doxy founded on the (domestic) laissez-
faire world of 1900.

This chronology is symptomatic of a
deeper problem. Economists, despite
their pretensions to objective social sci-
ence, are suspiciously reliable sock pup-
pets of the political status quo. In 1900,
when the American political consensus
was protectionist, the economics profes-
sion was protectionist. In 1960, when our
political consensus was Keynesian, the
profession was Keynesian.

Neither idea, in its orthodoxy form, is
taken seriously by significant numbers of
economists today. This is, frankly, quite
a record of failure, given how loudly they
insisted at the time that they were right.
Economists deserve to be taken seriously,
but the public should get over its def-
cence to them as if they possessed some
perfect and reliable knowledge beyond
the criticism that citizens of a republic
rightly apply to ideas that determine how
they are governed.

Another concern is that economic the-
orists keep saying things that practitioners
who have to deal with actual economic
facts—executives, investors, trade negoti-
ators—cannot take seriously without risk-
ing bankruptcy. Even economists em-
ployed by business schools are notorious
for being out of sync with the rest of
the profession. If engineers and physicists
did not see eye to eye, might we not wonder
about physics?

Some economists are simply paid shills
of one variety or another. This is more
true the more the theory in question con-
cerns policy questions where somebody
will make big money if Congress or regu-
larly agencies can be persuaded of cer-
tain things.

Economic consulting firms such as
Global Insight, MiCRA, and Strategic
Policy Research basically retail the ser-
vice of providing whatever conclusions
are desired. (Call them up and pretend
to be a potential client. After some boiler-
plate about integrity, you get to negoti-
ate what the study should conclude and
how.)

Some economists are hired guns not of
ordinary corporate interests seeking mon-
ney but of political interests who want glo-
balism for more sinister reasons and see
free trade as a way to get it. A one-world
economy may not directly imply one-
world government, but it is a step in the
right direction.

Economics has a certain number of
true believers for whom the infallibility
of free markets is a "beautiful idea" like
Marxism used to be. These faithful will
warp any facts to vindicate their dream.

Then there are people who are not
economists at all but libertarians or Ayn
Rand cultists who try to pass off mere ide-
o-logy as if it were economics. They may
object that restrictions on trade are a vi-o-
lation of economic freedom—they are—but
this is not economic analysis at all: It is
a political value-judgment.

The fact that economics aspires to be
a mathematically rigorous science cre-
ates a bias in favor of free trade because
it creates a bias in favor of nice, concep-
tually clean arguments and equations.
The case against free trade largely con-
sists in the observation that, in the real
world, empirical facts do not correspond
perfectly with the simplified abstractions
that purport to describe them. Free-trade
math is pretty; trade-realist math is ugly.

Take, for example, the theory of com-
parative advantage, the very core of free-
trade theory. Realistic analysis of how
nations acquire their comparative eco-
nomic advantages reveals that these are
mainly the product of accidents of eco-
nomic history, not of nature. Ralph Go-
mory and William Baumol, in their new
book Global Trade and Conflicting Na-
tional Interests, mathematize this insight.
The elegant graphs we all remember
from Economics 101 dissolve into fields
do's, and the curves that used to inter-
sect reliably at the point of free trade no
longer unequivocally support this pol-
icy as optimal. Uglier, but closer to the
facts on the ground in Silicon Valley and
Bangalore.

Economics as a discipline has a bias
toward free-market solutions such as free
trade for the same reason biologists have
a bias toward evolution: It is the theory
that best exalts the status of their profes-
sion. If free-market solutions are always
right, economists are the final arbiters of
what is serious policy and can intellectual-
ly trump anyone else who wants to "in-
terfere" with markets for political, moral,
or other reasons. They can sniff "futile"
at anyone's pretenses to produce better
outcomes than what they have to offer.
If free markets are not always right, how-
ever, this is not so.

And please do not be intimidated by
economists' equations, which dazzle with
their seeming objectivity. The problem is
not that the actual math is wrong but that
mathematical economics depends on
simplifying assumptions that are them-
selves not mathematical. These mathe-
matical ice castles rest on swamps.

Take, for example, the blithe assump-
tion that people have benign time prefer-
ences—i.e., that they do not want a short-
term consumption binge at the cost of
later indebtedness. If they want this un-
der free-trade conditions, it can cause
them to sell their country into debt for
cheap imports.

By themselves, none of these points
proves that free trade is bad; other argu-
ments are needed to do that. They do,
however, show that economists are ca-
pable of being wrong and that members
of the public who are prepared to use in-
tellectually legitimate arguments have a
right to question them. The stakes are
too high not to.

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DEMOCRACY

Democracy and God

by Thomas Storck

S
ince at least the 1960's, federal judges
in the United States have overturned
a number of state and federal laws deal-
ing, broadly speaking, with marriage,
sexuality, and the family—most notori-
ously in the 1973 Roe v. Wade decision
on abortion. And numerous commen-
tators have pointed out the constitu-
tional absurdity of these decisions, based on
no clear text of the written Constitution
but on "penumbras, formed by ema-
nations from [the Bill of Rights]," as
Justice William Douglas called them
in the 1965 Griswold opinion invalidat-
ing Connecticut's anticontraception
statute. Of course, the reason those
opposed to such remnants of Christian
morality have resorted to the judiciary
in order to gain their ends is that rarely,
ever, would they be able to get their
measures enacted by an honest appeal
to voters. The current debate on same-
sex "marriage" is another case in point.
Neither in Hawaii nor in Massachu-
setts—two very liberal states—would
a majority of voters ever approve same-sex
"marriage" in the foreseeable future.
So what we have in such cases are nothing
but examples of "raw judicial power," as
Justice Byron White termed it in his
dissent in Roe v. Wade.

Unfortunately, however, many of these
critics and commentators who quite rightly point out these instances of judicial usurpation do not understand the issue completely. For while complaining of the tyranny of unelected judges, they seem to think that, if only such measures were enacted by elected legislators, there would be nothing much to complain about. Sen. Rick Santorum of Pennsylvania, for example, in a graduation address that he gave at Christendom College in 2003, said that,

> While much of our culture is removing moral guideposts, so too is the government. With this I have no dispute. We are a representative democracy and eventually the collective conscience of the popular culture is going to be reflective [sic] in our laws. My concern is the usurpation... by the United States Supreme Court, of the people’s rights, through their elected representatives, to decide these crucial moral issues and the resulting dulling of our collective consciousness and that this vital debate of who we are and what we’re about is being moved from the living rooms of America to the court room.

Similar were the remarks of Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia in his dissent in the 2003 case of Lawrence v. Texas, which invalidated Texas’s anti-sodomy statute.

Let me be clear that I have nothing against homosexuals... promoting their agenda through normal democratic means. Social perceptions of sexual and other morality change over time, and every group has the right to persuade its fellow citizens that its view of such matters is the best. That homosexuals have achieved some success in that enterprise is attested to by the fact that Texas is one of the few remaining States that criminalize private, consensual homosexual acts. But persuading one’s fellow citizens is one thing, and imposing one’s views in absence of democratic majority will is something else.

Now, what is wrong with what Senator Santorum and Justice Scalia say here? Do not the people indeed have the right to determine such matters? If not the people, then who? Contrary to what Senator Santorum or Justice Scalia think, however, the people have no more right—either directly or through their elected representatives—to allow abortion or same-sex “marriage” or other such evils than unelected judges do. There simply is no such right, because whatever authority a government exercises comes not from the people but from God, and God does not give governments authority to enact such legislation.

Our Declaration of Independence says that “governments are instituted among men” and that they derive “their just powers from the consent of the governed.” This does not exactly accord with the traditional Christian view. St. Paul said that “there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God” (Romans 13:1). There is nothing wrong with the people choosing their rulers or their form of government. But a ruler, even if designated by the people, receives his authority ultimately from God. A man and a woman can freely choose each other in marriage, but the authority and duties of the husband and wife come not from their mutual agreement but from the divinely instituted order of the family. The couple has liberty only as to whether and whom they will marry. The essential order of marriage is from God. It is similar in the political realm. Rulers, however chosen, cannot lawfully enact anything contrary to the law of God. Whether the rulers are kings, an aristocracy, or a popularly elected legislature makes no difference. They govern as administrators of God and by His authority.

One of the wisest political writers of modern times, Gioacchino Pecci (1810-1903), better known as Pope Leo XIII, discussed these points exhaustively in a series of encyclicals beginning in 1885 with Immortale dei. In his 1888 encyclical Libertas, he speaks of those

> who affirm that the morality of individuals is to be guided by the divine law, but not the morality of the State, so that in public affairs the commands of God may be passed over, and may be entirely disregarded in the framing of laws.

He says of this position that its “absurdity... is manifest.” And Pope Leo here is simply repeating what is part of the entire tradition of Christian wisdom of course, this does not mean that a government is obliged to forbid by its laws every sin, for the tradition is equally clear that political prudence allows many acts that God will punish to remain unpunished by human law. Thus, according to Saint Thomas (Summa Theologiae I-II.96:2), “by human law not all the vices are prohibited from which virtuous men abstain, but only the more serious, from which it is possible for the greater part of the multitude to abstain.” This conception of law, then, does not point toward a tyranny but simply toward a subjection of human law, however enacted, to the law and sovereign authority of God.

Democracy is a perfectly legitimate form of government and can, at times, be the best form. The democratic ideology that insists that the people have an inherent right to rule themselves, and thus are answerable to no higher authority, however, must be rejected. In truth, the choice of democracy, or of any of the other just forms of rule that the ancients enumerated (monarchy, aristocracy, or a mixed regime), depends on political prudence, historical traditions, and accidental circumstances. As long as the rulers seek to promote the common good, the type of regime that we have matters less than most people think. Better a monarchy, for example, that governs with a genuine view toward promoting the common good than a faction-ridden democracy that has been hijacked by special interests.

In thinking about issues such as abortion, then, let us not be misled into supposing that the only problem is that our judges rather than our legislators have imposed the practice on us. For the latter have no more right to do so than the former. I am not sanguine about this point of view becoming widespread in the near future. Still, however difficult it would be to convince the majority of our fellow citizens of its truth, it is the correct view.

Any attempt at political wisdom that ignores this point is simply avoiding facing the most important political question of all.

Thomas Storck’s latest book is Christendom and the West: Essays on Culture, Society and History. He is a contributing editor of the New Oxford Review and a member of the editorial board of the Chesterton Review.