

nisms that facilitated the rise of industrial capitalism are very different from the learning of capitalism under the isomorphic pressure of the Western and Japanese imperialism” (144). Or as Ertman puts it,

It seems clear that Weber’s interest in accounting for the *initial* breakthrough to the modern economy, state and science has now become a largely *historical* question rather than one of burning contemporary interest, as it was in his own day. A similar project conceived today might aim to explain the origins and dynamics of different *varieties* of capitalism and of the modern state both within the West and between the West and other areas of the world, or the current condition of the world religions and their respective influences on individuals and societies. (350)

Heading into the centennial of Weber’s death in a few years, this volume is the starting point and a call for responsible engagement of Weber’s *Economic Ethic of the World Religions*.

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The Political Theory of the American Founding: Natural Rights, Public Policy, and the Moral Conditions of Freedom

Thomas G. West

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017 (428 pages)

In 2012, *First Things* invited authors including Wilfred McClay, Patrick Deneen, and Yuval Levin to contemplate the state of contemporary liberal society. The authors sought to define the founding principles of the American regime and then asked whether America’s current moral and political devolution is a consequence of those principles or is in conflict with them. Thomas G. West, who is the Paul Ermine Potter and Dawn Tibbetts Potter Professor of Political Science at Hillsdale College, impressively argues for the latter in his latest book, *The Political Theory of the American Founding*.

West structures his book in three parts. He looks at the political theory of the founding and the moral conditions of freedom. He concludes by discussing the importance of property and economics.

Recent scholarship on America’s founding thinkers often seeks to distinguish the unique arguments of each founder. For example, Vincent Munoz’s *God and the Founders* distinguished among James Madison, George Washington, and Thomas Jefferson. In contradistinction, West seeks to uncover the founding consensus on political theory.

West argues that the founding generation defined their political theory in terms of natural rights. Scholars such as Michael Zuckert have argued that the founders amalgamated apparently contradictory “traditions” such as a republican emphasis on civic virtue,

Protestant religion, and British constitutionalism. West believes that these other traditions were supports for a coherent natural rights political theory.

However, West argues that the founding generation believed that rights presuppose duties. Natural rights assumed natural-law boundaries in support of those rights. This fundamentally differentiates the American Revolution from the French Revolution, for the French revolutionary documents notably do not reference natural law or prudence. America's Declaration of Independence does. America's founders did not pit equality against liberty. For the founders, individuals are equal in their liberty.

Scholars such as Patrick Deneen and the late Peter Lawler have argued that modern natural rights theory replaces the highest things with a relativistic focus on individual pleasure. West argues that the founders would not have agreed. The founders believed that transcendent goals existed prior to government in the family, religion, and society. Government was created to protect the natural rights that allow individuals to pursue these highest goods. Thus, happiness is both the end and foundation of law, for government is created in order to allow individuals to pursue the happiness for which they were created.

The founders understood happiness to be objectively definable, thereby ensuring that nature provides both political goals and political boundaries.

The second part of the book studies the moral conditions of freedom. The founders did not believe in a purely libertarian society, for that kind of a society emphasizes rights while ignoring the duties that sustain those rights. John Adams's famous quote is rarely given in its context:

We have no government armed with power capable of contending with human passions unbridled by morality and religion. Avarice, ambition, revenge, or gallantry, would break the strongest cords of our Constitution as a whale goes through a net. Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.

Not all personal characteristics and cultures are amenable to liberty. The founders desired a homogeneous citizenry, with citizens who would be committed to protecting individual rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Interestingly, West argues that while the founders desired equal protection of religion, they did not necessarily intend equal support of all religions. West suggests that the founders were comfortable with supporting religions insofar as that support strengthened republican virtue.

I found West's arguments on changes in vice laws to be fascinating. He argues that the founding generation's laws on sexuality were concerned with protecting children and supporting the family. Bradley Wilcox's current research on the importance of family structure would not have surprised the founders. However, West argues that the founders were not concerned with the legality of the vices themselves. "Aggressive prosecution of 'vice'—homosexuality, prostitution, drug abuse, and the like—became and remained a feature of American law from about 1880 to 1960, during the heyday of moralistic Progressivism" (234). A further example of this is birth control. Birth control was practiced during the first part of the nineteenth century, but it was not prohibited until fifteen years after the

Civil War. One could infer that *Griswold v. Connecticut* represented progressive activists' changing their utopian focus on family structure to a utopian focus on sexual freedom.

The third section of the book discusses property and markets. West accurately notes that one can argue for property rights on the basis of both efficiency and justice. Today's conservatives desperately want to use the amoral efficiency argument. As West notes, however, the most effective arguments against property rights come from arguments based on justice.

West argues that many historians have incorrectly understood the Hamilton-Jefferson quarrel. West argues that this dispute was over means and not the ultimate ends of government. Both Hamilton and Jefferson desired to protect property rights. They differed on the best way to ensure the political stability necessary for that protection. Given the limitations of a book review, I can only recommend this section as a fine political analysis of economic issues.

This is a remarkably ambitious book, and I think it would be ideal for an undergraduate senior seminar. We currently live in an academic world that mistakes *ad hominem* attacks for debate. In contrast, West respectfully debates thinkers worth debating. Furthermore, West does not shy away from politically incorrect arguments made by several founding thinkers. This book is ideal for faculty who are contemplating student paper assignments. Let me give you one of many potential examples.

As mentioned above, *First Things* has published multiple perspectives debating whether today's moral and political chaos flows from America's founding principles or is in contradiction to it. (I will admit to assigning these articles to students.) West persuasively implies that properly understanding America's founding principles shows a conflict. I suspect that conservative scholars like Patrick Deneen and the late Peter Lawler would beg to differ.

West admits that after 1784, US state constitutions no longer included the statements of social or republican virtue that state constitutions previously contained. However, West argues that the governmental concern with character formation was still clearly seen in public policies such as education, sex and marriage laws, and support of religion. I suspect that Lawler would have responded that the story of the founding generation is one of lowering human goals. Therefore, removing the language of virtues from the state constitutions was simply a first step to the current political desire to entirely remove traditional ideas and morality from the public square.

Who is correct regarding the founding generation's principles? This is not simply an academic question, but it is a question that academics should be discussing. To be clear, West here only seeks to define the original principles of the American regime, but those principles simply could not be more politically relevant.

West concludes his book by stating that the "founders' doctrine that all men are by nature equally free and independent—that all political societies are produced by human beings, not by God or nature or an inexorable historical process—might continue to prove useful. It might even be true" (410). West has written an excellent overview of

that doctrine and one can only hope that others take up his challenge to better understand America's founding political theory.

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Faithonomics: Religion and the Free Market

Torkel Brekke

New York: Oxford University Press, 2016 (256 pages)

This is a strange book, partly political advocacy for religious freedom globally, partly a Freakonomics-style discussion of religious curiosities, and partly a survey of the economics of religion. It also has an autobiographical element as the author recounts his atheistic Communist upbringing, his brief affair with a Catholic choir, and his transition to academia. If nothing else, it is engagingly written.

Brekke begins predictably (after a brief discussion of David Hume and Adam Smith) with the argument that the goods provided by religious organizations are like any other goods and can thus be analyzed with the tools of economics. He overstates his case for the private-good rather than public-good nature of religion, perhaps wanting to avoid the argument about the benefits or otherwise of religion to society. If the goods are private, then his strategy of repeated assertion that markets will resolve the issue has some force, but I am not so sure. Religions do seem to have substantial spillover effects that call for nonmarket evaluation.

A real contribution of the book is a discussion of religious markets in Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism—territory that is seldom explored in overwhelmingly North American economics of religion literature. He does succeed, I think, in establishing that the tools of economics are equally applicable in these societies as in North America.

The largest part of the book contains chapters that deal with the so-called seven sins of government intervention in religious markets. These are:

1. “Crowding Out: When Government Kills Initiative” where Brekke considers the effects of religious subsidies, concluding that they are always detrimental.
2. “Rent-Seeking: Religions Jockeying for Privilege” that discusses the particular vulnerability of religious markets to wasteful rent-seeking. Brekke’s solution is always to get the government out of religious markets.
3. “Monopoly: Nordic State Churches and Communist Repression” where it is argued that monopoly reduces effort and innovation in religious markets to the detriment of society. Brekke makes a good point that the existence of different religious traditions does not mean there is competition, because religious markets are segmented so that in the US megachurches are competing with existing evangelical congregations rather than with the local mosque or Catholic church.