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Christian theology and the formation of economics as a discipline in 18th and early 19th century Britain

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Abstract

Christian theology shaped political economy as a discipline, and facilitated its rise to cultural dominance across the English speaking world. This paper outlines these theological influences (especially the British tradition of scientific natural theology of Bacon and Newton, and the moderate Calvinism of the Scottish Enlightenment). It connects doctrines such as divine providence and the future hope to economists' belief in the co-ordinating and beneficent powers of markets. It then discusses changes in the religious context in the mid-19th century that eroded the religious significance of economics and allowed the secularization of economics by the late 19th century in Britain and the early 20th century in America.

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Outline

Parallel with argument in history of science. Economics has curiously resisted this.
I'm retelling a crucial part of the story of economics as a discipline with the theology restored to its rightful place. Burden of Proof.

Natural Theology

British Scientific Natural Theology and its functions

Theodicy

How natural theology shaped political economy in the 18th and early 19th centuries

Adam Smith

Scottish Enlightenment context

Smith Biography. Stoic. Newtonianism. Church attender with mother. Snell. Hume

Moderate Calvinism. Aristotelianism? Westminster Confession. Natural theology lectures.

Language and Ideas of *TMS* 1759 and *WN* 1776

Invisible Hand. General vs Special Providence. Newton. Texts. Reasons. Origin, All3, Not Prominent, Irony

Backtrack to 18th century English Butler Tucker Paley Burke. Even if no Smith PE would have emerged.

Malthus

Context and biography, Clergyman. Teacher of PE. Sermons. Malthus Follows Paley on natural theology

Attacks on Malthus. (Excursus on Carlyle's "dismal science")

Principle of Population 1798 + 1802

Theological problem and Malthus theodicy

JB Sumner *Records* 1816. Added state of trial theodicy to Malthus *Essay*. PE itself providential.

Thomas Chalmers *National Resources* 1808, *Bridgewater* 1833. Influence. Ameliorative theodicy

Whately (and Nassau Senior) Rescue PE from Godless utilitarians *Lectures* 1832. Providence. City

Whewell and the struggle over theodicy in 1827 sermons

Separation of economics from theology in 19th century Britain

Not natural maturation of economics as a science, or inevitable secularisation

Demise of Natural Theology

Not refuted by Hume. Nor Darwin. Professionalisation. Too heavy burden re functions.

Bring together separation and the collapse of natural theological framework

Role of theodicy in both separation and collapse.

Rise of PE made economic suffering understandable remediable.

(Excursus Babbage's calculating machine and evolutionary approach. But still no adequate theodicy)

Conclusion – Theology must be part of the story of political economy.

Dialogue possibilities. Good for both economics and theology.