**From Consolation to Commitment: Philosophy and Theology’s role in meeting tomorrow’s Public Policy challenges**

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Good afternoon, ladies, gentlemen and graduates

Today, I wanted to make a few remarks to you on the challenges I see ahead in our societies, and the ways in which your philosophical and theological education may have provided you with special tools to address these events with measured professional expertise, and a moral compass to navigate the white water ahead.

I would like to place these remarks in the context of engaged philosophers, theologians, and pastors such as Boethius, and the Dominicans Thomas Aquinas, Francisco de Vitoria, and Bartolomeo de la Casas.   
  
Most of my professional career in the international civil service and academia was spent carrying out what is called “ strategic foresight”. The essence of this activity is to approach the evolution of our societies and economies from a multidisciplinary perspective trying to discover clues from past developments, and present trends to “image” possible futures for public policy makers. The purpose of this reflection is both philosophical and practical: the exercise is designed to stimulate thinking not only about what might be in the future, but how we can shape, in the here and now, that vey future through judicious policy formulation.

A recent report of the Martin Centre in Oxford brought together a number of experts to examine the longer-term challenges of our world. It summarized well the optimist views of the future:

*Now is the best time in history to be alive. Our world has experienced a sustained period of positive change. The average person is about eight times richer than a century ago 1. Nearly one billion people have been lifted out of extreme poverty over the past two decades 2. Living standards have soared, life expectancy has risen, the threat of war between great powers has declined, and our genetic code and universe have been unlocked in previously inconceivable ways. Many of today’s goods are unimaginable without collective contributions from different parts of the world, through which more of us can move freely with a passport or visa, provided we have the means to do so. Our world is functionally smaller, and its possibilities are bigger and brighter than ever before. Never before have so many people been optimistic about their future.”*

Such a positive view does not shy away from the challenges of tomorrow’s world, and I would like to take a few minutes to review some of these, in the light of your potential contribution to tomorrow’s future as graduates and citizens.

Among the major megatrends which have been identified by policy makers as drivers for future change we might include: demographics, climate change adaptation, increased integration and sophistication of technologies, the balance between public and private economic markets, resource availability and management, sustainable economic growth, equity and wealth distribution, the future of meaningful jobs and employment, geopolitical transformations, and the rule of law in societies. These are a few of the topics I would like to touch upon today in the light your own preparation in philosophy and theology.

I want to use these remarks as a framework to explore the ways and means by which you can enrich the public debate and influence decisions on future policy challenges.

Let us take a look at one of the primary drivers of change in our world – demographics.

Population estimates by the most reliable sources indicate that world population reached one billion for the first time in 1804. It was another 123 years before it reached two billion in 1927, but it took only 33 years to reach three billion in 1960. Thereafter, the global population reached four billion in 1974, five billion in 1987, six billion in 1999, and the United Nations estimates the world population reached seven billion in October 2011. According to current projections, the global population will reach eight billion by 2030, and will likely reach around nine billion by 2050. In other words, the global population is projected to grow nearly 30% in the next forty years.

Most of this growth will take place in developing countries. In the past, that largely confined the problems of population explosions to the countries themselves, and to their near neighbors. Today, with globalization, this paradigm has changed. The positive and negative effects of population growth are now felt globally, due to the structure of our economies, the need for skilled and unskilled labor, the changing patterns of consumption and the delocalization of production.

There is also a growing pattern of migration towards more affluent economies. The combined effects of climate change on agriculture and productivity drive these changes. These effects have also led to the challenge of the massive urbanization of populations and the worrisome problem of large-scale youth cohort unemployment.

So the population numbers are growing in absolute terms, and they are becoming more mobile and more concentrated in geographic terms.

This is accompanied by another effect that is equally unprecedented: we are now living in societies with five generations living simultaneously together. Let me explain the implications of this phenomenon. If we take a generational cohort to be 20 years, we now have the traditional first four “generations” of 1-20, 21-40, 41-60, 61-80 growing in absolute and relative numbers in most countries. The novel development is the growth of the fifth cohort, the 81-100-age range. These are populations that have profited from the advances in nutrition, preventive and therapeutic medicine and better life styles. This cohort is increasing in proportion to the other four.

There are serious social, economic and policy challenges given these changes. You will be called upon to bring philosophical and theological insights to future discussions on a whole range of morally significant social and economic issues.

As an example of potential problems, lets take a look at three aspects of this spread of humankind over a 100-year age span. First, we have to see how industrial societies have developed over the centuries. The first age cohort 1-20 has generally been considered a time of education, adaptation and learning. Productive work is generally low, except in poorer agricultural economies that depend upon child labor. The second cohort, 21-40 and the third cohort, 41-60 have been considered the “productive years” of an individual, who generally holds a full time job or is involved in a full time activity such as raising children. These two cohorts bear the brunt of taxation and social costs such as transport and housing. The fourth cohort is a transition from late work-life to retirement, at which time the individual is able to collect entitlements from contributions to pensions and social security systems. This takes place between 65 and 70 in most countries. In other words, individuals leave the “productive” economy and begin to draw down benefits from having worked. Typically these benefits materialize around 65-67 years of age. The German Chancellor Bismarck decided this age cut-off, paradoxically, in the 19th century, when the average age of a soldier/worker was 52. In other words, it was conceived as a benefit system for survivors, not for the mass of workers. This canonical age for retirement has stayed with us even today in 2014, in spite of the changes in demography and life styles. This is partially a form of cognitive bias in which we uncritically accepted and validated economic and social concepts inherited from the past without reviewing and restructuring them in the light of current circumstances.

The current system is asymmetrical: a good part of three of the five age cohorts are not in the workforce, and are not contributing to social security benefits or health care benefits in proportion to their income. This can mean underfunded and starved benefits systems. The asymmetries in the current system have spurred discussions about curtailing not only benefits and entitlements, but also reassessing care for the elderly and disabled, in the guise of providing “quality of life” management at the end of an individual’s life. All these economic developments raise serious moral issues about the nature of human rights and the value of individual life.

A second aspect of the demographic explosion and the attendant globalization of our economies is migration and immigration. From the very dawn of history, migration has been the driver for change and innovation. The novel aspect of today’s immigration patterns has to do with not only the asymmetry of income levels, but also the paradox of cultural difference. By this I mean that legal and illegal migrants often find themselves in new social situations where they automatically acquire the rights of citizens once they have entered the country and established legal residence. This admirable aspect of our societies is also what creates tensions, as long time residents view new comers as threats, not only to their economic status but also to the foundations of the political economy itself. The most common discourse of rejection and fear involving immigrants is based on “cultural assimilation” in the broadest sense. The metaphors mistakenly drawn from history are dramatic scare-mongering tactics—the last centuries of the Roman Empire being a favorite analogy for many anti-immigration campaigns. Here we need informed and committed Christian input to the public debate. The foundation of the public polity should be the recognition of the intrinsic value of each human being, and the responsibility of every citizen to take responsibility for themselves and others in society. Citizen must be aware of, and courageous enough, to enact philosophical principles in the their daily management of the commonweal.

Let me turn to two other areas of future developments that will sorely need your expertise as philosophers and theologians. The first is the riotous progress of technologies. Disruptive innovation will continue as hyper connectivity, driven by the mass of Big Data, is combined with predictive analytics, enabling the internet to become an intelligent agent that understands spoken languages and formulates meaningful, focused answers as it gathers relevant information in every format, and through every available connection. Equally challenging will be a pervasive “internet of things” as more and more physical objects are wired to the Internet and convey profiles and information about our surroundings and ourselves. All IT infrastructure will be wireless by 2020 , enabling the integration of satellite networks, cellular networks, RFID (radio frequency identification) and wifi, pushing us further towards a virtual world where augmented reality tools and virtual reality worlds will alter the ways in which we think about traditional learning and knowledge, as well as our place in society. This will pose a challenge to our policy communities as we struggle to adapt our current concepts to the new worlds of individualistic, if not to say self-absorbed, realities that might arise from these developments. We are going to need significant public presence in developing sound ethical principles for dealing with the evolution of technology towards a more powerful, independent and intelligent presence in our lives. The ability of these technologies to overwhelm and disorient us is a real challenge, and requires vigilant, active philosophical and theological reflection and input to the public debate.

In addition to these “hard” technology drivers, the biosciences are going to pose special challenges to the educated citizen of tomorrow. The search for cures to chronic disease and obesity are opening paths for understanding metabolic processes that can be controlled and regulated by biotechnologies. These include cutting edge research in human enhancement and life-style enhancement through drugs. The purpose is to improve mental performance, physical strength, speed and stamina in individuals, but also genetically enhance them for the benefit of future generations. Fundamental moral issues are involved in this type of technological advance, and we are going to need public policy analysts with an understanding of both the practice and also Catholic teaching to engage the debate early on.

Lastly, our daily economic life is being transformed in ways that will alter our relationship and responsibility to others in society. Globalization is a well-established fact, and it is driving our economies to integrate further across geographic distances once thought protective shields against “foreign goods”. New business models are emerging every year- from patterns that reflect new customer bias away from “ownership to usership”, aggregate buying and selling of commodities and services, the so-called “freemium” strategy to engage customers, and pay per usage. There are also those who are developing theories for an “ad usuam” economy, where goods and services are transacted not as acquisitions but as shared use to reduce wastage and promote collective ownership. These tendencies will promote different conceptions of “homo economicus”, and provide an opportunity for graduates such as yourselves to contribute to the debate on the nature of ethical, sustainable transactions in light of compelling philosophical and theological anthropologies. New networked business organizations and the tendency to reframe large scale organizations to accommodate multi-cultural and multi-racial environments is an opportunity to make good use of your academic skills to demonstrate that this education, this tradition and this teaching is of the utmost relevance today, and tomorrow.

We are facing challenges similar to those that our societies faced at the beginning of the second industrial revolution at the end of the 19th century: automation, robotics and artificial intelligence have the potential to transform economic sectors and to drastically downsize human roles in industries as diverse as accounting, healthcare, utilities, automotive, manufacturing and manual labor industries. We must become engaged with thinking about these changes, and the ways in which our educational system must change. We cannot afford to educate young people for careers that won’t exist by the time they enter the job market. This is a moral issue as much as an economic one. We need to engage in the process of educational renewal and reform to provide the platform to future generations to continue in the traditions, which we hold central to our definition of Christian and citizen.

Lastly, we need to be concerned about a fundamental shift operating in our economies today whereby wealth is being increasingly concentrated in the hands of a tiny elite. Whether this is the effect of long term cyclic developments inherent to capitalism, as is proposed by Thomas Piketty in his recent book Capital in the Twentieth Century, or to the combined effects of global markets and “winner takes all” business models, we need to recall the fundamental teaching of the Catholic tradition, and especially, the Dominican tradition as embodied by the work and thought of Bartolommeo de la Casas in the 16th century. The goal of every human society should be a just society defined by both the access to a means of living and the just distribution of benefits and responsibilities across the totality of society.

Change is the norm in our lives. A good education grounds us in fundamental principles that allow us to respond to change in a virtuous way. Philosophy is not just a consolation, as Boethius would have us believe. In fact, not just philosophy but also theology can serve to guide us to live better lives. The Stoics first developed the practical dimension of philosophy as a guide to life with manuals to guide disciples. It was refined through the centuries. Thomas Aquinas stands as a pioneer in devising a philosophical basis for the inquiring and restive mind of modern man, providing a guide to moral judgment and Christian commitment to action. It is a most useful basis to confront the world of tomorrow with a clear-headed, evidence-based approach to the new challenges ahead.

Let me end by saying a few words about being connected to the past. A tradition is a living transmission, relived and handed down through generations, amended and adapted to its time and place. This is what gives it vitality and longevity. Today you find yourselves in the line of descent from Boethius, the Christian Roman philosopher who was also an imperial civil servant. He spent his life trying to guide Theodoric the Great onto the straight path. He was the very model in the middle ages of the philosopher-civil servant. Thomas Aquinas himself points him out to Dante in Paradise, with the epithet of an influential public figure that steadied the hand of government. Dante remarked in the *Paradiso* that Boethius was

*“The blessed soul who exposes the deceptive world to anyone who gives ear to him.”*

(*Per vedere ogne ben dentro vi gode l’anima santa che ’l mondo fallace fa manifesto a chi di lei ben ode. (Paradiso, Canto X, 124-129)*

His *Consolation of Philosophy* is a coded manual to right living, a Platonist answer to the tumultuous world in which he lived. He was a precursor to many others who championed the role of philosophy in public life. He stands on the side of reason as it seeks to marry faith with action.

That tradition went far. I have a country house in Normandy, not far from the ancient abbey of Le Bec Hellouin, from where the great Anselm of Canterbury was called by the rustic William the Conqueror to take over the See of Canterbury. Amid the epic transformation of England that was to produce the hybrid culture of the Plantagenet world of the 12th century, Anselm calmly developed his thinking while re-organizing the Anglo-Saxon church in England.

Bec is a good place to reflect on Anselm’s famous phrase, *Neque enim quaero intelligere ut credam, sed credo ut intelligam* ("I do not seek to understand in order that I may believe, but rather, I believe in order that I may understand" (Proslogion 1) echoing Augustine’s *crede, ut intelligas*, "believe so that you may understand" (*Tract. Ev. Jo.*, 29.6) *Credo ut intellegam, intellego ut credam* = I believe to understand, I understand to believe. Anselm, like Augustine, began with the commitment of faith, and proposed reason to understand the fittingness of that faith. This has also been the hallmark of Dominican tradition through the ages, and has produced the wonderful array of erudition, social action, inspired leadership and faithful service to the Church and society that characterize the Dominicans. It is in this tradition that you have been formed and are set to live in a complicated and challenging post-modern world. Today is the beginning of that journey towards meeting the promise of your education. The future will be fraught with novelty, change, incertitude and choice.

Along this journey, remember the wisdom of an anonymous phrase, taken up by [Pope John XXIII](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pope_John_XXIII)'s in his encyclical **Ad Petri Cathedram** of 29 June 1959:

**In necessariis unitas, in dubiis libertas, in omnibus caritas—**

"Unity in necessary things; liberty in doubtful things; charity in all things".

You have a compass. Use it.

http://www.vatican.va/holy\_father/john\_xxiii/encyclicals/documents/hf\_j-xxiii\_enc\_29061959\_ad-petri\_lt.html

Verumtamen commune illud effatum, quod, aliis verbis interdum expressum, variis tribuitur auctoribus, semper retinendum probandumque est: In necessariis unitas, in dubiis libertas, in omnibus caritas.