

P.J. O'Rourke on The Wealth of Nations.
Atlantic Books 2007

This is another in the series of 'Books that Changed the World' published by Atlantic, other titles including The Qur'an and Darwin's Origin of the Species.

I greatly enjoy the writing of PJ O'Rourke, for he brings to his subjects a subtle yet biting wit and spirited iconoclasm of which the world is greatly lacking. The cover of the book shows him holding a copy of Adam Smith's magnum opus, with *magnum* being the operative word, an expression of humorous trepidation on his face. The book itself is divided into fourteen chapters, most of which analyse aspects of Wealth of Nations in all its complexity; but the author being P J O'Rourke there is also a chapter entitled Why is the Wealth of Nations So Damn Long (sic)!

I have to say that in spite of the author's commendable efforts there were moments in the book when my brain began to glaze over, but he then grabbed my attention back with a wonderful analogy, comment or witticism that made me want to persevere.

My favourite chapter in the book is the 12th, Adam Smith's Lost Book, wherein the author considers The Theory of Moral Sentiments which Smith died while revising. It is proof that even great minds, and Adam Smith certainly had one of them, can still fail to hit the button.

The Wealth of Nations is one of the greatest, and most turgid, books in the English language; huge gratitude should be felt towards P J O'Rourke for having produced a text that lays it bare for the reader who would never have the courage, or the energy, to open the original!

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh