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# International Relations and the ‘Modern’ Middle Ages: Rival Theological Theorisations of International Order

Adrian Pabst

The thesis that the secular system of modern international relations has medieval, religious roots is not new. Various accounts have documented how the Protestant Reformation and its late medieval antecedents represented a ‘revolution in ideas’ that broke away from the hierarchical arrangement of fragmented feudal polities, which was apparently characteristic of the Middle Ages, to the egalitarian society of sovereign states, which is seemingly synonymous with modernity.<sup>1</sup> Linked to this is the standard story in International Relations that views the Renaissance, the Reformation and the Discovery of the New World as a radical rupture, which replaced the ‘Dark Ages’ with a new era of enlightenment progress.<sup>2</sup> Such a supercessionist structuring of historical narrative reinforces the secularist bias that has dominated the discipline since the late 1950s and 1960s. As a result of the secularisation of international relations, the role of religion in international affairs has not so much been neglected and overlooked, as misrepresented and under-theorised.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See, *inter alia*, J.L. Holzgrefe, ‘The Origins of Modern International Relations Theory’, *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 15, no. 1 (January 1989), 11–26; Daniel Philpott, ‘The Religious Roots of Modern International Relations’, *World Politics*, Vol. 52, no. 2 (January 2000), 206–45.

<sup>2</sup> Hedley Bull, ‘The Emergence of a Universal International Society’, in Hedley Bull and Adam Watson (eds.), *The Expansion of International Society* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 117–122; Robert Jackson, *The Global Covenant: Human Conduct in a World of States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> See Adrian Pabst, ‘The secularism of post-secularity: religion, realism and the revival of grand theory in IR’, *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 38, no. 5 (December 2012), 995–1017, on which the present essay builds.

Most contemporary international relations scholarship lacks an account of both the historical influence and the contemporary relevance of *rival* theological approaches in relation to the modern international order. Recent scholarship in political thought and in the history of ideas has highlighted some of the profound continuities between the medieval and the modern period.<sup>4</sup> Building on these and other accounts, this essay explores the role of theological concepts in the genesis of modern international relations. The focus is on the contrast between the Franciscan legacy and the Dominican heritage. My argument is that the modern states system and transnational markets rest on late medieval ideas, notably Franciscan conceptions of inalienable individual rights, centrally vested sovereign power, and a natural state of anarchy that requires an artificial social contract. Against secular hegemony, which, paradoxically, can be traced to late medieval Franciscan theology, I contend that the Dominican tradition offers conceptual resources to chart an alternative modernity.

To suggest that we live in the (late) modern age assumes a particular meaning to modernity. But the modern project was never monolithic in the West, or elsewhere. On the contrary, from a global historical perspective, there was no single modernity but rather multiple and even rival modernities that were variously more secular or more religious.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, ‘we have never been modern’, as the French philosopher Bruno Latour has argued.<sup>6</sup> For modernity rests on an irresolvable *aporia* between the notion of human artifice (the social contract) and unalterable

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, André de Muralt, *L'unité de la philosophie politique. De Scot, Occam et Suarez au libéralisme contemporain* (Paris: Vrin, 2002); Francis Oakley, *Natural Law, Laws of Nature, Natural Rights: Continuity and Discontinuity in the History of Ideas* (New York: Continuum, 2005).

<sup>5</sup> See Shmuel N. Eisenstadt (ed.), *Multiple Modernities* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2002).

<sup>6</sup> Bruno Latour, *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes: essai d'anthropologie symétrique* (Paris: La Découverte, 1991); trans. *We Have Never Been Modern*, tr. Catherine Porter (New York and London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993).

nature (the violent ‘state of nature’). Crucially, there are no absolute breaks in history that inaugurate new eras which supersede preceding traditions and ideas, including the notion that Westphalia ushered in modern international affairs. If this is so, then perhaps it is also true that (late or post-)modernity is best described as the ‘modern’ Middle Ages — the intensification and extension of certain late medieval ideas rather than a wholly new phase of history. In turn, this helps explain why the shape of contemporary international relations really *is* neo-medieval but in ways that have not been conceptualised by theorists of international relations.<sup>7</sup>

The first section examines the historicist narrative of International Relations and traces it back to both Protestant and Catholic theology. The second section shows how the modern notion of secular *imperium* as an autonomous, neutral space on which the idea of the sovereign state rests, was invented and instituted by late medieval Franciscan theology, in particular the work of John Duns Scotus and William of Ockham. The third section argues that the conception of subjective, individual rights guaranteed by the sovereign state, independently of the Church, is similarly rooted in the nominalist theology of the Franciscans. This conception of rights can be contrasted with the notion of objective right (*ius*), and thus reciprocal rights and associative links between national states as contemplated by the (metaphysical) realist theology of Dominicans such as Thomas Aquinas. The fourth section focuses on the Franciscan invention of modern markets, based on sundering the immanent<sup>8</sup> order of nature from the transcendent order of the

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<sup>7</sup> See Adrian Pabst, ‘Commonwealth and Covenant: the West in a neo-medieval era of international affairs’, *Telos* No. 168 (Fall 2014), 107–31.

<sup>8</sup> The meaning of ‘immanent’ in this context refers to the idea that nature is an autonomous domain that can be studied independently and in its own right. In contrast, Francis Oakley’s usage of ‘immanent’ in chapter 4 refers to an order of nature that is defined by necessary and inherent interconnections, and which are intelligible in respect of their participation in divine reason. See ‘Secularism in Question: Hugo Grotius’s “Impious Hypothesis” Again’, 14.

supernatural Good in God, and on separating gift from contract. The conclusion suggests that the conceptual resources of the Dominican tradition can transform Franciscan modernity in the direction of a neomedieval international order wherein human beings are seen as naturally ‘social animals’ (not self-proprietors of subjective rights) and both states and markets help to promote the pursuit of the common good.

## **Beyond Westphalia: historicism and the theological sources of secular international relations**

Much of academic research and public political debate oscillates between Westphalian and post-Westphalian conceptions of international relations. The Westphalian account argues in favour of sovereign national states, equal interstate relations and non-interference in domestic affairs, which the post-Westphalian approach views as either unfeasible or undesirable (or both at once). However, these two conceptions tend to regard Westphalia as the foundation of modern international relations, and neither questions the fundamentally historicist logic that governs the dominant discourse of international relations scholarship, i.e. the assumption that there are absolute breaks in history which inaugurate new eras.

But to presuppose such breaks is profoundly problematic for a number of reasons that matter to the character of ‘modern’ international relations. First of all, it uncritically accepts the conventional periodization of Antiquity, the Middle Ages, and Modernity, which ignore deep continuities over time — whether in relation to statehood, law, or social-cultural patterns of conflict and cooperation.<sup>9</sup> Second, it embraces a supercessionist model of historical change, i.e.

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<sup>9</sup> On the continuities between Antiquity and the Middle Ages, see, for example, Julia M.H. Smith, *Europe after Rome: A New Cultural History 500–1000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), esp. 151–216, 253–92. On

the assertion that older principles and practices are superseded by more sophisticated ones. Arguably, this conception underpins both Marxist and liberal narratives of progress that dominate both the humanities and the social sciences, including much of international relations scholarship. The historian Brad Gregory puts this well: “Originally linked to strongly positive evaluations of historical progress in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, this supercessionist structuring of large-scale narratives [...] remains prevalent today”.<sup>10</sup> Variants of progressivism are all part of the Whig interpretation of history that Herbert Butterfield critiqued in his eponymous book.<sup>11</sup> By treating the modern international relations as an exemplification of historical evolution, supercessionism commits the fallacy of treating contingent events as necessary and normative.

Third, connected with this is the point that supercessionism rests on an ahistorical logic. The latter was invented by late medieval secular reason and progressively instituted by the forces of Protestant confessionalisation and the Enlightenment.<sup>12</sup> In positing absolute historical breaks — which in reality were entirely avoidable, contingent, and arbitrary — this logic is unable to demonstrate its own presupposition that the passage from the Middle Ages to the modern era

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the continuities between the Middle Ages and modernity, see Joseph R. Strayer, *On the Medieval Origins of the Modern State* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970); Thomas Ertman, *Birth of the Leviathan: Building States and Regimes in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Polity, 1997).

<sup>10</sup> Brad S. Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 10.

<sup>11</sup> Herbert Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History* (London: George Bell, 1949).

<sup>12</sup> John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory. Beyond secular reason*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006 [orig. pub. 1990]); Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); Louis Dupré, *Passage to Modernity. An essay on the hermeneutics of nature and culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993); Michael Allen Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

was somehow inevitable, necessary and normative.<sup>13</sup> History is treated as a fated and all-determining teleological process based on certain iron laws. And, precisely for this reason, the genuine alternative is not to opt for ahistorical, secular categories that are supposedly universal. Instead, it is to embrace history in such a way as to view intellectual, social, and political developments in terms of specific historical roots. For example, supposedly universal ideas and structures, such as the states system and transnational markets, can be traced genealogically to particular periods associated with the rise of nominalism in the fourteenth century, the Protestant Reformation in the late fifteenth century, and the wars of religion in the ‘long sixteenth century’ (ca. 1450-1650).<sup>14</sup> Far from representing clear historical breaks, these events form parts of a continuous historical period that spans the early fourteenth and late seventeenth centuries; and it is during this period that medieval ideas and practices achieve maturity in the ‘modern’ Middle Ages.<sup>15</sup>

Fourth, one can extend the critique of Protestant-liberal historicism and suggest that notions of *long durée* also lack historicity. The reason is that many late medieval features of the modern states system endured until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and in some instances even intensified in scope. These features are implicated in complex connections between central state coercion and global market exploitation, notably the ‘possessive individualism’ of the social

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<sup>13</sup> Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), and *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

<sup>14</sup> Dupré, *Passage to Modernity*, 15–90; Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity*, 19–43; Philpott, ‘The Religious Roots of Modern International Relations’, 206–45; and Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation*, 129–179.

<sup>15</sup> Brian Tierney, *Religion, Law, and the Growth of Constitutional Thought, 1150–1650* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Oakley, *Natural Law, Laws of Nature, Natural Rights*, 87–109.

contract, agrarian surplus extraction, and piratical forms of trade.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, the role of Protestantism and the ‘religious wars’ in bringing about the ‘modern’ Middle Ages (of which the late modern era is arguably a further extension) is complemented by an account of the Catholic roots of secularisation — from the late medieval Franciscan theology of John Duns Scotus and William of Ockham via the Baroque scholasticism of Francisco Suárez, all the way to contemporary Catholic liberalism.<sup>17</sup>

John Duns Scotus’ invention of univocity is central to the origins of modern philosophy and politics because it paved the way for bracketing the transcendent foundation and finality of the world out of the picture. His ontology of univocity and representation gradually replaced the metaphysics of analogy and participation that was central to the work of many Church Fathers and Doctors in both the Latin West and the Greek East.<sup>18</sup> Far from being an obscure theological point, this shift in ideas constituted a veritable revolution that unfolded over several centuries. From late antiquity to the high Middle Ages (to use standard periodization), Christian theologians — often in conversation with Jewish or Islamic thinkers — fused Greco-Roman

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<sup>16</sup> See Robert Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution: Commercial Change, Political Conflict and London’s Overseas Traders 1550–1653* (London: Verso, 2003); Benno Teschke, *The Myth of 1648. Class, Geopolitics, and the Making of Modern International Relations* (London: Verso, 2003), esp. 215–75.

<sup>17</sup> For some overarching accounts, see Taylor, *A Secular Age*, and Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity*.

<sup>18</sup> See Eric Alliez, *Les Temps Capitaux. Tome 1: Récits de la conquête du temps* (Paris: Editions Cerf, 1991), 269–322; Dupré, *Passage to Modernity*, esp. chap. 1; Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing. On the liturgical consummation of philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), esp. 122–31; Olivier Boulnois, *Être et représentation. Une généalogie de la métaphysique moderne à l’époque de Duns Scot (XIII<sup>e</sup>–XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle)* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1999). For an extended discussion of the character and implications of Scotist metaphysics, see Catherine Pickstock, ‘Metaphysics and the Problem of Order’, 7-21.



philosophy with biblical revelation and emphasised the participation of all particular beings in the universal being of a creative God.<sup>19</sup>

By contrast, Scotist univocity implies that all things are “bare beings” rather than things in relations to other things and their shared source in being itself. From Descartes via Newton to Kant, modern philosophy, ethics, and science tend to rest on this ontology of univocally existing beings, which are stripped of all metaphysical positioning in relation to other beings as well as common being. Crucially, this ontology establishes the primacy of individual substance over relationality — a conceptual shift that laid the foundation for the dialectical oscillation between the one and the many, and the individual and the collective. As Roland Bleiker argues, “IR theory and Western conceptualising in general have traditionally been based on the juxtaposition of antagonistic bipolar opposites”.<sup>20</sup> The dualism inaugurated by Scotus’ univocity of being was reinforced by the voluntarist and nominalist theology of William of Ockham, who makes the twin claim that will is the ultimate principle of reality (voluntarism) and that universals are merely mental concepts or names (nominalism). Ockham reinforces Scotus’ ontology by insisting on the priority of the individual over the universal and positing a radical separation of immanence from transcendence — a dualism that foreshadowed the transcendental philosophy of Descartes, Hobbes and Kant. Moreover, this separation grounded state supremacy vis-à-vis the Church within the temporal-spatial realm since the *saeculum* was not only redefined as an autonomous space separate from both God and the Church, but also subsumed under the dominance of the *imperium*.

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<sup>19</sup> See Adrian Pabst, *Metaphysics: The Creation of Hierarchy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 272–382; Oakley, ‘Secularism in Question’, 9-19.

<sup>20</sup> Roland Bleiker, ‘East-West Stories of War and Peace: Neorealist Claims in Light of Ancient Chinese Philosophy’, in Stephen Chan, Peter Mandaville and Roland Bleiker (eds.), *The Zen of International Relations* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 177–201 (quote at 181).

The invention of an autonomous secular space, which progressively came under the exclusive purview of the state, was bound up with the sundering of nature from the supernatural. This dualism grounded a host of other modern dualisms — reason and faith, nature and grace, immanence and transcendence — that separated theology from philosophy, physics, ethics, politics, and economics.<sup>21</sup> As Charles Taylor remarks in *A Secular Age*, “[o]ne of the great inventions of the West was that of an immanent order in Nature, whose working could be systematically understood and explained on its own terms”.<sup>22</sup> Over time, the idea of an autonomous order of nature bracketed God and shared transcendent ends out of the picture and reduced theological ethics to secular politics. The separation shaped the Reformation’s five *solae* — *sola scriptura* (by Scripture alone) *sola fide* (by faith alone) *sola gratia* (by grace alone), *solo Christo* (through Christ alone) and *soli Deo Gloria* (glory to God alone) — which are all founded upon an unbridgeable gulf between creation and Creator. It also informed the Counter-Reformation and the Baroque scholasticism of influential Catholic theologians such as Francisco Suárez, whose theology accentuates the autonomy of “pure nature” and thereby divorces man’s natural end from his supernatural finality. Therefore, divine grace is relegated to an extrinsic principle that is superadded to the natural realm, rather than a supernaturally infused gift that deifies nature from within, and human activity in the polity — politics and economics — is seen as increasingly autonomous and amoral.

In sum, the invention of immanent nature — on which the states system and transnational markets are based — can be traced to Protestant and Catholic theology. As Hegel wrote in a

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<sup>21</sup> Amos Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination from the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), esp. 25–63.

<sup>22</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 15.

famous paragraph from *The Philosophy of Right*, the origin of the modern state as “a self-organising rational and ethical organisation” can be attributed to the breakdown of religious unity in the West.<sup>23</sup> For reason was sundered from faith and ethics from the supernatural good in God. Significantly, these ideas, as well as cognate concepts, originated in the Franciscan tradition and gradually displaced the more reciprocalist and mutualist Dominican vision that is especially prominent in the writings of Thomas Aquinas.

## **Franciscan theology and the invention of the secular *imperium***

The modern state system rests on a number of foundational concepts and theories, notably the idea of inalienable individual rights, centrally vested sovereign power, and a natural state of anarchy that is meliorated by contractual relations within and between states. These concepts and theories can be traced genealogically to late medieval Franciscan theology, most of all to the work of Scotus and Ockham. Indeed, the notion of individual, natural rights was from the outset bound up with the absolute sovereign power of the central state that we find in different ways in the work of Hobbes, Grotius, and Kant. What, then, are the conditions of possibility for such rights?

Rights can be thought of as either relational and reciprocal (Augustine and Aquinas) or substantial and unilateral (Scotus and Ockham).<sup>24</sup> The Neoplatonist emphasis on relation is

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<sup>23</sup> The full quote is as follows: “Hence so far from its being or its having been a misfortune for the state that the church is disunited, it is only as a result of that disunion that the state has been able to reach its appointed end as a self-consciously rational and ethical organisation. Moreover, this disunion is the best piece of good fortune which could have befallen either the church or thought so far as the freedom and rationality of either is concerned”, in G.W.F. Hegel, *Elements of The Philosophy of Right*, tr. N.B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), §270.

<sup>24</sup> For a longer exposition, see Pabst, *Metaphysics*, 54–268.

evident in the work of Augustine and Aquinas, who defend the concept of the analogy of being. Accordingly, *creating* being and *created* being are analogically related but really distinct: whereas the Creator is being itself, the being of creation originates from its source, namely God. Connected with *analogia entis* are notions such as the *ens commune* and *bonum commune* in which each individual thing can participate and through which it perfects relations with other individual things. Therefore, things are fundamentally relational by participating in the common good and common being of God; and each thing has a ‘share’ in the distribution of goods, both ideational and material. Scotus ruptures the stability of this approach. First, he replaces the Augustinian-Thomist metaphysics of participation with an ontology of representation; second, he replaces a politics of objective order governed by the good with a subjective order governed by rights.<sup>25</sup> Scotus eschews relation in favour of substance, which is always already individual and entertains non-ontological, formal ties with other individual substances. The primacy of substance over reciprocal relation goes back to Duns Scotus’ ontology, notably his thesis of the univocity of being. His account abstracts from any individuating characteristics or mutual relations because all things are thought of as ‘bare beings’ rather than things in relation to other things, and their shared source in being.<sup>26</sup>

Scotus’ ontology of univocity and his politics of representation are linked to Ockham’s nominalism and voluntarism. Building on Scotus’ destruction of analogy and participation, Ockham makes the twin claim that will is the ultimate principle of reality (voluntarism) — not intellect or *logos* (intellectualism) — and that universals are merely mental concepts or names (nominalism) — not actually embodied in real things (realism). In other words, for Ockham God

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<sup>25</sup> On Scotus’ ‘double destruction’ of analogy and the real distinction, see Olivier Boulnois, ‘Analogie et univocité selon Duns Scot : la double destruction’, *Les Etudes Philosophiques*, Vol. 3 (juillet-décembre 1989): 347–69.

<sup>26</sup> John Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio (Opus oxoniense)*, II d. 1 q. 5 *textus interpolatus* and *Ord.* II d. 1 q. 5, nn. 189, 276, in C. Balic (ed.), *Ioannis Duns Scoti O.F.M. Lectura* (Vatican City: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1950).

rules over the universe by the sheer force of inscrutable divine volition, which sanctions the absolute power of kings. This view rests on the claim that God's absolute, unmediated power (*potentia Dei absoluta*) keeps all beings in separate existence, without any unifying bond of being.<sup>27</sup> The ontological priority of the individual denies the reality of universals in things: universals are but mental names (*nomina mentalia*) and not *real* things in actually existing beings. Individuality is an essential property that belongs to a thing immediately and intrinsically, and not in virtue of any relation with anything else. The whole of reality is radically singular and as such cannot communicate anything at all: "[...] there is nothing in [any two individuals] that is one and the same: whatever is in one simply and absolutely of itself is not something that exists in another".<sup>28</sup> Therefore, Ockham rejects the idea that God is the highest being in which all things participate; rather, his nominalist ontology posits a strict duality between God and all that has existence in virtue of His absolute volition.

The reason for this 'ontological individualism' is theological. Ockham contends that after the Fall, there is no metaphysical link between God and the world. Besides the individuality of each and everything, there is only the overriding absolute power of God's arbitrary will. In the post-lapsarian world, God grants humans two powers: to designate those who rule and to appropriate

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<sup>27</sup> William of Ockham, *Quodlibeta*, VI, q. vi, in *Guillelmi de Ockham. Opera Theologica*, ed. Gedeon Gál et alii, (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 1967–84), Vol. IX. Cf. William Courtenay, *Capacity and Volition: A History of the Distinction of Absolute and Ordained Power* (Bergamo: Pierluigi Lubrina, 1990), 119–26.

<sup>28</sup> "[...] nihil est unum et idem in utroque, sed quidquid est in uno simpliciter et absolute de se non est aliquid quod est in alio", in Ockham, *Ordinatio*, I d. 2 q. 6, in *Opera Theologica*, Vol. VII, 350; Ockham, *Ordinatio*, I, d. 2 q. 6, in *Opera Theologica*, Vol. VII, 350.

only individual (rather than also communal) property.<sup>29</sup> In this way, he lays the theological and philosophical foundations for the primacy of the individual over the common. Any form of commonality is now based on individual power rather than shared being that originates in God. Ockham's political thought largely reflects this theological ontology. He equates the temporal sphere with coercive jurisdiction that is a monopoly of the state, which sanctions the absolute power of kings. In consequence, ecclesiastical sentences based on papal and clerical authority have no legal force without the sanction of the secular authorities. So in the name of individual freedom and monarchical sovereign power, ecclesiastical power was subordinated to the state and the authority of the papacy is curtailed.<sup>30</sup> State sovereignty is no longer framed by the church, and religious limits on secular power are progressively loosened. As Janet Coleman argues,

secular politics not only has its own process of self-correction, but that it is independent of ecclesial power [...]. Because the temporal sphere is imperfect, he [Ockham] argued that secular sovereignty, once established, could be legitimate even when 'absolute', in that there need not be regular participation of the people in government, nor need there be institutions to restrain the power of kings.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> William of Ockham, 'Breviloquium de principatu tyrannico [On Tyrannical Rule], III, 13', in *Wilhelm von Ockham als politischer Denker und sein Breviloquium de principatu tyrannico*, ed. R. Scholz (Leipzig: SRADG, 1952), 113.

<sup>30</sup> Alain Boureau, *La Religion de l'État. La construction de la République étatique dans le discours théologique de l'Occident médiéval, 1250–1350* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2006), 111–77; cf. Brian Tierney, *The Crisis of Church & State, 1050–1300* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1964). King Louis of Bavaria used this argument, on Ockham's advice, to limit the imperial jurisdiction of the papacy in his dispute with Pope John XXII. See A.S. McGrade, *The Political Thought of William of Ockham* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 78–172, 197–206.

<sup>31</sup> Janet Coleman, 'Ockham's right reason and the genesis of the political as "absolutist"', *History of Political Thought*, XX (1999), 35–64, quote at 48 and 50.

In the wake of Scotus and Ockham, the *saeculum* was not only redefined as an autonomous space separate from both God and the Church; it was also subsumed under the dominance of the *imperium*. Ockham in particular helped to remove religious limits on secular politics and to legitimate the *de facto* absolute power of monarchs. Since the temporal realm was monopolised by the state at the expense of the Church and intermediary institutions that mediated the substantive common good as partaking of the highest good in God, Ockham's account of popular sovereignty cannot prevent monarchical absolutism. Thus, the ontology of univocal being and the theology of divine volition gave rise to one of the first and most influential conceptions of absolute state sovereignty — a model that is compatible with either monarchical or republican rule.

## **Individual natural rights and the absolute coercive power of the state**

### *Power and law in Franciscan theology*

The affirmation of subjective natural rights by Franciscan theologians such as Ockham paradoxically reinforces, rather than mitigates, the absolute power of the central sovereign. Even inalienable individual rights like the right to ownership or the power to delegate sovereignty to the ruler are ultimately alienable because property may be sold and delegation is irreversible. For inalienable individual rights are always already defined in terms of subjective right (*ius*), independently of the right use (*usus*) and the objective purpose (*finis*). The absence of ends or finalities is linked to the univocity of being that eliminates both analogy and participation in the supernatural Good of God, as I suggested earlier. By contrast, Augustine and Aquinas link individual rights to mutual obligations and thereby put the emphasis on reciprocal relationality

rather than substance. This more mutualist account of rights is connected with the idea of a substantive, just order that is upheld and perfected by good government and by the exercise of justice. In line with the participatory metaphysics of Neoplatonism, people can continuously participate in the realisation of justice through different forms of assent.

Ockham's work in the area of legal theory marks the decisive shift from objective *ius* to subjective *ius*, as Michel Villey and his followers have argued against Leo Strauss and others who claim that this shift was inaugurated by Hobbes.<sup>32</sup> For Aquinas, natural right is invested personally in each human being but denotes not so much a subjective entitlement as an objectively 'fair pattern of relationships', as Brian Tierney puts it.<sup>33</sup> In this sense, *ius* is owned in that each person has a proper 'share' in the distribution of things — both ideational and material. Therefore, *ius* is linked to the notion of an objective, ideal order in which man can participate, just as for Plato a good man who shares in the transcendent Good can also be considered to be good 'in his own right'. In short, for Aquinas (as for Augustine before him), *ius* is both subjective and objective *precisely* because it denotes the individual belonging to a wider cosmic order that is ontologically more relational and juridically more reciprocal than Ockham's conception of rights.

For much of Franciscan theology, starting with Bonaventure, individual rights are subjectively grounded in the sense that their meaning derives "not from social recognition in accordance with natural equity, but rather from a natural pre-moral fact, such as the fact of self-ownership or the

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<sup>32</sup> Michel Villey, *La formation de la pensée juridique moderne* (Paris: PUF, 2006); *idem.*, *Le droit et les droits de l'homme* (Paris: PUF, 1983); For an overview of the debate, see Francis Oakley, *Natural Law, Laws of Nature, Natural Rights: Continuity and Discontinuity in the History of Ideas* (New York: Continuum, 2005), 87–109.

<sup>33</sup> Brian Tierney, *The Idea of Natural Rights: Studies on Natural Rights, Natural Law and Church Law, 1150–1625* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm.B. Eerdmans, 1997), 170–94.



contingent *de facto* circumstance of property ownership upon which legitimacy is then positively conferred”.<sup>34</sup> Instead of being objective reciprocal rights linked to mutual obligation, individual rights become purely subjective when they are grounded in the sole capacity of the isolated individual. But isolated individuals end up clashing with one another on account of conflicting rights-based claims, and resolving such clashes requires intervention by the absolute power of a omnipotent God or a voluntaristic sovereign — or both at once. The latter applied to the distinctly late medieval and early modern idea of monarchical absolutism by divine right, which transferred God’s absolute power to that of the sovereign, as John Neville Figgis first documented.<sup>35</sup> Here again one can see the Franciscan emphasis on voluntarism and individualism that emerges out of Scotus’ univocity of being.

Moreover, Franciscan legal theory implies that only the individual right to property is inalienable, not the people’s power of electing their ruler. The reasoning is that it is the sovereign’s overriding duty to protect personal property and contractual rights. However, this raises the crucial question about whether and to what extent free subjects may alienate to the central ruler their original, natural right to self-protection. For Hobbes, sovereignty is based jointly upon the notion of originally ‘self-possessed’ individuals and on the contracts formed between them in order to ward off the threat of the other and thereby to conserve and even promote by artificial means the supposedly natural self-possession as far as possible. Later modern social contract theory — of which Franciscan theology was one of the main antecedents — makes the point that individuals trade their alienable right to self-protection for their inalienable right to ownership.

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<sup>34</sup> John Milbank, ‘Against Human Rights’, *Oxford Journal of Law and Religion* (January 2012), 1–32, quote at 19.

<sup>35</sup> The notion of the divine right of kings was an early modern innovation that departed from the patristic and medieval opposition to the sacralisation of secular power. See John Neville Figgis, *The Theory of the Divine Right of Kings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1896).

But the dialectic between natural right and social alienability ends up in an upward spiral of central state power, as the sovereign is now the supreme and sole guarantor of both security and property. This much-enhanced scope of secular power allows the ruler to suspend individual rights in the name of upholding the very order that purports to secure them. For in a ‘state of nature’ in which individuals are pitted against each other (in the wake of the Fall), private freedom and property require an alien enforcer. In this manner, Franciscan legal theory reinforces the absolutist tendency of this theologically founded political theory. The power of the absolutist monarch is itself irrevocable for just the same reason that individual right is inalienable. That is because for the sake of public order and security, all has been taken into the ruler’s *dominium* (both political and economic), and the constitutional-legal order now derives from his own self-proprietorship.

Crucially, secular power does not flow from the sovereignty of the persons, households and city-states that together make up society — never mind from the Church, which for much of patristic and medieval theology was seen as a polity in her own right that together with the state co-constitutes the public realm. Such a conception means that the Church as a suasive authority, which derives from beyond the political and beyond the human, is granted an important political status in such a way that it can speak truth to power and transform the state in accordance with transcendent principles. Otherwise, only coercive power is granted any political status and political authority becomes tautologous within a circle ultimately closed by mere force (as for Machiavelli and, to a lesser extent, Hobbes). Notions of legitimate rule and public morality are henceforth defined in predominantly nominalist and voluntarist terms that sidestep any questions of substantive unity or normative purpose beyond defending the power of the sovereign from both internal and external threats. Thinkers such as Jean Bodin or Francisco Suárez who were

influenced by Franciscan ideas defended a conception of politics and law that ascribes sovereign power to the secular state, which is the ultimate arbiter over individual rights.

By contrast, in patristic and medieval Christendom there was an attempt to create a balance between emperor and pope/patriarch on both spiritual and earthly matters that concern both state and Church. Starting with St Paul, credal Christianity viewed secular rule as confined to the temporal *saeculum* (destined to pass into God's Kingdom) and falling inside the Church insofar as it concerns justice and the orientation of human existence to the supernatural Good in God. In the late fifth and early sixth century, Pope Gelasius I emphasised the distinction between the two swords (ecclesial *auctoritas* and secular *dominium*). In the same spirit, St John Chrysostom rejected both the sacralization of the state and the secularisation of the Church. Thus both the Latin West and the Greek East shared a similar conception of politics and common law as secular (in the sense of belonging to the *saeculum*) without however being divorced from faith and canon law.

For example, Augustine and Aquinas argued for objective rights as part of a just order whose shared ends are ultimately underwritten by both secular and religious authority. Thus legitimacy and moral standing are inextricably intertwined with the nature of the wider order that the ruler has a duty to uphold — the pursuit of the common good through the exercise of justice and other virtues. The provisionality of politics (after the Fall) means that the state is autonomous and has its own integrity but that its coercive powers need to be counter-balanced by the persuasive powers of the Church. In turn, this involves a different conception of the complex ties between the visible, institutional church and the invisible, mystical Church — away from centralism and the autocratic tendencies of the post-Gregorian papacy towards greater collegiality and the participation of the faithful in the wider governance of the church and the political realm. This was suggested by Aquinas and in particular by Nicholas of Cusa who argued in favour of a

balance between hierarchy and authority of the clergy on the one hand, and consent, representation and participation of the laity on the other.<sup>36</sup> In this manner, the idea of the Church as a polity not only qualifies the power and authority of the state as something less than absolute and final but also holds secular law and politics to universally objective and transcendent standards of truth – even if these are never fully known and always deeply contested. From this paradoxical perspective, state sovereignty is ultimately provisional.

According to natural law and not just natural right, the sovereign authority is only ‘subjecting’ men because it is obliged to offer them the gift of good co-ordination of diverse talents and needs. St Paul de-sacralised and redefined human rule as only concerned with justice and not with the totemic protection of religious power or a sacrally bounded domain (all *termini* being in origin sacred) – hence no ‘human animal’ can fall outside this beneficent subjecting (in principle) which is in excess of contract. For this reason, the Christian principles of polity stand totally opposed to any idea of the ‘nation state’ as the ultimate unit, and rather favour at once natural pre-given persons and interpersonal relationships on the one hand, and the universal human ‘cosmic city’ on the other.

### *Westphalia and the consecration of contractual relations between sovereign states*

As I have already suggested, the shift toward nominalist-voluntarist ontology that was inaugurated by Franciscans such as Duns Scotus and Ockham is at the root of both secular

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<sup>36</sup> See Brian Tierney, *Religion, Law, and the Growth of Constitutional Thought, 1150–1650* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Francis Oakley, *The Conciliarist Tradition: Constitutionalism in the Catholic Church, 1300–1870* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Johannes Hoff, *The Analogical Turn. Rethinking Modernity with Nicholas of Cusa* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm.B. Eerdmans, 2013).

rationality and the secularism that pervades international relations scholarship. Jürgen Habermas recognises as much but judges this evolution in a largely positive light:

the move from Duns Scotus to [Ockham's] nominalism does not merely lead to the Protestant voluntarist deity [*Willensgott*] but also paves the way for modern natural science. Kant's transcendental turn leads not only to a critique of the proofs of God's existence but also to the concept of autonomy which first made possible our modern European understanding of law and democracy. Moreover, historicism does not necessarily lead to a relativistic self-denial of reason. As a child of the Enlightenment, it makes us sensitive to cultural differences and prevents us from over-generalizing context-dependent judgments.<sup>37</sup>

*Contra* Habermas, this essay argues that the Franciscan emphasis on nominalism and voluntarism paves the way for the secular settlement of the system of states. What links Ockham to Hobbes, Locke and later thinkers in the tradition of social contract theory is the Franciscan theological legacy of a voluntaristic conception of the Creator.<sup>38</sup> Accordingly, God's absolute power is mirrored in the absolute power of the sovereign, including the protection of natural rights that are seen predominantly as individual and inalienable. In this manner, rights are subjective and disconnected from any sense of a wider cultural and cosmic order wherein they are linked to use and purpose — as for Augustine, Aquinas and the Dominican tradition after him. Whereas the latter accentuate the objective nature of personal rights and their reciprocal obligations, the Franciscan conception of rights emphasises individual rights that are upheld by the absolute power of the state.

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<sup>37</sup> Jürgen Habermas, 'An Awareness of What is Missing', in J. Habermas *et al.*, *An Awareness of What is Missing: Faith and Reason in a Post-Secular Age*, tr. Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge: Polity, 2010), 15–23, quote at 22–23.

<sup>38</sup> Francis Oakley, 'The Absolute and Ordained Power of God in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Theology', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 59, no. 3 (1998), 437–461; and *idem.*, 'The Absolute and Ordained Power of God in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries: Philosophy, Science, Politics and Law', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 59, no. 4 (1998), 669–690.

The same theological shift from high medieval realism and intellectualism to late medieval nominalism and voluntarism led to the emergence of the ‘modern’ Middle Ages that we commonly describe as modernity. To recapitulate briefly, this shift is associated with the passage from the Neo-Platonism of Augustine and Thomas Aquinas to the neo-Aristotelianism of John Duns Scotus and William of Ockham, as the previous sections outlined. For Augustine and Aquinas, the world describes an order of being that is governed by transcendent universals (or divine ideas), which are present in immanent particular things (realism) and as such knowable to the human mind (intellectualism). For Ockham, by contrast, universals are just mental concepts/names (nominalism) with which the human intellect cognises the structure of the world that reveals the power of God’s will (voluntarism) rather than patterns or traces of the divine *Logos*.

Politically, the nominalist-voluntarist ontology of Ockham — by separating the natural order of immanence from the supernatural order of transcendence — introduces a series of antagonistic binary opposites such as natural reason *versus* supernatural faith or unalterable, created nature *versus* the artificial, human construct of society. Instead of discovering and perfecting a pre-given political order that is open to the transcendent supernatural Good in God, human rationality is henceforth concerned with constructing a new politics — as in Machiavelli or Hobbes. Paradoxically, their political ‘realism’ is rooted in the nominalist mode of Franciscan theology that rests on what Michael Oakeshott poignantly termed “will and artifice”.<sup>39</sup> By encompassing both the ethical and the religious, such a new account of ‘the political’ inaugurates the modern phase of the Middle Ages, notably the secular settlement of sovereign states,

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<sup>39</sup> Michael Oakeshott, ‘Introduction’, in Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan or the Matter, Forme and Power of a Commonwealth Ecclesiasticall and Civil* (1651), ed. M. Oakeshott (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1960).

contractual relations governing the transnational marketplace and individual rights at the heart of mainstream IR theories.

## **Franciscan theology and the invention of modern markets**

Like the modern state system, the modern market rests on a number of concepts and theories that are rooted in the nominalist and voluntarist mode of Franciscan theology. These concepts include the separation of contract from gift and risk from reward, the lifting of ethical restrictions on usurious practices, and the growing autonomy of commerce vis-à-vis social and civic life. As with individual, subjective rights and the purpose or finality of ‘just order’, Franciscan theologians stress unilateral contract and the primacy of utility over goodness. This contrasts with the reciprocal arrangements that are a part of the Dominican tradition, linking economic value more closely to social reciprocity and individual profit to the shared common good. Coupled with other conceptual innovations, Franciscan ideas on contract and capital provided some of the intellectual building blocks for transnational markets, which gradually became disembedded from social ties and civic bonds.<sup>40</sup> After Westphalia, transnational markets increasingly converged with national states to form a new system of power that progressively subsumed the institutions of empire, church and city-states. But, just as the modern states system was not invented at Westphalia, so too the modern system of capitalist markets was not founded by Calvinism or the Protestant work ethic. The previously neglected role of the Franciscan tradition in the history of economic thought is now increasingly well-established, and a number of studies have corrected the Weberian narrative on the origins of capitalism, which has been

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<sup>40</sup> Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2001 [1944]).

influential in IR.<sup>41</sup> But deep disagreements persist over whether Franciscan thought promoted moral markets by linking social value to economic profit, or whether it facilitated the rise of the capitalist logic by subjecting both production and money to exchange rather than use value.

In the second half of the thirteenth century the Franciscan Pietro du Giovanni Olivi redefines usury in more narrow terms, such that merchants can engage in wider forms of money-lending without falling foul of the laws banning usurious practices. In his *Treatise on Commerce, Money-lending and Repayment*, he argues that it is licit to distinguish between loans linked to production and money lent for other purposes. While the latter could be seen as forms of usury, the former should be viewed as a compensation for losses incurred by the merchant. As Oreste Bazzichi suggests his commentary of Olivi, “Those damages, with their two components of forestalled profits and resulting harm, were expressed with the word ‘interest’, derived from the Roman law term of the same meaning”.<sup>42</sup> However, the point that Bazzichi underplays is that Olivi treats money not merely as a medium of exchange aimed at facilitating production and trade and therefore shared benefits but rather as something that has value in its own right which lends itself to profit-making. In the words of Olivi: “that which in the firm intention of its owner is ordained to some probable gain does not only possess the character of money or a thing straightforward, but beyond this a certain seminal reason of profitability which we usually call “capital”.<sup>43</sup> Unlike Aquinas, who limits money-lending for productive purposes and regards

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<sup>41</sup> See, *inter alia*, Joseph Schumpeter, *History of Economic Analysis*, reprint (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986; Oreste Bazzichi, *Alle radici del capitalismo. Medioevo e scienza economica* (Turin: Effatà Editrice, Cantalupa, 2003); Ernesto Screpanti and Stefano Zamagni, *An Outline of the History of Economic Thought*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Dotan Leshem, *The Origins of Neoliberalism. Modeling the Economy from Jesus to Foucault* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).

<sup>42</sup> Quoted in Bazzichi, *Alle radici del capitalismo*, 101.

<sup>43</sup> Peter Olivi, *De Usuris*, Dubium 6.



other forms as usury, Olivi opens up a space for speculative capital. This conception introduces a split in the economy between that which pursues the common good and that which merely serves self-interest, and it tends to remove ethical limitations on certain financial transactions. Just as the secular state comes to dominate the Church, so too the market is sundered from a wider ‘divine economy’.

Olivi’s argument in favour of speculative capital was taken further by his contemporary Duns Scotus, whose (theologically cogent) insistence on ‘human usefulness’ as a criterion for economic value did not stop him from arguing for the remuneration of merchants. While one might see this as a proper form of reciprocity, it is nevertheless the case that Scotus emphasises the individual entitlement of the merchant to profit and that the judgement of what constitutes a useful service to the community is not subject to communal determination. Alessandro Bonini (also known as Alexander of Alexandria) —Scotus’ successor as bishop of Paris and minister general of the Franciscan order — extended the logic of financial capital that had been invented by his fellow Franciscans. In his treatise *On Usury* (1302) he effectively ignored the canonical condemnation of usurious practices by arguing that profit from monetary transactions involving money lending “is necessary for those who travel in different places for commerce, without which there is no social life”.<sup>44</sup> In this manner a whole range of financial and credit operations were hereafter seen as legitimate.

Another Franciscan theologian, Gerald Odonis, argued in the fourteenth century that lenders retain ownership of the loans they disburse and that the interest charged is therefore a kind of rent rather than a profit. This claim follows the same secular logic as Olivi, Scotus and Bonini in shifting the emphasis away from reciprocity and mutual benefit (as part of a participatory

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<sup>44</sup> Quoted in Bazzichi, *Alle radici del capitalismo*, 114.

metaphysics) to individual regard for profit and unilateral, subjective control (as part of a univocal ontology). Linked to this shift in thinking is the focus on representing immanent exchange value rather than embodying a share of the transcendent good that is distributively present in all things. In the Dominican tradition, questions of money-lending and ownership are seen in more reciprocal and mutual terms. Lending at a certain interest rate is not merely a matter of individual utility or (risk of) loss, but rather involves both a measure of co-investment and a gradual transfer of ownership. For this reason, risk and reward are closely connected, and the benefits of an investment (based on a loan) should be shared between the borrower and the lender.

Bound up with this distributist vision is the accentuation of just price, proper use, and true human ends. Objective human flourishing, not subjective rights or individual utility, is the right finality of economic activity. Far from being a mere instrument in generating wealth, for Aquinas and his fellow Dominicans the market could and should reflect social norms that promote human flourishing, from food and shelter via education to honour and esteem.

Franciscan theology laid the conceptual foundations for an increasingly capitalist market in the sense of being disembedded from both social bonds and ethical constraints. Hence John Milbank rightly remarks in relation to the contribution of Franciscan thought: “one theoretical building-block of ‘capitalism’ is indeed in place here”.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> John Milbank, ‘A Real Third Way: For a New Meta-Narrative of Capitalism and the Associationist Alternative’, in A. Pabst (ed.), *The Crisis of Global Capitalism: Pope Benedict XVI’s social encyclical and the future of political economy* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 27–70 (quote at 43).

Recent studies have documented the extent to which the work of Olivi, Scotus, Bonini and Odone shaped other Franciscan figures, such as Bernadino of Siena and Nicola Oresme.<sup>46</sup> The ‘economic theology’ they invented was further elaborated by Baroque scholastics such as Francisco Suárez and ultimately paved the way for the ‘marginalist revolution’ in the 1870s that gave rise to the neo-classical economics of both the Austrian and later the Chicago schools of economics.<sup>47</sup> Common to this tradition of economic thought is the idea that utility maximisation is the overriding goal and that it takes the form of commodities consumed by individuals in isolation — independently of just price, proper use, and the true human end of flourishing through the participation in the supernatural good of God.

Two key conceptual innovations laid the intellectual foundations of modern markets and the earliest observable germs of capitalism. First of all, Scotus’ theology erased the ontological difference between Creator and creation, and replaced the metaphysics of analogy and participation with an ontology of univocity and representation. Ockham extended this by substituting the will for the intellect and mental names for real universals in things. Instead of viewing everything as potentially participating in the good of God, the Franciscan tradition invented a new immanent plateau of being — a universal *mathēsis* of abstract and spatialized relations wherein individual substances are bound together not by a metaphysical relationality but by formal and procedural links. As Joel Kaye has shown, the new account of nature in the late thirteenth and the fourteenth century was shaped decisively by a growing monetisation of

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<sup>46</sup> Giacomo Todeschini, *I mercanti e il tempio* (Bologna: Edizioni il Mulino, 2002); Giovanni Ceccarelli, *Il gioco e il peccato* (Bologna: Edizioni il Mulino, 2003).

<sup>47</sup> Alejandro A. Chafuen, *Faith and Liberty. The Economic Thought of the Late Scholastics* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2003), 13–29; Adrian Pabst, ‘On the Theological Origins of the Secular Market State’, in Roberto Scazzieri and Raffaella Simili (eds.), *The Migration of Ideas* (Sagamore Beach, MA: Watson International Publishing, 2008), 99–122.

European society.<sup>48</sup> There was a mutually reinforcing convergence between ideational and material changes, as both ontology and economics were increasingly separated from theology and come under the purview of a new science of natural philosophy and physics. Based upon measurement, gradation, and the quantification of qualities, this new science shifted the emphasis from questions of proper use, shared ends and a just order towards issues of individual utility, subjective control and unilateral arrangements.

The second conceptual innovation that helped give rise to the modern capitalist market was the sundering of nature from the supernatural, which Ockham's late medieval nominalism inaugurated and the Baroque scholasticism of the Counter-Reformation brought to full fruition. According to Suárez, the autonomy of "pure nature" implies that man's natural end is divorced from his supernatural finality. Consequently, economy and society are separated from divine deification, which means that both state and market are seen as increasingly autonomous and amoral. That the market is thus viewed as morally neutral helps to explain why modern Catholicism is largely compatible with the secular liberalism and capitalism that Max Weber imputes almost exclusively to the Protestant Reformation. For a morally neutral market is compatible with the sole promotion of individual freedom at the expense of fraternal solidarity and the "preferential option for the poor." The latter is a key element of Catholic social teaching that is ignored by the neo-Baroque position of contemporary Catholic commentators, in particular George Weigel and Michael Novak.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Joel Kaye, *Economy and Nature in the Fourteenth Century: Money, Market Exchange, and the Emergence of Scientific Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

<sup>49</sup> On this misreading of the Catholic Christian tradition, see Adrian Pabst, 'Introduction: the future of political economy', in *The Crisis of Global Capitalism*, 1–18.

Crucially, the entire tradition of modern economics — from its origins in late medieval Franciscan theology via Baroque scholasticism to the Austrian and the Chicago schools — views markets as abstracted from the communal and associationist ties of intermediary institutions. It thereby severs both production and exchange from the civic virtues that are embodied in various forms of human association and from the moral sentiments that govern interpersonal relations. The modern states system and transnational markets are rooted in this nominalist and voluntarist mode. By contrast, Dominican theology, exemplified by Aquinas, shaped an alternative tradition that includes the Cambridge Platonists, the Neapolitan Enlightenment, and nineteenth-century Russian political economy. This tradition focuses on reciprocal and mutual arrangements that reflect the shared pursuit of the common good in which all can participate. Notions of international society or a family of nations dimly reflect this (metaphysical) realist and intellectualist mode. Thus, both the dominant models of modern international relations and the hitherto more marginal alternative vision rest on late medieval theological traditions. And in this sense we can speak of the ‘modern’ Middle Ages rather than a whole new phase of history.

### **The neo-medieval shape of international affairs**

The tradition of Franciscan theology is central to the late medieval ‘imagination’ that has shaped much of modern thought, including dominant ways of thinking about international relations. Individual subjective rights and the absolute power of the central sovereign have privileged purely contractual relations within and between states. The states system and transnational markets have enshrined the priority of abstract principles and procedural processes over substantive ties and a commitment to shared ends. Crucially, the Franciscan legacy is wedded to an international system that repeatedly re-produces the very conditions of anarchy and violence which it purports to overcome.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> See Pickstock, ‘Metaphysics of International Order’, 25-6.

But among the many shortcomings of the modern states system and modern markets is the idea of a purely formal alliance of nations that share only formal principles in common — whether the cessation of hostilities after the Thirty Year War, or the balance of power following the Vienna Congress, or again human rights and democracy in the post-1945 era. Neither international treaties nor international organisations, such as the League of Nations and the United Nations, have created lasting peace because in different ways they suffer a double deficit that is doubly linked. First, merely formal principles impede parties to a treaty or members of organisations from debating and developing any substantive account of a shared polity that is constituted by social bonds and cultural ties, and not just by rights and contracts. Second, merely formal alliances ensure that treaties and organisations lack any real power of enforcing agreements, unity, or even peace. The mutual linkage between formal principles and formal powers arise because principles of themselves engender no concrete unity, while mere contract — which is divorced from the power of enforcement — fails to generate any substantive agreement.

Partly for this reason, older and more mutualist notions of ‘international society’ or ‘family of nations’ (connected with the fusion of Christian realism with the English School of IR) are coming once again to the fore in both academic research and public debate.<sup>51</sup> Arguably we now live in a neo-medieval era insofar as we have outlived the hegemony of national states and

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<sup>51</sup> Cf. Charles A. Jones, ‘Christian Realism and the Foundations of the English School’, *International Relations*, Vol. 17, no. 3 (2003), 371–87; Adrian Pabst, ‘The secularism of post-secularity: religion, realism and the revival of grand theory in IR,’ *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 38, no. 5 (2012), 995–1017; Jodok Troy, *Christian Approaches to International Relations* (London: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2013); John Milbank and Adrian Pabst, *The Politics of Virtue. Post-liberalism and the Human Future* (London: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2016).

transnational markets.<sup>52</sup> International affairs really *are* neo-medieval in the sense that they combine the pre-modern legacy of overlapping jurisdictions and multiple membership with a contemporary focus on transnational networks as well as the institutions and actors of ‘global civil society’. It is nonetheless equally clear that a statist international order remains dominant. But the end of the bipolar international order and the continuous crisis of the capitalism suggest that sovereign states and capitalist markets are inherently unstable because they bring about the very anarchy that was their own presupposition. Even if, as Christopher Dawson notes, there was a medieval rift between an ecclesial ‘society of peace’ and an imperial ‘society of war’, the former had a tendency to temper the latter at the international level when the enduring ties of faith and culture could provide bonds of trust, cooperation, and reconciliation.<sup>53</sup> Thus the question is about which tradition can transform the present and shape the future. However unlikely it may appear to scholars of international relations, the emphasis on reciprocal and mutual arrangements in Dominican theology can provide some key conceptual resources for a new vision of international affairs that reflects the embeddedness of states and markets in socio-cultural and religious ties.

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<sup>52</sup> See, *inter alia*, Joseph A. Camilleri and Jim Falk, *The End of Sovereignty?: The Politics of a Shrinking and Fragmenting World* (Aldershot: Edward Elgar, 1992); Robert Cooper, *The Breaking of Nations: Order and Chaos in the Twenty-First Century* (London: Atlantic Press, 2003).

<sup>53</sup> Christopher Dawson, *The Judgment of the Nations* (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011).