

economically rational organization to which the volume is otherwise devoted would have extracted rents of equivalent value in return for such favors, limiting the Cistercians, like modern tax-exempt organisations, to earning no better than normal rates of return. One would have also liked more historical context and empirical evidence at various points, but it is possible to read only so many illuminated manuscripts. Overall, however, *Sacred Trust* represents an important contribution to the literature, demonstrating as it does so well the catholicity of the neoclassical economic model. I recommend it highly.

WILLIAM F. SHUGHART II, Economics and Finance, University of Mississippi, University, MS 38677, U.S.A.

Public Choice 94: 216–219, 1998.

Gordon L. Brady and Gordon Tullock (Eds.), *Formal contributions to the theory of public choice: The unpublished works of Duncan Black*. Norwell, MA: Kluwer Academic Publishers. 1996. 271 pages. \$89.95.

While Duncan Black's work remains reasonably well cited and his name is perpetuated in the Public Choice Society's Duncan Black Award, I think it is fair to say that in neither economics nor political science does he have the stature that he deserves. When he wrote his classic work on the foundations of mathematical political science in the 1940s, economists had not yet moved to the imperialism of a later day and, although his work appeared in leading economics journals, he had some trouble convincing the editors and reviewers of these journals that what he was doing was economics, and there was no follow-up to his work by others. It would take ten years before his major ideas were collected in book form (*The Theory of Committees and Elections*, Cambridge, 1958) and one early book on multidimensional spatial voting, *Committee Decisions with Complementary Valuation* (with R.A. Newing), was published so obscurely and was so hard to find that it essentially had no impact on the field. Today, to younger economists, I suspect that Black's work has a quaint tone to it because of his notation, which predates game theory, because of the concern for normative issues that is always lurking at the edges of his work, and because of his continued emphasis on the history of ideas. Perhaps more importantly, Black's work has been overshadowed by Arrow's seminal *Social Choice and Individual Values*, a work which had the impact of a bombshell in welfare economics and which spawned a vast literature, in complete contrast to the indifference with which Black's own work was

initially received. Indeed, Black never got over the feeling that his own work had been unfairly slighted.

I am personally delighted that Kluwer has been reprinting Black's major work and commissioning the posthumous publication of his other writings,¹ edited by leading scholars who are able to provide the intellectual context for this work. Black was in ill-health for much of his later years, and he never was able to complete the major opus (on Lewis Carroll) that preoccupied him. The state of his papers at his death was such that we owe an especially great debt to Professors Brady and Tullock for spending the time to edit Black's writings, sometimes combining material from more than one draft.² As we would expect, given this history, the pieces in *Formal Contributions to the Theory of Public Choice* are of varied length and uneven quality, but they accurately reflect the variety of issues that occupied Black and the originality of his mind, as well as displaying evidence of his own idiosyncratic approach to issues that, in mainstream economics, were regarded as well settled.

The editors have organised the papers into five categories: history of thought, epistemology, logrolling, economics, and psychology. These categories are largely for convenience; even the section on logrolling is not tightly focused on a single topic. There are over two dozen essays in the volume and I will make no attempt to discuss most of them. Rather I will single out one or two selections in each section which I found either of more general interest or important for the insights they provide us into Duncan Black the man and the scholar.

Black's earliest published work was in public finance, on taxation policy. Chapter Three, on the treatment of tax incidence in classical economic thought reflects Black, the outlier. In this essay, which contains an extended discussion of the views of various eighteenth and nineteenth century thinkers, Black argues that taxation cannot be understood solely as a burden, affecting production and consumption decisions, without taking into account how tax revenues will be used/(re)distributed. The nature of the discussion suggests that Black had less than complete sympathy with the view he attributes to Adam Smith and most later economists that "Capital left in the hands of individuals is employed productively and increases while capital taken by the government yields no returns." Unfortunately, Black, himself, does not offer ways to model how the effects/distribution of government expenditures affect those subject to taxation.

The first section, on the history of thought, also contains an important essay in which Black critiques Arrow's work, which he labels a form of ethical intuitionism, and asserts that the totality of Arrow's conditions should be regarded as neither necessary nor sufficient for what Black refers to as the "suitability" of a committee procedure. Black then distinguishes normative

and positive elements of a theory of committees (or of constitutions), and concludes with a reference to the Condorcet criterion as one with strong intuitive appeal.

Chapter 10, in the section on epistemology, deals with the commensurability of intra-individual desires, i.e., with what we might now refer to as multi-criteria decision-making. However, the discussion is cast in much more philosophical terms as a debate about the compatibility of Hedonist and Idealist views of human action. It appears to me that in it Black is offering the distinction between separable and non-separable preferences and seeking to provide a geometric representation that allows one to view any given choice as embedded in a framework of expected choices such that what one prefers will be contingent on the social state one expects to be in. Chapter 24, in the section on psychology, deals with closely related questions, and makes the intriguing argument that intensity of preference can only be understood as an ordinal and not a cardinal concept.

The section on logrolling reflects Black as an upright man, who, like, Dodgson and others, was skeptical of methods that seemed to improve social welfare but which required preference falsification or the appearance of corruption involving deals done behind closed doors. In it Black argues for what we might call, *pace* Wilson, "open logrolls, openly arrived at." That section also contains an interesting essay on supermajority decision-making when voters have single-peaked preferences. While none of the results are surprising, the essay does lay the foundation for later results in spatial voting games on the conditions for stability of super-majority decision-making such as Kramer's work on the minmax set.

An essay in the section on economics, one that looks at the concept of cost in economics, perhaps best displays Black's noted iconoclasm in that, while Black is totally dismissive of the labor theory of value, in that essay he is also sharply critical of the view that the opportunity theory of cost is an adequate explanation of the workings of the cost element in ordinary economic life.

While this is not a book for everyone to own, it is one which students of the history of Public Choice should definitely peruse. For those of us lucky to have known Black personally, as we read its pages, with their characteristic Blackian tone and notation, we cannot help but see in our mind's eye this gifted and idiosyncratic scholar.

BERNARD GROFMAN, School of Social Sciences, University of California, Irvine, Irvine, CA 92697-5100, U.S.A.

Notes

1. I was introduced to Duncan Black in 1968 by Professor E. W. Kelley. Black, officially retired, was then a visiting faculty member at the University of Chicago where I was a graduate student. My M.A. Thesis (a version of which was published in *Public Choice* in 1969 under the title "Some Notes on Voting Schemes and the Will of the Majority") was directly inspired by Professor Black's work and benefited greatly from his comments and corrections.
2. Students of *Public Choice* also owe a special debt to Iain McLean and the University of Glasgow for making sure that the Black papers were preserved.