

apparent contradictions in Marx's thought, such as the way Marx depicts vices as inherent to human nature while also expecting humans to overcome these vices politically. Such assessments are rather standard fare among Marx's critics. On the other hand, Dennison's critique comes off as idiosyncratic. It descends, in effect, to Dennison preaching at Marx, declaring what Marx's system of thought "must presuppose" (82, 89), and telling Marx that his view of history is contrary to Scripture (a point Marx himself would gleefully concede). For instance, in attempting to turn the tables on Marx's view of Christianity as mythology, Dennison proclaims that Marx "should have demythologized his own imagined world in order to truly hear the good intention of the call of the gospel from the Lord of the cosmos" (86–87). This approach is more point-scoring than argument, and it likely will only resonate with those who are predisposed to argue in this way—namely, devotees of Van Til's presuppositional apologetics.

This could have been a book with a broader scope and appeal. Dennison could have achieved this even while writing for Christians, or even while writing for Reformed Christians. As it is, however, there are much better short introductions to Marx on offer. While not written from a Christian perspective, the introductions by Peter Singer and John Seed critically engage the breadth of Marx's thought and are honest about the flaws in his system. Among Reformed Christian contributions, Lester DeKoster's *Communism & Christian Faith*, while a bit dated and at times quirky, surveys Marxist ideas more extensively and addresses a broader Christian audience than Dennison's book does. In sum, Dennison's *Karl Marx* may appeal to readers in the author's theological and apologetic tradition, and it may introduce Marx's view of history to that readership, but unfortunately the book does not accomplish more.

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## The Moral Economists: R. H. Tawney, Karl Polanyi, E. P. Thompson, and the Critique of Capitalism

**Tim Rogan**

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Before Adam Smith explored the nature and causes of the wealth of nations in 1776, he developed a theory of moral sentiments in 1759. Economists after Smith tended to focus more on the questions of wealth and the workings of the market's "invisible hand" that extracted shared benefits from selfish motivations. Their attempts to define the good using a common metric such as money or utility have never been fully satisfying to most laypeople or to other economists, even as economics as a whole focused on quantitative approaches to any number of questions about human behavior alone or in groups.

The moralist alternative never found its footing in the twentieth century. Its footing today is tenuous enough that Bernie Sanders, the socialist US Senator from Vermont, can base his definition of a moral economy in material terms: "In the wealthiest country in the history of the world, all our people should be able to live with dignity and security."

Tim Rogan thinks the financial crisis of 2007 has presented an opening for those critics of capitalism who blame it for alienation, nihilism, and utilitarianism. He marks how that critique developed in the last century through the lives and work of R. H. Tawney, Karl Polanyi, and E. P. Thompson who were influential through their writing and involvement in Great Britain's Marxist circles, but who are not as familiar to American readers.

Tawney starts from the Christian perspective that each person has infinite value because God became man. He traces the split in economics back to the medieval period when Scholastics could not adapt their arguments to the changes taking place around Europe in finance and business organization. Once people were paid wages instead of being connected to their land, the alienation of markets took hold. This analysis lost ground with Christianity itself and other social institutions as a result of World War I. Rogan notes that Tawney's contemporary critics could find no practical way in his work to reconnect human value and economics or society.

This remains an unfinished project, but Polanyi and Thompson took promising approaches that Rogan sees carried through into the work of Kenneth Arrow and Amartya Sen on social choice. Polanyi, whose brother Michael is better known in free-market circles, made it seem less of an impossibility by putting the split after Adam Smith and pulling from Marx's writings a value in the inherent potential of a person. He saw a "double movement" of market forces alienating people from themselves and centralizing forces to protect them from that alienation. Thompson went back to small communities to show how values could be contingent on institutions and traditions. By retreating from universal rules, he pointed a way forward based on local knowledge. Sen builds on the insights of local variability versus utilitarianism, which assumes values are the same for everyone everywhere, immutable and unchanging.

Those more familiar with market-oriented thinkers such as Friedrich Hayek, Wilhelm Röpke, Robert Nisbet, Richard Cornuelle, and Arthur Brooks will recognize the questions and even some of the answers even though Rogan and his forebears are men of the Left. In particular, Rogan sees social choice theory as developed by Kenneth Arrow and Amartya Sen as the most hopeful path forward. They have influenced and been influenced by James Buchanan and Gordon Tullock and more recent developers of public choice theory, such as Michael Munger and Peter Boettke, who study the institutional and constitutional frameworks created by groups to govern group choices.

Rogan's reintroduction of Tawney, Polanyi, and Thompson to modern readers is a valuable endeavor. Their efforts within a Marxist context to find a role for tradition, community, and conserving institutions that could buffer between markets' myopia and governments' grasping hand do provide a great deal of context for the current struggles of capitalism's critics. It is for the reader or a future book to put their search in context with

the parallel pursuit of the Austrian economists, public choice theorists, and their fellow travelers. After all, Buchanan blamed socialism on utilitarianism, and Nisbet saw in the Left's embrace of politics an outlet for the universal quest for community.

If nothing else, *The Moral Economists* provides a hopeful reminder that the utilitarian logic of Senator Sanders is not the only route taken on the Left.

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