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Money and Love by Peter Berkowitz

A review of *Economic Sentiments: Adam Smith, Condorcet, and the Enlightenment* by Emma Rothschild. (Harvard University Press, 353 pp., \$45.)

Business is in the ascendant. Its reputation has never been better. The new economy, the old economy: the fragility of our current economy notwithstanding, the Bush years, like the Clinton years, are a golden age of the commercial spirit. Commerce is held in the highest esteem, and it is doubtful that making money in huge (and incomprehensibly huge) sums has ever been less subject to censure or scorn, or that marketing products (as well as oneself) has ever been regarded as a more admirable and socially useful outlet for an individual's energy, creativity, and ambition. Especially striking is the rehabilitation of business's reputation among the young and the political left, typically business's harshest critics.

It was only a generation or so ago, after all, that the popular imagination was furiously critical of what William H. Whyte famously dubbed the Organization Man. He wore gray suits and white shirts and red ties. He worked from nine to five, very likely for the same corporation for life. He took pride in providing well for his wife and children. He rarely wavered from his routine, performing his tasks in the office as well as at home like clockwork. He was disdained by college students and many progressive intellectuals in the 1960s, who, oblivious of both the genuine pleasures and the deliberate sacrifices that marked his life, looked down on him as a person who sold his soul for security and stability.

In the 1970s, businessmen wore longer hair and wider ties and had more flamboyant cultural tastes, but this did not release them from the stigma of business, from the prejudice --- widespread on college campuses and among intellectuals --- that business was for dullards and drudges and drones. Making money meant buying in and selling out. It meant stultifying one's higher artistic, intellectual, and spiritual powers. It meant putting aside moral principles and social ideals. It meant growing up and giving in and getting used to the grind.

By the beginning of the 1980s, however, change was in the air. Boom times had arrived on Wall Street. After a short training session, graduates in the humanities from elite universities could assume responsibility for hundreds of millions of dollars of clients' investments, and could in no time rake in yearly compensation in the many hundreds of thousands of dollars, and excel and exceed as traders and raiders. Even as they were unfolding, of course, the

1980s were condemned for their excesses: Oliver Stone's *Gordon Gecko* and Tom Wolfe's *masters of the universe* set the tone. It became common to blame the excesses of the 1980s on Ronald Reagan and the conservative resurgence.

But this was quite absurd. Friendly as the Republican Party was to the free market and to the interests of business, it was not the politics of the Reagan government that drew talented young people to business in droves. What did the trick was prosperity, a boom of extravagant proportions. And in the 1990s, in the years of a Democratic administration, the proportions became even more extravagant. The incredible run-up in the stock market brought unexpected windfalls to millions of middle-class Americans who had dutifully invested in company pension plans and 401(k)s, which gave them a substantial and very tangible stake in the well-being of corporate America. The proliferation of fresh-faced dot-com multimillionaires and billionaires in opennecked shirts and jeans and running shoes subverted the traditional association of wealth with age and authority and decades of hard work. Graduating seniors stood in line on campus to interview for high-paying high-tech jobs that they planned to begin before the ink on their diplomas was dry, and whose stock options would (if all went according to plan) enable them in a few short years to enrich themselves once and for all.

Business had been glamorized and democratized; and not even the recent bursting of the bubble has weakened the common perception that business is where the action is. To be sure, not all businesses are held to be equal. In the new knowledge economy, those whom Robert Reich dubbed "symbolic analysts" flourish the most. Still, whatever the variety of business, as wage earners we increasingly demand of our jobs that they bring, or contribute mightily to, our personal fulfillment. We want our work to develop our talents, to provide association with interesting and good people, to offer a platform from which to advance our moral ideals. Work in this view is not opposed to, or apart from, or even only a means to, the good things that life has to offer. In the view that Americans increasingly share, work is itself an indispensable good and a constitutive part of human happiness.

The glamorization and the democratization of work may be a mixed blessing. The commingling at work of the imperatives of the marketplace with higher aspirations and intimate relations --- the interweaving, as work increasingly becomes the location for friendship and romance, of public and private --- may make the business world a warmer place, a more decent and more just place. Or, by opening them up wide to the cold calculation and systematic manipulation and single-minded professional specialization summoned by the logic of the marketplace, such commingling and interweaving may corrupt friendship and love. Or maybe both. Certainly we confront a dramatic change in commercial life and in our attitudes toward it.

Or do we? Emma Rothschild believes that commercial life today and our attitudes toward it -- particularly our openness and our enthusiasm and our sense of boundless possibility --- correspond in crucial ways to the situation that was confronted by Adam Smith at the dawn

of the era of liberal capitalism. This makes the moment ripe, she suggests, for a reconsideration of the achievement of the great eighteenth-century Scottish thinker; and this is the task to which she devotes the bulk of her interesting and learned book on the original understanding of *laissez-faire*, or free market, economics.

Smith, in Rothschild's account, has been badly misunderstood. According to the common caricature, he is a conservative, a crude enthusiast of *laissez-faire* economics, a "cold-souled enemy of the poor," "a relentless proselytizer of free enterprise," who engages in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) in "an extended and relentless critique of government." In fact, Rothschild argues, there is nothing crude or relentless --- or, she seems to want to say, conservative --- about Smith's economics, or about the larger and quintessentially Enlightenment philosophical system in which he unfolded them.

The "real' Smith," Rothschild argues, is simultaneously an economist and a moralist, who, in his other masterwork, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), derived virtue from the passions, and discovered the ground of moral judgment in our natural sympathy for our fellow human beings, and in our imaginative capacity to adopt the perspective of an impartial spectator and to see things from their point of view. The real Smith is a progressive, a friend of the poor, for whom the relief of poverty is one of government's primary responsibilities. The real Smith is a comprehensive thinker who saw the close connection between sentiment and conduct, and to whom the disciplinary boundaries of contemporary intellectual life were foreign, because he understood that the spheres of human conduct --- economic, moral, political, religious --- are interwoven and mutually dependent. The real Smith is a courageous philosopher who believed that commercial and liberal society would foster the ideal of an "unfrightened mind," and who developed his comprehensive account of human nature and human conduct without recourse to the certainties of religious faith or a fixed standard of human perfection.

In coming to understand the real Smith, moreover, one comes to understand much more than the principles of modern economic life. "To rediscover a different political economy," declares Rothschild, "is also to rediscover a different, and more open, enlightenment." Indeed, a larger aim of her study is to combat the image of "the cold, hard rationalist enlightenment." The real Enlightenment, or the best part of the Enlightenment, in Rothschild's judgment, champions a universal disposition, "a way of thinking and seeing," in which the mind is "undepressed and unneglected." And Smith, according to Rothschild, believed that "the universal disposition of enlightenment," which was a "disposition of universal discussion," both was fostered in economic life, which he conceived as "itself a form of discussion," and took economic life as one of its prime topics.

It is a peculiar feature of Rothschild's approach that she does not search for Smith's different political economy and Smith's different Enlightenment by means of an extended analysis of his major works. Instead, in the manner of the school of political theory that is associated with the University of Cambridge, where she teaches, she focuses on the economic and

political disputes of the late eighteenth century in which Smith participated, and in which his ideas themselves became a subject of heated debate. The reasonable assumption behind this approach is that arguments and ideas ought to be studied in historical context. The conceit that cramps the assumption is that the study of the historical context is more challenging and more revealing than the sustained analysis of the books in which a writer develops his ideas.

With a wealth of detail, Rothschild sketches the forgotten lineage of selected concepts that are critical to Smith's system, and reconstructs the reception of Smith's ideas, and deftly guides the reader through debates whose terms and stakes are distant and unfamiliar. Her practical intention --- "using the past to illuminate the present" --- is admirable, though it is hardly a "now unfashionable possibility." Rothschild is a serious historian who brings to her call upon the past an extraordinary knowledge of it. What is most startling, for this reason, in her attempt to gain insight into the present by regarding Smith in historical context, is the comfortable familiarity of the Smith that she rediscovers, his conformity in salient respects to certain signature ideas of today's leading academic moralists.

At his death in Edinburgh in 1790, observes Rothschild, Smith was known not only as the outstanding theoretician of the free market, but also as a skeptic, a subversive, a friend of French philosophy and (severely stretching the historical record) of the French Revolution. Yet this Smith was destined to be short-lived. According to Rothschild, Smith's first and highly influential biographer played a critical role in launching Smith as a conservative thinker. In his "Account of the Life and Writings of Adam Smith," published in 1793, Dugald Stewart argued that *The Wealth of Nations* was imbued with a respect for established institutions. And its vision of political economy was built, Stewart explained, on a distinction between commercial freedom, whose purpose was to promote wealth, and political freedom, whose purpose was to provide opportunities to change law; and it regarded both forms of freedom as essentially instrumental.

Rothschild contends that "Stewart's description of the instrumental value of freedom corresponds to very little which Smith himself wrote." But Stewart's misunderstanding was not arbitrary, either. For "it does reflect," Rothschild emphasizes, "an intense public discussion in Edinburgh, Paris, and London about the words 'freedom' and 'liberty.'" For no apparent reason, Rothschild neglects the possibility that Smith regarded freedom, commercial and political, as both a means and an end.

In Rothschild's account, debates over government policy in the decade after Smith's death also served to mask his true political views. During the English food crisis in the mid-1790s, Smith's name was invoked on both sides of the debate in Parliament over whether to permit the regulation of wages by establishing a minimum wage. And both sides appealed to what Smith actually wrote. But while it was the Smith who strongly opposed regulation that prevailed as the common understanding of the thinker in England, the Smith who favored state intervention in the economy to protect the poor was, in Rothschild's view, "in many

respects closer to the 'real' Smith or the real Wealth of Nations." Why the real Smith is not the one who strongly opposed government regulation and allowed some exceptions in the case of the poor Rothschild does not say.

Another reason that it is difficult to discern Smith's true political intentions, Rothschild argues, has to do with his manner of writing. Since "he was in general a most circumspect writer," he appears more conservative than he really is. For fear of persecution as a consequence of his radical criticism of organized religion, and out of respect for public opinion, Smith "went to considerable lengths to obscure his opinions." This is rather a Straussian reading, though Rothschild does not mention Leo Strauss, whose pioneering work on the practice by pre-Enlightenment philosophers of prudently concealing their true opinions has frequently been ridiculed by proponents of the historical approach that she practices.

The misinterpretation of Smith also stems, says Rothschild, from the position that he took in the great eighteenth-century controversy over free trade and corn. Smith argued firmly in favor of free trade, a stand that has been interpreted as an expression of his uncompromising opposition to government intervention in the economy. But his argument, Rothschild stresses, rested in part on the ground that freedom from government regulation was a means (contradicting what she says in criticism of Dugald Stewart): it would protect against scarcity and famine, while government regulation would make both more likely. To show that one must not conclude from this that Smith was a doctrinaire free-marketeer, Rothschild observes that Turgot and Condorcet, both of whom argued as passionately as Smith against the general evils of government regulation and insisted that trade in corn be free, nevertheless came to the conclusion, based on much greater study of the actual circumstances, that in the case of food shortages, government intervention --- public employment, food imports, tax adjustments --- was a necessary evil to avert the greater harm of widespread famine. Since at other times and in a variety of writings Smith, in order to protect the interests of the poor, supported state involvement in economic matters, including the regulation of labor, land, and public works, it is reasonable to suppose that had he known the facts, his principles would have guided him, as the same principles guided Turgot and Condorcet, to support both free commerce and public policies designed to combat food shortages connected to the new commerce in corn.

Smith's egalitarian and humanitarian intentions may also be seen in his "unrelenting criticism" of the institution of apprenticeship, to which he objected on the grounds of both inefficiency and inequity. Indeed, Rothschild argues, his objections to apprenticeship, an institution generally aimed at the poor, "turned out to be concerned with oppression and injustice, as much as or more than with efficiency." In addition to obstructing competition, apprenticeship interfered with universal public education, which Smith favored; it imposed unjust restrictions on the liberty of apprentices, who were confined to their positions; and it infringed upon the liberty of non-apprentices, by keeping them out of those positions; and it was generally governed by laws that served the interests of the rich and powerful.

While the debates about apprenticeship in England early in the nineteenth century embodied many of Smith's concerns, Rothschild observes that they were notably lacking in Smith's central concern with the security and the liberty of the individual. Indeed, Smith's sustained criticism of apprenticeship reflects, in her view, the basic emancipatory drive of his thinking:

| The objects of Smith's obloquy are not only the institutions of national government; they are also, and even especially, the oppressive government of parishes, guilds and corporations, religious institutions, incorporated towns, privileged companies. One of the most insidious roles of national government is indeed to enact, or to confirm, the oppressive powers of these intermediate institutions. The criticism of local institutions, with their hidden, not quite public, not quite private powers, is at the heart of Smith's politics; it is at the heart, too, of his criticism of the apprenticeship system.

She does not elaborate the point, but Rothschild's analysis suggests that individual liberation was, for Smith, the essential end, and the restriction of government's role was the contingent means, with the implication that in changing circumstances, as new threats to individual freedom arose, expanding government's role might well be necessary, from Smith's point of view, to defend and to expand individual freedom.

In this century, perhaps no misunderstanding has contributed more to impairing a proper appreciation of Smith's views on freedom, Rothschild contends, than the one pertaining to the doctrine most closely associated with his name, and thought by many to be his most powerful and enduring idea. I refer, of course, to the doctrine of the "invisible hand." Its best-known formulation comes in Book IV, Chapter 2, of *The Wealth of Nations*:

| Every individual generally neither intends to promote the public interest, nor knows how much he is promoting it....He is in this case, as in many cases, led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention. Nor is it always the worse for society that it was no part of it. By pursuing his own interest he frequently promotes that of society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it. I have never known much good done by those who affected to trade for the public good. It is an affectation, indeed, not very uncommon among merchants, and very few words need be employed in dissuading them from it.

Rothschild performs some fascinating scholarly detective work in the attempt to prove that the invisible hand, which Smith actually mentions by name only three times in his writings -- in the passage above, in the "History of Astronomy," and in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* --- is best understood as a "mild and ironic joke." Still, she eventually concedes that her indirect evidence does not put in doubt that the idea most commonly associated with the invisible hand --- that private self-interested acts tend to produce publicly beneficial outcomes that exceed what could be attained by relying on either benevolence or government regulation --- was pervasive in Smith's thought, and fundamental to it. Moreover, there are obvious answers to Rothschild's several arguments that Smith did not take the invisible hand seriously. She suggests that Smith might well have intended to disparage the notion by allusion to unpleasant literary references, such as Macbeth's plea to the night to conceal his

crime with its "bloody and invisible hand," as well to invisible hands in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and in *Oedipe*, Voltaire's reworking of Sophocles. But surely it is at least as plausible to conclude that Smith might have been trying to bring out the dark side of a generally beneficial process.

Rothschild observes that despite Smith's great defense of individual freedom, the idea of the invisible hand "is extremely condescending about the intentions of individual agents," since it presupposes that people "are blind, in that they cannot see the hand by which they are led." But in fact the idea is flattering to individual agents, since it presupposes that people are the best judges of their own self-interest. As Smith declares in *The Wealth of Nations*, "Every individual, it is evident, can in his local situation judge much better than any statesman or lawgiver can do for him." Anyway, why is it condescending to suggest that social and political life is of sufficient complexity that individual agents lack the information to determine just which individual acts, laws, or policies will advance the public interest?

Rothschild asserts that the idea of the invisible hand is also inegalitarian, in that "it presupposes the existence of a theorist (if not a reformer) who sees more than any ordinary individual." But if that is what we mean by inegalitarian, so is the very scholarly enterprise that she undertakes to establish Smith's egalitarian bona fides. She worries that the invisible hand diverts attention from Smith's criticism of government institutions and the way in which individuals use politics to choke competition. That may or may not be an unfortunate effect of the doctrine, but it is no reason to doubt its centrality.

Rothschild believes that the concept of the invisible hand, to the extent that it has religious connotations as a kind of providential guarantor of human relations, flies in the face of Smith's decidedly irreligious views. Yet the invisible hand is perfectly intelligible without appeal to religion, as Rothschild herself acknowledges toward the end of her long discussion: "It is serious, and unironic, in its intimation that there can be order without design; that a society can be prosperous without being conducted by an all-seeing sovereign, just as the universe can be orderly without being conducted by an 'all-wise Architect and Conductor.'" Of course this is precisely the sense in which contemporary students of Smith, the ones whom Rothschild is trying to correct, understand the concept.

Proving the relative insignificance of the invisible hand is urgent business for Rothschild, because in her view the notion covers over two persistent shortcomings of liberal economic thought. The doctrine that self-interested economic conduct willy-nilly promotes the public good disregards the way in which the accumulation of economic power enables individuals, contrary to the public good, to use government to promote their private economic interests. And the doctrine of the invisible hand rests on an unwarranted faith "in the mildness and thoughtfulness of most individual men and women," in their capacity to discipline desire and to act lawfully and in accordance with enlightened self-interest. Despite her assiduous efforts to disassociate Smith from the doctrine of the invisible hand by insisting on Smith's

lukewarm and ironic attitude toward it, Rothschild confusingly suggests that Smith's thinking suffers from the very shortcomings that she believes stem from taking the invisible hand seriously.

When all is said and done, however, the Smith that emerges from Rothschild's scholarship has gone a long way toward grasping the essential features of the human condition. And he is a man ahead of his time, who would have felt very much at home in ours. For it turns out that Smith is not only a progressive with a strong belief in human equality and a conviction that government has a responsibility to enable the poor and disadvantaged to enjoy individual freedom. He is also a kind of deliberative democrat, who thinks that ever more inclusive discussions about economics and morals and politics constitute the apex of politics, and that individuals are prepared for such a life by the exercise in understanding others that comes from the trucking, bartering, and exchanging at the heart of economic life. And Smith is also an anti-foundationalist who believed that we live, as he writes in a phrase from *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* to which Rothschild frequently adverts, in a "fatherless world," where order in moral and political life is a result of what human beings create for themselves; and that our lot, if we have the wherewithal to recognize it, is to live with fundamental uncertainty and irresolution. In sum, Rothschild's Smith is defined by the set of beliefs that virtually defines the outlook of contemporary academic liberalism.

Rothschild's learning is deep --- the detailed footnotes that comprise more than one-quarter of her book exhibit a wonderfully rich knowledge of eighteenth-century intellectual history -- - but her learning is oddly narrow. Much that she has discovered in Smith and in his time was already noted and explored by scholars --- Joseph Cropsey, Jerry Z. Muller, and Charles Griswold --- whose work examines in detail the arguments of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* and *The Wealth of Nations*. It would be equally hard to identify a single claim about the character of the Enlightenment that Rothschild wins from her investigation of the origins of laissez-faire economics that has not already been suggested by Judith Shklar, Robert Pippen, and Charles Taylor, scholars and thinkers for whom the interpretation of text rather than the exhaustive analysis of historical context is the central preoccupation. And yet of the scholars who have insisted on the multiplicity of Smith's thought, and of those who have, in response to the challenges of recent criticism, reconstructed the Enlightenment's complex character, she has next to nothing to say.

Rothschild's intellectual history provides a valuable contribution to the project of recovering the many-sidedness and the enduring significance of Smith's system, as well as the original moral and political intentions of the Enlightenment in all their splendor and questionableness. Still, in the effort to wrest him from the conservatives and to enlist him on her side in today's battles, Rothschild occasionally runs the risk of suppressing aspects of the real Smith and his Enlightenment legacy. She stresses Smith's progressive call for universal education, but she neglects his argument that such education will teach the poor to respect their superiors and promote political stability. And although she calls attention to the lesser

virtues that lead to economic success, she slights Smith's analysis, in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, of the greater praise deserved by --- and the dependence of good government on --- those who pursue politics, generalship, connoisseurship, and wisdom.

While she celebrates Smith's enthusiasm for public discussion in the manner of today's deliberative democrats, Rothschild understates the danger of conformism built into his view that socialization requires the internalizing of how others judge our acts, of their approval and disapproval. Nor does she grapple with the homogenization built into the good of Enlightenment, understood as "the idea of a universal disposition of enlightenment, or of a discursive, disputatious theorizing way of life." This may seem to welcome the pluralism of human goods, but really it elevates the way of life of people who write books very much like this one.

As for Smith's speculations about uncertainty, which Rothschild lauds as a tenacious coming to grips with a disenchanted universe, those speculations are in fact rooted in moral and metaphysical premises that seek to cloister themselves beyond all reason and doubt. There is of course uncertainty and irresolution in Smith's world, especially in economic relations, in which we must often make decisions about buying and selling, including the sale of our labor, on the basis of highly imperfect knowledge. But "religious and moral and metaphysical" uncertainty? I do not think so. Smith is not Pascal. The silence of the infinite spaces does not frighten him.

To be sure, in the very passage from Part VI of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* that refers to "a fatherless world," a phrase that Rothschild adduces as evidence of Smith's unbelief, Smith suggests that religious belief provides a fundamental support to morality:

| This universal benevolence, how noble and generous soever, can be the source of no solid happiness to any man who is not thoroughly convinced that all the inhabitants of the universe, the meanest as well as the greatest, are under the immediate care and protection of that great, benevolent, and all-wise Being, who directs all the movements of nature; and who is determined, by his own unalterable perfections, to maintain in it, at all times, the greatest possible quantity of happiness. To this universal benevolence, on the contrary, the very suspicion of a fatherless world, must be the most melancholy of all reflections; from the thought that all the unknown regions of infinite and incomprehensible space may be filled with nothing but endless misery and wretchedness. All the splendour of the highest prosperity can never enlighten the gloom with which so dreadful an idea must necessarily overshadow the imagination; nor, in a wise and virtuous man, can all the sorrow of the most afflicting adversity ever dry up the joy which necessarily springs from the habitual and thorough conviction of the truth of the contrary system.

Whether the support that religious belief provides to morality is based on the truth of its picture of the cosmos is unclear from these ambiguous words.

Smith's anticlericalism is scarcely open to doubt. Still, to insist that all of Smith's moral and economic thinking hangs together without any reliance on faith or fixed foundations is to overlook the metaphysical entanglements of the key moral premise that Smith shares with all great thinkers in the liberal tradition, the natural freedom and equality of all. Rothschild makes a convincing case that progressive, deliberative, democratic, and anti-foundationalist elements may be found in Smith's thought; but neither their centrality nor their soundness is secured by showing that Smith thought them.

Self-interest informs virtually all human conduct. Generally quite powerful, it is taught by custom and reason and the promptings of the heart to be discreet and to respect limits. But the economic arena emancipates self-interest, encouraging it to come to the fore, to speak loudly and to act boldly. In the economic arena, this is as it ought to be, or at least so Smith memorably maintains in *The Wealth of Nations*, in its most frequently cited passage:

| It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities but of their advantages.

In the process of proclaiming self-interest the ruler of the commercial world, Smith plainly recognizes, by the name "humanity," the claims of another class of motives. In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, he examines these motives under the category of benevolence, and argues for their ascendance in other spheres of human conduct.

What happens, though, when the commercial spirit meets the democratic spirit and merges with it? Bent as she is on democratizing the real Smith, Rothschild does not discuss this momentous merger and so falls short of the larger goal that she set for herself, which was to learn from Smith about the challenges that we face in the present. To understand them, it is necessary to recognize how the democratic spirit transforms social life by opening wide the gates of the economic arena to women as well as to men, and to individuals of all classes; and to appreciate the simultaneous movement by which the democratic spirit, opening wide also the gates of other arenas, allows the commercial spirit to enter into spheres that had been comparatively closed off to it, and permits it to crowd out other motives and clear away space for the naked calculation of self-interest and the unsentimental weighing of utility.

Our habits and our vocabularies testify to this commingling of the spheres. We form an increasingly seamless web between friends and lovers, and the business acquaintances with whom we buy and sell and connect and "network." Consider only dating, that subject of which our culture never tires. Dating (as movies and television shows and novels depict it) gives people the opportunity to shop around and to find just the right partner. Until we achieve the perfect fit, we dump boyfriends and girlfriends like traders getting rid of declining shares. Eventually we hope to close a deal and find a partner for life, but having

learned to be choosy consumers in the romantic marketplace, it is not easy to cease being constantly on the lookout for a new, improved model. Commercial reflexes have infested the most intimate corners of our lives, unless we actively resist them.

To be sure, friendship and love have always reflected the imperatives of self-interest and economic necessity. Aristotle distinguished between true friendship based on a shared understanding of the good and friendships that are merely useful and pleasant. And marriage has always included an economic component, from considerations of women's dowries and men's worth to the formal legal obligations into which bride and groom enter. But the merger of the commercial spirit with the democratic spirit breaks down the walls and removes the ropes that in the past have restricted the reach of self-interest, and of marketplace calculation generally.

The progress of "economic sentiments" in our time can also be seen in the advent of what David Brooks recently called "the organization kid." Like their namesake, the organization kids are creatures of routine. He and she are students at elite universities. Under the watchful eye of their parents, he and she, since before they can remember, have made all the right moves. They have earned good grades at every level, have excelled in recognized and approved extracurricular activities, and have stayed out of trouble and on the right side of the tracks. At college, he and she keep to a tight schedule, but every once in a while they know how to let go. They stay off drugs, they don't drink too much, and they avoid entangling romantic alliances.

Yet the organization kid differs fundamentally from the organization man. Whereas the organization man did his duty for the sake of duty, organization kids do their duty for the sake of autonomy and choice. They defer to authority because they have determined that it is in their interest to do so; deference, for them, actually represents a denial of authority. They want their piece of the pie, which has grown large and sumptuous and available, and their rigorous routines and their avoidance of risk are carefully calculated to secure it. With the encouragement of their elders, they have become virtuosos of calculation.

Different eras give rise to different cultural dangers. In the heyday of the organization man, a sage of the 1960s took aim against the veneration of the commercial spirit, in the name of what Adam Smith might have called "benevolence," and gently protested that "money can't buy me love." The danger posed by the veneration of the commercial spirit in our own day is that we will forget that the increasingly quaint-sounding anthem of the 1960s was intended as a criticism of money, not as a criticism of love.