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The overview of Michael Novak's economic and political theory in the context of his relations with Poland

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Abstract

Michael Novak's concept of democratic capitalism in Poland aroused great interest for several reasons. The most important of them consisted in its close relation to the teaching of the Polish Pope John Paul II. The second was its temporal coincidence with the start of a political transformation in Poland, when a model of development consistent with Polish tradition and social expectations was sought. The third was related to its Slavic roots and origin, which gained in importance given a perceived civilizational backwardness of the countries belonging to the former socialist bloc. For Polish Catholic thinkers, the concept of democratic capitalism initially seemed to promise a smooth transition to a market economy, protecting society from the shock of a possible collision with predatory capitalism. But the discussions of Michael Novak's conception which took place in Poland at that time were unfortunately burdened with fears of cultural pluralism and with leaving individuals too much freedom in implementing their own ways of achieving happiness. Polish conservatives, who were in power at that time, did not seem to understand the important need for a dynamic moral and cultural system in a society that was just starting its modernization processes. It is paradoxical, but in these discussions what was most feared was the weakening of religious traditions in Polish society. According to the author, this fear caused distrust of the democratic conception, and especially its moral foundations, which continues to this day. This paper, therefore, also contributes to reflection on to what extent the teachings of John Paul II have been absorbed in Polish conservative circles.

Keywords: Michael Novak, democratic capitalism and its reception in Poland, moral and cultural system, political transformation

Introduction

Slavic inspirations in political thought usually show a tendency to take a conservative stance in the sphere of values and a liberal approach in the economic sphere. This seems to be an effect of the turbulent history of the Central European nations, which for most times in their history were under a foreign rule, pursuing other nations' civilizational and development goals. The political subjugation of nations, and the associated scarcity of individual freedom, was, as it were, automatically translated into a sensitivity toward any aspirations that offered to expand the scope of both individual and social freedom. The views of Michael Novak (1933–2017), a prominent political philosopher of Slovak origin, clearly exemplify this type of influence. His family had come from the region of Spišské Podhradie and Levoča in Prešov Region (Archlebova, 2006, p. 475). Novak never forgot his ethnic origin, as a commitment to tradition played an important role in his political philosophy and ethics.[2]

The American political philosopher, Hadley Arkes, a close colleague of Michael Novak, wrote that Novak's views on politics, ethics and economics had been shaped by the social milieu in which he had grown up (Arkes, 2017). Novak spent his childhood and teenage years in the industrial town of Johnstown, Pennsylvania, which was known above all for its mining and metallurgical industries. It was for this reason that he always held in high esteem people who owed their prosperity in life to hard work. Initially, he was a supporter of the old Democratic Party, which still kept liberal standards. It was in part the departure of the Democrats from these

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[2] The terms 'political philosophy' and 'political ethics' are not accidentally used here, as in the author's understanding, philosophy of politics deals with that which actually exists, i.e. mainly with the mechanisms of governance, while political philosophy projects the situations that are only postulated. Within its framework, there are also included all concepts of reforming the existing socio-political order.

positions that changed his political mindset. That was why the European-style socialism was not acceptable to him; he considered it to be an artificial creation, as it deprived people of a chance of authentic self-improvement through their own work. Arkes mentions that Novak, while discussing this issue, would ask: "What do you particularly like about socialism — that everything is controlled by the government?" He pointed at the insurmountable conflict between a desire to establish a justice, which would ensure the same goods for everyone, and a natural desire to improve one's personal status, which would ultimately result in the situation in which nobody wanted to live under socialism–even though almost everyone supported the idea of justice it postulated.

Arkes tried to reconstruct the evolution of the attitude toward social justice which he found in Michael Novak. Freedom is not assigned to everyone like a specific pool of goods in socialism, for everyone can expand its scope by their own efforts. In other words, one must first strive for freedom, and then be careful as not to lose anything from its abundance. Consequently, there is no equality in the exercise of freedom, and thus in every society there are both winners and losers. However, the point is not that the individuals are most important, because what matters here is the overall numerical prevalence of those who are in the winners' camp over those who remain in the losers' position. And this is where Novak saw the superiority of capitalism over socialism. Socialism was based on the delusion that everyone is equal and entitled to the same goods, while capitalism gives nothing to anyone for free. No one denies socialism certain achievements in lifting people out of poverty and raising their standard of living, but it is capitalism that has moved far more people from poverty to prosperity, and did it far more quickly than socialism. In Arkes' opinion, the dilemma concerning the way human communities should take was resolved by Novak with a simple argument: "Socialism is a system built on belief in human goodness, so it never works. Capitalism is a system built on belief in human selfishness; given checks and balances, it is nearly always a smashing scandalous success. Capitalism had made the world rich, inventing riches other populations didn't know they had. And yielding sinful pleasures for the millions" (Arkes, 2017). But no one forces people to make this choice: every moral agent if acting rationally must seek solutions that benefit themselves and their family, which constantly forces them to take risks. Therefore, they must calculate so that the sum of the good they will gain by doing so outweighs the possible negative consequences. According to Novak, this is the 'spirit of democratic capitalism', derived directly from egoism, which corresponds to the interests of individuals as it is based on 'enlightened self-interest'.

Michael Novak formulated his concept of political philosophy at a time when the so-called 'real socialism' was collapsing in the countries of Central Europe, and these countries were faced with a challenge to choose a path for further development. By that time, all Central European countries had already rejected socialism, but traditional capitalism was not an attractive proposition for their societies. For this reason, it was with hope that they began to study Novak's conception of democratic capitalism, which at the time seemed to constitute a modernized version of capitalism, free of its defects. It is therefore the author's intention to reconstruct the dilemmas that emerged in the political debate at the time. Particularly significant were fears of communism 'recidivism', which eventually led to the situation in which democratic capitalism was not accepted by the new Polish political elites. Above all, it was caused by a different approach to tradition. Novak considered tradition indispensable for providing a moral basis for modernizing aspirations, whereas, for Polish conservative circles, tradition constituted an area in which no changes were allowed.

Democratic capitalism as a concept of political philosophy

The evolution of Novak's views towards conservatism led him to getting involved in the Republican party. The declared reason for this reorientation was the Democrats' approval of

abortion and their distancing from religion and traditional morality. Interestingly, for him it was the church described as "a community of sinners created by sinners, for sinners" (Arkes, 2017). which constituted a model of political order. As a result, he tried to develop his own concept of social organization, reconciling tradition with modernity. Conventionally, it could be called a liberal Catholic social teaching, as it sought to preserve all that expansive capitalism offered to the world, while at the same time limiting the number of its victims as possible. Caring for the interests of the human person, however, should not consist in mechanically assisting those who do not wish to participate in this project, but in inspiring people in such a way that they themselves become involved in the struggle for a better future for themselves and for the whole of humanity.

Novak's project of building a global society was based on his analysis of contemporary American society, which he called a 'planetary nation', for in his view, everything that happens in the world always directly or indirectly affects a part of American society. "This fact is, as it were, a foreshadowing of the life in which all the globe inhabitants would like to participate: the opportunity to enjoy both the freedom to be themselves, and the recognized relationship with others. Unity in diversity, diversity in unity, these are the ideals of a 'new ethnic consciousness' and, I believe, of the whole human race" (Novak, 1985a, pp. 34–35). This task does not require the creation of a new man, nor equipping him with a new value system; on the contrary, it requires linking the entire tradition with the current situation. According to Novak, the institutional system of education strips the young generation of a rooting in tradition and deludes them with a sick vision of modernity, in which man ceases to be himself (Novak, 1985b, p. 122). He gives the example of a Slovak immigrant who begins to study the sociology of religion. His education does not foster a respect for tradition, but rather it negates tradition, replacing it with a modern religion based on the fetish of science and technology, and a belief in the beneficial character of the related progress of civilization. It claims that our task is to be always at the forefront, to be more liberated from tradition, even for example to break with the stereotypical perception of gender roles. Such a 'modern' person is characterized by three attributes: liberation from tradition, loneliness and alienation. The problem is that such people do not form a strong and lasting community, because their understanding the community contains a limitation, a ballast that hinders their development. But the task of education system is to liberate the truly American spirit of entrepreneurship and resourcefulness once again, i.e., a new liberation and, moreover, a rejection of everything that restrains individuals, that prevents them from expressing their human creative potential. The source of such aspirations for Novak was the Evangelical virtue of hope.

One may ask why religion played such a great role in Michael Novak's conception of democratic capitalism. After all, there is no scientific proof that God exists or that he exerts any influence on human beings. Nevertheless, people do believe, and this is not a mere declaration, but a certain order of thought and action as a consequence of the faith they profess. Admittedly, Novak consistently emphasized his Catholicism, but in no way belittled the significance of other religious denominations. "There is no other reason for counting yourself religious, except that it says something true about your place in the world" (Novak & Novak, 1999, p. 16). Religious faith does not need to be externally sustained, it just is, which distinguishes it from the so-called 'secular humanism' with which it can allegedly be replaced. According to Novak, such humanists "believed in Reason, Science, Progress, pragmatic action, and common sense" (Novak & Novak, 1999, p. 92), but it was they and not people of unshakable faith who became the inspirers for totalitarian ideologies, fascism and communism. That is why, he claimed, the whole concept of secular humanism had lost prestige: it cannot even explain why there occurred such a distortion of the ideal. Novak therefore suggests that there is simply no other sensible project for building anything without religious foundations. Hence, he stated: "Yet even atheists have to be satisfied with this world; it's the only world they – or we – have got. We both, non-

believers and believers, have to do the best with it we can" (Novak & Novak, 1999, p. 103). This world must function by making use of the natural dispositions of each individual in the interests of both himself and his environment. Hence, people need to be provided with the conditions for the actualization of this purpose. And this is why the government exists, for: "If men were angels, no government would be necessary" (Novak & Novak, 1999, p. 16).

According to Novak, for the harmonious functioning of society there must be three unshakeable pillars considered in inseparable connection: capitalism, democracy, and their moral and religious sources. These are the first causes of capitalism, which have to be continually updated. That is why Novak used the term 'democratic capitalism', which, in the context of China's growing economic power, has taken on particular significance today. For it turns out that capitalism can be undemocratic. In contrast, democratic capitalism is the result of the interaction and mutual control of three systems: political, economic and cultural. No additional institutions of control are needed to make the whole work harmoniously, because each system controls the others. That is why both unbridled capitalism and centralized socialism cannot work in practice.

After the collapse of the communist system, Novak proclaimed the victory of capitalism, but this proclamation was not unconditional. He saw many negative features in capitalism, which, in his view, involved the marginalization of the moral message attractive to average citizens. Hence, instead of triumphalism, he advocated a search for 'the true, vital and humanistic premises of capitalism' (Novak, Rauscher & Zięba, 1991, p. 11). It is owing to them that capitalism defeated socialism, but this does not mean that it is itself without faults, which may also lead to its twilight. This is why research into the humanist foundations of capitalism still needs to be carried out, because the task of reforming capitalism is never-ending.

The concept of the common good

Novak's concept of the common good resulted directly from the influence of his Slovak cultural heritage. The specific features of this cultural circle were the ability to combine self-interest with the interest of the community. For centuries, Slovaks had had to protect their cultural identity while living within multinational political structures. As noted by Vasil Gluchman about the Slovak: "In the spirit of liberalism, he wants to be entitled to free growth in a way he considers sound and right for him, as long as it is not in contradiction with the essence and true interests of the community, nation, or the country" (Gluchman, 2022, p. 140).

According to Novak, the importance of the common good lies in the fact that people voluntarily gather as a community established around commonly shared values. Implicitly, this is necessary too for any initiation of processes of globalization. It is naturally initiated by a superpower which reaches a level of development that provides a kind of model for other nations. In particular, he emphasized the indelible mark made by scholastic-inspired Spanish thinkers of the era when their homeland constituted the greatest power on the planet. They were the ones who found a rationale for the development of trade and dealt with the role of money in society, and they did not need a theory of added value or any other measure of value in the form of human labor input. For this purpose, religion and the explanations it offered were sufficient for them (Novak, 2002, pp. 10–11). This is why the representatives of religious thought made the greatest contribution to the creation of free market economy. The foundations of the widely understood Western culture have Judeo-Christian roots, to which representatives of Protestantism also made their contribution. "The Protestant ethic stressed the sacred nature of property, the virtue of hard work, and the importance of independence, thrift, and accumulation" (Younkins, 1999, p. 20). Nevertheless, it is an ethic with roots in religion: it is derived from a religion that has shaped a moral and cultural system which still imperfectly allows for the use of man's natural dispositions.

Each individual, however, needs to act within the framework of a community, for only within a community he can he exercise the full range of freedom to which he is entitled. On the other hand, it is the community that needs acting individuals, because only they can support its existence and extend its scope. It is individuals who establish associations and companies, which Novak regards as the most characteristic institutions of democratic capitalism. For it is within them that the intergenerational transmission takes place, which enables their continuation and development. It is not true, therefore, that the product of democratic capitalism is the greedy individual. In fact, the opposite is true: democratic capitalism produces the socialized individual. This is reflected, for example, in the market behaviors of consumers, since consumers do not act as individuals.

Novak himself acknowledged the fact that the idea of democratic capitalism was the result of two seemingly impossible concepts – the liberal and the Catholic – coming together. The well-organized society is made up of individuals aware of the need to live in a community, but at the same time being the community takes care that the scope of freedom which individuals possess is not be diminished: "Being a citizen requires caring for the common institutions that safeguard personal freedoms and foster their flourishing. [...] A free person is subordinate to building up the common good; the common good is subordinate to the fulfilment of free persons" (Novak, 2002, p. 11). For Novak this obviously means that the common good can in part arise spontaneously, which, however, does not exclude its deliberate multiplication. In this respect, he agrees with liberals that what arises spontaneously does not need to be regulated. The freedom of individuals in democratic socialism consists in the fact that they have the opportunity to realize their own visions of the good. There is no sharp distinction between personal and public good, because one conditions the other: "The genius of democratic capitalism is to serve brotherhood by recognizing that the most precious of all common goods is the individuality of each person, and that the best way to increase the common good is to empower people through differentiated systems" (Novak, 1991, pp. 226–227). Thus, the common good is actually to achieve a social order in which free individuals have a possibility to realize their own visions of the good – both personal and communal, both private and public. This common good is not measurable, as no individual is able to register all the goods that compose it. Hence, it is impossible to define it in a simple formula, which requires defining the conditions for its constant multiplication rather than some orderly system. The market economy that forms the basis of democratic capitalism fulfils such rules. It requires the aforementioned practical intelligence from all participants in the market game.

Organized along capitalist lines, the market is a teacher of virtue, bringing also an order to the lives of individuals, while supporting the poor. Importantly, the market is always dynamic, and forces all participants in the market game to be dynamic as well. It never reaches an ideal state, as it always creates opportunities for both moral and immoral actions. Its participants are therefore not flawless angels, and hence it is never static. It also presupposes that not everyone contributes equally to the multiplication of the common good. Democracy does not specify on whom concretely such an obligations will rest. Yet, all persons who – out of their own free will and with their consent – perform certain functions, and are charged with such an obligation, for: "Neither its political system nor its economic system nor its moral-cultural system can function as they are intended to function without the leadership which draws on the ideals of fraternity and community and inspires all to self-sacrifice for the common good" (Novak, 1991, p. 357). In this situation, to speak of the common good is to remind each person of the duty to multiply it. The common good is thus the inner drive of human progress, rooted in the human capacity to control one's own actions, to become aware of one's own weaknesses and imperfections, and to choose a path running towards the full development of the whole range of human capacities.

"Ultimately, the good of each of us is to become all each can become. For someone to love that good latent within us is to call us to grow as we might otherwise not. Friends give each other the most precious gift humans can, not so much the comfort of sympathy as the call to self-realization" (Novak, 1991, p. 354). So equipped, a community is able to face any crisis.

On the other, in Poland, the common good was, as it were, established arbitrarily. Individuals were allotted a certain amount of participation in the common good and were taking advantage of it. The liberalism of Novak's concept did not suit the new Solidarity elites. Certainly, far more supporters of Novak's conception could have been found among the elites associated with the old system. This was certainly also one of the reasons why the concept of democratic socialism was not accepted in Poland in the end.

The reception of the concept of democratic socialism in Poland

It is not easy to analyze Novak's views if one refers to the Polish cultural tradition. Within this tradition, any attempts to modernize the social component of Catholicism may be regarded as heresy or as an attempt to destroy the spiritual envelope of Polish national identity. Yet, Novak cherished great hopes for the pontificate of John Paul II, whom he regarded as a figure who creatively developed the social message of the Catholic Church, particularly in the encyclicals *Laborem exercens*, *Sollicitudo rei socialis* and *Centesimus annus*. As a political philosopher, he had a particular appreciation for the papal thesis of the primacy of human labor over capital. For Novak, this also meant an obligation on the part of capital holders to dispose creatively of their resources, which of course excludes the attitude of a rentier. Consequently, he found affinity between his own views and the Pope's teaching. Novak called it a "theology of creation" (Novak, 1993, p. 223), in which he saw the realization of the divine intention in Genesis to "make the earth subject to you" (Gen 1:18). He saw similarities between the social teaching of John Paul II and his own views, on four levels:

1. The assumption that all human beings are burdened with original sin, which means that human beings are inherently damaged, and hence all creations of their hands and minds will prove to be imperfect, but which also means that these creations can be continuously improved;
2. The recognition that both the sinful nature and dignity of human beings derive from human freedom, "from the human capacity for reflection and choice, a capacity which in each individual is 'the image of God the Creator' and endows each person with the inalienable rights which such freedom entails" (Novak, 1993, p. 225).
3. "The vocation of each person to participate in the realization of the good that is common for all. The goods of the created world are meant for all, and the work of all is necessary to bring creation into flourishing" (Novak, 1993, p. 225).
4. The principle of the primacy of the person over the state. The purpose of the state is to multiply the common good, but the state has no right to compel the individual to pursue his or her own ends. Political power is not limitless but is subject to the control of individuals. Hence, individuals have the right to civil disobedience and to change the authorities if they violate human freedom and dignity.

In the teachings of Pope John Paul II, Novak found approval for human entrepreneurship, freedom to choose and perform a line of work, and support for participation in multiplying the common good (Novak, 1993, p. 327). The obligation faced by people who show the capacity for effective action is to combat unemployment and poverty – the factors that restrict and even deprive humans of inherent freedom. Political liberalism, therefore, if subjected to social control, need not be at odds with a Catholic religious message, for it essentially aspires to the same goal. This is how the idea of democratic capitalism, which stemmed directly from Christian social teaching was born. The religious accents outweighed the others at that time, but in the author's opinion there was no insurmountable conflict among them. Novak did not

transcend the realm of Christianity, since he clearly suggested that it was the values of Christianity that should constitute the basis of globalization processes.

On the other hand, the leaders of the Polish democratic opposition largely ignored the conception of democratic capitalism, even though they had an opportunity to learn about it. A well-known Polish dissident and later prominent Democratic Union politician, Aleksander Hall, in his introduction to the Polish translation of Michael Novak's book *The spirit of democratic capitalism*, dedicated to Pope John Paul II, emphasized the author's contribution to overcoming the communist 'empire of evil'. For Polish dissidents, usually organized around the institution of the Catholic Church in Poland, and benefiting from its support, Novak's political thought was an attractive proposition, as it somehow revalorized the capitalist tradition depreciated in the countries of the Soviet bloc. In his thought, they saw the possibility of building a modern "capitalism with a human face", in which Christian tradition is harmoniously combined with modernity. As Aleksander Hall wrote: "Novak draws attention to the communal dimension of capitalism, the impossibility of its development in a society in which religious and moral values are not respected, and to the inevitable – in his opinion – consequence of the capitalist system in the form of accepting the democratic order" (Hall, 2001, p. 5). Novak's links with Poland are also emphasized by his one-week visit to that country in 1978, which he mentions in the preface to the Polish edition of *The spirit of democratic capitalism*. He spoke at a meeting of the Krakow Club of Catholic Intelligentsia, a gathering of the representatives of Polish conservative circles.[3] Hall recalls that what occasioned the most debate was Novak's thesis that there needed to be pluralistic discourse within democratic capitalism, which implies a lack of one distinctive system of values (Hall, 2001, p. 7). For the religiously and culturally homogeneous Polish society, this thesis sounded almost blasphemous. The milieu of Krakow's conservative intellectuals played a significant role in Polish politics at the beginning of the vetting process, as Poland's first non-communist prime minister, Tadeusz Mazowiecki was associated with it. Nevertheless, as time passed its importance waned, and today it is politically marginalized. In fact, this circle has never been able to give up the time-honored belief in the axiological monolith of Polish society, imbued with virtues derived exclusively from Catholicism. Contemporary events related to the huge influx of refugees from Ukraine have shown, however, have called this honored belief into question, as Polish society ineluctably approaches the pattern outlined by Michael Novak. The erroneous political diagnosis, resulting from a kind of fundamental misapprehension, has led to the withering away of the traditional conservative

[3] The conservative circles in communist Poland had no political representation. In the political sense, they could be considered a continuation of the conservative groups active in Poland before 1939. They had a great impact on the establishment of the "Solidarity" independent trade union and had a significant influence on its activities. Ideologically, they differed significantly from the liberal opposition that dominated at the time, as their goal was not a radical socio-economic change, but rather a restoration of the traditional system of values of society, which they considered to be an inevitable condition for ensuring its continuity and carrying out a necessary moral renewal. The conservative opposition was concentrated in the Catholic Intelligentsia Clubs operating in larger urban centres in Poland, as well as around the Znak Publishing House and the "*Tygodnik Powszechny*" magazine, which were legally operating in Krakow. The leading activists of the Polish conservative opposition were: Tadeusz Mazowiecki, Krzysztof Kozłowski and Aleksander Hall. The Catholic social teaching constituted the ideological basis for the conservative opposition, especially the teaching of John Paul II. After the beginning of the political transformation in Poland in 1989, the former oppositionists dominated the Polish political scene, as T. Mazowiecki became the first non-communist prime minister in post-war Poland, and Kozłowski and Hall took ministerial positions. Looking for a way to lead the country out of the deep crisis, the representatives of this group reached primarily to the teaching of John Paul II and the postulates of reforming the society formulated by Catholic intellectuals all over the world. The worldwide popularity of Michael Novak's concept of democratic capitalism caused that its assumptions were considered in the first place. At the time, however, they were recognized as too radical and incompatible with the Polish realities. The influence of this group was quickly marginalized after the former opposition liberals took power in the country and now has virtually no political significance.

milieu in Poland, even though many of the theses formerly propounded in that milieu have by now been adopted within populist circles.

The Polish elites seem to have ignored the fact that *The spirit of democratic capitalism* was largely inspired by the social encyclicals of the Catholic Church, including those of Pope John Paul II. Novak claimed that the papal encyclicals included the contents that he himself had developed, and that even his friends from various countries around the world noticed it (Novak, 2001, pp. 322–323). But that book was first published in 1982, i.e. after the beginning of John Paul II's pontificate, and already after the publication of the encyclical *'Laborem exercens'*, which referred back to Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum novarum* of ninety years earlier. The subsequent edition of Novak's book was published in 1993. According to its author, the greatest similarity of his concept of democratic capitalism is to the encyclical *Centesimus Annus* promulgated on the centenary of Leo XIII's encyclical (Novak, 2001, p. 321). In this way, the Catholic inspirations demonstrated its universality and independence of the geographical context. The Polish political elite took far too little advantage of this message.

Novak did not, however, provide any information on whether he also visited his hometown in Slovakia at the time of his visit to Poland. It would have been quite natural for him to meet the intellectuals in Krakow in the course of visiting the sites from which his family originated. The meetings he held at that time filled him with depression, most probably because of the censorship he encountered, and the institutional restriction of civil liberties. Perhaps he had expected some inspiration for his own concept of democratic capitalism, which he was formulating at the time, but obviously nothing of this sort could have taken place. However, he was most affected by the lack of prospects for political, cultural and economic progress. The socialist system must have appeared to him as a kind of negation of the dynamic potentials inherent in human nature. Undoubtedly, such a shock had an enormous impact on the final shape of his conception. He might also have begun to perceive the reasons for this state of affairs in the institutional reduction of tradition stemming from religion.[4]

Conclusion

Catholic social teaching does not emphasize its economic component, as it allows for various ways of satisfying social needs, even if it excludes communism. The conception of democratic capitalism is a classic example of a mode of economic life which Christianity can embrace. Admittedly, many Christians have held that the most important thing is not how wealth is produced, but how it is distributed. Yet any impetus towards a just distribution of goods needs a stable basis and source. According to Novak: the moral-cultural system is the chief dynamic force behind the rise both of a democratic political system and of a liberal economic system. The moral-cultural system is the sine qua non of the political system and the economic system. Neglect of it bodes ill (Novak, 1991, p. 185).

He draws attention to the rivalry between the ideals of democratic socialism and the actual capitalism that is ongoing in the West. In his opinion, other types of capitalism serve to weaken the West, by dissipating the creative dynamics of the market into projects that actually undermine the unique position of the West in the world.

Novak also attempted to develop a theological conception which was ideologically similar to liberation theology, which he called the "theology of democratic capitalism," an attempt to reconcile the dogmas of Christianity with the conception of a free market and democratic capitalism. For him any criticism of his postulated reconciliation arising from Christianity was unjustified. He claimed, as a political philosopher, that democratic capitalism is not only

[4] Novak's relations with Poland included also scientific research. For example, Mark M. Michalski, a graduate of the Jagiellonian University, who is currently a professor at the Catholic University of America in Washington, was his student and assistant.

justified by everyday practice, but also does not contradict the religious tradition. He interpreted the history of mankind as a history of love for God, and he claimed that this love is also expressed in the dynamic of democratic capitalism. It was on this basis that his conception coincided with the encyclicals of the Polish Pope John Paul II.

However, democratic capitalism is not a finished concept, because the author himself assumes, in the spirit of Thomas Garrigue Masaryk's philosophy, that: "The starting point refers to a theoretical assumption that gives a very precise direction to political action. However, the ideal of the democratic program also expresses a concrete and therefore practical goal – a final and never perfectly or definitively achieved aim that imperfect, fallible, and unconscious people set for themselves in the course of their personal human journey" (Foltin, 2023, p. 101). Owing to this, the autonomy of individuals is preserved and they never lose their political subjectivity.

Some critics of the conception of democratic socialism maintain that Novak, following the views of John Locke, erroneously identified democracy with pluralism, and yet he did not preserve this pluralism in the economic sphere, because he hold that the rules of exchange, which are assumed to result from the natural inclination of every human being, are absolutely binding. Cooperation between people, on Novak's view, is to take place not on the basis of rules established in religions, or according to a universal system of values, but rather according to what may seem to be ephemeral rules of exchange. The opponents thus argue that "the spirit of democratic capitalism does not lead to the cognition of truth or to building communities around the truth, as is the case in the concept of Christian ethics, but is an expression of abstraction and a strong form of individualism" (Swiątkowski, 2016, p. 79).

However, in reply one might urge that the conception of democratic capitalism aspires to restore the disturbed balance between a humanistic outlook, on the one hand, and the unpredictability of technological innovation, on the other hand. As one commentator puts it: "The initial stage of the information age in some ways resembles the onset of the Industrial Revolution when humans mastered a new powerful technology, but still lacked a proper moral and legal attitude to it" (Laniuk, 2020, p. 218). It is not surprising that most of Michael Novak's works are based on historical retrospection, through which the author tries to demonstrate that his views stem directly from the evolution of human culture, and that their roots go back to the very beginnings of civilization. He seems convinced that the accuracy of his diagnoses and prognoses is supported by the entirety of humanity's achievements to date. On the other hand, he was aware of the existence of socio-political systems in which only declarative slogans about the relationship between work and one's own prosperity were in force, while, in practice, it was impossible to change one's social and material situation without the consent of political authorities.

The political transformation in Poland was basically a great social and economic experiment which brought to its citizens a "shock therapy" in the form of a rapacious capitalism, which Novak had warned against. It also seems to have been a lost opportunity to carry out this experiment in accordance with the spirit of democratic capitalism. Arguably, the social costs of such a change would have been considerably lower for Polish society.

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