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## CHAPTER 4

## “The ryche man hatz more nede thanne the pore”: Economics and Dependence in *Dives and Pauper*

Elizabeth Harper

In “Holy Poverty,” the prologue to *Dives and Pauper*, the eponymous Pauper announces that, although a beggar, he does not need the money of the wealthy man with whom he is debating. Alluding to Matthew 6:26–30 and Luke 12:24–28, Pauper claims that God will take care of him:

For he þat fedyȝt fouyl in flyght and fysh in fiod and alle thyngge þat lyuyȝt vpon erthe, he þat clothyȝt bryddyȝ in the eyr wyt federys and wengys so fayre and shene and the lylis and flourys vpon erthe in craftly wede so fayre and bryght, wol wondyrful and lykynge to seen, he þat byddyȝt vs nought to been besy ne karyn to mehil for oure lyflood ne for oure clothyngge, he shal sende me þat me nedȝt. (1976, I: 52, ll. 41–7)<sup>1</sup>

In this passage, Pauper describes the birds and lilies from the Sermon on the Mount, along with rich and poor human beings (“we”), all arrayed together in their dependence upon the divine creator. Pauper is not directly quoting the Synoptic Gospels, however. His rendition of the Sermon on the Mount collapses the finely constructed garments of the wealthy person into the same category as the useful wings and feathers of

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birds and the ephemeral beauty of flowers. This small detail apparently comes from Saint Francis's famous sermon to the birds, in which the saint bids the birds be thankful to God, who has given them feathers for clothing and wings for flight.<sup>2</sup> Francis's verbal conflation of the two passages (Jesus mentions food for birds and clothing for lilies, while Francis imagines God dressing as well as feeding the birds) appears here in Pauper's speech as well. And like Francis, Pauper embraces dependence and vulnerability as essential parts of created existence. All "lyflode" comes from God, says Pauper. Not just the poor, but all created things are defined by their dependence on God for beauty, clothing, food, and survival.

Scholars agree that the author of *Dives and Pauper* was likely a Franciscan. While the writer is pointedly vague about his own identity, he does emphasize the fraternal themes of poverty and preaching throughout the treatise. Moreover, internal details indicate a partisan stance: his preference for the sort of shoes worn by Franciscans, his critical comments on every fraternal order except the Franciscans, a short, approving mention of Francis himself, and citation of a scriptural commentary that was available only in the library of the Franciscan convent at Oxford until the late 1400s.<sup>3</sup> Further, this writer composed another, later set of scriptural postils contained in MS Longleat 4, and some of these postils express criticism of the diocesan preaching rules that would have been most irksome to Franciscans.<sup>4</sup> More compelling than these details, however, are the text's thematic elements which echo and amplify older Franciscan themes. In chapters one and two of the prologue, for instance, Pauper describes himself as a stranger and exile from heaven, language Francis and his early followers had used in the thirteenth century to describe their place in the world.<sup>5</sup> Likewise, in the ten chapters that follow, Pauper repeatedly frames his arguments in favor of voluntary poverty within a larger understanding of humans as created by God and thus as fundamentally dependent and needy. This framing allows Pauper to problematize the categories of "rich" and "poor" by showing that the attributes that constitute wealth—possessions, money, social status, access to power—all derive from the cooperation and provision of other creatures.

The writer's arguments in "Holy Poverty" reflect both fourteenth-century Franciscan discourses about poverty and contemporary academic ideas about money.<sup>6</sup> He carefully dissects the hidden networks of production and distribution that underpin individual consumption at every point. This writer manifests an intense, analytical concern with the ways in which economic activities both tie his own society together and create imaginary

divisions between individuals who are fundamentally defined by their shared suffering and mortality.

### CREATION AND LORDSCHEPE

Saint Francis himself embraced Christ's evangelical counsels about poverty literally, without attempting to work out potential contradictions or provide for possible practical needs. He and his followers thought of themselves as reviving the practices of the apostles and the early church, who according to Acts held everything in common. This was part of what made early Franciscanism so attractive. But as the group grew, its members felt a greater need for institutional and intellectual structures to sustain it.<sup>7</sup>

Thinkers of the thirteenth and very early fourteenth centuries saw the development of absolute poverty as a distinctive, controversial Franciscan doctrine. Bonaventure laid out the first systematic justification of the Franciscans' position. According to him, Christ demonstrated the most perfect life by not owning anything, whether individually or in common. Bonaventure argued that although the gospels did mention a moneybag, this was only a concession to the weak. Bonaventure and those who followed him distinguished among several different relationships to property beyond straightforward *proprietas* or *dominium* (ownership or, translated into English more literally, lordship). Those who would follow Christ in the most perfect life could use property owned by another who could always take the property back (*simplex usus facti*). They could not, however, "retain" property (*possessio*, just having a thing, separate from having legal right to it); they could not use property and enjoy its fruits (*usufructus*); nor could they use property and enjoy just some of its fruits (*usus*).<sup>8</sup> Along with *dominium*, all of these were less perfect relationships to property, said Bonaventure and his followers.

Bonaventure's arguments made sense of Francis's unsystematic claims about poverty, while attempting to create a legal justification for Franciscans' place in Christendom. However, his arguments also created massive controversy both internally, mainly between the Spiritual and Conventual factions, and externally, between the Franciscan order and the papacy, particularly Pope John XXII.<sup>9</sup> It is clear why. To claim that a life without possessions is the highest form of Christian perfection is to claim that owning possessions is second best (at best). Bonaventure's arguments thus implied a fundamental criticism of the wealth of monasteries and the institutional Church. As these arguments evolved from a narrow focus on

the Franciscan order to a larger debate about monastic and ecclesiastical ownership, fourteenth-century English clerics such as Richard FitzRalph, Uthred of Durham, John Wyclif, and the Franciscan William Woodford added and innovated to the conceptual arsenal from which all drew.<sup>10</sup>

During these debates, all sides appealed to creation as an originary moment that indicated God's intentions for how humans should live thereafter. In the thirteenth century, the Franciscans and their opponents made this move as part of a larger argument about the order's relationship to property. Following Augustine, Bonaventure argued that God had created all human beings equal, and that private property only came into existence after the Fall. In contrast, the papal theologian Giles of Rome argued in 1302 that property ownership had existed before the Fall and that private property was therefore sinless.<sup>11</sup> Later in the fourteenth century, English mendicants and their critics continued to refer to the moment of creation as normative. The Franciscan William of Ockham and the anti-mendicant Richard FitzRalph, bishop of Armagh, for instance, both contrasted the dominion or lordship that Adam had before the Fall, which had been common to all human beings, with a post-lapsarian dominion which included individual ownership and had to be instituted as a result of human sinfulness. Ockham believed that it was possible for later believers to renounce the second type of dominion, while FitzRalph asserted that it was only Christ and the apostles who had had the ability to do this.<sup>12</sup>

The writer of *Dives and Pauper* is aware of these discussions. In chapter seven of "Holy Poverty," he makes Dives refer to Adam's pre-lapsarian dominion as evidence that it is unnatural to reject ownership:

God made Adam and mankende lord of alle thyngge vpon erthe qhanne he seyde: Dominiamini piscibus maris et volatilibus celi, etc [Gen. 1:28], Beth 3c lordys of fysshis in the see and of bryddys in the eyr & of alle thyngge þat steryzt and lyuyzt vpon erthe. Ergo, it is aȝens kende a man to forsakyn al maner lordshepe as 3c doon. (63, ll. 8–13)

In reply, Pauper distinguishes between "lordshepe ordeynyd of God be weye of kende" and "temperyl lordshepe ordeynyd and foundyn of man be weye of synne and of coueytise" (63, ll. 13–15)—the distinction that both Ockham and FitzRalph had made. Pauper then places himself in agreement with Ockham by asserting that he and his colleagues can and do reject human "lordshepe" but retain the lordship given by God, which belongs equally to all human beings. But Pauper's chief concern is not

with political theology, as he makes clear in the next sentence. He continues, "be weye of kende we been euene in lordshepe, as oure begynnyng and oure ending shewyt wel" (63, ll. 16–18). Pauper's chief concern is to show that the rich and the poor are the same by nature. Abstract philosophical questions about dominion and lordship, for him, are only secondary.<sup>13</sup>

What unites rich and poor, according to this writer, is their createdness, and the vulnerability and suffering that accompany that createdness. Elsewhere in the prologue, he makes clear the connection between createdness and vulnerability. From the very first sentence of the prologue, a quotation and gloss of Proverbs 22:2, the writer homes in on what it means to be created: "The ryche man and the pore metyn hem togedere; God is makere of hem bothyn, for he made bothe ryche and pore and boughte hem bothe wyt his blod wol dere" (51, ll. 3–6). The text, which resolves itself into the voice of the character Pauper, then elaborates on the shared "kende," or nature, of these two categories (51, l. 6). Rich and poor both enter the world naked and poor; they leave it naked and poor. For both, birth and death are traumatic experiences of pain, sorrow, and helplessness (51, ll. 6–15). Yet, says Pauper, this shared experience of suffering does not result in compassion. While the poor man lives by begging, the rich man's life consists of a refusal to alleviate the suffering of the poor man. In other words, their shared *kende*, which ought to unite them in bonds of reciprocity and affinity, is obscured by economic privilege and the sins that such privilege makes possible.<sup>14</sup>

This theme, set up so directly in the first lines of *Dives and Pauper*, appears throughout the first chapter, where we see no less than five references to God as "makere of hem bothyn." In one place, God is referred to as the one who made the poor poor (52, ll. 22–3). As a result, Pauper argues, to reject the poor is to reject the rule of God who made them poor. In another place, Pauper warns against despising the poor because God's creative act is the only thing that separates different sorts of people: "dispysyt nought þe pore but hauyt pyte on hem and thynkyt þat God myghte a mad me as ryche as 3ow" (1:52, ll. 34–35). This emphasis on the poor person as *created* poor might suggest that inequity is divinely ordained and thus permissible. Yet, Pauper does not draw this conclusion in the text. Rather, Pauper argues that the createdness of all humans is what unites them. And to be created is to be poor and dependent by nature, regardless of how much money one has. Where the earliest

Franciscans embraced dependence as a radical departure from ordinary life, this writer seems to be insisting that in fact dependence and contingency are part of human nature.

### NETWORKS OF DEPENDENCE

Having characterized all humans, whether rich or poor, as dependent by nature, the writer of *Dives and Pauper* then marshals arguments that appear to be influenced by scholastic philosophical treatments of economics. As Joel Kaye has shown, scholastic philosophers of the thirteenth and fourteenth century increasingly understood money as a dynamic medium of exchange. Reflecting Aristotle's famous statement, in the *Ethics*, that money serves as a measure for all things, scholars during this time began to imagine the world as a set of constantly changing relationships and exchanges, with money indexing the shifting, momentary value of objects to particular individuals rather than some kind of static, set price. The motivation behind that value was termed *indigentia*, or need. While it is probably going too far to characterize these understandings as a specifically "Franciscan economics," Franciscan scholars like Peter John Olivi and Duns Scotus were prominent among those who used Aristotle to apply geometrical principles to ideas of justice and exchange.<sup>15</sup> In particular, Olivi emphasized that money could be understood as measuring usefulness (*utilitas*) and need (*indigentia*), these two qualities being determined situationally rather than in some absolute measure—what modern economists call *demand*.

We see a version of this in chapter four of the prologue to *Dives and Pauper*. Pauper's larger claim in chapter four (against Dives's commonsense preference for wealth) is that poverty of any kind is better for the soul. He makes several theological arguments in support of this claim, but the centerpiece of the chapter is his paradoxical claim that "the rycche man hatz more nede banne the pore" (58, l. 41–42). The poor man, says Pauper, needs only food, drink, and clothes—the necessities—to maintain himself and his dependents. The rich man, on the other hand, has grand social expectations attached to his estate. The necessities will not suffice: he needs to buy luxury items ("ryche clothing, pellure and perre, deynthe metys and deynthe drynkys" [58, ll. 51–52]) to put on a proper show for society. At the same time, the rich man is dependent upon others. They are the ones who will come to his feasts and show him honor, of course, but

more darkly, he needs to pay them off: he "must zeue to his frendys to han [here] assistance and here helpe; he zeuyzt hese enmyis to lettyn here malice" (58, ll. 56–58). The bleak implication is twofold: that he must rely on bribes rather than on the personal loyalty or love that would normally define friendship, and that he must pay off his enemies rather than actually reconciling with them.<sup>16</sup> In Pauper's telling, wealth even replaces natural affection and the possibility of real forgiveness.

To a modern reader, Pauper's deployment of the word *nede* in this chapter will seem inconsistent with its use in the rest of the prologue: it is hard to imagine anyone needing jewelry or furs. But I would suggest that the writer is translating the Latin term *indigentia* into its closest English equivalent. Although his use of Middle English *nede* elsewhere in the prologue does not carry philosophical overtones, in this passage he treats *nede* as a flexible, subjective quality that motivates exchange of goods and services differently for different people.<sup>17</sup> The thrust of his argument shows the influence of scholastic discussions put forward by Olivi and others.

In making this point, Pauper draws a direct line between the abstraction *indigentia* and its spiritual effects. Part of what makes the writer's critique so effective is that he accurately imagines the subjective experience of *indigentia*. Endlessly driven to demonstrate affluence while at the same time endlessly beholden to those who make such a demonstration possible, the rich man is not free from, but rather hostage to, social expectations of generosity, expenditure, patronage, and display. In contrast, the poor man is free not just from the burden of wealth but from the social debts and expectations that wealth incurs. Pauper argues that riches make their owner vulnerable precisely because they enslave him to social obligation, entangling him in a net of imperatives to spend, to give, to patronize, and above all to display his estate. In other words, Pauper turns upside-down the normal social system of valuation in which all these expenditures, displays and connections are useful, sought-after things. His rendering makes them sources of anxiety rather than sources of satisfaction.

This inversion is the central project of "Holy Poverty." The writer proclaims poverty as the ideal way of life not just to validate his own teaching authority (though that is a necessary side-effect of his arguments) but also to reduce the wealthy to the same humiliating dependence as the poor. In chapter seven, Dives tries to resist this reduction, claiming that the rich are necessary to the poor: "3yf alle meen weryn as pore as pu art, pu shuldist fare wol etuel" (63, ll. 18–19) This objection is important: Dives here



argues that the sanctity that friars claim (and at this moment the debate is clearly about the mendicant way of life) as a result of their renunciation actually depends on the compromises that their donors have made by having worldly possessions. Without alms given by the wealthy, they would starve. Pauper himself has implicitly affirmed Dives's point already by not mandating that Dives become like him. But at this moment in the text, Pauper nevertheless absolutely denies that wealth means independence. Rather, he demonstrates, Dives is one individual within a larger network of laborers and artisans upon whom he depends. In a biting series of rhetorical questions, Pauper names the tasks of agricultural, production, manufacture, and maintenance that support the lifestyles not just of rich men but of everyone (63, ll. 18–34).

The main thrust of Pauper's argument is a sociological and economic one. Pauper seeks to make the wealthy individual aware of his social context, and especially to show how the wealthy depend on the labors, skills, and production of both skilled and unskilled workers. Wealth, he implies, produces an illusion of power and autonomy. In reality, Dives's money is valuable only because it connects him to a network that provides all the apparatus of affluence in exchange for his expenditure. If his workers were as rich as he, they would have no need to work for him: "Al muste þu þanne doon alone. ʒyf þu haddyst a wyf, mehil woo shulde she han, and ʒyf þu haddist noon, þu shuldist been wrecche of alle wrecchys. Per shulde noo man welyn doon ony thing for þe" (63, ll. 27–30). He would be stranded in his opulent but unproductive house, coffers full but larder empty.

Dives, then, is totally dependent upon the market. The workers who supply his goods and services in chapters four and seven work for money. They are not obligated to do anything for Dives because of their social status or his, nor would they do it out of friendship or fellow-feeling. Pauper's implicit message here is that within the network of human social life, money can quantify value but it cannot replace the commodities and services that its members produce. This recalls Giacomo Todeschini's characterization of "the Franciscan attention to the relativity of needs, to the variability, often subjective, of those needs, and once again to the enigma constituted by the value of created things ... Poverty [for Francis] means the ability to see the usefulness of things that a monetary rationality, anchored to the metal of coins, declared to be without value."<sup>18</sup> The writer of *Dives and Pauper* reverses this insight to declare that wealth is

useless apart from the goods and services that it buys and the network of social actors who provide such goods and services.

### CONCLUSION

What characterizes human beings in the prologue of *Dives and Pauper* is dependence: dependence on a divine creator, dependence upon commodities to maintain his social station, and dependence upon human social and economic networks to provide those commodities. Interestingly, Pauper never attacks wealth itself in this text. Rather, he attacks a set of assumptions that Dives makes about himself: that he has achieved his status himself; that his money has a value separate from its ability to connect him with others; that he himself exists separate from the economic systems that sustain all human social life. Pauper invokes powerfully the power of God as creator to awaken the rich man to the essential givenness of his own life. We also see that Dives—and by extension the reader—is dependent in two directions, both on God and on his fellow human beings.

In making these arguments, the writer of *Dives and Pauper* draws on a wide range of ideas used by Franciscan scholars in the preceding centuries. Some of these ideas derive from the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Franciscan defenses of absolute poverty, entirely appropriate for a prologue titled "Holy Poverty." Yet, others show the broader influence of scholastic philosophical investigations of Aristotle, particularly as Aristotelian ideas related to the usefulness of money and the interrelationships it could create by measuring human *indigenia*. At the same time, the author of *Dives and Pauper* does not appear to be interested in entering these debates himself. He does not, for instance, invoke the most contested issues from the controversies, such as the question of whether Christ owned anything or a precise definition of *dominium*.<sup>19</sup> Nor does he draw attention to the philosophical background of his arguments about human need and wealth. His main interest is intellectual and spiritual transformation, as he seeks to change his audience's attitude toward their social position. He is trying to convey to his readers that the poverty and vulnerability experienced by Franciscan friars is an existential reality for all human beings, whether Franciscan or not.

## NOTES

1. Barnum's edition is divided into volume 1, parts 1 and 2, which contain an introduction and the edited text, and volume 2, which contains commentary and explanatory notes. All quotations of the text are taken from volume 1, part 1 of this edition and cited by page and line number.
2. Thomas of Celano (1963, 31).
3. See *Dives and Pauper* (1976), volume 1, part 1, 317, ll. 17-23 and p. 319, ll. 71; and volume 2, 194, l. 61. See also *Dives and Pauper*, "Introduction," 2, xxv; Plander (1933), 307; Hudson and Spencer (1984), 231; Willmott (1994), 4-5. For more on the role of Franciscans at the University of Oxford, see Courtenay (1992), 1-34.
4. Willmott (1994), 49-54.
5. Wood (2002), 27; Vauchez (2012), 163.
6. *Dives and Pauper* has not received the scholarly attention it deserves as a literary text. While it is frequently mentioned in aggregation with other vernacular theological works or as a repository for tidbits about late medieval religious beliefs, almost thirty years separated the publication of volume one and two of its critical edition. As a result, only a few scholars have examined its literary construction or thematic elements. See, for instance, Tavormina (1994), 271-86; Aers (2004), 157-62; Fitzgibbons (2013), 181-214.
7. See Lambert (1961), 133-48; Little (1978), 146-52. For a detailed history of how Franciscans entered European university settings, see Senocak (2012).
8. See Lambert (1961), 133-56; Little (1978), 34, 164; Dawson (1983), 320ff; Dipple (1994).
9. There is a dense secondary literature surrounding Bonaventure's innovations and the resulting controversies, which had far-reaching consequences for law and political thought as well as theology. See, in addition to what has been cited already, Lambert (1961), 167-9; Coleman (1988), 607-48; Canning (2011), 107-32; Todeschini (2009), 79-150.
10. See Dawson (1983); Doyle (1983), 17; Scase (1989), 47-58; Dipple (1994).
11. See Dawson (1983), 326ff; Lambert (1961).
12. See Dawson (1983), 325-6; Coleman (1988), 642-5; Scase (1989), 55, 58.
13. Canning (2011, 118-19) argues that Ockham saw the Franciscan life of poverty as being primary and that he intended his arguments to be fundamentally apolitical, a stance which seems similar to the stance that the *Dives*-writer is taking in this passage.

14. This use of the multivalent Middle English word *kynde* to evoke ideas of reciprocity and mutual help will be familiar to readers of other fourteenth- and fifteenth-century English literature. See Galloway (1994) and Davis (2016).
15. See Kaye (1998) 48-9, 130-46.
16. Compare Langland's Lady Meed in both the B and C versions of *Piers Plowman*, whose gift "reconciles" the victim and perpetrator of violent crime to each other without seeking real forgiveness and moral change. See Langland (1995), Passus IV, ll. 47-103 and (1994), Passus IV, ll. 45-98.
17. See Kaye (1998), 66-70, 139.
18. Todeschini (2009), 67-68.
19. He is even willing to borrow the arguments of an earlier anti-Franciscan writer, Uthred of Durham, who argued that the evangelical counsels did not forbid owning property but rather forbade loving and relying on property. See Dipple (1994), 251. Pauper uses a version of this argument in his exegesis of Matthew 19, the story of the rich young ruler, in chapter nine of "Holy Poverty."

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## CHAPTER 5

## Summoning Hunger: Polanyi, Piers Plowman, and the Labor Market

Robert Epstein

In the midst of one of the most famous passages in *Piers Plowman*, Piers does something curious. His attempts to establish the disciplines of work and society by requiring individuals of all ranks and divisions to help him plow his half-acre have begun to unravel, as Wastour and his ilk refuse to work, in defiance of both Piers and the dutiful knight. Frustrated, Piers does not merely, like the little red hen, deny the malingers the fruits of the labor to which they refuse to contribute. Rather, he summons the allegorical figure of Hunger:

"Now by Crist," quod Peres the ploughman, "Y shal apayre yow alle,"  
 And houped aftur Hunger, that herde hym at the furste.  
 "Y preyc the," quod Perus tho, "pur charite, sire Hunger,  
 Awreke me of this wastors, for the knyhte wil nat." (VIII.167–70)<sup>1</sup>

It seems out of character for Piers to shout for Hunger and demand that he wreak vengeance on Piers's antagonists. As Derek Pearsall notes, "Peres's role here is a little blurred: his action is dramatically vivid but not entirely logical" (2008, 163 n.). Pearsall assumes that Hunger is equivalent

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