moral equality, but erroneously equates income equality with welfare equality</td>
<td>b. Difficulty in establishing rule of comparative productivity across disparate fields and industries</td>
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<td>c. Socially impracticable</td>
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<td><strong>2. [Proportional] Needs</strong></td>
<td><strong>5. Scarcity</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>a. Reward with capacity to use goods reasonably</td>
<td>a. Relative supply of labor across different, particular fields creates greater command of compensation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. Ideal if independent of process production</td>
<td>b. Can account for efforts and sacrifices required to labor in higher compensatory fields or disagreeableness of work</td>
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<td>b. Requires supplemental attention to relation between distribution and production</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>3. Efforts and Sacrifices</strong></td>
<td><strong>6. Human Welfare</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Ideal if could ignore needs and productivity</td>
<td>a. Would have called it “social justice” had term been in Catholic Social Doctrine at time of publication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. Treats persons unequally in matters of welfare and productive contribution</td>
<td>b. Accounts for and synthesizes prior five canons in consideration of the well-being of persons as individuals in a social context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Socially impracticable</td>
<td>c. Subject to modification and exception as contingencies require</td>
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Formally **ethical** rules; directly based on human personhood and its dignity

Formally **physical** and **social**; measures economic value in situations of competition
Notes


2. The inspiration taken from MacIntyre in the approach to closing the gap in understanding between Catholic theologians and economists is only an analogical application of the framework he elaborated in chapters 19, “Tradition and Translatability,” and 20, “Contested Justices, Contested Rationalities.” The claim here is not that Catholic theologians are “Catholic” and economists “liberal,” which is patently false. The merit of this analogy, however, lies in the intellectual formation and historical person of John A. Ryan himself, who though firmly in the Thomistic theological tradition acquired the “language-in-use” of a particular rival tradition, that of economic science and was thus able to mediate the rationality of an alien “tradition of social science” to his native tradition of moral theology.

3. In the 1942 3rd edition of *Distributive Justice*, Ryan advert to the usefulness of the term “social justice” in two particular places—first, in regard to arguments for and against the right of labor to the total value of industry production (cf. pp. 96–99) and second, in regard to the naming of the sixth canon of distributive justice (cf. p. 188), the latter of which will be commented on later in this paper.

4. Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* IIa-IIae, q. 58, a. 5–8; q. 61, a. 1-4; q.62, a. 1.

5. By setting the scope of his book *Distributive Justice* in its subtitle, “The Right and Wrong of Our Present Distribution of Wealth,” it seems odd that Ryan dismisses a thorough discussion of potential programs for wealth redistribution. In a way, Ryan did begin with this reassessment, but obliquely, by arguing a traditional position of private landownership and private property as “natural right.” He very briefly raises the cases against private property leveled by Communists, Socialists, and Henry George’s “Single Taxers,” dismissing them in turn for either the inefficacy or impracticability of each of those ideal systems in the face of the nature of the human beings that inhabit them. Instead, Ryan appeals to his own tradition of natural right as the basis for private landownership, as he will for private capital. Enumerating three kinds of natural rights—1. rights to goods in themselves, 2. rights directly necessary as means to human welfare, and 3. rights indirectly necessary as a means to human welfare—Ryan places private property in the third category. Although not essential to personal identity and one’s relationship to God and others, but because of the social institutions which human beings have created, private property is a right to the presence and benefits of those institutions once established (Ryan 1942a: 48).

6. The use of these terms *quaestiones facti* and *quaestiones iuris* is derived from Pius XII’s address on religion in the community of nations *Ci Riesce* (1953) as he attempted to explain how the Catholic magisterium could hold to the moral and theological principles of religious establishment of true religion while admit-
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ting the prudential tolerance of the evil of false beliefs for the sake of a greater
good found in the common good and civil peace. Leon Hooper explains this well
in his note on a volume of John Courtney Murray’s work (cf. John Courtney
Murray, Religious Liberty: Catholic Struggles with Pluralism, ed. Leon Hooper

7. A solid study on the continuing need for attention to both anthropologi­
cal and economic realities in Catholic discussions of economic rights is Michael
McCcartan’s dissertation on the American Catholic reception of bishops’ docu­

8. Explicitly drawing upon the 1919 Program of Social Reconstruction
drafted by Ryan, the U.S. bishops included many of his concepts in their appeal
to the nation at the end of the twentieth century. In it we find Ryan’s commitment
to the necessary establishment of a legislated baseline for wage justice through
a minimum wage that is a living wage, restoring purchasing power to those at
risk of poverty (NCCB 1986: n. 197). That commitment is founded on what the
bishops call “basic justice”—whose three dimensions are commutative, distribu­
tive, and social justice—all accounted for in the six canons of Ryan’s “distributive
justice” (nn. 68–74). The bishops raise questions directed at the prevailing Ameri­
can economic system and its values that prioritize profits over human needs and
dignity (n. 132). Finally, calls are made to bring “democratic ideals to economic
life” in a new role for labor as partners in and with management (nn. 298–300).

lie Social Justice Tradition (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press,
2010). In the very first chapter of his book, Bailey argues for a paradigm shift
away from the emphasis on income to that of assets and wealth which more com­
prehensively captures the long-term causes and consequences of poverty and dis­
crimination in the United States.

10. In an article by Harlan Beckley, the author concludes that due to both
similarities and differences with later twentieth century liberal thinkers like Rawls
or Gauthier, “Ryan could join American liberals, who had a quite different per­
spective, in advocating policies that increased the power of labor unions and the
proportion of national income going to laborers. But it also explains why Ryan
advocated state intervention to establish industrial democracy and the occupa­
tional group system and why he did not think justice requires policies to reduce
all large profits.” Ultimately Beckley concludes that Ryan’s theory of justice as
a whole is incompatible with that of egalitarian liberalism and that he himself
98. Available at http://scholarship.law.nd.edu/ajj/vol33/iss1/3. Accessed March 2,
2015.
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