

Political Economy as if People Mattered! Part 2



By Steven Yates

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[More apologies to the ghost of E.F. Schumacher.]

Click here for [Part 1](#),

Back to Basics: from Aristotle and Aquinas to the Scientific Revolution.

The first three words above were the title of one of my favorite sermons, from around eight years ago. The main text was from the Apostle Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, penned around 56 A.D. The church Paul founded in Corinth was in trouble. Against his counsel, its membership had divided into factions. There was sexual immorality. There was idolatry. They lived in what was by the standards of the time a thriving metropolis. Many church members enjoyed the trappings of material prosperity. They had become *worldly*, that is, thinking that because of their successes they could stand on their own (the mistake made by every form of secular humanism).

There is something about worldly success – *economic* success – that throws us off track.

The Corinthians had lost sight of how Christ died for *them*, how monumental of a sacrifice that was, and what it demanded of them in terms of how to worship and live. They had become

distracted, fallen into pointless squabbles, and imperiled their institution's long term survival. Not to mention tarnishing the reputation of Christians generally.

They'd forgotten the *basics*!

Have we, too – Westerners, that is – lost the basics? Become distracted by ideas that disintegrate when looked at carefully and critically? Embraced agendas that are divisive and destructive?

This is a no-brainer!

A few non-Christian philosophers have gotten things right in essence. Consider Aristotle. He realized how human beings are political as well as moral beings: meant to live in communities or *polises*, guided by reason, their lives directed toward virtue.

The Stoics, too, got many things right. Stoic physics saw the *Logos*: a world of inherent order, which a Christian would expect if the world was the product of design and not chance. Stoic logic outlined our best thought about our perceptions of the world. Stoic ethics then offered counsel on how to accept and live peacefully in a world that often fails to meet our personal expectations: be it the world of our fellow humans or just the natural order which seems indifferent or even hostile to us (see Gen. 3:17-19). First century Christians and Stoics saw each other as competitors. This is unfortunate, because the two complement one another in many respects. Early Christians, based on their public experiences with the resurrected Jesus Christ, offered the living, personal God who is absent from Stoicism. Stoicism, on the other hand, offered down-to-earth advice on how to live day-by-day in a fallen world. A Stoic-Christian philosophical theology would counsel: *focus on what you can control and leave the rest to God*.

Twelve hundred years later, St. Thomas Aquinas tried to unify the Roman Catholicism and the Aristotelianism of his day.

Among the results was natural law philosophy and ethics. There are definite, discoverable realities in God's universe: repeated patterns that permeate the world. Then there is what we should *do*, if we wish lives of peace and genuine prosperity, starting with recognizing truth and righteousness to be found in following the Christ whose Kingdom is not of this world while shunning their opposites, found in this secular world.

Aquinas still understood the *basics*.

Arguably, without his pivotal contributions, the scientific revolution would not have happened. Nothing quite like it ever happened before (that we know of), nor did it happen anywhere else in the world where peoples had myriad *crafts* that solved specific problems for them but not an enterprise that sought *explanations* of phenomena.

Science, after all, presupposes the reality of ordered patterns in nature, discoverable by the human mind. This, I argue, is *a priori*: independent of experience and experiment. We'd never attempt physical science if we didn't first believe that physical order exists to be discovered and that our minds are capable of rising to the task – however imperfectly. We presuppose further that what we discern and understand is not simply imposing language on the world (nominalism) nor establishing a cultural artifact differing from place to place (cultural relativity).

Enlightenment philosophy compromised all this – ironically, by philosophers who thought they were advancing scientific understanding. They removed God, not realizing that they would be removing the *basics*. They would replace Him not with science but The Science, a secular icon and cultural artifact. As industrialism got underway, other elements of Western civilization would replace God with State, Money/Success/the Market, Self, Sex, or some other surrogate.

The Basics Lost: Cartesian and Enlightenment Rationalism.

Arguably, the first error was committed by the French philosopher René Descartes whose quest for (an unattainable) epistemic certainty led him to invent the autonomous rational intellect: a “thinking thing” liberated from its personal history including family and culture; from emotion; and from all else that makes us organically human.

For Western philosophy, this was a disaster! Philosophy ceased to be about the *basics*, able to evaluate worldviews and offer counsel. It got lost in abstractions and eventually became an academic decoration.

The Cartesian autonomous intellect became the ancestor of *homo economicus*, the atomized rational, self-interested economic actor and consumer who was *perfect* for a life of consumption and obedience to secular authority as an industrial peasant in a mostly anonymous civilization built on perversions of the older rules of order.

That order, steeped in *classical* philosophy (Aristotle, Aquinas, etc.) and applied to *polises*, held that there were natural hierarchies, especially of institutions. Inverting these hierarchies leads to disruption. Faith and family were *meant* to stand above political economy: not the reverse. When political economy *defines* civilization, this introduces distortions. Over time and generations, distortions worsen.

Civilization ceases to contain a state and a marketplace. It *becomes* an unholy fusion of the two: a *corporate state*, or *corporatocracy*.

We’ve always had rich and poor. Both believed they answered to God and would be judged. By the twentieth century, the rich no longer believed they had any reason to think they answered to anyone other than (perhaps) each other. Judgment? If they ever thought about it (most did not), they’d say, “We have no idea.” So, they began doing as they pleased. They created,

e.g., central banking, which made use of the fractional reserve banking their recent ancestors invented to ensure accumulations of unearned wealth. Eventually they designed a political economy that would thwart the developing middle class and redistribute wealth upwards. They would cynically proclaim, “This is the free market at work,” “Markets know best,” and “There is no alternative.”

We ended up with today’s state of affairs: a group of people who would fit comfortably into our living rooms controls more wealth than the bottom 90 percent of the world’s population.

But we’re well ahead of ourselves. We’ve at best a *partial* diagnosis of how we lost the *basics*.

The Rise and Fall of Modernity.

Auguste Comte, founder of sociology and of the philosophical ideology of positivism (which saw The Science as the sole path to truth), outlined his [Law of Three Stages](#). His way of describing the first two indicates what he thought of them: respectively, “theological or fictitious” and “metaphysical and abstract.”

The Third Stage was “scientific and positive.” Third Stage thinking, I’ve called it, was the brainchild of Enlightenment philosophers from Voltaire down through Kant and LaPlace. The latter spoke of God with a clinical, “*Je n’ai pas besoin de cette hypothèse* (I have no need of that hypothesis).”

Modernity embodies the following: *secularism*, a focus on *this* world, not some world to come; *scientific method* as the sole reliable means of discovering truth about this world; *technological change* as a given as we solve problems in this world; *commerciality* and a transactional approach to life as we sell our solutions in the marketplace; *public education* to inculcate the right attitudes in the next generation, especially acceptance of the industrial system and its unstated rules; and a *firm commitment* to the idea that the

future will be better than the past because we're standing on our own and we'll make it so.

Modernity doesn't oppose religion as such. Not if it stays in its place (the margins). Modernity sets religious institutions aside as irrelevant. As Harvey Cox put it in his exposé *The Secular City* penned back in the 1960s, it "bypasses religion and goes on to other things."

Comte and his intellectual disciples envisioned universal progress, based on scientific method as they understood it to all areas of life including human persons and society. They were the first Technocrats, before that term was coined. They believed the methods that had proven so successful in physics and chemistry could be applied essentially unchanged to the study of human beings and the redesign of societies. Which meant: *control*, unchained from morally-grounded limits.

Dostoevsky and Nietzsche, who'd never heard of one another, issued very similar warnings of the impending collapse of the moral view of the universe we'd inherited from the Christian worldview. The former: "If God does not exist, everything is permitted." The latter described the "death of God" and warned of an "advent of nihilism" in which we must create "new values" for a materialist world in which, after death, we become worm food.

The century to come saw great technological progress. No one questions that. Societal and moral progress? We saw no "revaluation of all values" that Nietzsche had called for. We saw instead the two most destructive wars in human history (the Great War, as it was then called; and World War II). Arguably there was *some* moral progress, which piggybacked on the strong economy of the 1950s combined with residual Christianity (to which Dr. King, for example, appealed).

The 1950s and 1960s gave Americans a high-trust society. Despite its failure to bring about a more peaceful world,

modernity seemed vindicated in the face of detractors like Aldous Huxley who warned of its Technocratic permutations and their dangers (*Brave New World*, 1932; *Brave New World Revisited*, 1958). Technology was making life better and better!

Then, slowly, over ensuing decades, it all fell apart. We'd utterly forgotten the *basics*. Now, the specter of Technocracy looms over us like a colossus.

The American Dream Collapses.

Most Americans were schooled on the idea of representative government answerable to the governed. We do hold elections, right?

But if both major parties are controlled by moneyed interests and what Eisenhower called the military-industrial complex, voting won't change anything (and usually doesn't).

The need to preserve the fantasy of representative democracy distorted education and media. Both became sources of indoctrination and gaslighting, speaking of *democracy* while preparing students to live in an increasingly regimented world in which in which their worth as persons would be tied to their ability to help an employer make money and/or what they could accumulate in their bank accounts, portfolios, and wallets.

Today, of course, the "worth" of, say, an Instagram "influencer" is her number of followers, measuring her success at getting responses to "Look at me! Look at me! Look at me!"

The story of how we got here has been told many times over.

On a larger scale, our situation is one in which billionaires in corner offices can say to each other, "Let's make a deal!" and suddenly tens of thousands or even hundreds of thousands of people are out of work because their jobs just went to a

cheap labor country – or been automated out of existence. Neither billionaires nor the politicians they buy and sell see peasants as having intrinsic value.

As noted [a couple weeks ago](#), if there's a class war, the super-rich are winning it, no contest. Inflation – caused primarily by Fed money printing – has destroyed the currency's purchasing power, while not raising wages for the industrial peasantry. Housing, healthcare, insurance, college, and new vehicles, are increasingly priced out of the ordinary person's reach.

Nor can he have a family, or rear children; these, too, are priced out of reach.

The billionaire class gets billions richer each year. Elon Musk's net worth in 2012 was \$2 billion. This year it's risen to \$495.6 billion (I don't have a specific date for these figures, so by now they might be higher). Jeff Bezos was worth \$18.4 billion in 2012; today his net worth is \$233.7 billion. In 2012 Mark Zuckerberg's wealth stood at \$17.5 billion. Today it stands at \$245.2 billion. These are just three obvious examples.

Minimum wages haven't budged. With currency debauchment fueling inflation, life for the peasantry gets ever more precarious. Homelessness in the U.S. hit an all-time high in 2024. Others are "affording" homes, utilities, vehicles, etc., by going deeper into debt. American households carry \$18.4 trillion in debt; 70 percent of this is mortgage debt. Credit card debt stands at \$1.2 trillion. Student loan debt is over \$1.6 trillion. All of these figures are going up, some of them rapidly. ([Source.](#))

Small wonder Gen Z is giving up on the "American Dream" and would probably agree with George Carlin's [assessment](#), however profane (scroll to 1:30).

Neoliberal ideology, perhaps the most aggressive exemplar of

economics über Alles, declares that the poor and the precarious are in the condition they are in due to their own bad choices. To be sure, some people *do* make bad choices – often because they grew up in dysfunctional families and never had the moral or practical guidance that might have helped them make better choices. And because of that inverted hierarchy we mentioned above, which places politics and economics above faith and family.

Interlude: the Paleoconservative Rebellion.

As far as I can tell, only those increasingly rare creatures who known as *paleoconservatives* figured much of this out. Probably the most visible author who fits that label is Patrick J. Buchanan, who penned books like *A Republic, Not an Empire* (1999) and *Suicide of a Superpower* (2011). Others, far less visible (and whose books are a great deal denser than Buchanan's) are Paul Gottfried who coined the term, Clyde Wilson (a leading authority on John C. Calhoun), John Derbyshire, Samuel T. Francis, Thomas Fleming, Peter Brimelow, and Joseph Sobran. Since founding his own online network and giving airtime to a variety of dissident scholars and personalities, Tucker Carlson probably qualifies for admission to this group.

In political economy, paleoconservatives oppose *both* hypercapitalism and socialism. They are suspicious of globalization, and open borders. They tend to be “conspiratorial” and can outline their reasons. They reject Zionism and criticize the unquestioned support for Israel by both Republican and Democratic administrations. They look askance on the dual American-Israeli citizenship of several of their arch-foes the *neoconservatives* (or *neocons*). They oppose foreign interventionism and wars for regime change in nations that haven't attacked or threatened the U.S.

As far as cultural issues go, they reject abortion as murder, almost as if they realized that the dehumanizing of the unborn

is the dehumanizing of the *most* vulnerable (see Jeremiah 1:5). They reject other trappings of feminism, the mainstreaming of homosexuality, “trans” rights as based on fantasy, and so on.

So what are they *for*? The answer takes us *back to the basics*. We cannot do without a sense of the Transcendent, even if some of us see it differently than others. We should be realists about natural categories and respect the land which is ultimately the source of life, via agriculture. Our lives and organizations should reflect those natural hierarchies of family and faith over state and market. Paleoconservatives are not Utopians. We are fallen people in a fallen world, and this suggests limits on social experimentation. We’re not God. When we try to be God, we invariably not only fail but leave a trail of destruction in our wake.

Sadly, most paleoconservative efforts have been ignored. When not ignored, they are denounced as backward, racist, sexist, homophobic, antisemitic, etc.: the full range of canards easily drawn from the left wing bestiary.

Summation of Part 2: the Suicide of the West.

This is the end / beautiful friend. This is the end / my only friend, the end. Of our elaborate plans, the end. Of everything that stands, the end. I'll never look into your eyes, again.

—The Doors, “The End,” 1967

If the purpose of civil rights was to end discrimination against blacks and women, it failed. The policies it came to implement (e.g., affirmative action – or DEI, as it is now called) *strengthened* rather than reduced group identity. Such policies hurt white men without helping blacks (except a few who were as well connected as their white counterparts had always been). The primary beneficiaries of these policies were white feminists.

The wealth pump, of course, hurts us all (except the super-

rich oligarchs). The left, once focused on class, chased an impossible race, gender, and sexual Utopia (the latter in all conceivable forms, whatever floats your boat).

Nixon killed the gold standard in 1971. This opened the door to full-throttle currency debauchment. Neoliberal economic policies developed by Milton Friedman and introduced by Thatcher in the U.K. and Reagan in the U.S. set the stage for the wealth pump, leading to that state of affairs in which owners of most of the world's wealth would fit comfortably into our front room.

“Globalization” sent jobs overseas courtesy of corporate wheeling and dealing. Automation decimated them further. The country was deindustrialized. Available jobs were the low-paying services or increasingly, “gigs.”

AI threatens to become the biggest job killer in human history!

We’re more atomized than ever. More people than ever, especially men, claim not to have any close friends. Teenagers as well as adults are now drawn to AI bots as “companions,” and since these entities can simulate sentience without actually being sentient, sometimes the results are catastrophic (as when a bot offers a lonely teenager clinical suggestions on the most efficient means of dying by suicide).

Children and teenagers struggle with mental health issues in a world without hope for a better future. For those between the ages of 10 and 24, suicide is now the third leading cause of death.

Marriage has largely collapsed. Men don’t trust women and women don’t trust men. The younger the population, the more pronounced this discontinuity. One out of two marriages that happen end in divorce. If children are involved, their lives are upended. Men, meanwhile, know that in today’s feminist-influenced, female-friendly family courts, a divorce could

wipe them out financially. So, they're not marrying. They turn to porn instead. It *is* among the most lucrative online industries. Women choose careers over childrearing. As the saying goes, they need men like fish need bicycles.

A consequence has been falling birthrates. The U.S. is no longer at replacement level. The total fertility rate in the U.S. fell to 1.62 births per woman in 2023 according to CDC date – the lowest fertility rate ever recorded. This is not mere demographic change. It represents a systemic loss of hope: neither men nor women see a future worth building together. For many, children are just too expensive.

In the long term, this means population decline and eventual civilizational extinction.

Falling birthrates are not limited to the U.S., of course. European nations see it. So does Japan and so has China (trying to recover from its horrific one-child policy). There is something about “advanced” civilizations that seems fundamentally destructive of loving relations between the sexes, their willingness to have children and build of families with long-term stability, and of children’s and adolescents’ own mental health.

Worldliness has its price! We’re seeing it in spades!

Forgetting the basics has its price!

Returning to Comte: arguably, starting with Nietzsche’s long-term foresight, we began to enter a Fourth Stage: post-Enlightenment, post-liberal in the classical sense of that term, and eventually post-truth (scientific as well as moral) as preserving one’s own subjective ideology became more important than what is provably true.

If the Third Stage was “positive and scientific,” the Fourth Stage might be described as “negative and dystopian.” High-trust has been replaced by zero-trust: you can’t do anything

online without running a gauntlet of layers of authentication to prove “you’re you.” Those who know how to use anger, frustration, disruption, precarity, and zero-trust for their own ends will have no hesitation doing so. If I keep coming back to Technocracy – the “science of social engineering,” or “scientific” dictatorship – it is because Technocracy is the *telos* of the road we’re on. There is no Humane Economy, or Political Economy as if People Mattered, waiting at its end.

END OF PART TWO.

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Steven Yates is a (recovering) ex-academic with a PhD in Philosophy. (Obtain his book on the “wisdom” of obtaining such a degree [here](#).)

He taught for more than 15 years total at several colleges and universities in the Southeastern U.S. He has authored three books, more than 20 articles, numerous book reviews, and review essays in academic journals and anthologies. Refused tenure and unable to obtain full-time academic employment (and with an increasing number of very fundamental philosophical essays refused publication in journals), he turned to alternative platforms and heretical notions, including about academia itself.

In 2012, he moved to Chile. He married a Chilean national in 2014. Among his discoveries in South America: many of the problems in the U.S. are problems everywhere, because human nature is the same everywhere.

He has a Patreon.com page. Donate [here](#) and become a Patron if you benefit from his work and believe it merits being sustained financially.

Steven Yates's book *Four Cardinal Errors: Reasons for the Decline of the American Republic* (2011) can be ordered [here](#).

His philosophical work *What Should Philosophy Do? A Theory* (2021) can be obtained [here](#) or [here](#).

His cosmic horror novel *The Shadow Over Sarnath* (2023) (written for the sheer fun of it) can be gotten [here](#).

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