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## Reply to Arnold McKee

By Edward J. O'Boyle

Arnold McKee's comment on my article "On Justice and Charity" which appeared in the Winter 1991 issue of this journal affords an opportunity to elaborate on the meaning of justice and charity and the role that each one plays in the workplace and the marketplace. It is unfortunate for readers of the *Review* that I did not address these matters more adequately from the very beginning. However, because all of us humans are more or less imperfect beings, a second-effort such as this frequently is necessary if we are to make any headway at all against our own ignorance. My remarks will be brief and are confined to the issues of meaning and role.

My implicit intention in the article was to unravel the meaning of justice in the narrow sense, and, for that reason, I referred to it generally as "economic justice." In retrospect, it might have been wiser to leave out entirely any references to justice in the wider sense. In any case, what matters finally for social economics and the social economy is a correct and complete understanding of the duties of producers, consumers, and resourceholders (including labor), in the marketplace and the workplace. The labels employed to designate those meanings logically derive from those meanings. Regrettably, a certain carelessness in the past with regard to the labels that have been employed signals some confusion with regard to meaning.

Fortunately, McKee and I are agreed on the three-part classification of economic justice: equivalence (he prefers "commutative"), distributive, and contributive. And we are agreed on another significant matter: the business of social economists is to apply those principles to economic affairs so that we understand more fully how the social economy actually functions. When we have done that work properly, then and only then will we be able to convince the "Biblical simplifiers" that social economics and, more importantly, the social economy are best grounded in neo-scholastic thought. They are not likely to accept our foundations without first seeing the structure that we build on them.

I have no problem, in general, with McKee's interpretation of charity including social charity. Nor do I take exception to his assertion that social charity is a requirement — if by that he means a requirement of conscience because as Leo XIII stated and I cited in the article Christian charity cannot be enforced by legal means.

McKee may be correct in not following the social encyclicals closely in order to ferret out the meaning of justice and charity. However, I have and do precisely because overall I find them instructive, especially the ones written by John Paul II. (His other writings on personalism are especially instructive too.)

As to the principle of equivalence in the workplace, there is an obvious and significant difference between net compensation and gross compensation, as McKee clearly indicates. I did not reference that difference mainly to avoid the complication that proceeds from the fact that taxes are a matter of distributive justice, which means that justice relating to net compensation calls for the simultaneous application of two principles of economic justice not just one. Additionally, contributive justice intervenes between gross compensation and net compensation whenever, for instance, support of United Way through payroll deduction is introduced or payment of dues by nonunion members is proposed in an open-shop workplace.

McKee also correctly asserts that the use of “common expressions” and “unjust practices” in the table that summarizes the three principles of economic justice are not sufficient to get us from definition to application. My intention, however, was not so much to show specifically how they have been applied as to indicate that for some time all three have been recognized as valid principles in both the marketplace and the workplace.

As to McKee’s statement that some equate solidarity with social charity, my argument is that solidarity is one of the effects of charity in a market economy. Further, while “solidarity” has become damaged goods in the 20th century, the Solidarity movement in Poland has given new, positive meaning to that word in the English-speaking world. In addition, the alternatives are not much better: “team,” “family,” “togetherness,” “community,” to cite several.

In re-thinking the role of justice and charity in the workplace and the marketplace, I have concluded it would have been better to present justice as a constraint and ill will, ripoff, and disorder as the social environmental contaminants produced in the workplace and the marketplace whenever that constraint is not respected. Looking back, I should have presented charity more clearly as a resource or input and solidarity, along with good will and the authentic bargain, as outputs. All human beings have some disposition toward charity and justice, and differentiating the two in this fashion perhaps will drive home why it is that justice alone is not sufficient to clean up the workplace and

marketplace environment. Resources are productive; constraints are not.

McKee asserts that I am being carried away by representing charity as I have and that, even if true, "it is not the point." In *spiritual matters*, I agree. In *economic matters*, however, it matters importantly because real workplace solidarity helps meet the human need to belong — a need that derives from the sociality of human nature. Moreover, the person who is able to provide an authentic bargain has a competitive advantage and with that advantage is able to provide greater employment security to his/her employees.

The conventional wisdom in economics is that "there is no such thing as a free lunch." Charity, construed as a resource rather than a virtue, is the exception. It is the only resource that is free because it does not exist and does not create real value unless it is freely given. Additionally, charity is unique among economic resources because it is never exhausted through use and cannot be conserved through nonuse.

This argument in no way threatens or diminishes the centrality of charity *in the spiritual order* as a requirement of Christian living. Rather, it indicates that *in the economic order* charity contributes importantly to meeting human material need, not just for the taker but for the giver as well.

No doubt, the market system unrestrained by either justice or charity has triggered major economic transformations for peoples in various countries and places around the world. Even so, in most of the southern hemisphere and in many of the major cities in the northern hemisphere, poverty is the central economic reality. If our perspective on the role of justice as a constraint and charity as a free resource has validity, the implications for addressing the problem of unmet human material need are promising. Perhaps the saintly Mother Teresa instinctively knows more about how the social economy actually works than we give her credit for.