

tions. The voluntary organizations provide institutional nurturing for these bonds, which, in turn, provide more impetus for the formation of, and involvement in, voluntary organizations. The authors cite Robert Putnam's findings that "the more likely a region's citizens are to join football clubs and choral societies, the faster the regional government is in reimbursing health care claims." Putnam claims that this improvement in the public sector arises because of the personal connections among people that augment and are augmented by the formation of voluntary organizations. Unlike physical capital that degrades through overuse, social capital increases through overuse.

Dollery and Wallis's book is not characterized by the ubiquitous mathematics that often marks the economics literature. This makes the book an excellent read for noneconomists interested in the topic of the voluntary sector. One section only is marred by a halfhearted employment of econometrics: In partially reproducing the mathematics of economic growth models, the authors achieve the worst of both worlds by giving too little mathematics to be of use to economists and too much to be of comfort to noneconomists.

The *Political Economy of the Voluntary Sector* lays much of the groundwork necessary for economists to develop models describing the failure-based interplay of the public, private, and voluntary sectors. More importantly, Dollery and Wallis suggest intriguing lines of inquiry that have the potential for furthering the links between economics, psychology, and sociology. For example, they suggest an interesting path to a consumer psychology-based model describing the life cycles of nonprofit organizations via the interplay of positive and negative emotions and the feedback generated by the inception, growth, and maturation of the organizations. The review of the literature is presented in a coherent and complete fashion and is stitched together with compelling narrative, thus making this book an invaluable asset to researchers interested in the core intersection of the social sciences.

—Antony Davies  
*Mercatus Center, Capitol Hill Campus  
Duquesne University, Pittsburgh*

## Economic Theory and Christian Belief

**Andrew Britton and Peter Sedgwick**

Oxford, United Kingdom: Peter Lang, 2003 (308 pages)

As its title indicates, this very interesting book sets out to contrast economic theory and Christian belief. In fact, it does much more as it also relates Christian doctrine to social theory (chap. 3). It is therefore a welcome departure from the usual Christian attempts to elaborate on ethically informed practices in business, finance, politics, and other social activities. The authors seek to reach a deeper, theoretical understanding of economics and Christianity and to establish a fruitful dialogue between the two. They hope to work out the concepts of "man" and society (the anthropology) that respectively structure economic theory and Christian belief.

The methodology followed by the authors is determined by this objective. In the introduction, they define the nature of theory and doctrine. The successive chapters then pass the content of economic textbooks in review by first introducing a specific procedure. They present, in a first section, the approach followed by economic textbooks. Then they analyze the corresponding Christian belief in a following section. A third section summarizes and discusses the results. One advantage of this method is that it is neoclassical theory that raises the questions, which the Christians are called to answer, instead of the common approach by which Christians “tell” practitioners what they should do. It is also a way to use economics as a stepping stone to a better understanding of Christian faith, to a view of the world as the *preparatio evangelica*.

In chapters 2, 3, 8, and 9, the authors investigate the concepts of the economic agent in Christianity and neoclassic theory (i.e., the respective anthropological programs). Chapters 4 through 7 discuss the impact of conventional aspects of economics such as consumer satisfaction, production, and growth on Christian beliefs. Chapters 10 and 11 deal with more advanced topics such as long-term development and economic regimes.

A further value of the book is that it provides a good bibliography of the literature. Its only drawback is its failure to include J. R. Tiemstra’s survey of the literature published in the 1993 *Christian Scholar’s Review*. The book’s extensive review of familiar economic topics and of respective critiques also provides a mine of arguments for discussions in schools. Finally, the book’s emphasis on postmodern viewpoints opens new vistas. Altogether, then, it is a useful addition to the libraries of various departments.

Unfortunately, the book does not fully come up to its promise, essentially for epistemological reasons. The economists it pits against the believers are not so much theoreticians as academic practitioners, and it is not clear whether its believers are Christians rather than religious people. The discussion thus falls short of a rigorous encounter between fundamental economic theory and Christian theology.

Economics is defined by its subject matter (as listed in textbooks) rather than as the paradigm of minimization of scarcity through exchanges. The economic agent also is defined by his or her “secondary” characteristics (degree of rationalism and instrumental use of utility in elaborating objectives) rather than as the activity of an autonomous (self-managing) and dynamic person confronted by scarcity, a characteristic of the human condition. (This reality is cursorily alluded to on page 124.)

The difference between basic economic theory and its technical implementation, such as neoclassics, is thus missed. The authors spend so much time arguing that in the real world agents may well not fit the model of rational expectations or solipsism of neoclassical theory that they give insufficient weight to the fact that these assumptions can be relaxed if required by the specific analysis.

One result of this approach is that the authors fail to tackle the familiar Adam Smithian paradox that markets lead solipsistic agents to produce (against their subjective interests) the common good of improved collective production. This is an observation from which interesting theological questions could be derived. They also do not acknowledge that these egoists did indeed usher economic progress while traditional

societies—one of which is their favored biblical society—remained in underdeveloped misery. This does not imply that economic development is a perfect process, but it prompts economists and Christians to investigate underlying systemic failures and anthropological deficiencies. Such analyses would have prevented the authors from reiterating conventional antidevelopment views (134).

Most importantly, their insufficient analytic insight prevents the authors from contrasting the modern market system (a system based on the anthropology of independent, autonomous, and dynamic agents) with the many traditional systems based on subjects—rather than agents—whose iterative activities are determined by (social) customs and religious laws, from which Saint Paul said Christ’s followers were freed. It also allows them to ignore the incidence of Christianity on the rise of modernity, an important topic, which they briefly mention on page 79 but then fail to discuss. The authors are in fact quite clear that they prefer the traditional system to the market systems. This emphasis may well have led them to never discuss entrepreneurship and to ignore the prophetic nature of Christianity. This is all the more paradoxical as the role of prophetism in the rise of the market system was emphasized in the later work of Max Weber who showed that the Chinese and the Indian cultures remained in the hold of traditional societies because they did not generate prophets.

The authors also criticize the deficiencies of actual market systems without ever raising the question whether the subjects of Roman or Egyptian systems were better or worse “proto-Christians” than agents in market systems, who are prodded by competitive constraints to somehow serve their customers.

The analyses of Christian beliefs similarly remain at too descriptive a level. For example, the authors rightly point out that relationship is essential to the nature of Christian anthropology (94), which thus differs from neoclassical solipsism, but they concentrate on Old Testament approaches and “forget” the core of the Christian message: the Trinitarian nature of the Christian anthropology and the social ideal. Stanley Grenz’s work *The Social God and the Relational Self* (2001) aptly summarizes this point.

The crux of the issue thus seems to be that the dialogue between economics and theology needs to be established at a foundational level. The authors’ concentration on neoclassics is extremely useful to criticize the economic practice and ideology, which dominate the teaching in American and British universities at the turn of the century. This adds to the usefulness of their book as an elementary teaching tool but distracts from the pursuit of their challenging initiative.

—Francis Woehrling

*Monetary Directorate, Commission of the European Communities, Brussels (retired)*