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A Meta-theoretical Assessment of the Decline of Scholastic Economics

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on the decline of the scholastic economics: a meta-theoretical assessment.

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Abstract.

The aim of this paper is to offer certain insights into the process of declining of scholastic economics in late medieval and early modern European intellectual circles. In this attempt, the paper adopts the metatheoretical framework of Laudan's philosophy of science and introduces the concept of scientific research tradition in pre-classical economic thought. It then considers the features of scholastic research tradition, specifies its empirical and conceptual problems and indicates a general scenario of assessing its performance over time. Of primary importance, in this respect, becomes the issue of evaluating the external and internal factors of disintegrating of the scholastic tradition, whose constraints reflect its incorporation into a broader ethical analysis and necessitate its transformation into a more secular approach to economic phenomena.

Keywords.

Laudan and Economics, Scholastic Economics, Research Traditions, economic ethics, Economics and Theology.

THE PROBLEM.

and fall of scholastic economics has not drawn enough attention among the historians of the economic thought. Scholastic economics are often considered to be a theological and moral current of ideas whose apparent normativity makes it stand outside the accepted corpus of modern mainstream Economics. The evolution of scholastic economic ideas has, since long, undoubtedly found its place among textbooks of the history of economic thought¹, or has even become the object of separate analysis by eminent scholars in individual papers, monographs and volumes². Yet, one possible aspect of the problem needs further discussion: there were certain reasons entailing the abandonment of the scholastic scope, method and doctrine in economic thought, or other things being equal, why the transition to subsequent forms and schools of economic reasoning was an almost inevitable process in early 17th century?

Explanations of this problem must not be restricted to a mere descriptive consideration of the factors involved in this change of perspective; a thorough analysis of any important cognitive dimension should be taken into account. The paper's premise is that these questions deserve an answer, that is an adequate explanation of this decline must identify both the socio-political and the intellectual dimensions of such an outcome. From this point of view, it would be mostly helpful if we turned to recent developments in the contemporary philosophy of science in order to define a proper context of evaluation and assessment of the problem of repudiation or abandonment of theories and other structured sets of thinking. For our analytical perspective, the framework of examination of such problems adopted by L. Laudan's philosophy of science would be mostly useful, as its applications are not restricted in the realm of the mature sciences, but can also be extended to the area of non-scientific research traditions- as in the case of theology, morals and metaphysics which are crucial constitutive parameters within scholastic economics.

to offer some methodological comments on the origins of scholastic research tradition. The first part of the paper is a general survey of the literature on the decline of scholastic economics, while in the first subsection of the second part, the criteria of Laudan's appraisal of research traditions are exposed in brief. In the two following subsections of this part we shall discuss the contribution of the scholastic tradition to Economics, strictly confining our analysis of the respective problems to issues of application of Laudan's metatheory. Given the specific task of our approach, our primary concern should be to assume a thorough analysis of primary sources as the distinct object of the historian of Economics, so as to focus exclusively on how scholastic economics succeed or fail to accomplish their cognitive goals. Finally, in the last two parts we shall focus on determining the reasons of decline of the scholastic tradition at the time it was confronting competing streams of economic ideas in early modern European intellectual milieu.

2. THE PROBLEM OF THE DECLINE OF SCHOLASTIC ECONOMICS: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE.

J. Schumpeter provides an extensive discussion of the economic thought of the Scholastic doctors (1954:82-94). According to Schumpeter, the Scholastic doctors were responsible for the emergence of Economics as a field: "It is within their systems of moral theology and law that economics gained definite if not separate existence, and is they who came nearer than does any other group to having been the "founders" of scientific economics" (1954:97). Schumpeter emphatically argues that: "The Scholastic science in the Middle Ages contained all the germs of the laical science of the Renaissance. And their germs developed slowly but steadily within a system of scholastic thought so that the laics of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries continued rather than destroyed scholastic work" (1954:81). The same emphasis is attributed to the Salamanca School, since Schumpeter accepts that it can be seen

ism of economic reasoning: “But the core of this school was of the most eminent of whom happened to be Spaniards; and their was nothing specifically Spanish about their teaching; the rest of Spanish sixteenth century economists, though most of them were also clerics, do not form a school” (1954:165).

The evidence that the decline of medieval scholasticism was a complex phenomenon, is rather compelling. This process is generally held to be a function of two crucial parameters reflecting *external* and *internal* factors in the growth of knowledge, of the changing economic environment of the early modern times³, and of the Scientific Revolution of the XVIIth century which inaugurates a new era of scientific spirit and an entirely different approach to phenomena of the real world (Screpanti and Zamagni 1993:16-23).

The importance of external history of science is emphasised by the majority of the historians of economic thought. Galbraith (1987:20-30) attributes the decline of scholastic economics to changing socio-economic conditions only, without paying much attention to the scholastics as a distinct school, and the same line of argument is followed by Fusfeld (1994). In the same spirit, Bell (1953:68,74) observes that medieval economic doctrines were superseded by the inevitable growth of emerging capitalist economy which resulted in a process of transition from domestic to national economic structures, placed increasing emphasis on the satisfaction of human wants and restrained every religious attempt to codify rules for economic relations, thus favouring the rise of mercantilist policies. Similarly, Staley (1989:8) at best provides short clarifications on these issues as he adopts Viner’s position which emphasises the role and significance of economic conditions and the immediate impact of mercantilism’s economic doctrines on social behaviours of the laymen.

Landreth and Colander (1994) describe scholastic economic doctrines, not in terms to “attempt to analyze the economy, but (rather) to set religious standards by which to judge economic conduct” (1994:33). In this perspective, the decline of scholasticism is inherently

tion of new economic practices reflecting “the disruptive
gy...slowly upsetting the feudal order” (*ibid*): under these
conditions, scholastic ethical considerations of economic phenomena seemed rather
inappropriate to the prevailing values of the emerging market economies. A necessary
prerequisite for the transformation of the European institutional structures was undoubtedly a
sense of freedom from religious ideology and its concomitant ethical teaching that resisted
individual emancipation from its precepts and viewed economic activities as subject to the
political and economic power of the church (1994:33-34).

Spiegel (1991) explains this claim by providing thorough insights into the ideological
foundations of scholasticism. Since material welfare of the individual was dependent upon the
need to promote the common good, “the economic doctrines of the church aimed at minimizing
sin and maximizing charity, but not in a manner that would have precluded the important
economic developments that took place during the later Middle Ages” (1991:55). Scholastic
economics were certainly reflecting the ideal of correspondence between theological teachings
and secular practices, but such correspondence could not be but imperfect (1991:56).

Hunt (1979) extensively refers to older medieval paternalistic social precepts that sought
to an explicit condemnation of greed, acquisitive economic behaviour and the human desire to
accumulate material wealth (1979:24). These moral injunctions were at odds with the new
demands of emerging market economies, dominated by self-interest, self-seeking motives and
acquisitive economic attitudes to function effectively. In this new context alternative theories
stressing the importance of self-interest for individual conduct, began to dominate economic
thinking, thus asserting the social values of independent and autonomous individuals and
turning against the medieval doctrines of individual subordination to religiously determined
social ends (1979:25-6).

le insights to the problem of transformation of market
s of thinking in late medieval societies. Pribram attributes
the disintegration of thomistic economic doctrines to a variety of societal factors, mainly a
dramatic shift of popular mentalities, attitudes and practices underlying an overall attempt of
“emancipation from the hierarchical structure of concepts, upon which was based the inflexible
medieval classification of professional and occupational functions” (1983:25-6). The
introduction of new procedures in commercial life, the reshaping of financial and the
undertaking of risky economic activities under the progressive invalidation of market restrictions
would have been, according to Pribram, entirely inconsistent with traditional scholastic
categories. In this context, the increasing affirmation of profit-seeking behaviour, “not as a
single expression of greed condemned by the clerical authorities, but as a rational principle of
organizing production and trade” (ibid:27), was associated with a process of transformation of
social structures, which necessitated adjustments of patterns of economic action to a world of
risk and uncertainty. Repudiation of long prevailing thomistic doctrines could be a part of that
overall change of institutions, resulting in unavoidable modifications of the predominant
economic conceptions. In this respect, “unifying medieval methods of reasoning were
progressively undermined by the influence of other patterns of thought (since) these methods
could no longer copy effectively with new problems resulting from revolutionary changes of
political ideas and from the application of new procedures to the organization of production and
trade (Pribram 1983:31). Neoplatonic, nominalistic and humanistic streams of thought rivalling
with each other for prominence, offered secular directives in identifying the objectives of both
economic behaviour and social action, unlike their scholastic opponents.

Finally and somewhat differently from the above, Ekelund and Hébert (1975) argue that
the scholastic tradition was composed of theological fundamental beliefs and was consequently
displayed by new forms of economic inquiry, though the latter did not represent “a de novo

5:29). There are also historians of economics who do not
the scholastic thought (e.g. Deane 1978).

3. THE SCHOLASTIC RESEARCH TRADITION IN THE HISTORY OF ECONOMIC THOUGHT.

3.1. Laudan's concept of research tradition

It is worth mentioning that Laudan introduces the notion of the research tradition, a conceptual structure analogous to Kuhn's paradigm or Lacatos' scientific research programmes. Research tradition, is described, in Laudan's words (1977:78-79), as a set of specific theories which exemplify and partially constitute it, some of those being contemporaneous, while others being temporal successors of earlier ones. All these theories share the ontology of the parent research tradition and can be tested and evaluated only within this methodological framework. What is most important, every research tradition is associated with certain metaphysical and methodological commitments which individuate the tradition and distinguish it from others, for research traditions extend through long periods of time. Research traditions reflect such enduring, long-standing commitments and dominant beliefs: it is this cluster of beliefs which constitute such fundamental views about the world that Laudan calls "research traditions" (Laudan 1996:83).

In his approach of the history of a discipline, Laudan argues that any meaningful analysis of the historical development of any research tradition needs to "take account of all the 'cognitively relevant' factors which were actually present" (Laudan 1977:138). This undoubtedly includes theological, political and sociological factors. However, contrary to Kuhn's conception of normal science, it "seems to be far more common for scientific disciplines to involve a variety of co-present research approaches (traditions)" (Laudan 1996:85). What is crucial here, is the fact that Laudan (1977:121-33) elaborates a model of scientific rationality which, without

nal decisions in theory-choice, permits to specify certain
ty as dependent on cultural and social context, apart from
those elements which still remain *trans-temporal* and *trans-cultural* (1977:130-1). In this
respect, scholastic emphasis on the relation between faith and reason does not prevent a
critical discussion of economic problems, or, in Laudan's words: "Thomas Aquinas or Robert
Grosseteste were not stupid or prejudiced when they espoused the belief that science must be
compatible with religious beliefs" (ibid:131). Thus Laudan rejects a strict demarcation criterion
between scientific and other forms of intellectual inquiry since "our central concern should be
with distinguishing theories of broad and demonstrable problem-solving scope from theories
which do not have this property" (Laudan 1996:86); the only vital difference between sciences
and other disciplines lies in the fact that outside the former, there is no independent criterion for
inclusion in a tradition, i.e. no objective basis for including achievements in the theoretical
canon of the discipline (Laudan 1996:152-53).

The first serious attempt to introduce Laudan's ideas in Economics was made by Pheby
(1988), who shares Laudan's ideas of the notion of research traditions as being both more
flexible and more realistic than the constructions of Kuhn and Lacatos. For example, it is quite
feasible for different theories within a developing research tradition to be rivals (Pheby
1988:74). Pheby further applies the idea of "abandoning" research traditions in Economics in
his discussion of Austrians and Keynes (ibid:74-5), and he analyses the Laudan's concept of
Scientific Revolutions (ibid:78-9) in a way that seems to fit with Economics, by giving two
distinct examples in the recent history of the discipline, Keynesian Revolution and the Rational
Expectations Revolution (ibid:78). Research traditions in Economics are not entirely
superseded by their rivals, but they are afforded the opportunity to experience a revival, albeit
the latter does not probably occur in our specific 17th century context. Another two typical

ideas to Economics include Rappaport (2001) and Arouh

3.2. Medieval Economics as a Research Tradition.

Scholastic economics do not represent a unified and totally homogenous doctrinal conception, albeit they incorporate a wide range of economic arguments on a certain kind of economic phenomena. The term “Scholastic” indicates a specific approach to economic reality adopted by a group of 13th and 14th century theologians, doctors and medieval masters; scholasticism is the main medieval current of thought which emerged during the 13th century and contained a remarkable synthesis of ancient sources, mainly Roman law and Greek philosophy, with the patristic tradition and canon law, of which economic reasoning constitutes only a very small part. It is generally held that the subsequently dominant tradition of scholastic economics was partly dependent on a previous tradition in law. Odd Langholm (1998) supports with convincing arguments the view that the “scholastic paradigm” in economics was articulated at the crosspoint of three distinct ancient traditions, namely: *the Aristotelian tradition* (through the Latin translations and paraphrases of the ancient texts, and other commentaries on the *Nicomachean Ethics*), *the Roman law tradition* as a legal approach to social relations (which exerted a considerable influence on medieval economic ideas through the work of the medieval romanists and glossators), and finally *the Augustinian tradition* with its major significance at the doctrinal, ethical and conceptual level (exemplified and developed by the most prominent commentators of medieval canon law before Thomas Aquinas).

The emergence of the scholastic tradition in Economics can be interpreted in terms of its components, i.e. as a consequence of a new, creative synthesis of three independent pre-existing traditions of thought. The scholastic tradition did in fact incorporate elements of traditions which seemed to be previously incompatible. Despite the fact that scientific revolutions in pre-scientific traditions are far from conceivable, we could agree with Laudan’s

ment of a research tradition whose novelty consists in the
combined”, is of the utmost importance for our case study.

This integration, however, entails according to Laudan (ibid), “the repudiation of some of the fundamental elements of each of the traditions being combined”, possibly a resonance of the so-called “Kuhnian losses” during a paradigmatic change. This statement could indeed be valid in the case under examination.

The Scholastic tradition in Economics is composed by a family of mutually consistent theories, applying the tradition to different parts of its domain, and focuses on certain empirical and internal conceptual problems solved within its scope, worldview and methodology, the most important of them would be schematically categorized in the following way:

Conceptual problems.

i) Private property as an institutional arrangement poses an initial conceptual problem within the doctrinal system of medieval Christendom, since its introduction as a conceptual entity entailed a sort of logical inconsistency, given the discrepancies between poverty vocations and wealth accumulation. The scholastic solution to that problem was formulated in the context of thomistic economic discussions, in the light of the argument that private property represented a conventional human arrangement, an institution apt to stimulate economic activity through the creation of economic incentives and to promote collective welfare (cf. Langholm 1998b:444-9; Finnis 1998:188-96).

ii) The problem of wealth retention, accumulation and profit was treated in the context of a stewardship theory of property, where excess resources (over those required to sustain one's life and social position) should be distributed through almsgiving, in support of the needy (Langholm 1987:119). This moral justification of profit-seeking activities was inserted within a specific code of economic ethics applicable to every commercial activity (a code prohibiting hoarding, fraud, usury and illicit means of negotiation). Economic arrangements yield a

price variations as a function of alteration in needs and derived by differentials in just prices was allowed under the

condition that commercial activities were not motivated by pure seeking of financial gain, given the negative valuation of avarice and greed in medieval societies⁴.

iii) The problem of the definition of just price⁵ was solved in the context of an Aristotelian-based approach to economic exchanges, where justice in exchange was considered as an application of commutative justice. It was further treated in terms of *indigentia communis* or common need underlying common estimation, a concept developed on the grounds of roman law considerations of a mutual agreement between the contracting parties. This problem, however, of an exact determination of the just price of a commodity remains partly unsolved, since it is accepted that just price is subject to alteration with regard to time and place, so as difficult to be determined to a fixed point. Just price consists in a kind of estimation that allows a certain latitude for it, precisely because its formation presupposes an economic bargaining that precludes deceit, fraud and every means of economic compulsion; this condition is ensured only in a purely competitive market (Langholm 1998b:469 and 1987:120-1)

iv) The problem of the value of goods was considered on both subjective and objective level. The paradox of value in terms of intrinsic worth seems to remain partly unsolved within the scholastic tradition (though the dominican Antonin of Florence in the fifteenth century holds the view that this paradox is associated with scarcity and abundance of goods, objective usefulness and subjective pleasingness of things; nevertheless, "it was Peter Olivi who first split the composite concept of *indigentia* into the factors of *utility* and *scarcity*" -Langholm 1987:124). A further (initially empirical) problem is attested when, in a cost of production theory of value, expenses are exaggerated in a way that exceeds what is necessary for the production of a good (and thus its just price could be artificially raised). The Scholastics were able to distinguish the case where scarcity of qualified labour (or scarcity of other productive

ds (or when excess demand for a product influenced the
r). Not only it was agreed that, in the case of exceptionally
high actual costs the merchant was permitted to charge a higher price, but also a moderate
gain from commercial activities was a licit practice, pertaining to risky activities such as those
undertaken by merchants. Indeed, Duns Scotus and Peter Olivi were among these authors to
point to certain cost factors (including labour, risk, transport costs, skill and other expenses) as
value determinants (Langholm 1998b:471-3). A further conceptual problem of relevance for our
purpose, was emerging in those cases when economic exchanges were in fact utility-
enhancing for both contracting parties (these exchanges implied an advantage for either party
and contradicted the common held view that only goods of equal worth could be the object of
an exchange, in the Aristotelian sense of commutative justice).

v) Finally, lending at interest could be considered as an *anomalous problem* within the total
theoretical construction of medieval schoolmen, since usury seemed to be an illicit practice,
falling exclusively within the scope of injustice. This was unavoidable, given the Aristotelian
theory concerning the sterility of money, its lack of intrinsic worth and its use primarily as a
social convention yielding no utility to its holders. The weakness of the theory, if judged from a
modern point of view, consisted in that it precluded cases where fixed interest earnings on
monetary loans could be derived: to restrain this logical incongruity, the scholastics admitted
that interest should be demanded in some forms of earning without labour, where one could
gain utility from holding an object of worth (e.g. rent or land) or could undertake a risk in an
economic activity (e.g. investing money funds in a partnership, or in the case of dividends from
profit shares).

Empirical problems.

i) Among the medieval schoolmen, Nicole Oresme addresses the widely spread problem (in
14th century France) concerning the progressive debasement of national currencies by their

...y function of money consists in its use as a medium of
debasement process, which converts money into an object
of borrowing and lending (Langholm 1987:128-9). Oresme enlarges the explanatory potential of
previous medieval commentators on these subjects by assessing the economic (and social)
consequences of debasement, its different techniques and its devastating effects, the
devaluation of the purchasing power of money, in particular, and, ultimately inflation, loss of
confidence in money as a medium of exchange and loss of monetary stability. The practices of
debasement are theoretically analysed as a means of extracting negative interest on behalf of
the sovereign rulers, and thus as a form of usury (precluding consent of the contracting parties,
since it is imposed on the subjects of a kingdom). Debasement yields illicit profits to the ruler
since they are extracted from (naturally) free people, the community to whom money belongs –
thus debasement is a form of economic coercion that cannot endure for long. It serves only as
a temporary measure for raising money funds for the common good⁶: this pre-figures a means
of exercising monetary policy by the prince (acting as an agent on behalf of the community, that
appears as the principal), since for Oresme money is a kind of loan granted to government by
free people who acquire it by their labour activities (Lapidus 1997:47).

ii) The medieval schoolmen placed a great deal of emphasis on the explanation of the problem
why the same goods are exchanged at different prices in different places, or even more
significantly, on the determination of reasons for alterations of market prices of the same good
over time, as we have discussed above.

iii) The scholastics were confronting the expanding practice of usury in later medieval societies
in an ambivalent way: condemning lending at interest if it was orientated at consumption, but
encouraging the same practice if it served productive engagements. Usury is not only an
economic practice that seems to contradict basic postulates of medieval economics (albeit the
latter acknowledged the existence of *specific cases legitimizing usury*), but also an *empirical*

ed to overcome –usually investing usury with negative
institution, at the detriment of the weaker parts in society.

Usury was considered as a socially detrimental activity in the light of a mode of economic inquiry reflecting the dominant value system of feudal societies of the Middle Ages and aspiring to normative purposes –actually to reduce the burdens of servitude and compulsion on the individuals (Baeck 1994:150-1).

3.3.The evolution of the scholastic tradition in the doctrines of the Salamanca School.

The so-called school of Salamanca represents a synthesis of older thomistic ideas achieved in the 16th and early 17th centuries by a distinguished group of eminent theologians and Jurists known as “the late Scholastics”. The denomination “School of Salamanca”, albeit disputed in modern scholarship⁷, denotes a circle of church intellectuals around Francisco de Vitoria and encompasses his colleagues, disciples and his principal continuators in many cognitive fields, economics included (Gòmez-Camacho 1998:504). The accomplishments of that trend of economic and legal thought have acquired a certain acceptance between contemporary historians of Economics partly because the Spanish doctors tried to rationalize economic institutions of their own epoch, perhaps more effectively than their medieval predecessors. More specifically, their economic ideas reveal a greater emphasis placed on empirical data of the early modern Spanish economy. In the light of Laudan’s notion of an evolving research tradition, which combines elements of continuity and change within the same tradition (Laudan 1977:95-100), the different positions of the Spanish doctors summarized by Gòmez-Camacho (1998), can be reconstructed in terms of core-axioms of a research tradition, in the following way:

institutional features of the economic life constitutes a

necessary prerequisite for any consistent economic theory.

2.The scope of economic inquiry is primarily to offer a rational moral insight into human economic behaviour.

3.Reconciliation of faith and reason amounts to the construction of specific ethical rules derived from natural (and divine) law and applied to a wide range of economic phenomena.

4.Principal economic motives of individual agents are moral obligation in connection with freedom of will and right reason.

5.Economic agents are guided by a practical need to make judgements of facts and values in circumstantial cases within the limits dictated by right reason.

Core axioms, described above, are deemed to serve as the foundation of the following irrefutable assumptions:

Core assumptions:

1.Economic individuals do not dispose perfect knowledge of relevant market conditions, but act as fallible human subjects of economic activities.

2.Economic individuals are able to orientate their actions by making rational calculations of probability and uncertainty.

3.Individuals do not exhibit maximizing behaviour, but an attitude of personal responsibility aiming to promote economic (and social) justice.

4.Individual decision-making implies choices that cannot be based on a mechanistic causality process, as they seem to result from a finalism inherent in every human action. And

5.Position in time is irrelevant; due to a concept of homogeneity of time and space, which renders mere passing of time completely extrinsic to economic phenomena (thus time represents only an extrinsic measure of duration).

core axioms and core assumptions for the elaboration of
Spanish doctors are depicted in the following table, which

stresses the theoretical coherence of this evolving research tradition:

Table I.

Following Grice-Hutchinson's (1978), Gómez-Camacho's (1998) and Baeck's (1994) discussion of the Salamanca School, our analysis of the most significant conceptual and empirical problems which this evolving tradition aims to solve, risks caricature, but it suffices for our purposes.

Empirical problems:

- i) The inflationary processes of the XVIth century Europe was a primary concern of Jesuits and Dominicans (Baeck 1994:186-9). The explanation of this phenomenon was achieved in terms of a simplified form of a *quantity theory of money*, which was used from the Salamanca intellectuals to explain inflation resulting from the import of precious metals (gold and silver) from the New World. The Salamanca School came to formulate the essential properties of such a causal relationship between money supply and price level almost independently of Jean Bodin, Davanzati, Copernicus and other mercantilists of the same epoch.
- ii) The problem of the status of contracts and the particularities of commercial exchanges are treated within a contract theory that stresses the free consent of the parties involved and precludes the exercise of economic compulsion on the economic agents, since economic exchanges are effectuated only in the absence of fraud, deceit and force.
- iii) The high level of interest rates imposed on loans to compensate for loses resulting from raising prices (reducing the value of debts), was interpreted within a theoretical construction on usury: such interest rates seemed unjust not to be allowed, in the form of extrinsic titles to interest.

institution poses no problem for a theological approach to economic life, since the Spanish doctors established the idea that private property was introduced by right reason even in conformity to natural law: it actually represented a rational, rather irreversible, human decision not contradicting the fundamental norms of co-existence.

ii) The problem of value of goods undergoes a further elaboration, as the Spanish doctors adopted and defended a scarcity theory of value on the grounds of a “utilitarian” ethical doctrine placing an emphasis on *common estimation*, the product of right reason and freedom of will. In their formulation of a general scarcity theory of value, every merchandise (money included) becomes more expensive in the context of strong demand and shortage of supply. Thus the quantity theory of money seems, not only not incompatible, but even reducible to such theoretical framework: the value of money is diminished in the periods of excess money supply, lack of total output’s increase and inflation, a view supported by eminent Spanish scholars (Navarrus, Mercado, de Soto; Grice-Hutchinson 1978:102-7). Most Jesuits seem to reject a cost-theory of just price because of the incentives involved to raise the level of productive expenses artificially.

iii) The problem of the definition of just price attracted the interest of the Spanish theologians who, focusing on the notion of public good, stressed the importance of the competitive price: they also came to underline that, what is considered as a just price, fluctuates *within a zone of just indeterminacy*⁸, since just price can be *any* price within the margin allowed by the principle of justice. Market prices should be established within the spectrum of just natural price, even if the latter is subject to changes, due to the relative number of buyers and sellers, the quantity of money, and scarcity (or abundance) of goods. Monopoly, however, represents a conceptual problem *unsolved* within this tradition: it is morally condemned as it distorts productive effects and leads to artificially raised prices. The necessity of competitive market to define just price

monopolistic markets), were already anticipated by the

iv) Profits denote no longer a conceptual problem within the scholastic tradition, as they are in fact morally justified as wages for productive services, the remuneration of the merchant's economic engagement. Profit-maximization was, however, illegitimate, since it could not come to terms with the thomistic injunction for a moderate level of profit for the purposes to sustain oneself (and his relatives).

v) Finally, in their effort to clarify the appropriate commercial practices, the Spanish doctors based their analysis on the purchasing power parity theory of exchange rates, thus applying the supply and demand approach to foreign exchanges (Baeck 1994:190-1). International trade was justified on the grounds of the argument that the art of exchange results to benefits for every republic, as it entails various mutual gains (not confined on the economic sphere). People engage in international trade because of the variety and diversity of needs to be satisfied; in addition to this, such exchanges retain their immediate cultural impact, as they promote mutual understanding between remote people, and reinforce the bonds of brotherhood between different nations, in the form of universal-binding principles governing human socio-economic relations.

4. A FRAMEWORK OF EVALUATION OF THE SCHOLASTIC RESEARCH TRADITION IN ECONOMICS.

Medieval scholasticism, and its Salamanca Version, in particular, declined gradually during the XVIIth century, but this inevitable course of an intellectual movement encompasses a variety of interdependent factors. The most important of them (in terms of what Lacatos called "external history" to structured science) should be identified in that, inherited from the Middle Ages, the Spanish worldview was promoting a type of economic inquiry reflecting the

christendom, but totally opposed to the new sense of emerging national states of the early modern times. Even more, this problem became particularly acute by the time that, a potential antagonist to the scholastic tradition (in terms of a rival opponent) appeared and established its position during the late XVIth century. The rise of mercantilism was a considerable alternative to the Salamanca School, given that the latter could not promote the concerns and interests of the emerging classes of traders acting in a way that their motivations were not dictated by purely moral precepts. While mercantilism introduces new cognitive goals and re-orientates economic inquiry to other directions⁹, the Salamanca School represents the summation and culmination of practically unattainable ideals, namely justice in economic activities. Baeck (1994) assesses this transition in terms of his remarkable suggestion that the center of gravity of economic thought gradually shifted from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic tradition, not without a major transformation of central issues and concerns (1994:1-6). Scholasticism and mercantilism denote two entirely different directives for the economist to comply with, and this incongruity raises further disputes about the aims and scope of pre-classical economic reasoning. A settlement of such disputes is not entirely unfeasible.

Briefly, as Laudan (1984) suggests, “when values are not fully shared, we seem to be confronted by an irresolvable disagreement”, which implies “a fundamental challenge to the very idea that science is a rational and progressive undertaking” (1984:41). This divergence between cognitive ends can be effectively overcome within the context of a reticulated model of justification (Laudan 1984:62-6), where “determinations of progress must be relativised to a certain set of ends, and that there is no uniquely appropriate set of those ends” (1984:66). In our case, the adoption of mercantilistic axiology may denote a choice that promotes one cognitive aim in Economics, but fails to promote a rival one. For example, the shift towards mercantilism is associated with an abandonment of aims implied by the core axioms 2 and 3 of

recognition of the fact that aims and values both change does
Economics to use a notion of cognitive progress, since
judgements of progress are appreciated against a *certain conceptual framework*.

Consequently, the “internal history” of science in the Lacatosian terminology¹⁰ should be of interest, since the methodology of research traditions offers such criteria of evaluating the performance of a tradition over time. Given that a successful and viable research tradition seeks to minimize the numbers of unsolved (and anomalous) problems and maximize the numbers of solved (conceptual and empirical) problems, we have already determined (though roughly) the numbers of those problems that the scholastic research tradition sought to solve in each of its two distinct phases, the generations of the medieval schoolmen and that of the Salamanca School. These categorisations albeit too loose, do not lack their logical consistency: they serve our analytical purpose to denote the problem-solving ability of the scholastic tradition and its rational pursuability.

Each of these two distinct phases seems to address the same type of conceptual and empirical problems discussed above and enumerated in the respective sections of the paper, but in specific cases their relative weight differs increasingly. We shall focus our analytical interest on three important aspects of the general progress exhibited by this tradition by comparing its latest and earliest formulations:

First, the Spanish economists of the XVIth century extended the explanatory potential of the medieval economics to such empirical fields as their study of inflation, money debasement and the gradual economic decay of Spain, tends to prove¹¹. This is evident in their attempt to offer a first formulation of the quantity theory of money: the latter was proposed however, alternatively, by other European intellectuals (perhaps a typical example, in early intellectual history, of a multiple discovery, in the mertonian sense¹²). In doing so, the Spanish theologians sought to resolve certain practical problems of business ethics; considerations of economic

...at the pre-eminent factor in the rise of this new approach (1974:74), while their overall approach “led to a much clearer understanding of the meaning of a market and a more comprehensive analysis of price-formation” (ibid:75), which extended the scope of traditional scholasticism, thus yielding theoretical benefits for economic thought. According to B. Gordon, underlying these innovations was a definite break with medieval views on monetary transfers and an emphasis on the consensus of the contracting parts in real markets of 16th century Europe. Similar explanations, however, had in fact been developed quite independently by rival traditions in pre-classical economics, i.e. mercantilism, which did not presuppose any of the metaphysical commitments and ethical constraints of the late scholastics. This also means that the totality of the scholastic convictions relevant to economic behaviour and to its anthropological presumptions (as illustrated in Table One) could not be shared by the proponents of mercantilistic doctrines. Economic institutions, accordingly, were no more permeated by values and beliefs situated within the context of scholasticism.

A second theoretical achievement of the Spanish scholars that tends to overcome the conceptual deficiency of medieval schoolmen, is their effort to reconcile the views on just price with usury doctrines in such a way so as to bring both real and monetary goods under the governance of a unified theory of value: these modifications could be however, considered as *ad-hoc* adjustments of the theory to the changing empirical world of early modern times (usury doctrines were deprived of any meaning in the subsequent post-scholastic thought).

The third element we emphasize is the introduction of casuistics in moral thought: such an approach to economic activities within the framework of probability and uncertainty, constitutes a major theoretical innovation of the Spanish doctors, which will remain aside, perhaps until its new significance obtained in the context of the keynesian revolution three

ing with the related view of fallible economic agents, could
nomics. From this point of view, the scholastic tradition
seems both theoretically and empirically progressive, which in turn presupposes a certain rate
of progress over a given period of time: the latter is not subject to a proper evaluation, without
setting some independent criteria of estimation of its effectivity in a certain phase of its
development.

Laudan's model provides a comparative framework for theory evaluation, within whom a
theory (or a family of theories) cannot be judged *independently* of a knowledge of its rivals:
strictly speaking, only a comparative evaluation of its effectiveness and progress to that of its
rivals offers a rationale for the acceptance of that theory. The scholastic research tradition in
Economics has in effect exposed a higher problem-solving capacity in its latest Salamanca-
version (compared with an earlier, medieval period), but this effectivity must be evaluated in its
competition with rival traditions. Indeed, mercantilism (as a main rival approach) seems to
escape from any dilemma yielding from the variety of conceptual problems (just profit, just
price, usury) that the scholastic tradition was bound to confront. Blaug (1985:29-31) points out
that it was the 17th century mercantilism that stressed the importance of self-interest for profit-
seeking economic engagements and anticipated the function of the price mechanism as an
efficient means for the allocation of resources. On the contrary, scholasticism was promoting a
pure juristic approach to economic activities in the tradition of the Roman law, and this feature
of scholastic thinking made it stand apart from the mercantilist tradition, or, in Blaug's words, "it
was the mercantilists who, long before Adam Smith, broke with the canonical conception of
market behaviour as a moral problem and fashioned the concept of "economic man" "
(1985:30).

More significantly, however, this transformation of thinking seems to reflect, not only a
transition to economic structures of higher complexity which gradually discredited the

adoption of different patterns of theory construction that ethical norms of scholasticism. The breakdown of the

scholastic paradigm of justice was ultimately, a function of a process of depersonalisation of the idea of the economic sphere and of its replacement by a system of impersonal relations between typical agents motivated by self-interest and acting only on their own advantage, thus undermining the dimension of virtue in economic activities (Langholm 1998a:161-4).

5. SCOPE, ORIENTATION AND INHERENT LIMITATIONS OF THE SCHOLASTIC TRADITION.

Medieval economics reflect the particularities of the medieval society which was primarily a social formation based on rigid social hierarchies, a society established on status rather than in terms of contract (in contrast to the modern societies of Enlightenment or those in the period of emerging capitalism). Spiegel (1991) asserts that, since “the medieval order was an essentially one, and the idea of progress was as yet not born to serve as a stimulus to drastic and relentless change” (1991:56), the scholastic economic constructions (esp. just price) were intended to “conserve the order of medieval society, with its customary occupational structure and the traditional levels of living of each noncompeting group” in a way that “would serve as an instrument of stabilizing the allocation of productive resources along customary and traditional lines” (1991:63). The Salamanca School stands in complete conformity to that tradition: it provides the moral grounds for constructing an efficient argumentation on economic activities, and by that reason, its basic postulates and fundamental premises are morally impregnated. For instance, analytical (descriptive) and normative (prescriptive) analysis is interwoven, since the dominican and Jesuit friars just provided a consistent and logically coherent strategy of assessing (and justifying) economic activities that serve morally accepted social ends –the moral goals of promoting public good and social welfare¹³. This aspect of

contemporary point of view, purports to offer a moral
resulting to the formation of an economic ethics, which

raises claims to universal validity and application¹⁴.

This kind of economic ethics has little in common with the contemporary positive approach to economic phenomena, but it also began progressively to show little relevance to the evolutions and processes of the modern European economies¹⁵. Indeed, scholasticism elaborated an holistic conception of the economic world as embedded into a set of religious beliefs and cultural norms, unlike the modern, disembedded economy (in Polanyi's particular terminology). Negishi (1989) is right to observe that the theory of just price, entirely normative in nature, lacks its practical necessity in the world of perfect competition presupposed by classical and neoclassical economics. Similar conclusions can be drawn of the medieval arguments against interest, which rather imply imperfect loan markets, distinguished by unequal distribution of status and contracting power of the bargaining members (1989:6-7). Ekelund and Hébert (1975:22) on the contrary, argue in favour of the contemporary significance of the scholastics, at least in the field of value analysis, on the grounds that scholastic economics must not be perceived as a set of "fallacies about market prices, interest and property...expelled from the corpus of economic knowledge", but as a major tradition representing a synthesis of subjective and objective elements of value that "stopped short of what we today call the "neoclassical synthesis" (1975:26). Furthermore, Melè (1999) points out the importance of a decision making subject in the formulation of ethical principles governing economic transactions, and evaluates the Spanish scholasticism's business ethics as ultimately oriented to the economic agents, albeit primarily focused on particular actions. By the same token, Landreth (1976) and Landreth and Colander (1994) support the claim that the ethical issues raised by medieval economics still remain relevant, and this can be corroborated by the contemporary concern with various versions of economic justice in the price system economic

cal considerations in certain current regulatory economic

This certainly positive reappraisal of late scholastic economic thought requires further attention. Rothbard (1996) places the Spanish doctors among the antecedents of praxeology and contends that their prominent position in the history of economic thought lies, not merely in that they have addressed issues in the field of the theory of money and interest, but in their development of protoliberal reflections on economic phenomena. Moreover, Soto (1996:63) shares this view and defends Rothbard's position that the Spanish scholastics at Salamanca might be the direct predecessors of the Austrian School in Economics and the forerunners of its subjectivist conception. Baeck (1994) underlines the importance of the doctrines of the Flemish Jesuits of the 16th century for the establishment of free markets, as well as their advocacy for non-intervention by the state in exchange markets, i.e. the adoption of policies favouring economic liberalism. R.A. Sirico (1998) seems to employ the same arguments to denote a certain link between Menger's approach and post-Conciliar Roman-Catholic economic thought, as he contends that both focus on acting and purposive individual as the relevant unit of inquiry and allow intentionality to reveal the true motivations for decision-making actors, in a way that enlarges the scope of the personalist agenda inaugurated by the Late Scholastics.

It is true that this recent revival of the scholastic tradition in the form of contemporary catholic economic teaching¹⁶, fits well with Laudan's metatheory. However, such a retrospective approach implied in the argument in favour of the contemporary dimension of scholasticism amounts to some extent, to obscure the nature and identity of economic categories of the past, which are invested with different meanings, not always consistent with contemporary economic knowledge, as Lapidus (1992:13,16) demonstrates in the case of monetary loans. Nevertheless, it must be noticed that a limited retrospective reading of the history of economic thought certainly offers an opportunity for reconstructive formulations in the

ds and elucidates the epistemological difficulties inherent
praising the validity of any theoretical construction.

The merits of an internalistic evaluation of the decline of medieval economics must undoubtedly be taken into consideration. Langholm (1998a) emphatically admits that “the modern mechanistic conception of the market as a suprapersonal force setting the terms to which an individual exchanger must submit, was foreign to the medieval masters. Their frame of reference was a moral universe that obliged any buyer or seller to act for the common good and agree to terms of exchange accordingly, regardless of the advantage granted him by the forces of the market” (1998a:85). Economic exchange, accordingly, was conceived as a means of distribution of scarce resources, and “it was this feature of the economy on which the scholastic masters focused their attention, and which shaped their main analytical paradigm” (Langholm 1998b:452).

The doctrines of the Salamanca School represent a first tentative, though not deliberate towards a depersonalisation of economic reasoning that became so a prominent feature of post-scholastic thought. In Langholm’s (1998a) words, “this ethical alienation between exchangers represents a decisive break with the ideals with which economic philosophy had been infused since the time of the Early Church Fathers” (1998a:116). But, as it has been pointed out, even the later scholastics could not explicitly advocate the idea of the economy as an autonomous sphere of interactions between individuals. Alternatively, the Salamanca School continued to embed the economic reasoning to a set of morally constructed core axioms and core assumptions in such a way that, every effort to abandon such normative principles would result in a complete renunciation of the scholastic tradition in Economics. What was really at stake seemed to be moral obligation as constituting the primary economic incentive orientating economic attitudes under certain ethical constraints imposed by the common good. Instead of virtue economic ethics, subsequent economic philosophies would

ditions to effective economic activities. In other words, this substantially secular approaches to economic reality (as

mercantilism itself proved to be) and the ultimate demise of scholasticism.

6. CONCLUDING REMARKS.

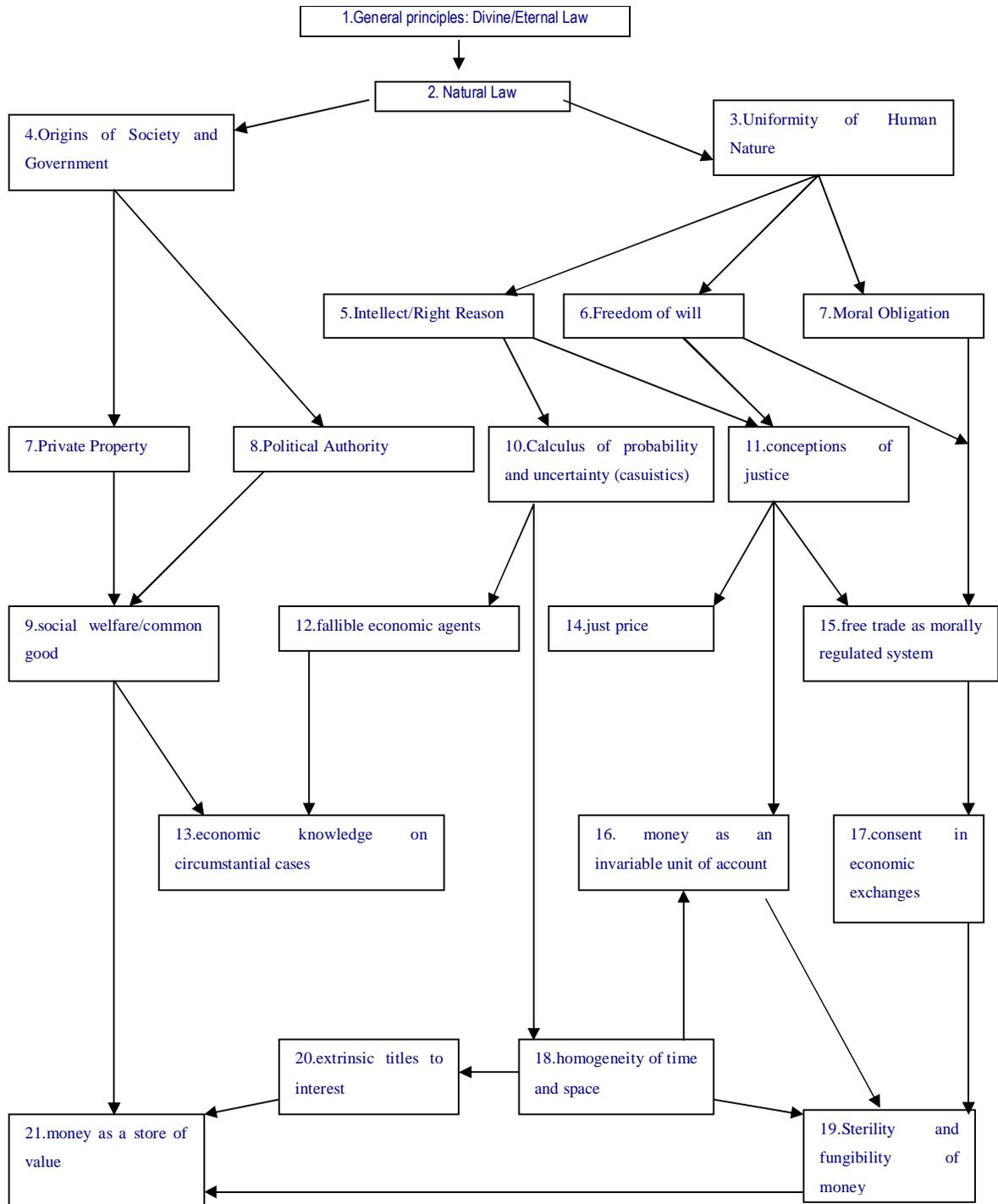
The paper has sought to investigate the contemporary significance of employing a metatheoretical framework for assessing a historical incident in the history of economic thought, the decline of scholastic economic ideas. For that purpose, a specific metatheory, that of L. Laudan's theory of scientific research traditions is adopted, due to the fact that the latter is constructed through an effective combination of philosophy of science on the one hand, and of sociology and history of science, on the other. Then, the paper sought to identify and specify the reasons of the decline of scholastic economics, resorting to the contributions on this subject by distinguished historians of economic thought. The first thing that becomes obvious is that scholars have sought to examine the problem in attempting to provide explanations underlying the importance of *external* history of science for the disintegration of scholastic economics. In doing so, they attribute special emphasis on the social, political and economic environment of the early modern European world, while they recognise the role of some cognitive factors associated with alternative currents of secular ideas during the same period.

This paper found that there are some other important aspects of the problem. Drawing on Laudan's distinction between conceptual problems, affecting the logical consistency of theories, and empirical problems placed at the level of empirical challenges each theory needs to confront, the paper argued that scholastic economics provides successful solutions to a number of empirical problems, together with some major developments in abstract theorizing. The scholastic approach, however, is integrated within an ethical and religious framework that

worldview to the extent that the latter seem progressively
s of the emerging secular scientific spirit.

It is useful to see the decline of scholastic economics in terms of both external and internal factors involved in such an outcome; there is much work needed to be done in this area, but one crucial point should be re-considered, the eventual inadequacy of scholasticism to offer the proper foundations of a value-free scientific activity. The paper has presented an agenda for an overall research tradition in scholastic economics, whose advance and limits are dictated by its structure, religiously originated and apparently normative in nature.

Table I
of Spanish scholasticism's economic conceptions



A.1,2: Metaphysical premises B.3,5,6: Anthropological assumptions
 C.4,7,8,9: Institutional Structure D. 10,11,12,13: mode of economic behaviour
 E.14,15,16,17,20,21: Spanish approach to market, money and value F. 18,19: Spanish world view on time and nature of goods

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See, among others, Bell (1988), Eriksson and Hébert (1975), Houmanidis (1999), Landreth and Colander (1994), Pribram (1983), Roll (1973), Schumpeter (1954), Screpanti and Zamagni (1993), Spiegel (1991).

² See, for instance, the survey and substantive discussion of medieval economics provided by George O' Brien (1967) and Odd Langholm (1992, 1998a and 2003), or the highly instructive analysis of scholastic economic ideas in Langholm (1987) and (1998b).

³ Backhouse (1998:193-203) readdresses the question concerning convergence of economic beliefs over time, concluding that the inability of contemporary economics to reach a consensus and, eventually, eliminate disagreement, is partly due to the fact that "empirical evidence provides very weak constraints on theorizing" (ibid:201), while new problems are posed by the continually changing nature of the economic world. Change of theories is associated with transformations of economic environment which may change in response to new theoretical discoveries.

⁴ R. Newhauser (2001) challenges the common-held view that avarice originated from patterns and values of a monetary economy at the dawn of capitalism. On the contrary, the sin of greed for possessions, or *avaritia*, is deeply rooted in anthropological structures through a long history and occupies a central position among the list of vices in a series of theological and literary texts, from biblical times to early Middle Ages and beyond. Confronting the concrete manifestations of avarice and its socio-economic implications, Aquinas and the canonists argued that avarice is a sin because of its corrupting effects on both individual and social integrity. This argument was based on a stationary conception of society, namely on a zero-sum game of economic relations, where an excess surplus for a small elite minority was achieved at the detriment of others. Odd Langholm (2003) underlines the fact that, despite the Italian humanism's attempt to reach a compromise between religious and secular codes regulating economic behaviour, this static view prevailed in all the fifteenth-century penitential literature, originating in a natural rights tradition that was reluctant to recognize the long-run social benefits of accumulation. Certainly, this tradition seemed to be entirely different from the social philosophy upon which classical political economy was based (2003:269-71).

⁵ Typical discussions of the problem of the just price in medieval economic thought can be found, among the abundant literature, in the recent contributions of Hamouda and Price (1997) and Lapidus (1994). See, also De Roover (1958), without ignoring the classical analysis of this issue by J.W. Baldwin, S. Hollander, G. Wilson and S.T. Worland.

⁶ Kempshall (1999) more specifically examines the relevance of the concept of the common good for medieval thinking and raises questions of crucial importance for the relation between individual and community. Kempshall stresses the ethical dimensions of this concept and underlines the fact that "the individual is subordinated to the common good of the political community as a necessary precondition of participation in eternal beatitude" (1999:6). If virtuous life, however, is promoted by one's incorporation

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employing such an idea derived from philosophical speculation into more concrete matters, becomes even more crucial for medieval economics. Its precise significance for the scholastic approach to matters of economic policy (such as taxation, debasement, or toleration of usury) lies in that “the scholastic theologian will therefore conceive of the common good in human society as a hierarchy of political authority to which every citizen must subordinate all his actions” (1999:9-10), which constitutes an ambiguous problem for late scholastic thought.

⁷ There is an abundant non-English literature on early economic Spanish thought. Gómez Rivas (1999) for example, cites an annotated bibliography on the Salamanca School, in his overall review of Spanish publications focusing on the relationship between problems in business ethics and the advance of the economic theories of the Spanish doctors.

⁸ Camacho (1998:523) indicates that the Spanish doctors’ analysis of this interval of justice seems closer to the “Marshallian analysis of price indetermination in the ultra-short period of a corn-market in a country-town, (where) buyers and sellers are supposed to come to the market without knowledge of the equilibrium price”.

⁹ Laudan (1984) extensively refers to the impasses involved in an hierarchical model of justification of rational consensus formation in the case of the rising of scientific disagreements. According to prevailing hierarchical views of the relation between methods and aims of scientific activity, disagreements about factual matters are to be resolved at the methodological level while methodological differences must be treated at a axiological level (Laudan 1984:26). This tradition, however, tends to underscore axiological differences as either nonexistent or else, irresolvable. In our case, if the disagreement between scholastic economics and mercantilism is placed at the axiological level, that is at a *dissensus* on what the founding intentions of a discipline must be, then there is none level of resolution of the existing conflict. In other words, disputes about cognitive goals of science (as described at least by Core axioms 2 and 3) cannot be terminated, since we can always “specify a broad range of circumstances in which we would expect factual dissensus to endure” (ibid:33). It follows that, in the conflict between scholastic and mercantilist methods, we are unable of invoking shared procedural rules for, there is no common ground for realizing identical cognitive goals and values.

¹⁰ Y. Shionoya (1997) sets out to explore the relationship between external and internal history, or between the sociology and the philosophy of science with regard to the problems associated with the establishment of Economics as an autonomous science. Then, he argues that a conflict between the criteria of revolutionary change and synthesis arises in the case of the foundation of Economics as a science, and he contends that equal attention must be paid to the two instrumental concepts adopted in Schumpeter’s *History*, the “filiation of scientific ideas” and the “classical situation”.

¹¹ See, for instance, van Houdt (1998), who discusses in detail the theoretical novelties introduced by Lessius, the eminent Flemish Jesuit theologian, in late scholastic economic thought. For a critical reappraisal of scholastic monetary economics, see Nichans (1993).

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...on between two contrasting approaches of the nature of creative thinking, the heroic and systematic theories of invention.

¹³ As Odd Langholm (1992:593) concludes: "The logical consistency of scholastic economic doctrines in its two main areas of application, the exchange of commodities and the lending of money, has often been questioned...While modern Economics is dominated by social and utilitarian arguments, scholastic economics was mainly deontic, and its focus was personal". This was due to the fact that the medieval schoolmen sought to establish the material presuppositions of a virtuous way of living, and thus their treatment of economic life was merely instrumental. And he continues: "In the medieval schools, an element of utilitarian reasoning was reluctantly admitted but vigorously circumscribed by a deontological element. No complete harmony can be established between these fundamentally different elements of ethical theory, and this incompatibility is the source of a dilemma which always troubled christian social thought. It is a compromise" (1992:594). It should be kept in mind, however, that: "The ideal of a Christian economy would not be efficiency or optimality in any material sense" (1992:595).

¹⁴ Another version of continental scholasticism was generated from the transplanting of Spanish economics to the New World, with important contributions to the theory of value, prices and quantity theory of money. For a critical survey of these developments, see Popescu (1997:32-56). Popescu explains the economist's lack of interest in the contributions of spanish-american theologians and jurists as dependent upon the scholastic pursuit to reiterate religious and moral principles in the study of economic problems, and to attempt to find solutions incorporated in this view of economic processes.

¹⁵ From the historian's point of view, Aurell (2001) emphatically observes that the values of the new commercial capitalism, so deeply rooted in the environment of the Italian city-states, were not inserted in the circles of the Barcelona's merchants of the late 15th century. Aurell contends that, because of the lack of such an enterprising mentality, "Barcelona was unable to generate a 'capitalist' form of viewing the economy, through the incorporation and generalisation of the most modern commercial techniques... Thus it should hardly be surprising that merchants adopted a position of social rigidity... From social rigidity to downright monopoly, there is but a step" (2001:215-6). The author specifies a cluster of traditional values which, combined with other economic motivations, were in practice responsible for the forsaking of a sense of entrepreneurial risk among Catalan merchants of that period.

¹⁶ See, for example, Barrera (2001) and Van Drunen (2002). For more on catholic social philosophy, see Cochran (2003).

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