

QUOTES - TOMAS SEDLACEK

Economics of Good and Evil

- This book is composed of two parts: In the first part we look for economics in myths, religion, theology, philosophy, and science. In the second part, we look for myths, religion, theology, philosophy, and science in economics. We should go beyond economics and study what beliefs are “behind the scenes,” ideas that have often become the dominant yet unspoken assumptions in our theories.
- Since economics has dared to imperialistically apply its system of thought to provinces traditionally belonging to religious studies, sociology, and political science, why not swim against the current and look at economics from the viewpoint of religious studies, sociology, and political science? As long as modern economics dares to explain the operation of churches or conduct economic analyses of family ties (often resulting in new and interesting insights), why not examine theoretical economics as we would systems of religions or of personal relationships?
- An economy tells us much more about itself when it expresses its weakness, not when it is at full strength. We can get to know it much better when it is bare and humble than when it overflows with pride and despises everything other than itself. Strength frequently hides the essence of things, while weakness reveals it.
- The medieval notion frequently prevails that the first sin in the Garden of Eden was sexual, that the form of the original sin had sexual character. But this is missing convincing argumentation. I offer another possible angle: It would appear to be much more likely that the original sin had the character of (over) *consumption* . After all, in the story of the Garden of Eden, Eve and Adam *literally* consume (the word “ate” is repeated two times) the fruit. “She took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.”
- The more we have, the more we want. Why? Perhaps we thought (and this sounds truly intuitive) that the more we have, the less we will need. We thought that consumption leads to saturation of our needs. But the opposite has proven to be true. The more we have, the more additional things we need. Every new satisfied want will beget a new one and will leave us wanting. For consumption is like a drug.

- Before the industrial revolution, we did not expect much of growth. Then we were impressed with its speed, and today we consider it to be completely automatic. What's more, today we think of progress in economic and technical terms.
- The paradox is that we must — often artificially — create shortage. Only in shortage is there adventure, and therefore entertainment and meaning of life as well. It is symptomatic that an entire industrial sector has been created for this purpose: The entertainment industry — factory-created entertainment and diversion, which frequently lies in the *simulation of shortage*. And so it happens that we the oversatiated watch, from the warmth of our homes, televised adventures in which the heroes suffer from hunger and cold. It is a paradox: The more satiated and safe we become, the more we demand artificial entertainment and plastic danger. And there is a second paradox: We can *only* watch filmed simulations of suffering of cold and hunger from a position of surplus, in the warmth of our homes and with popcorn in hand. Watching such films while also experiencing the same type of shortage (hungry, cold) would be hard to imagine.
- One of the most broken of the Ten Commandments today is — paradoxically — not observing the Sabbath. It is paradoxical that this had to be a commandment; it would appear that it would be enough for God to *recommend* rest, and not (frequently under threat of death) forbid work. But there is probably something in our nature that has a tendency to permanently work — to maximize — and this is why this commandment had to be a commandment.
- The key message is this: We should change the way we drive from MaxSpeed to MinDebt, and slow down to *Economy drive*.
- Dreams simply never sleep — and they are hard to control. In multiple meanings of the word: The one who learns to control his or her dreams will be able to control his or her reality.
- Mainstream economics in recent years has abandoned the original topics of economics such as ethics, morals, and on the contrary became somewhat lost in the refuge of analytical-technical apparatus. But mathematics is also only a language. Should the focus of our attention change just because we start to use this different language?

Other texts

- They ask us economists, whether we are opti- or pessi-mystic about the future of the economy. I answer that we are nor opti nor pessi, that we are just mystic. Its just that many still, including economists, have not realized it. Or - which is worse- have not admitted it.
- The man, it seems, is the only creature that is naturally unnatural. We are in a need of external things, of ownership, in order to feel natural. Without them we feel extremely unnatural (naked).
- Our identities are disjointed, out of place, always somewhere else, never truly with us at the very moment. And economy makes full use of this, this disjointness is the very drive of our economy. We saturate this distance by possessions.
- In the story of Eden, the very first possession of Adam and Eve after the Fall, was clothing, which covered his true nature, namely that of being naked. Before the Fall Adam and Eve fell natural when they were natural – they were themselves and felt natural without any possession – and they lacked nothing. Only after the Fall they started feeling naturally unnatural, in other words they felt unnatural in their natural state. Since then, we dress up and cover our nature, hide ourselves with external possessions which we feel amplifies our „true self“. First possession of man was clothing to cover his natural shame.
- A fool who thinks that he is an expert is a fool proper, an expert who thinks he is an expert is a double fool (to paraphrase a famous saying from Jacques Lacan).
- The very statement, that economics *should be* a positive science (value free and stating what is and not what should be) is a normative statement (a statement that carries a subjective judgement, stating how things *should be*). It obviously does not describe the way economics is, but the way those who say it *want it to be*. If economics truly was a positive science, we would not have to say that it *should be* one.
- The only thing we don't have enough of - in your generation and civilization - is scarcity. Scarcity (the very subject of official definition of economics) is in scarce supply. We should rethink our focus of economics: it no longer should be a science of scarcity but a study of abundance - and how to survive it.
- One will never be a good economist, who is only an economist (to paraphrase a quote from John Stuart Mill).

- All of economics is, in the end, economics of good and evil. It is the telling of stories by people of people to people. Even the most sophisticated mathematical model is, de facto, a story, a parable, our effort to (rationally) grasp the world around us. Economics – like all science – is more or less sophisticated storytelling for adults. We are people of words, and stories.
- The key task of a sensor is to sensor himself out, to be invisible. Now, I want to see and talk to my censor.
- Every model is a "as if, let's pretend" parable, in the same way that every parable is a model.
- Money can travel in time – this is mainly thanks to interest rate. It is key to realize that you always borrow from your own future (both at a level of Government, company and an individual). All thinkers of old have warned us against the use of interest; we have made it a cornerstone of capitalist economy. We are riding on a very curious, strong and untamed force – all our sophisticated mathematical models will never master the strength of money-time travel, we will never be able to anticipate future. No wonder this force kicks around and creates havoc from time to time.
- Since economics wants imperially to understand everything, we must venture out of our field to truly try to understand everything.
- Mathematics, models, equations, and statistics are just the tip of the iceberg of economics; the biggest part of the iceberg of economic knowledge consists of everything else. Disputes in economics are rather a battle of stories, beliefs and various meta-narratives than anything else. People today, as they have always, want to know from economists principally what is good and what is bad.
- Today we are intoxicated by the idea of progress, but in the very beginning, the idea of progress was non-existent. Time was cyclical, and humanity was expected to make no historical motion. Then the Hebrews, with linear time, and later the Christians, gave us the ideal (or amplified the Hebrew ideal) we now embrace. Then the classical economists secularized progress. How did we come to today's progression of progress, and growth for growth's sake?
- A question arises about how much of economics is myth-making, respectively, how many myths does it need or draw from? Economics considers itself to be in the best position to interpret the social world of our time, but we are finding that

it needs myth for this role. Economics uses myth in several regards or several ways. First, it draws from myth in its assumptions (the unconscious use of myth), and second it creates myths and stories (we call them models).

- Economics as a science is a clear follower of the hedonistic approach equating goodness with utility. Only the hedonist program—maximize your supply of goods until it reaches your demand for good, has not been fulfilled, although we have tried very hard for many generations.
- The anthropological difference between scientific and pre-scientific man is that pre-scientific man explicitly knew the assumptions referred to (articles of faith and myths) and actively accepted them (or rejected them). In contrast, modern man bears his (scientific) faith more or less unconsciously. Religion is accompanied by an explicit profession of faith but not science (although it is clear that you must use belief in science as well). It is as if modern man is ashamed of his (scientific) faith: This could very well be because it cannot be scientifically proven, which somehow does not correspond with our modern anthropology. The whole concept of “scientific faith” seems to a common ear to be an oxymoron, but it is not.
- In economics there is not even agreement on the most fundamental models, and methodology by far is not unified. It is more the agreement on a question that unites a field, not the answers.
- Perhaps our era will go down in history as the Debt Age. In recent decades, our debt has risen not out of shortage, but of surplus, excessiveness. Our society is not suffering from famine, but it must solve another problem—how to host a meal for someone who is full?
- When Jesus said: do not worry about what you shall eat and what you shall dress, he spoke laudably even to our over-saturated generation, but from an opposite direction: we worry what to eat, because we eat too much; we worry what to dress (“oh, what shall I wear tonight?”) because we have our cupboards full.
- We thought that consumption leads to saturation, the satiation of our needs. But the opposite has proven to be true. The more we have, the more additional things we need. It’s enough to compare what all we did not need twenty years ago (computers, mobile telephones) and what we objectively need today (ultra light laptop, new mobile phone every two years, permanent and fast connection to the mobile Internet etc.). While the rich should have fewer unfulfilled needs than the poor, the reality is turning out to be absolutely the opposite.

- Although economics presents itself as a science that highly values rationality, there are surprisingly many unexplained factors behind the scenes, and a religious and emotional zeal that accompanies many schools of thought.
- Once films were made in such a way as to look like they are “from a real life;” today, I feel, we try to live our lives so that they look like they were “from a movie”.
- Dreams simply never sleep—and they are hard to control. In multiple meanings of the word: The one who learns to control one’s dreams will be able to control his or her reality.
- If we were to search for the prophets of the twentieth and twenty-first century, we would have to look among economists. It is us (of all the social sciences) who most often predict the future and fulfil the role played in the ancient world by oracles. The trouble is that we can try to predict everything, except the truly important events.
- The crisis is a phenomenon of growth. We can attain greater order only by walking through the valley of higher chaos and disorder. Have you ever noticed that the best method to re-order a drawer is to overturn its contents and actually create more chaos before instilling better order? That *while* cleaning up a room you create a bigger mess than was before? That if you are painting a room, it becomes less usable, during the painting itself? It is like that with all our earthly business: We don't know how to increase the level of order in a given system without some temporary disorder first. Before arriving in the promised land, one must first cross a dry desert. And the greatest example in our civilization: Before forgiving sins, there had to be the sacrifice of Jesus Christ; a descent into hell preceded his ascent into heaven.