

*Journal des Economistes et des  
Etudes Humaines*

---

*Volume 13, Number 2*

2003

*Article 2*

NUMÉRO 2/3

---

American Classical Liberalism and Religion:  
Religion, Reason and Economic Science

**Leonard P. Liggio**, *George Mason University*

**Recommended Citation:**

Liggio, Leonard P. (2003) "American Classical Liberalism and Religion: Religion, Reason and Economic Science," *Journal des Economistes et des Etudes Humaines*: Vol. 13: No. 2, Article 2.

Available at: <http://www.bepress.com/jeeh/vol13/iss2/art2>

DOI: 10.2202/1145-6396.1090

©2003 by Berkeley Electronic Press and IES-Europe. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher, bepress, which has been given certain exclusive rights by the author. *Journal des Economistes et des Etudes Humaines* is produced by Berkeley Electronic Press (bepress).

at the Hoover Institution) worked at the bookstore at JFK which received the first shipment of the book. Bob Hessen immediately was asked to purchase copies for Murray Rothbard, Ralph Raico, George Reisman and myself.

Whittaker Chambers denounced Rand in National Review; Murray wrote a pro-reason letter which National Review published. Ayn Rand had met Murray Rothbard some years earlier, and she wrote thanking him for his letter and inviting Murray and his friends to visit her. We accepted her gracious invitation, and had several visits at her home or at that of Barbara and Nathaniel Brandon.

I was in the midst of my graduate studies — spending mornings and afternoons at the New York Public Library and at Fordham graduate seminars in the early evening. My only outside activity was attending the weekly Thursday evening economics seminar of Ludwig von Mises at New York University. But, in addition to the inconvenience of the time, it was mutually agreed that I did not fit the profile of a 'student of Objectivism.' I was a theist. I had a couple of conversations on the topic and found that the one area of philosophy Rand had neglected was Natural Theology. Later Joey Rothbard, Murray's wife, was criticized for her theist conclusions, and Murray Rothbard (along with Ralph Raico) was excluded from Ayn Rand's self-styled Collective into which I had never any interest to enter.

Nevertheless, despite the 'atheist entrance gate' to her inner circle imposed by Ayn Rand, Aristotelian philosophy and Austrian economic were encouraged among those whom she influenced. In particular, many sought formal graduate training in Aristotelian philosophy which meant in practice studying in Jesuit universities with Thomist traditions. As a result all the classical liberal philosophers in the United States, with a few exceptions, shared my own background in Thomist philosophy. Murray Rothbard is to be complimented for his own self-education in Thomism.

For seminar programs of the Center for Libertarian Studies or the Institute for Humane Studies, the Thomist trained philosophers were the mainstay of CLS's and IHS's interdisciplinary work. Henry Babcock Veatch (chairman of the Philosophy Department at Georgetown University) was the paradigm of IHS's moral philosophy programs, and senior scholar for IHS residential summer seminars. Veatch saw a succession from Thomas Aquinas through Richard Hooker's *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* to John Locke (whom Joseph Schumpeter classifies as a Protestant Scholastic) as well as the 17th Century Jesuits.<sup>1</sup>

I benefited studying (sixth grade through twelfth grade) with Irish Christian Brothers who themselves were studying Scholastic Philosophy at Fordham University. Thus, they introduced formally in class and informally in our

<sup>1</sup> Veatch-1971; Rasmussen/Den Uyl-1991, and Miller-1995; Fred Miller is the Director of the Social Philosophy and Policy Center, Bowling Green State University, Ohio.

distinguished by its emphasis on the individuality of the soul. Reality is not a pantheistic collectivism. There is free will and responsibility of each individual soul. Siger of Brabant (1235-84) held the idea of the collective soul which he drew from the great Islamic Spanish philosopher, Averroes, and for which he was criticized by Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas answered in *On the Unity of the Intellect against the Averroists* (1270). Thomas Aquinas defended the Christian theology of the individuality of the person's soul against the collectivism of the Latin Averroists' "single agent intellect."

Aquinas challenged Peter Lombard's *Sentences* where Lombard held that virtue came only through Jesus' Gospels. Thomas Aquinas held that man can naturally practice virtue, although it is very difficult. Thomas Aquinas emphasized individual responsibility through the habits of performing virtuous human actions. When Thomas was condemned after his death, the aged Albertus Magnus travelled from Cologne to Paris in order to defend Thomas' philosophy. Free will and the responsibility of the individual soul created in the *Image of God* is at the center of Christian philosophy.

On October 15, 1998, Pope John Paul II released a new Encyclical: *Fides Et Ratio*. It is addressed to Catholic bishops in an attempt to lead them to restore rational philosophy to the training of seminarians. In many seminaries, rational philosophy has been replaced by sociology and psychology. John Paul II begins by emphasizing the universality of "the principles of noncontradiction, finality and causality." John Paul II states:

"A quite special place in this long development belongs to St. Thomas, not only because of what he taught, but also because of the dialogue which he undertook with the Arab and Jewish thought of his time. In an age when Christian thinkers were rediscovering the treasures of ancient philosophy, and more particularly of Aristotle, Thomas had the great merit of giving pride of place to the harmony which exists between faith and reason. ....

"With the rise of the first universities, theology came more directly into contact with other forms of learning and scientific research. Although they insisted upon the organic link between theology and philosophy, St. Albert the Great and St. Thomas were the first to recognize the autonomy which philosophy and the sciences needed if they were to perform well in their respective fields of research".<sup>5</sup>

First criticizing historicism, John Paul II turned to scientism "which is the philosophical notion which refuses to admit the validity of forms of knowledge other than those of the positive sciences. ... In the past, the same idea emerged in positivism and neo-positivism, which considered metaphysical statements to be meaningless. Critical epistemology has discredited such a claim, but now we see it

<sup>5</sup> Pope John Paul II-1998, pp. 329-30.

17th Century philosophers who might be well considered still medieval philosophers in the scholastic Aristotelian tradition compared to later thinkers. Copleston emphasized:

“For example, those historians who emphasized the scholastic elements, deriving from the Middle Ages, in the philosophy of Descartes doubtless performed a useful service. They showed the absurdity of supposing that philosophy, having suffered a demise when the emperor Justinian closed the philosophical schools in Athens in 529, was suddenly reborn with Descartes in France and Francis Bacon in England.

“... philosophers continued for many years to use categories of thought and philosophical principles which had been used by medieval thinkers. It would be a mistake to attribute what we might describe as the scholastic elements in philosophies such as those of Descartes, Malebranche and Leibniz to the interest in classical literature which was shown during the Renaissance.”

“Descartes’ first philosophical studies were in the scholastic tradition, going back to the Middle Ages. And though his mind came to move in other directions, the influence of his early studies were permanent. Malebranche was deeply influenced by Augustine, while Leibniz had a fairly extensive knowledge of philosophical literature belonging to or stemming from the medieval tradition. Moreover, its influence upon him is apparent in his writings. Again, we can trace a connection between medieval philosophy of law and that of John Locke. For the matter of that, Locke’s empiricism is not so completely alien to all aspects of medieval thought as has been sometimes supposed.”<sup>9</sup>

Murray Rothbard recognized Thomas Hobbes as the founder of modern Collectivist theory. Hobbes sought the destruction of the historic institutions which sheltered the individual from the crushing power of the state. Hobbes sought the total state over the empty individual. Robert Nisbet in *The Quest for Community* noted of Hobbes:

“Only the invincible economic determinist would see in the pages of the Leviathan, with their brilliant and eloquent portrayal of the impersonal, absolute, and imprescriptible State, a piece of ideology reflecting the alleged interests of the middle class. In light of Hobbes’s plain distrust of the market place, and ... his ascribing to (merchants) the blame for the civil war, and of his general hatred for their acquisitive and exploitative proclivities, and above all in the light of the relentless political direction of his writings, it is difficult to understand interpretations that relegate his beliefs to the vague categories of economic determinism.”<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Copleston-1972, pp. 2-3. Copleston’s *A History of Philosophy* has been a major reference work for classical liberal philosophers since its publication, and a best-seller in the Laissez-Faire Books catalogue.

<sup>10</sup> Nisbet-1953, p. 124.

Through the William Volker Fund Murray Rothbard, Joseph Peden and Leonard Liggio became well acquainted with Professor Howard L. Adelson of the City College of New York. Adelson had attended Volker Fund seminars and later Institute for Humane Studies seminars for faculty with lecturers such as F. A. Hayek, David McCord Wright and Bruno Leoni. Adelson was research director of the American Numismatics Society where Joseph Peden studied medieval gold coinage with Adelson.<sup>16</sup>

Adelson, with Murray Rothbard, Joseph Peden and Leonard Liggio, was a founding member of the Columbia University (Faculty) Seminar: History of Legal and Political Thought which grew out of the Columbia University Seminar on Medieval Studies which had been headed by Gerhart Ladner when Rothbard, Peden, Liggio and Adelson had been members (Leonard Liggio and Joseph Peden had been graduate students of Ladner).

The chairman of the History of Legal and Political Thought Seminar was Father Charles Loughran, S.J., former dean at Fordham University and an Oxford-trained professor of Early Christian and Medieval History and a professor of Joseph Peden and Leonard Liggio. The Columbia Seminar on the History of Legal and Political Thought was named the 'Collegio Bartolus de Saxoferrato', after the fourteenth century medieval canon law professor of Perugia; and the papers dealt with medieval and early modern political and legal thought. A leading member was Paul Oskar Kristeller. Murray Rothbard, Joseph Peden and Leonard Liggio were members of the Legal and Political Thought seminar for thirty-five years until Murray Rothbard's (January, 1995) and Joseph Peden's (February, 1996) deaths.

In 1983, Rothbard was very influenced by the publication of Harvard Professor Howard Berman's now classic work: *Law and Revolution*<sup>17</sup>. Law and Revolution concerned the 11th Century reform movement of Pope Gregory VII and the foundation of Western Europe's Legal and Political Tradition. This intensified Rothbard's continuing interest in the history of the medieval Law Merchant influenced by Bruno Leoni's *Freedom and the Law*, and Hayek's *Law, Legislation and Liberty*. Leoni's *Freedom and the Law* intensified Murray's repugnance toward the thought of Jeremy Bentham. As Robert Nisbet noted of Bentham in *The Twilight of Authority*:

"Interestingly, it was directly from Roman Law that Jeremy Bentham - who loathed the common law and, with it, the jury system - acquired his ideal of an all-powerful Magistrate ruling directly with the theoretical consent of the mass of people, with all intermediate bodies such as parliaments, assemblies, parties, and

<sup>16</sup> Howard Adelson is a Misesian and strong proponent of the Christian role in the history of liberty. Adelson was founding chairman of the history department, Graduate Center of CUNY, and chairman of the history department of City College of New York when Leonard P. Liggio taught in CCNY history department for seven years.

<sup>17</sup> Berman-1983.

"The Mantle of Science" essay caused an attack by Ayn Rand and her break with Murray Rothbard. It is important to emphasize this milestone as a defining event in the 20th Century American Classical Liberal movement: Ayn Rand who admired Thomas Aquinas and Aristotle would not accept Murray Rothbard's learning from modern Jesuit philosophers in the Thomist tradition. The impact of Scholasticism in the modern American Classical Liberal movement has yet to be studied.<sup>23</sup>

Murray Rothbard, Joseph Peden (a City University of New York professor of early Christian and medieval history) and Leonard P. Liggio were the core of libertarian scholarship in New York. Their lectures, discussions, dinners, articles and newsletters defined Classical Liberalism. Additions included: Father James Sadowsky, S. J. and his students at Fordham University; and scholars from the doctoral program at Marquette University. William B. Baumgarth, editor, *Saint Thomas Aquinas, On Law, Morality, and Politics*<sup>24</sup> has been chairman of the Political Science Department and Honors Program at Fordham University. Douglas Rasmussen (St. John's University, New York) and Douglas Den Uyl (Bellarmine University, Louisville) are the authors of *Liberty and Nature: An Aristotelian Defense of Liberal Order*<sup>25</sup>. Fred D. Miller, Jr., (Bowling Green State University, Ohio) published *Nature, Justice, and Rights in Aristotle's Politics*<sup>26</sup>.

Louis M. Spadaro was a very important influence especially on Murray Rothbard, Joseph Peden, Leonard Liggio, Gerald O'Driscoll and Mario Rizzo. He received his Ph. D. under Mises at NYU and was a continuing member of Mises NYU seminar. Spadaro was Professor of Economics in Fordham University where he served several terms as economics chairman. He concluded as Dean of the Joseph A. Martino Graduate School of Business at Fordham University. He became president of the Institute for Humane Studies in Menlo Park (1976-1980). Besides writing for *Il Politico* (Turin) and a textbook, *Economics*<sup>27</sup>, Spadaro edited *New Directions in Austrian Economics*<sup>28</sup>.

Schoek/Wiggins-1961 (including papers by Ludwig von Mises, Bruno Leoni, Richard Weaver, and Leo Strauss).

Schoek/Wiggins, *Scientism and Values*.

Kirzner, *Economic Point of View*.

Rickert, *Science and History*.

Mises, *Epistemological Problems of Economics*; and *Ultimate Foundations*.

Rothbard, *Man, Economy and State* (2 volumes).

Leoni, *Freedom and the Law*.

<sup>23</sup> Rothbard-1960 [1979].

<sup>24</sup> Baumgarth-1988.

<sup>25</sup> Rasmussen/Den Uyl-1991.

<sup>26</sup> Miller-1995.

<sup>27</sup> Spadaro-1969.

<sup>28</sup> Spadaro-1978.

Evans for forty years has been a major writer in the libertarian/conservative tradition. M. Stanton Evans and I participated together in Ludwig von Mises' famed NYU seminar in Gallatin House, Washington Square North in the mid-1950s when Stan, having finished at Yale in the aftermath of William F. Buckley's *God and Man at Yale*, was associated with the Foundation for Economic Education (with a legendary staff of Leonard Read, Dr. F. A. Harper, Rev. Edmund Opitz, and many more; it was Leonard Read who reintroduced the name libertarian when the New Deal seemed to capture the name Liberal in America).

Professor George Carey (Georgetown University) in *Freedom and Virtue*<sup>33</sup> selected essays from the early years of National Review, when William F. Buckley, Jr., the masterful editor, drew accomplished essayists, such as M. Stanton Evans, Frank S. Meyer and Dr. Russell Kirk (none of the three was a Catholic), who later contributed several of the essays in this volume. They had responded when they were challenged by a benighted California professor with his claim that American conservatism was inconsistent because conservatism had to be only associated with the Middle Ages in the sense of irrational, monastic, and manorial while National Review was Humanist/Scholastic, Capitalist, and post-medieval Tridentine.

Stanton Evans responded:

“The conservative believes ours is a God-centered, and therefore an ordered, universe; that man's purpose is to shape his life to the patterns of order proceeding from the Divine center of life; and that, in seeking his objective, man is hampered by a fallible intellectual and vagrant will. Properly construed, this view of things is not only compatible with a due regard for human freedom, but demands it. The conservative's first concern is that man restrain his appetites by the imperatives of right choice — choice which can take place only in circumstances favoring volition. ...

If man is corrupted in mind and impulse, he is hardly to be trusted with the unbridled potencies of the state. ...the limitation of government power becomes the highest political objective of conservatism.”<sup>34</sup>

Frank S. Meyer posited the principle that transcendental truth is compatible with individual human freedom. Meyer declared in his response:

“Christian understanding of the nature and destiny of man, which is the foundation of Western civilization, is always and everywhere what conservatives strive to conserve. That understanding accepts the existence of absolute truth and good and at the same time recognizes that men are created with the free will to accept or reject that truth and good.

<sup>33</sup> Carey-1998.

<sup>34</sup> Evans-1998, pp. 6-7.

them have the understanding of foreign policy that the elder Robert Taft represented. ...most of the libertarians believe in the humane scale; they vehemently oppose what Wilhelm Roepke called "the cult of the colossal." They take up the cause of the self-reliant individual, the voluntary association, the just rewards of personal achievement. They know the perils of political centralization."<sup>37</sup>

An important contribution was the essay of Robert Nisbet. When he originally presented it at the April, 1979 annual meeting of the Philadelphia Society, Nisbet generously stated that in his essay he took F.A. Hayek to be the libertarian spokesman. Nisbet saw the modern issue: to regain the rights of society represented by the private associations, such as family, neighborhood, church, to protect them against the political power of governments.

Nisbet viewed the common ground of libertarians and conservatives to be their "common dislike of the intervention of government" in economic and social lives of citizens: "there is a common belief in the necessity of freedom, most notably economic freedom." He saw a consensus in "what legitimate equality in society should consist of. Such equality, is, in a word, legal."

Nisbet noted "there is a common dislike of war and, more especially, of the war-society this country knew in 1917 and 1918 under Woodrow Wilson and again under FDR in World War II." He recalls that Tocqueville saw business, families and churches as "reluctant to engage in any foreign wars because of its predictable impact chiefly upon business and commerce and upon other social and moral activities as well."

An expanded presentation of his ideas is available again with republication of Robert Nisbet's *The Twilight of Authority*.

Richard Weaver, the author of *Ideas Have Consequences* (a bible of American conservatives for the past half century due to Weaver's critique of Nominalism) stated (in *Freedom and Virtue*):

"My instincts are libertarian, and I am sure that I would never have joined effort with the conservatives if I had not been convinced that they are the defenders of freedom today." He believes that there is a common ground in political, economic and philosophical foundations. He concisely notes: "It took the study of John Calhoun to wake me up to a realization that a constitution is and should be primarily a negative document. ... A constitution is a series of "thou shalt

<sup>37</sup> Kirk-1998, pp. 172-74. Wilhelm Roepke writings complemented these writers. Cf: Nash-1976, pp. 180-81; Ritenour-1999, pp. 205-221. The German tradition continues in the annual journal, *Ordo*, for example, Rowley-1983, Volume 34, pp. 39-57.



**References**

- Baumgarth, W. B. (ed.) (1988)** *Saint Thomas Aquinas, On Law, Morality, and Politics*, Selections from the *Summa Theologica*, Indianapolis, Hackett.
- Berman, H. (1983)** *Law and Revolution*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press.
- Brennan, R.E. O. P. (1941)** *Thomistic Psychology*, New York, Macmillan.
- Chafuen, A.A. (1986)** *Christians For Freedom: Late-Scholastic Economics*, San Francisco, Ignatius Press; Spanish translation: Alejandro A. Chafuen, *Economía Y Ética, Raíces cristianas de la economía de libre mercado*, Madrid, Ediciones RIALP, 1991.
- Copleston, F.C. S. J. (1972)** *A History of Medieval Philosophy*, Notre Dame & London, University of Notre Dame Press.
- De Roover, R. (1974)** *Business, Banking, and Economic Thought in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, Edited by Julius Kirshner, Chicago, University of Chicago Press.
- Evans, M.S. (1962)** *Revolt on the Campus*, Chicago, Regnery.
- Evans, M.S. (1998)** "Toward a New Intellectual History," in George Carey, editor, *Freedom and Virtue: The Conservative/Libertarian Debate*, Wilmington, Delaware, Intercollegiate Studies Institute, pp. 125-134.
- Fagothey, A. S. J. (1953 [1959])** *Right and Reason*, second edition, St. Louis, C. V. Mosby Company.
- Grice-Hutchinson, M. (1952)** *The School of Salamanca. Readings in Spanish Monetary Theory, 1544-1605*, Oxford, Clarendon Press.
- Grice-Hutchinson, M. (1978)** *Early Economic Thought in Spain, 1177-1740*, London, George Allen & Unwin.
- Harmon, F.L. (1938)** *Principles of Psychology*, Milwaukee, Bruce Publishing.
- Hassett, J.D. S. J, Mitchell, R.A. S. J., & Monan, J.D. S. J. (1953)** *The Philosophy of Human Knowing*, Westminster, Md., The Newman Press.
- Hayek, F.A. (1955)** *The Counter-Revolution of Science*, Glencoe, IL, Free Press.
- Hayek, F.A (1960)** *The Constitution of Liberty*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press.
- Hoffman, R.J.S. & Levack, P. eds. (1949)** *Burke's Politics*, New York, Alfred Knopf.
- Kauder, E. (1953)** "Genesis of the Marginal Utility Theory from Aristotle to the End of the 18th Century," *Economic Journal*, Vol. 63, September, pp. 638-50
- Kauder, E. (1965)** *A History of Marginal Utility Theory*, Princeton, N. J., Princeton University Press.
- Kirk, R. (1998)** "Libertarians" in *Freedom and Virtue*, George Carey, editor, *Freedom and Virtue: The Conservative/Libertarian Debate*, Wilmington, Delaware, Intercollegiate Studies Institute, pp. 113-124.
- Leibell, J.F. ed. (1926)** *Readings in Ethics*, Chicago, Loyola University Press.

- Schumpeter, J.A. (1954)** *History of Economic Analysis*, New York, Oxford University Press.
- Spadaro, L.M. (1969)** *Economics*, Milwaukee, Bruce Publishing.
- Spadaro, L.M. (1978)** *New Directions in Austrian Economics*, Kansas City, Sheed and Ward.
- Tierney, B. (1955)** *Foundations of Conciliar Theory*, Dom David Knowles, Series Editor, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Toohy, J.T. S.J. (1946 [1952])** *Notes on Epistemology*, Ann Arbor, MI, Edwards, 1946; Washington, D. C., Georgetown University Press, 1952.
- Van Melsen, A.G. (1953)** *The Philosophy of Nature*, Pittsburgh, Duquesne University Press.
- Veatch, H.B. (1971)** *For an Ontology of Morals*, Evanston, Northwestern University Press.
- Weaver, R.M. (1948)** *Ideas Have Consequences*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press.
- White, L. Jr. (1958)** "Dynamo and the Virgin Reconsidered," *The American Scholar*, Spring, pp. 183-212.
- Yeager, L.B. (1996)** "Book Review," Review of Rothbard: Economic Thought before Adam Smith (Vol.I) and Classical Economics (Vol.II) Elgar 1995. *Review of Austrian Economics* Vol. 9, no.1, pp. 181-188.