

# The Origin of Economics and Augustinianism:

On the Late Seventeenth Century French Thought

Syohei Yoneda

The purpose of this paper is to examine recent studies that shed new light on the origin of Economics in its relation to Augustinianism. For the advent of Economics, it is necessary that people liberated from the control of traditional morals and driven by their avarices, can freely seek their interests, and that new ethics that allow people to have their desire for opulence emerge. It is within this dynamic change that Economics appeared on the stage.

What caused this change is the late seventeenth century French thought, produced by a variety of thinkers such as Moralists like La Rochefoucauld, Jansenists like Pierre Nicole and Jean Domat, and Libertines (free thinkers) like Pierre Bayle. They all held the Augustinian understanding of man. Man, burdened with the original sin due to Adam's Fall, is completely corrupted, such that his behavior is entirely driven by self-love / self-interest. However, this vice brings about social utility. In other words, it can be a principle of harmony owing to "that strange

Augustinian alchemy that turns sin itself into universal good" (Jean Lafond).

Some recent studies indicate that the encounter between Augustinianism and Epicureanism brought about this alchemy. This new stream of thought becomes an important source of utilitarian ethics and the utilitarian Economics of Boisguilbert and Mandeville. Both look upon the society as a "system of desire" and think that the mainspring that drives the dynamism of society is people's various desires. With regard to the condition for the transformation of self-love into public good, while Mandeville emphasizes the dexterous management of a skilful politician, Boisguilbert enlightens the work of a market mechanism: an epoch-making jump from the standpoint of Nicole and Domat who considered political order based on Providence as the definite condition.

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