A Presuppositionalist Perspective on Economics: 
Anti-Christian Presuppositions Cause Economic Fallacies
By W. J. Whitman

Christians presuppose the existence of the Christian God who is back of all things. When the believer approaches the natural sciences, he presupposes that God has created the universe and providentially organized it. The universe is ultimately rational, being governed by certain predetermined scientific laws that God has set in place. When we empirically study the universe, we are approaching a world that is fundamentally rational. God has created the natural order and organized it—He has rationalized it. We come along and interpret what God has set before us in an orderly fashion. In essence, we re-interpret what God has already interpreted—we “think God’s thoughts after Him,” as Cornelius van Til put it. Not only is God behind the scientific facts themselves because He created them, He is also back of our minds because He has created us and designed us. When He created us He designed us in such a way that we would have the capacity to be able to perceive reality and interpret it accurately. All of this is involved in the Christian worldview. The non-Christian scientist makes no such assumptions. He assumes that the world is ultimately irrational. Therefore he assumes that he is actually approaching the matter for the first time. He regards himself as an autonomous entity. He presupposes that the universe has not previously been organized, rationalized, and interpreted by God. When the non-Christian scientist theorizes about the world, he assumes that the world is ultimately irrational and that he has spontaneously popped up on the screen in order to rationalize it with his theorizing. In other words, he is just “rationalizing the irrational” as Cornelius van Til used to say. To drive this point home I only need to cite two prominent scientists: Einstein and Haldane. Albert Einstein, in his *Sidelights on Relativity*, asks to what extent mathematical science corresponds to reality. But, because Einstein presupposes that the universe is ultimately irrational, he asserts that “as far as the laws of mathematics refer to reality, they are not certain; and as far as they are certain, they do not refer to reality.” He concludes that “it is also evident that mathematics as such cannot predicate anything about perceptual objects or real objects.” Mathematics as such, according to Einstein and his anti-Christian worldview, only represents “empty conceptual schemata.”

Likewise, J. B. S. Haldane, an important evolutionary biologist and geneticist said that his “practice as a scientist is atheistic” and that when he sets up an experiment he assumes that there is no God. And thus Haldane thinks that the human mind cannot be rational because there is no ultimate rationality behind the universe, concluding that “if my mental processes are determined wholly by the motions of atoms in my brain I have no reason to suppose that my beliefs are true. They may be sound chemically, but that does not make them sound logically. And hence I have no reason for supposing my brain to be composed of atoms.” As you can see, there is a fundamental antithesis between the Christian and non-Christian worldviews.

---

1 Cf. Albert Einstein, *Sidelights on Relativity*, “Geometry And Experience”
2 Cf. J. B. S. Haldane, *Fact and Faith*, Preface
3 Cf. J. B. S. Haldane, *Possible Worlds*, “When I am Dead”
This antithesis applies to economics as well. The Christian must approach economics as a Christian. He has certain presuppositions that are essential to his entire worldview and he absolutely cannot dispense of those assumptions. He assumes that the economy is fundamentally rational in the very nature of the case. God is back of all things and it is Him “who works all things according to the counsel of His will,” in accordance with certain predetermined economic and scientific laws that God Himself has put in place. (Cf. Ephesians 1:11) In the field of economics we may speak of “spontaneous order,” but we only use this phrase humanly speaking. We only mean by it that men do not have to intentionally organize the economy. However, the primary reason that we assert this is because we presuppose that God is back of the economy and that He has caused it to be orderly so that man does not need to engage in any sort of central planning. This is precisely what Adam Smith meant by “the invisible hand of the market” when he asserted that the economic man “neither intends to promote the public interest, nor knows how much he is promoting it….he intends only his own gain; and he is in this, as in many other cases, led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention…. By pursuing his own interest, he frequently promotes that of the society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it.”

It is readily apparent that these Christian presuppositions are the basis of free market economics. The reason that most modern economists do not advocate a free market is because they have rejected Christianity. Once people start to reject Christian presuppositions it is only a matter of time until they realize the consequences of their unbelief.

The non-Christian economist presupposes that the economy is fundamentally irrational and, therefore, that he must step in and rationalize it. The economy is unorganized and disorderly, so it is necessary for us to have some sort of “central planning” in order to assure that it runs smoothly. The economy does not naturally bring about an acceptable distribution of wealth and, therefore, we must step in and redistribute wealth. (Marx, Shaw, ChesterBelloe) The economy is naturally unstable and prone to booms and busts, so whenever recessions set in we must have the government intervene to “stimulate” the economy artificially. (Keynes, Samuelson, Krugman) The monetary side of the economy is not self-regulating, so we must artificially adjust the supply of money in order to stabilize the price level and ensure full employment. (Friedman, Bernanke, Greenspan) The antithesis between the Christian position and the non-Christian position is just as clear in the area of economics as in the natural sciences. The non-Christian looks at the economy through the prism of his anti-Christian presuppositions: his worldview colors his eyes and affects the way he sees things. His eyes are tinted yellow by his faulty worldview and “all is yellow to the jaundiced eye,” as Van Til was fond of reiterating. When the Christian points out that the economy is governed by certain laws, the non-Christian economist will refuse to see the facts. The non-Christian economist will simply deny the validity of economic laws. This is why the neo-Keynesians can hold that the value of money is not affected by supply-and-demand. It is also the reason that they deny that credit expansion has any necessary affect on how people invest. And no matter how hard the Christian tries to demonstrate the self-regulating nature of the

---

4 Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, Book 4, Ch. 2
economy—even if he provides sufficient scientific evidence—the non-Christian economist will
not accept that conclusion because he is blinded by his hostility to the truth.

If Christian economists and political theorists have fallen on the non-Christian side and
non-Christian economists have fallen on the Christian side, then it is only because the fallen
nature of man after Adam’s sin causes us to be inconsistent. There are certain psychological
effects of sin that have caused us to be inconsistent in our thinking. So R. H. Tawney, G. K.
Chesterton, and Hilaire Belloc reached an anti-Christian conclusion in spite of the fact that they
were Christians because they presupposed the validity of the non-Christian classical economics
of Smith and Ricardo. Likewise the Austrian School economists like Hayek, Mises, and
Rothbard were able to hold to a more Christian position in spite of the fact that they were non-
Christians because they presupposed the validity of the Christian economics of the Hispanic
Scholastics, like Luis de Molina and Domingo de Soto. The Austrian economists reached the
right conclusion only because they were working off of “borrowed capital” from the Christian
worldview.

5 This psychological effect of sin—i.e. the inconsistency in the thought of fallen man—is referred to as the “noetic
effect of sin” by writers in the Calvinist tradition. I, however, do not like that phrase because the term “noetic” has a
different meaning in Orthodox Christian theology.