
AREOPAGITICA: MILTON'S INFLUENCE ON CLASSICAL AND MODERN POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC THOUGHT

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Introduction

TAKING ON A GREAT AUTHOR like John Milton, and in particular attempting to draw from a work on free speech and the importance of an open exchange of ideas (specifically for religion) and endeavoring to apply its arguments to the field of economics is, to say the least, risky. I am well aware of the pitfalls and tendency to stretch for tenuous connections that comes with such a task—and Milton has seen his share of bad attempts to make his works fit into modern paradigms.

It is not my goal to demonstrate, however, that *Areopagitica* is a foundational work of classical or modern economic theory, or that it has ever been explicitly viewed as such. Milton's polemic is relevant to economics for three primary reasons.

First, free speech is fundamentally connected to all other freedoms, including economic freedom. The oft-used dichotomy between “economic” and “social” freedoms is at best cumbersome, and sometimes dangerous. On the practical level, any society that does not allow the free exchange and study of ideas and a vigorous pursuit of knowledge is no place for an economist. Free speech is a precondition to good economics. On a more abstract level, economists cannot isolate “economic” behavior and policy from “social” behavior and policy, and a robust study of economic relations requires an understanding of all human relations. Communication is the most

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foundational element of human relations, and as Aristotle tells us, speech is the only reason we are “political animals.”¹

Second, the brilliant arguments Milton makes against licensing and regulation of printing offer some of the best arguments against government interference into all parts of the economy. I am not claiming Milton was conscious of the applicability of his arguments to other forms of intervention, or that he would necessarily agree with it. But the fact remains that many of the arguments he makes have been used and refined by countless economic minds to describe and oppose government regulation in many forms. Milton makes plain why a lack of competition and the presence of central control in the market of ideas is detrimental. The market of goods and services is not so different.

Finally, Milton’s work has something to teach economists not only in its content but in its style and strategy. Milton did not restrict his theories on free speech to scholarly journals. Though his rhetorical style hardly seems accessible to the masses today, he intentionally wrote a short pamphlet with conscious allusions to popular sentiment in order to communicate rather complex ideas to the body politic. Economists who lament the lack of economic knowledge among the “man on the street” and the preponderance of antigrowth economic policy which result have much to learn from Milton. He wrote his work because he truly wanted change. For that reason, he made it accessible to the people whose hearts and minds he would have to win to see change come about. Modern economists would do well to more frequently attempt communication with more than a handful of scholars.

I. The Work

Areopagitica, written in 1644, derives its title from a speech written by Isocrates in 355 B.C. in Athens. The ancient author wrote in support of returning power to the Council of Areopagus. Milton was advocating a removal of government *Imprimatur*, or licensing laws which forced all published works to be funneled through a small set of government officials for approval. He saw this as a return of power to the people, hence the parallel with Isocrates represented in the title.²

Like Isocrates, Milton never delivered his speech orally, nor did he intend to. He addressed it to Parliament in the style of a speech, harkening back to rules of classic rhetoric. In keeping with those rules, Milton laid out

¹ Aristotle, *Politics*.

² Lewalski, Barbara K. *Life of Milton*. Blackwell Publishing, 2002.

the four points he would make, each in its own section, in the beginning of the speech.³

The first section describes in some detail the history of licensure and censorship of the written word throughout the world. Milton gives numerous examples and illustrations, the main purpose of which seems to be to prove that such licensing has been somewhat rare throughout history, and where implemented it has had deleterious effects on individuals, societies and governments. The historical cases serve as a not so thinly veiled warning of the dangers of restricting the dissemination of ideas, and an aggrandizement of those societies which let thoughts and words freely flow.

Partly because of his own personal beliefs and biases,⁴ partly because he knew it would appeal to his audience, Milton made constant reference to the "Romanizing" effect of licensing. That is, he painted it as a Roman Catholic concept, something offensive to himself and his readers in a time of great Protestant-Catholic tension. Though he may go too far in criticizing Catholicism, Milton communicates something important by his constant warning that Protestant licensing was no better than papal censorship; it is not the personality that makes the restriction dangerous, but the system itself. To Milton, licensing was the problem. It could not be remedied simply by having the "right" censors. The restriction of speech by Protestants or Catholics was equally abhorrent to him.

The second section is on the value of reading in general. There is no doubt that books are elevated far above what most would think of them in this section. Listen to this dramatic prose:

For books are not absolutely dead things, but do contain a potency of life in them to be as active as the soul was whose progeny they are; nay, they do preserve as in a vial the purest efficacy and extraction of that living intellect that bred them.

And more striking still,

[A]s good almost kill a man as kill a good book. Who kills a man kills a reasonable creature, God's image; but he who destroys a good book, kills reason itself, kills the image of God, as it were in the eye.

Still, despite the seemingly romanticized description of books, what is being laid down in section two is that the ingestion and exposition of ideas is a powerful and sacred, even if sometimes dangerous, thing. He is definitely appealing to the Protestant idea of personal revelation through scripture,

³ Blasi, Vincent. "Milton's Areopagitica and the Modern First Amendment." Yale Law School. Mar. 1995.

⁴ Hayek, F.A. *The Road to Serfdom*. London: Routledge, 1944.

rather than papal or priestly understanding passed down and accepted by the people. The takeaway from this argument on the value of reading is that reading is simply too valuable to be centralized and regulated by a small number of experts.

The main thrust of the second part of the speech is not only that good books are important, but that bad books are as well. Who can tell when a good man might gain knowledge and revelation, even from an unlikely (or bad) source? Milton talks about biblical authors and early church thinkers who benefited from studying and knowing pagan writings. Additionally, says Milton, if people are to have strong character (the supposed impetus behind the *Imprimatur*) they must not be deprived of choice. In reality, the choice to think and spread bad ideas still exists in spoken form even if books are restricted, but the idea that government will make the right decisions for the people regarding which books to look out for was, to Milton, a recipe for a complacent and morally weak people.

Here we have some of the first parallels to economics. Milton is arguing that competition in the marketplace of ideas is the only way to ensure the best ideas prevail. He describes the inability of central planners to know all, and laments their tendency to overlook value to be found in unlikely places—value that great intellectual entrepreneurs will uncover if left free to do so. The freedom to fail must be present, however. He is anticipating Francis Hutcheson’s morality and Adam Smith’s concept of competition keeping human vice in check. But we will look further into the economic applications in the following pages.

The third section of *Areopagitica* is something of a public choice argument against licensing. Milton says that the consistent application of the laws is, on a practical level, impossible. That some twenty licensers could never possibly prohibit all unlicensed publication, and that the cost of trying is prohibitive. Furthermore, to be consistent, songs, clothing, conversation, and all forms of communication would have to be regulated. But perhaps more interesting is the argument he makes that the system of regulation itself will tend to attract to it “ignorant, imperious, and remiss, or basely pecuniary” licensers. The work of being “the perpetual reader of unchosen books and pamphlets, oftime in huge volumes . . . and in hand scarce legible” is nasty stuff, and hence would attract nasty men. This section is perhaps the earliest form of F.A. Hayek’s argument in *The Road to Serfdom* in a chapter titled “Why the Worst Get to the Top,” where he describes why in activist governments bad people will tend to be attracted to and obtain positions of power.⁵

⁵ Ibid. 4.

It is here also that Milton touches upon what Hayek called the knowledge problem.⁵ That is, there is no way that any one person or group of persons could have enough knowledge to properly order and plan the market of ideas so as to deliver the necessary concepts to the necessary people. Though his approach was not explicitly based on a market, the parallel's between the exchange of ideas and that of goods is striking, and the arguments are much the same.

The fourth and final section is also the most substantial in arguments, and it describes the “manifest hurt” done by licensing. Though the previous sections touched upon the negative consequences in history, the loss to knowledge and character and the attendant difficulties of enforcement, and section three in particular begins to make some strong arguments, Milton saved his most forceful opposition to print restrictions for section four.

Here Milton argues that disputation is good not just for the individual knowledge seeker, but for society as a whole. He could be accused of a naively optimistic view of human nature for thinking the masses will be able to effectively parse out ideas and embrace only the good, but I think his argument does not rest on such a utopian view. Indeed, his argument that the people need free expression of thought rests not upon their inherent virtue, but upon the very fact that none of them are virtuous enough to properly decide the right books for all. C. S. Lewis, the 20th century literary critic, philosopher, lay theologian, and novelist, a close study of Milton, described this same concept in his *Present Concerns* as it relates to democratic institutions in general,

A great deal of democratic enthusiasm descends from the ideas of people like Rousseau, who believed in democracy because they thought mankind so wise and good that everyone deserves a share in the government. . . . The real reason for democracy is just the reverse. Mankind is so fallen that no man can be trusted with unchecked power over his fellows. Aristotle said that some people were only fit to be slaves. I do not contradict him. But I reject slavery because I see no men fit to be masters.⁶

Milton being a Protestant with a belief in the total depravity of man would no doubt have agreed with Lewis on this count. In this, Milton again anticipates Adam Smith's check on the vices of economic man—competition in the marketplace is the only way, and central control is dangerous.

Much of section four deals with something with which economics is constantly interested—incentives. The author argues that a system of

⁶ Lewis, C. S. *Present Concerns*. Toronto, Ontario, Canada: HarperCollins Publishers Canada, Limited, 1987.

regulations regarding speech will reduce the incentive of intellectual entrepreneurs to invest in ideas and discover new modes of thought. The knowledge that some “unleisured licenser, perhaps much his younger, perhaps his inferior in judgment, perhaps one who never knew the labor of bookwriting” would be a “dishonour and derogation to the author, to the book, to the privilege and dignity of learning.” Such an environment will create a strong incentive to remain ignorant, according to Milton since, “to be ignorant and slothful, to be a common steadfast dunce, will be the only pleasant life.”

The idea that all manner of ideas should be free to flourish, even fringe and extreme ideas, was very radical for the time.⁷ Milton argues forcefully for the value of such freedom as a safeguard against passivity and conformity, as barriers to entry in the publishing of books would reduce innovation and progress. The diverse, organic differences in thought would be good for England. One might begin to see Milton as a true pluralist were it not for one major, and to the modern reader rather startling, caveat: Catholic ideas did not require toleration in Milton’s view.

While charges of hypocrisy may be somewhat warranted on this count, one cannot accuse Milton of logical inconsistency within his work. He did not argue for all speech to be free for its own sake, but built the edifice of toleration upon the foundations of a better Christian man and nation, and he believed Catholic doctrine to be itself intolerant and anti-Christian, therefore at odds with his very purpose in wanting toleration. I do not think we should let this dissuade us from the great arguments in *Areopagitica*, nor do I think it diminishes their broader application in politics and economics. Even if one disagrees with his beliefs, one shouldn’t let Milton’s anti-Catholic views cast a poor shade upon him as a scholar. As the editor of the Yale Press edition of the book, Ernest Struck, remarks, “We may think Milton’s proscription of Roman Catholicism unnecessarily severe, but we cannot think it is inconsistent with the principles upon which he based his plea for toleration.”⁸

II. Milton the Man

From the early 1500s in England there was a licensing system for published works. In 1640 King Charles I convened the Long Parliament, who acted to abolish the Court of Star Chamber, which served as the body that censored political and religious expression in opposition to the Crown, and

⁷ Ibid. 3.

⁸ Blasi, Vincent. “Milton’s *Areopagitica* and the Modern First Amendment.” Yale Law School. Mar. 1995.

granted monopolies to members of the printing business. The abolition of the Star Chamber was not meant as an endorsement of free speech as much as to repudiate the idea that the King should have preference over what gets printed.⁹

During this period of free speech new ideas and doctrines proliferated at an incredible rate in England. According to Professor Vincent Blasi, there were in 1640 22 pamphlets published under the licensing regime, compared to 1,966 pamphlets published just two years later in 1642 with licensing absent.¹⁰

It was during this time that Milton, who had been educated for the ministry but had since devoted himself to poetry, put down the poet's pen and began pamphleteering. He wrote several works against Episcopacy, and on Church-State relationships and Reformation. Milton was seen as a radical, and was definitely not within the mainstream of his contemporaries in theology or politics. Still, his were just a few among many new ideas and works being circulated during this tumultuous time in British history.¹¹

By 1643 the Royalists, including the majority of Parliament, were concerned about the spread of anti-Crown propaganda as they were in the midst of a civil war, which had broken out a year earlier. For this reason the licensing regime was reinstated.

The Stationers' Company, the trade organization for those with printing patents, was permitted to bring to justice anyone who printed without license. A small number of printers were allowed to legally print, the rest were enemies of the state. What was an attempt to gain political and religious unanimity and conformity by the royalists turned out to be a very beneficial economic situation for the privileged printers. Monopoly privilege once granted is hard to remove, since interests become heavily vested and have a disproportionate sway on the decisions of lawmakers.¹²

There were a total of 20 officials who were charged with the examination of all printed works to determine whether they were fit for *Imprimatur*. Specialists in various topics were assigned to vet works in those fields—law, philosophy, history, mathematics, etc. Authors, printers, and licensers who were overly permissive could be imprisoned if Parliament so ordered.¹³

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid. 2.

¹² Hill, Christopher *Milton and the English Revolution*. New York: Viking, 1977.

¹³ Ibid. 3.

The political debates raging during the civil war became more religious as the various factions attempted to create alliances. Parliament sought to gain the allegiance of Scotland, but the Scots wanted an official state-sanctioned church in England following their rigidly Calvinist beliefs. This stirred up a great deal of controversy among Parliamentarians and the public alike, and doctrinal disputes were the talk of the day. Religion and politics, faith and patriotism were intimately connected. This sheds some light on the reasons Milton appealed so strongly to a sense of English pride, Protestant virtue and anti-establishment allusions to Roman Catholicism.¹⁴

Milton further cemented his reputation as an extremist with the publication of a pamphlet on divorce in 1643. He had it printed illegally, without the required approval of the licensers. Though obviously motivated by his personal struggles with a wife who had essentially left him (though later to return and mother their children), Milton's advocacy of divorce for reasons not only of infidelity, but incompatibility reflected a deeply personal theology and a willingness to stand out as a radical. *Areopagitica*, though less controversial among the public of the time, was also printed illegally and addressed to the very body who had prohibited it. At this point in his life, Milton hadn't much to lose as far as reputation was concerned, and this gave him free play to forcefully argue his points on free speech. (Milton's reputation had also suffered as some had accused him of libertinism, since his views on divorce were so liberal. There is no evidence that the Puritanical Milton was licentious, but he suffered the allegations nonetheless.)¹⁵

Indeed, despite the negative views of him held by many in public office and at the pulpit, Milton was in many ways a picture of Protestant virtue and work ethic. Not only was he studied in eight languages and interested in a variety of subjects both scientific and philosophical, but he was a disciplined Bible reader. According to Blasi he read the Bible in original Hebrew and Greek for several hours each day.¹⁶ Though scholars continue to argue what his theological views were, it is clear that he was deeply religious and did not see himself as outside of the Protestant tradition of the day, though others may have seen him as such. To him, the political ambitions and moral degradation of leadership had corrupted the true church and state, and he was simply attempting to bring it back to its proper place.¹⁷

¹⁴ Ibid. 7.

¹⁵ Ibid. 3.

¹⁶ Ibid. 3.

¹⁷ Ibid. 2.

III. The Arguments

As mentioned above, Milton's work is broken into four sections, section one deals with the history of licensing, two with the good of reading, three with the practical impediments of licensing, and four with the negative consequences. It is in section three and especially section four that we find the most profound insights for economics. In these sections he makes two broad arguments in defense of unlicensed printing which have implications to economics and political theory, and laid the groundwork for many free-market arguments to come: the practical argument and the moral argument.

The moral arguments against licensure may seem to have less application to economics than the practical, but I do not believe this is so. Economics began as a moral philosophy—to understand what leads to human betterment and to increase it. Making material progress the object of the science is an implicit affirmation of material progress as “good”—a moral judgment. Additionally, classical economics was built upon a foundation of natural rights, and sought to discover systems which could best check vice and promote virtue.

Milton stands sharply in contrast to the utilitarian strain of thought that would quantify and weigh the benefits and harms of any policy and direct policy to the positive side of the balance sheet. Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill (even though Mill used Milton's arguments in his own *On Liberty*)¹⁸ would've had different arguments against licensure.¹⁹ In a decidedly un-utilitarian spirit, Milton says, “God sure esteems the growth and completing of one virtuous person more than the restrain of ten vicious.” The moral benefit of unregulated speech was not something weighed out on a scale and measured against its harm; to Milton, even the potential for harm was part of the good. Virtue cannot be forged without a resistance to the real temptation to choose poorly. Regulations, by making that choice for the people, would deprive them of the very thing needed to make them morally strong.

Milton also stands in contrast to Thomas Hobbes, one of his contemporaries in England during the 17th century. Hobbes' famous *Leviathan* sees men as an unwashed and fickle mass which require a strong and pervasive state to control their passions.²⁰ Hobbes was not religious and sought sound political theory on rationalist and practical grounds. Milton, on the other hand, was deeply religious and his arguments for free speech at bottom relied upon his idea that Christian men must be free to think and debate; it was central to a strong Christian individual and to a strong church.

¹⁸ Mill, John Stuart *On liberty*. Peterborough, Canada: Broadview Press, 1999.

¹⁹ Bentham, Jeremy *Introduction to Principles of Morals and Legislation*. 1780

²⁰ Hobbes, Thomas *Leviathan*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster Inc, 1997.

He did not see men as an unruly mob in need of strong central direction as did Hobbes. Not because he thought the public was upstanding and virtuous—though his poetry was romantic, Milton himself was immensely realistic—but precisely because he believed that they could not become virtuous in the presence of a state which would make moral decisions for them, and because no group of leaders could be virtuous enough to be conscience for all.

It is little surprise that Milton was a study of Machiavelli.²¹ The pragmatism he displays throughout *Areopagitica* is perhaps surprising in light of his strong religious and even millennial leanings, but as mentioned above, though the ends Milton sought were perhaps idealistic, he was constantly aware of human realities when deciding the proper means.

In his defense for free speech on moral grounds, we see in Milton much that would later be picked up by Adam Smith, both in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* and *The Wealth of Nations*. Of note is the notion that human vice cannot be done away with by imperial edict, but that a system must be allowed which best manages, reduces and channels vice to the best ends. For both Milton and Smith that system required freedom from government interference. In one of Smith's most famous passages he says that under free-market competition, each person in their self-interest is guided, "as if by an invisible hand" to do good for society. Competition was the best check on individual vice.²² Milton's own thoughts on the necessity of freedom as a check on vice are displayed in *Areopagitica* though he speaks of the market of ideas rather than goods:

And though all the winds of doctrine were let loose to play upon the earth, so truth be in the field, we do injuriously by licensing and prohibiting to misdoubt her strength. Let her and falsehood grapple; who ever knew truth put to the worse, in a free and open encounter? Her confuting is the best and surest suppressing.

The moral decay that Milton says is symptomatic of a paternalistic state, which decides for its people which ideas and doctrines they may be exposed to, was probably of greatest concern to him. We see shadows here of modern arguments against the welfare state and nanny-state prohibitions on victimless crimes. Charles Murray's seminal work *Losing Ground* argues that welfare is bad not primarily for the taxpayer, but for the recipients of welfare

²¹ *Ibid.* 3.

²² Smith, Adam *The Wealth of Nations*. Modern Library Edition. New York: Random House, 1937.

themselves,²³ an argument that echoes Milton's thoughts on the weakening of the people by the provision of a conscience from the state.

Milton was very pluralistic in his religious views and did not believe that revelation was restricted to leaders or even wise men. He saw truth as progressive, not static. It should continually be flowing lest it "sicken into a muddy pool of conformity and tradition." Emblematic of his Protestant beliefs, he did not think truth could only be revealed in one way or through one set of persons, "it is not impossible that she [truth] may have more shapes than one." If truth is to be ever progressing, if she should have more than one form, how could one leader or one group of leaders in any state or church effectively guard and protect her? How could the licensers, supposedly there to filter immorality, be exempt from immorality themselves? Milton believed that regulation would stifle doctrinal and moral innovation, which were required in his progressive version of truth. He also believed that in the "last days" truth would come from unexpected places, and to limit it by license would only stifle what was needed for the church at that time. His view on the anti-innovation effects of regulation are applicable to innovations not only in ideas but in goods on the marketplace.

We shall now turn to the practical arguments against *Imprimatur*. Even if one is in agreement with the goal of the regulations, Milton argued, how could that goal possibly be met? The enforcement of the regulations was literally impossible. A black market for literature could not be suppressed (perhaps the best evidence for this being Milton's own work in which these arguments were written!). Even the attempt would be costly to the state in pecuniary terms, but also in terms of its reputation. An ineffective state, or a police state (which would be required to attempt enforcement) do not long sustain the confidence of the people.

Milton made practical arguments that would later be echoed in different forms by Ludwig von Mises²⁴ and F.A. Hayek²⁵; central planners can never match the market as an organizer, disseminator, filter and process for delivering what's needed to those who need it—whether goods or ideas.

No central body could ever know enough about enough subjects or keep up on the spread of all the ideas in the marketplace enough to control and restrict them and to only let the good pass and discard the bad. Though Milton did not make so bold a prediction of the licensing regime as Mises did

²³ Murray, Charles *Losing Ground*. Toronto, Ontario, Canada: Harpercollins Publishers Canada, Limited.

²⁴ Mises, Ludwig *Human Action*. Chicago, Henry Regnery Company. 1963

²⁵ Hayek, F.A. *The Use of Knowledge in Society*. American Economic Review. 1945. v. 35, no. 4, p. 519-530.

of socialist central planning—that it was an impossibility doomed to fail²⁶—he did argue that the goals sought by the licensers were impossible and doomed to fail. The idea of central regulation and control flies in the face of the nature of knowledge itself. Its mere attempt would serve to stifle the innovation needed for a strong and improving society. The state planners sought to prohibit the dangers of the unknown, to stop failed ideas before they were attempted and to ensure a good society by protecting them from dynamic and changing concepts. The unknown and unknowable future, to the Austrian economists and to Milton, must be embraced and allowed to play out if progress is to occur.

Milton also made some of the earliest and best arguments in what has become known in modern times as public choice economics. That is, the study of the system of politics itself and the actors and interest groups which control it. Milton saw and foresaw the problems associated with giving a few men power over a great deal of the market.

As mentioned earlier, Milton’s description of the types of men who would inevitably be attracted to the regulating profession is less than desirable for a position aimed at protecting truth and virtue. Like modern public choice theorists, Milton did not believe that it was merely a matter of getting “good” people into the apparatus of government, but that the system itself was the problem. “[E]rrors in a good government and in a bad are equally almost incident”—the intentions do not create the results. In a letter to Richard J. Wilcke, Milton Friedman says something strikingly similar to Milton’s words above:

Like you, I do not believe that the solution to our problem is simply to elect the right people. The important thing is to establish a political climate of opinion which will make it politically profitable for the wrong people to do the right thing. Unless it is politically profitable for the wrong people to do the right thing, the right people will not do the right thing either, or if they try, they will shortly be out of office.²⁷

Milton also foresaw the power of vested economic interests in controlling print and deterring competition and innovation. After one hundred years of government-granted publication monopoly followed by three years of free printing, there was ample evidence in front of Milton as to the power of the monopoly to limit growth and competition. No doubt a printer of considerable political connections had a better chance at official

²⁶ Ibid. 13.

²⁷ Friedman, Milton. Quote from letter to Richard J. Wilcke in 1981, quoted in “An Appropriate Ethical Model for Business and a Critique of Milton Friedman’s Thesis,” Richard J. Wilcke, *The Independent Review*, Vol. 9, No. 2, Fall, 2004.

sanction than a political novice, or worse yet someone in opposition to the majority.

IV. Conclusion

Though rarely cited explicitly as an inspiration for classical or modern theories in economics or political science, save for issue of free speech in which it is considered one of the founding texts, *Areopagitica* offers some incredibly thought-out and beautifully worded arguments which became foundational to classical economics and have become so to modern free-market economics.

Milton is best remembered for his epic poem *Paradise Lost* and is thought of as a literary giant and sometime theologian, but I think his work in *Areopagitica* demonstrates a true philosopher and renaissance man who could ably communicate on a variety of human concerns in profound and memorable language. It is hard to imagine such a luminary as Milton, who would have been read by all the classical economists, not having an impact on their thinking. The moral foundations of economics and the natural law tradition out of which they sprung owe much to Milton's free-speech polemic. Not only directly in the arguments he offers, but moreso indirectly by the fact that his work helped to cultivate beliefs in the English people that would prepare them to embrace the ideas of later economic thinkers such as Smith, Ricardo, and Mill. Generations who had been through the civil war and participated in the debates on truth, censorship, and regulation in which Milton participated gave birth to new generations who would produce the great thinkers of classical economics. It is no accident that they came about at the time and place that they did, and Milton was one of the primary reasons the British culture produced and embraced much of classical economic thought.

Apart from the impacts and influences of *Areopagitica* on thinkers of the past, I believe it offers much wisdom for the present and future of economics. The arguments contained in the small pamphlet on the value of competition for improving character and safeguarding truth, the inability of regulators to control it and the propensity for corruption and individual and societal decay under such a system are timeless and should be resurrected anew with each generation. Of course, as Milton would remind us, we should not look for the arguments to present themselves in the same form, as truth may have many forms and be ever progressing, but the principles he lays out against regulation of speech are fundamental arguments against regulation in general.

Finally, we should not overlook the impact of Milton's writing style and the audience with whom he chose to communicate. In the battle of ideas as well as the regulation of printing, one cannot achieve success by imposing from above onto an unwilling people. If we seek to see sound economic policies enacted we must seek to foster sound economic ideas in the minds of individual members of society. Communicating our ideas to the general public may be the most important thing we can do to promote the progress of economic thought and its implementation. Milton clearly understood this with regards to the ideas he was championing, and his works reflect it.