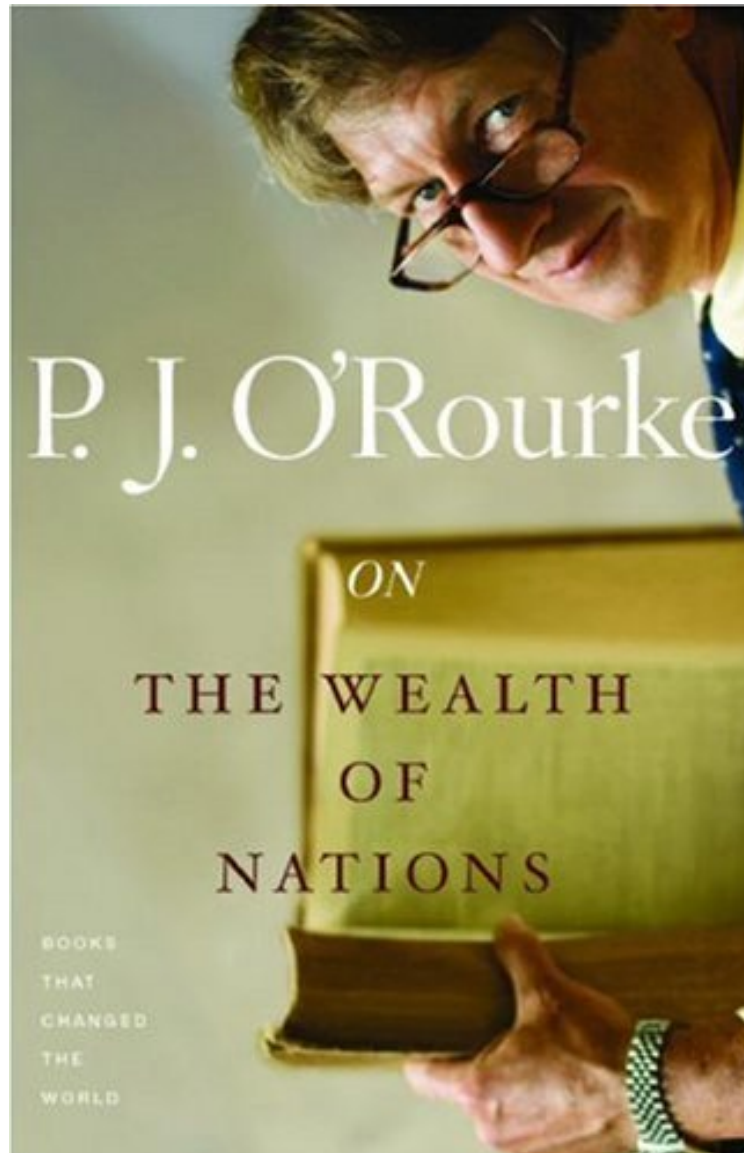


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On The Wealth of Nations: Books That Changed the World

P. J. O'Rourke

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P. J. O'Rourke : On The Wealth of Nations: Books That Changed the World before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised On The Wealth of Nations: Books That Changed the World:

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Yes, Adam Smith is Still Relevant; Too Bad There's No Reading Guide By Wayne Lucas If you're like me, you've long had an itching curiosity to read Adam Smith's The Wealth of Nations (Modern Library Classics). But after picking up his 1000-page tome and thumbing through a few sections,

your itch is soon forgotten. After all, how much is there to say about 18th century economics? And, though the undisputed economic bible, how come the only quoted text I've regularly come across is a few short excerpts about an invisible hand? This well-respected and identifiable excerpt surely has my veneration, but for diving into economics, doesn't there have to be an easier, more modern means for doing so? Of course there is, but this inevitable conclusion has always left me asking whether Adam Smith was still, well, relevant. P.J. O'Rourke has given us a gift by explaining why he is. Wielding his dry wit and characteristic humor, O'Rourke clears a path through not only Smith's characteristic work, but his lesser-known *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Penguin Classics) as well. Presenting both in terms of why they (1) should be read together and (2) should be regularly referenced when analyzing current policy, O'Rourke's buoyant style adds a bit of levity to an otherwise dense subject. Even with the occasional flippant remark and incisive jab at modern day politics though, this is still a serious book. Concentration, reflection, and, in my case reiteration, were necessary to absorb the essential ideas, and thus leaves me wondering: if a synopsis and introduction to an 18th century text requires a fair amount of work, how much more difficult is the source material? Likely very difficult, which makes this reader long for a much-needed reading guide to traverse an unrecognized economics yester-world. While giving some helpful tips, O'Rourke isn't the tour guide I wanted him to be. Neither does he suggest any shortcuts for getting to Smith's essential high points without slogging through fifty pages of colonial era corn laws. Both disappointing, and while O'Rourke does point the reader to the best versions of the original text, some useful secondary materials, and some pithy Scottish quotes to encourage you onward, a syllabus for reading Smith in so many lessons is what I really longed for. Unfortunately, it isn't to be found here. Leaving me itching more than ever to read Smith, but not inclined to scratch.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Tried to be humorous and informative but was none. By Wohlvisar. It was supposed to be funny and informative, but it was none. It had the occasional zingers and interesting information, but the economic information that I expected to learn from it was very simplified. The redeeming quality would therefore be its humor. However, if you don't enjoy PJ O'Rourke's humor, then this book will be difficult to read. I would not recommend it. This has probably been the only unpleasant book bought from that I have read. I did enjoy some of the trivia of Adam Smith, such as the friendship he had with some notable Americans, Voltaire, and David Hume. I was also impressed that Adam Smith's principles influenced The Earl of Shelburne, who signed the Treaty of Paris with the United States. The Earl of Shelburne stated to "have been converted to Smith's ideas during a trip" to London in 1761. (pg. 185) Adam Smith was also friends with some of the Physiocrats, and "admired their founder, court physician Francois Quesnay, enough that he planned to dedicate *The Wealth of Nations* to him." (pg. 111) However Adam Smith was very critical about their ideas. Overall, I would not recommend this book if you want to learn more than some tidbits of knowledge here and there.

48 of 49 people found the following review helpful. A must read! By Stephen B. Waters. I should have been exposed to a reliable, useful exposition of Adam's Smith's ideas in my History, Political Science, and Economics classes. None of them did as good a job as O'Rourke has done, distilling 900 pages down. O'Rourke ties Smith to today's issues. So far I have given away copies of this book to government officials, teachers, and friends. Please do the same. It is frightening to discover that so many politicians' proposed solutions to current problems have been tried and failed, with historical examples and explanations documented by Smith. Where is our sense of history! Smith offers not belief, but fact. We all want to solve society's problems, but the solutions ought not cause greater problems than they cure. After I listened to the CDs, I bought hard copy to underline. Now I leave it on my iPod so when I shuffle, I get 3 minutes of pithy insight, interspersed with cleansing music. Put this on your permanent reading and rereading list.

In *On The Wealth of Nations*, America's most provocative satirist, P. J. O'Rourke, reads Adam Smith's revolutionary *The Wealth of Nations* so you don't have to. Recognized almost instantly on its publication in 1776 as the fundamental work of economics, *The Wealth of Nations* was also recognized as really long: the original edition totaled over nine hundred pages in two volumes including the blockbuster sixty-seven-page digression concerning the variations in the value of silver during the course of the last four centuries, which, to those uninterested in the historiography of currency supply, is like reading *Modern Maturity* in Urdu. Although daunting, Smith's tome is still essential to understanding such current hot-topics as outsourcing, trade imbalances, and Angelina Jolie. In this hilarious, approachable, and insightful examination of Smith and his groundbreaking work, P. J. puts his trademark wit to good use, and shows us why Smith is still relevant, why what seems obvious now was once revolutionary, and why the pursuit of self-interest is so important.

"Some jobs require protection, to ensure they are performed locally in their own communities. My job is to make quips, jests, and waggish comments. Somewhere in Mumbai there is a younger, funnier person who is willing to work for less. My job could be outsourced to him. But he could make any joke he wanted. Who would my wife scold? Who would my in-laws be offended by? Who would my friends shun?" "Later economists, such as, in the early nineteenth century, J. B. Say, felt that Smith undervalued the economic contributions of services. And he did. The eighteenth century had servants, not a service economy. It was hard for a man of that era to believe that the semi-inebriated footman and the blowzy scullery maid would evolve into, well, the stoned pizza delivery boy and the girl behind the

checkout counter with an earring in her tongue." "Unfortunately, Adam Smith didn't have graphs. Hundreds of pages of *The Wealth of Nations* that readers skim might have been condensed into several pages that readers skip entirely. Another thing Smith didn't have, besides graphs, was jargon. Economics was too new to have developed its thieves' cant. When Adam Smith was being incomprehensible he didn't have the luxury of brief, snappy technical terms as a shorthand for incoherence. He had to go on talking through his hat until the subject was (and the reader would be) exhausted."