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January 20, 2013: Jeffrey Tucker Defends the Morality of Markets at Duquesne University Talk

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Title: Jeffrey Tucker Defends the Morality of Markets at Duquesne University Talk

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1/20/2013—Jeffrey Tucker, the Executive Editor at Laissez Faire Books, spoke at Duquesne University Friday night on the topic, Markets: Unjust or Moral? Unfortunately, I had to leave by 8 pm and missed the end of the talk and the Q&A. But what I heard before I left was very good indeed. But the talk was not really about morality, but about the misconceptions many Catholics have about Catholic Social Teaching. The origin of this thrust from the Church beginning in the 19th century (often dated at 1891 with the issuance of the Encyclical Rerum Novarum by Pope Leo XIII, but, Tucker argued really originating somewhat earlier) was opposition to Marxism and nationalism. Pope Leo was defending civil society and liberty against these forces, much as economic conservatives do today in the face of overbearing government. Far from supporting what passes today for liberalism, Catholic Social Teaching originated as an effort to enhance morality and restrain the State. Rerum Novarum in particular embraced private property, free association and freedom of worship. Tucker did not deny Pope Leo's emphasis on the right to a just wage—nor for that matter Pope Benedict's indictment of the excesses of financial capitalism. But Tucker emphasized that the Church could be incorrect about how markets are best regulated or wages best adjusted. There is no implied fallibility in the Church's views on economics and public policy and no Pope since Pius IX has tried to claim such expertise. I hope Tucker was questioned closely on his presentation. If I had been there, I would have asked him whether he viewed global warming as theft—Pope Leo did so view socialism and global warming seems to have similar characteristics (my acts deprive you of your property without your having any say). I also wanted to ask him about his theory that there is no inherent conflict between nature and human development. Are humans then entitled to make any changes in nature and its creatures that they wish? Does nature then have no inherent independent dignity? According to Duquesne Professor Antony Davies, Tucker's talk is just a first step in an ongoing dialogue between Catholic Social Teaching and the philosophy of freedom. I will note on this blog what future programs are being offered.