

This book is at its best in carefully documenting the history of telecommunications policy and explaining the decentralized, and occasionally random, nature of the process. This process had led to good results under imperfect information

in telecommunications. It is easy to be sympathetic with Brock's conclusions. However, such an assessment must remain tentative because we cannot know what the results of a more centralized process would have been. ■

Profits, Priests, and Princes: Adam Smith's Emancipation of Economics from Politics and Religion

Peter Minowitz

Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993. ISBN: 0-8047-2166-1, \$45.00.

Peter Minowitz, from the University of Santa Clara, has written a powerful and controversial book. Minowitz is a political philosopher with a Straussian twist. Perhaps I should digress a moment to explain the Straussian influence for those of our readers who are not political philosophers. Leo Strauss was a political philosopher at the University of Chicago who reinvigorated a serious concern for the classic texts by reading them with a rigor usually reserved for sacred texts. Every detail, every seeming slip is noted for what it might imply about the teaching. Mistakes and logical contradictions are part of the great jigsaw puzzle to be assembled by the careful reader. You are also wise to assume that the writer you are examining is wiser than you are.

There is no simple teaching which comes out of Strauss' approach and there are bitter battles among his students and non-students as to who carries the mantle. There are atheist Straussians, epicurean Straussians (not necessarily the same thing), Jewish Straussians, and, yes, even Christian Straussians; there are conservative Straussians, liberal Straussians, radical Straussians, and yes, even East Coast Straussians and West Coast Straussians.

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In my own intellectual development, the reading of Strauss did an important thing which curiously enough was the same tonic administered for many of my generation by the work of Ayn Rand. We were woken from a dogmatic slumber induced by relativism and historicism. Moral talk might be about something objective. Plato might have something to teach us which is eternally true. In other words, contrary to the corrosive cynicism of the present day, the canon was not simply a cannon. Words are not simply base rhetoric designed to gain power.

Whereas political philosophers treat political texts as Holy Scripture or Talmudic writings, economists are usually more superficial. Economists are much more pedestrian intellectuals than the political philosophers. They keep their feet squarely on the earth and walk along the surface. When they stumble upon a contradiction, they want to pry it out of the earth and have done with it. They enjoy finding contradictions since, as Minowitz puts it, "Economists earn their keep by addressing problems and paradoxes." They don't want to tease these contradictions like a cat might play with a mouse; they want to eradicate them. It forces the critic to take one statement and reject the other. Truth is discovered by rejecting poor thought.

Now what do the political philosophers make of Smith? Previous Straussians such as Joseph Cropsey and Martin Diamond have stated the importance of Smith for modern political philosophy, meaning the enterprise carried out by Locke and the Federalist Papers. But Minowitz is more thorough and more radical.

The flavor of Minowitz's book can be captured by using an observation made by the liberal clergyman, Alexander Carlyle, who wrote the Duke of Buccleuch about Adam Smith: "We must understand this respectable author, you see, my lord, as we do scripture, by comparing one passage with another, and taking the general scope of the whole."

The irony is that Peter Minowitz uses

this approach to argue that Smith is an atheist and an anti-Christian. This, of course, will please some Christian economists and distress others. Moreover it does not mean that Minowitz is himself an atheist since he is only trying to explicate Smith.

No one should ever have doubted that Smith was elusive, cagey, and hard to pin down on religious issues. There has been a good deal of sloppy thought by superficial thinkers who have attributed to the Invisible Hand passage theological dimensions supporting religion, Smith's Protestantism, Smith's sunny belief in a good God, and other such puerilities. These are knowledge claims about Smith's views which are not even based on the surface. I have long shared with Minowitz doubts as to the orthodoxy of Adam Smith.

But Minowitz is also making dramatic knowledge claims of Smith's teaching which just happen to be the opposite—Smith was an atheist and an anti-Christian! This goes far beyond the more simple claims that he was an agnostic, or that he was a non-Christian. But let us explore just one example of Minowitz's careful reading to see if we can find even circumstantial evidence for his claims. I find that his case is not proved.

He claims that Jerry Muller (1993) overlooks "the only chapter or section of Smith's corpus that begins with the word 'religion' and ends with the phrase 'self-approbation' (*The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (TMS) III.6)...the chapter in question demonstrates just how hostile even TMS is towards existing forms of Christianity: Christianity is initially identified as a sect (III.6. 1) and thereafter represented by bigotry and bloody persecution coupled with ridicule of 'our Savior's precept' (turning the other cheek) (III.6.12-13)."

Let me give my reading which provides a completely different picture. Smith is questioning certain sectarian ideas of Christianity which attack the natural or social foundations of virtues or good behavior. He finds this sectarian narrowness unpleasant in "any sect, who professed themselves of a religion in which, as

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it is the first precept to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength, so it is the second to love our neighbor as we love ourselves; and we love ourselves surely for our own sakes, and not merely because we are commanded to do so. That the sense of duty should be the sole principle of our conduct, is no where the precept of Christianity;..." (TMS, III.6.1). What follows after that is an attack on what might be called a religious Kantian idea of duty. He is defending Christianity against sectarian attacks.

As for the bigotry of Christianity, Smith first discusses Voltaire's play, *Mahomet*, then the complicated problem of a "bigoted Roman Catholic" during the Massacre of St. Bartholomew who is afflicted with a natural sense of compassion against the stern sense of his duty which would tell him to slaughter all the Protestants. He lacks self-approbation because he feels he is not carrying out his sense of duty. He is not completely one with himself and therefore is not the picture of perfect virtue. But the admission of bigoted Roman Catholics and, of course, bigoted Protestants is not to say that Christianity is to be equated with bigotry.

As for the ridicule of the Savior's precept of turning the other cheek, let us again look at the context. Smith again is using a recognized sect, in this case the Quakers: "A very devout Quaker, who upon being struck upon one cheek, instead of turning up the other, should so far forget his literal interpretation of our Savior precept, as to bestow some good discipline upon the brute that insulted him, would not be disagreeable to us. We should laugh and be diverted with his spirit, and rather like him the better for it. But we should by no means regard him with that respect and esteem which would seem due to one who, upon a like occasion, had acted properly from a just sense of what was proper to be done" (TMS, III.6.13).

Smith as well as many Christian theologians is simply pointing out that the

precept of turning the other cheek is a hard one to put into social and political practice if taken literally. Total passivity toward the Hitlers and the Stalins of the world is not uniformly endorsed by all Christians. Just wars and tyrannicide are not without Christian support. Roger Mahony (an ardent peace advocate within the Catholic Church) starts his article on "The Case for Nuclear Pacifism," with this preliminary sentence, "The Roman Catholic Church, as is well known, has never held a position of absolute pacifism. It accepts the premise that one can legitimately resist evil by force in justified self-defense. It has espoused a complex moral reasoning about the right to declare and engage in warfare known as the 'just-war theory.'"

Smith is talking about "good discipline" against an acknowledged "brute." Smith is simply interpreting the Gospels, not ridiculing them. This is just a small example. To do Minowitz justice one would have to spend several years with all the texts including his. But, to put it bluntly, at least in this one small example, Professor Minowitz seems to go beyond what the text can support if a careful textual reading is made. If I may be allowed to mix my metaphors, those who live by the Straussian sword may be hoisted upon their own petard.

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