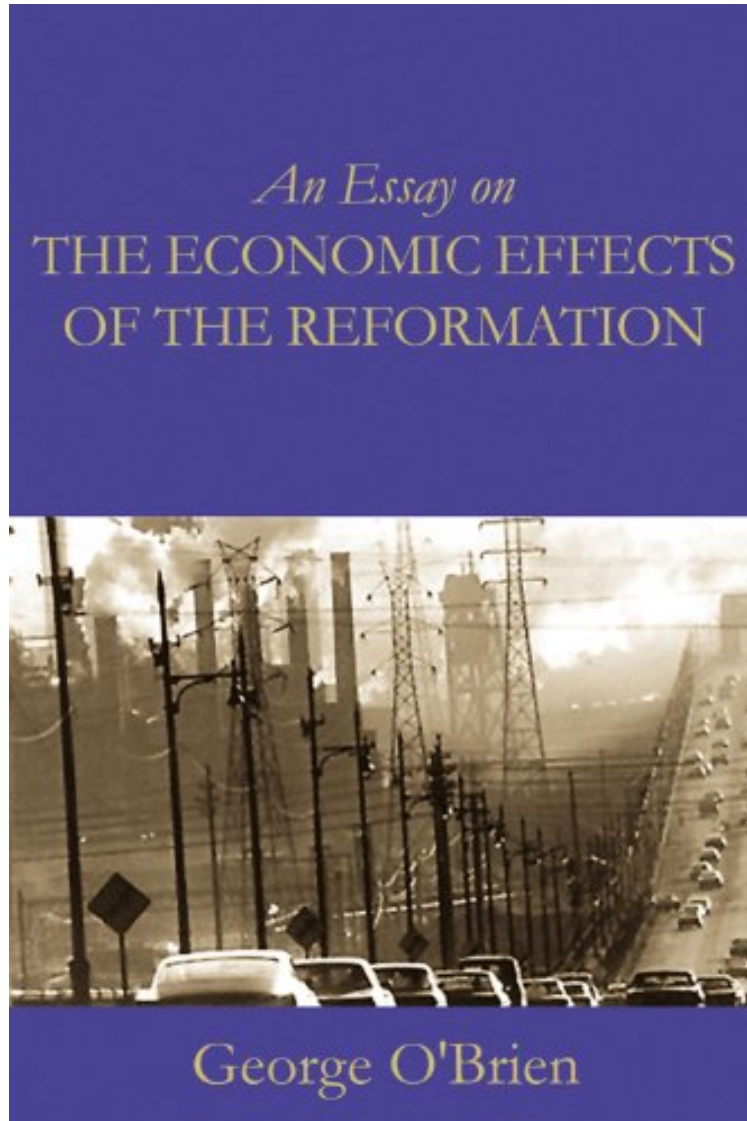


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An Essay on the Economic Effects of the Reformation

George O'Brien

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George O'Brien : An Essay on the Economic Effects of the Reformation before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised An Essay on the Economic Effects of the Reformation:

7 of 8 people found the following review helpful. Excellent Book!By Gabriel JonesI bought this book in high school and attempted to read it, but since it is a little heady and somewhat dense it sat on my shelf until I finished my B.A. in Economics. Not that it requires a degree in economics to understand (it doesn't), that was just when I finally had enough time and willingness to sit down and finish it.What this book is not:For anyone looking for hard data, graphs, numbers, and definitive economic information, this book does not contain anything of the sort. It is not a collection of boring charts, graphs, and models. As such, it does not conform to the prevailing modern interpretation of

"economics." Neither is it a ardent defense of capitalism. What this book is: Far from boring, this book/essay is an excellent treatise on how the Protestant mindset stemming from the Reformation changed society's worldview of the economy and its operation. The content is closely aligned with the Austrian school's preference for philosophy, ethics, and the motivations behind human action. At times it is more of a Catholic moral theology text than an economics book - although the two are not mutually exclusive (which is more-or-less the point of the essay). At times it also becomes a sharp critique of Protestantism, especially the "Protestant Ethic" so often heralded in our modern world. As a contrast, it presents Catholic ethical teaching as the model from which economics should be considered. That being said, it posits both capitalism and communism as stemming from the same erroneous genesis (i.e., a focus on the material world), and in doing so offers profound and thought-provoking ideas for how the shallow paradigm of the modern world of business and economics might be changed for the better. Additionally, although it can be slightly heady, this book (when read with patience and some basic understanding of philosophy, theology, and economics) makes sense of basic economic theories without resorting to confusing graphs and charts.

This work offers a unique perspective on the rise of capitalism and socialism and the effect of the Reformation. Specific topics include consequences of belief in the private judgment of scriptures; separation of spiritual and secular life; difference between Lutheran and Calvinist teachings on economics; the Calvinist concept of vocation; its perception of material success as a sign of divine election; its praise of frugality and disdain for beauty. Also covered is socialism as a reaction to excesses of capitalism; the manner in which Protestantism had strengthened secular authority; diminution of charity toward the poor following Reformation; materialism underlying socialism abetted by Protestant emphasis on earthly prosperity; egalitarian ideas traceable to Protestantism; and the ease with which socialism blended into Protestant thought. This is a unique work of economic philosophy in that it examines the ideological causes of the economic changes of the period, thus offering a refreshing philosophical perspective rather than merely the mathematical or statistical sides of the question.

About the Author George O'Brien authored numerous works in the field of economics including *An Essay on Medieval Economic Teaching*, *Labour Organisation*, and *Agricultural Economics*. His work on the economic history of Ireland, published in 1921, has not been superseded to date. He occupied the post of professor of national economy at University College, Dublin, for 35 years, and also participated in debates on economic matters in the Irish Senate. Edward A. McPhail is an assistant professor of economics at Dickinson College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania.