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François Etner, *Catholiques et économistes: Leurs controverses depuis la Révolution*. Bibliothèque de l'économiste, no. 46. Edited by André Tiran. Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2022. 453 pp. Bibliography and index. €48.00 (pb). ISBN 9782406129479.

Response by François Etner, Université Paris Dauphine-PSL.

Professor Coleman noticed (for fun) that Louis Althusser was not quoted in my book. He is right and I want to justify that decision. Catholicism didn't "explain" any economic analysis of this special Marxist, and it probably didn't even "explain" any other analysis of anyone since the French Revolution. It is hard to define the word "explain," but I can and will define what an economic analysis is: it comes from economists and it is not understood by those who are not economists. For example: knowing whether the capitalist system is desirable or not is (perhaps) a question for economists but also one for philosophers, sociologists, politics and historians. But the analysis of the effects of an indirect tax is (or should be) a question dedicated to economists. That is why my admittedly exaggerated justification in response to Professor Coleman's (ironic) remark states that French catholic economists may have examined subjects without being directly influenced by their religion. They have prioritized themes like misery (Villeneuve-Bargemont) or under-development (Father Lebret) but they have not provided any analysis that contradicts other economists.[1] The influence of Catholics mattered, but indirectly, by encouraging economists to debate without theological references. Therefore, Jean-Baptiste Say's utilitarianism didn't have much to do with Bentham's calculations, but was only a way to think outside of a religious framework.

It is well known that ardent French Catholics completely rejected the French Revolution of 1789. They wanted to restore absolute monarchy and the power of the Church; they rejected political, cultural and economic liberalism; they hated capitalism, as well as socialism, and they believed in the future of a corporatist system; they called Protestants heretics, almost as abominable as Jews and atheists; they denied Reason and Progress in the name of Providence and Mysteries; they accepted the Republic only by default; they mistook individualism and selfishness. From the beginning, French economists adhered to the opposite views.[2] They persevered, encouraged by the intransigence of popes, who were particularly hostile to modernity. This opposition between catholic and economists' points of view has nonetheless disappeared since the 1970s, having begun to fade after WWII. Why? On one hand, because the Catholic world have changed, becoming less arrogant and less sure of its dogmas. On the other hand, because French economists have adopted quantitative methods; and equations are written in the same way whether the author is an ardent or a moderate Catholic, or not even Catholic. Catholics, therefore,

remain opposed (like Louis Althusser) or in favour (like Daniel Villey) to the analysis and principles of economists, but using the same arguments as everyone.

NOTES

[1] On French Catholic economists, see : António Almodovar et Pedro Teixeira, “The Ascent and Decline of Catholic Economic Thought, 1830-1950s,” *History of Political Economy* 40/5 (2008): 62-87.

[2] On French economists, see : François Etner et Claire Silvant, *Histoire de la pensée économique en France depuis 1789* (Paris: Economica, 2017).

François Etner
Université Paris Dauphine-PSL
etner@dauphine.fr

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