

BOOK REVIEWS

Book Review: *Sexual Freedom and Its Impact on Economic Growth and Prosperity*

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Sexual Freedom and Its Impact on Economic Growth and Prosperity

Feler Bose

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In *Hayek's Modern Family*, the late Steven Horwitz (2015) asserted that sexual freedom is one of the blessings of economic liberty and prosperity. Feler Bose has dealt a serious blow to that thesis in *Sexual Freedom and Its Impact on Economic Growth and Prosperity*. In it, he provides a robust economic argument that sexual and economic freedom are inversely related, while providing numerous empirical illustrations of this relationship.

Much like Shawn Ritenour's (2010) *Foundations of Economics: A Christian View*, Bose's book draws on Protestant Christian theology and numerous biblical references—but it applies them to the relationship between sexual libertinism and economic degradation. While those who are uninterested in theological arguments or view such references as irrelevant might dismiss the relevance of these observations, Bose nevertheless skillfully and logically deploys them to great effect for those with Christian worldviews.

Early in the work, Bose rests this central thesis on the work of Joseph Unwin, the early twentieth-century ethnographer. Unwin attempted to describe the relationship between sexual and economic liberty from a value-free position and showed no evidence of any Christian convictions or confessions. Nevertheless, his conclusions aligned with Christian sexual ethics. Indeed, he claimed that the sort of married, heterosexual monogamy advocated by Saint Paul released an “expansive energy” into society, the economy, and therefore civilization itself (Bose 2024). Bose quotes Unwin's (1940) finding that “the evidence is that in the past a class has risen to a position of political dominance because of its great energy and that at the period of its rising, its sexual regulations have always been strict. It has retained its energy and

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dominated the society so long as its sexual regulations have demanded both pre-nuptial and post-nuptial continence. . . . I know of no exceptions to these rules.”

To illustrate Unwin’s hypothesis, Bose provides a matrix comparing societies that are more or less sexually free and those that are more or less economically free. In short, these freedoms are substitutes and not complements as Horwitz (2015) claimed. Indeed, Bose would regard Horwitz’s complementary view of sexual and economic freedoms as inherently unstable.

Table 1. Economic and Sexual Freedom Possibilities Matrix

	Not Economically Free	Economically Free
Sexually Free	Primitive Societies	“Freedom” Hypothesis – Unstable per Unwin Thesis
Not Sexually Free	Totalitarianism (Unstable)	Unwin Thesis

Source: Bose (2024, figure 1-1).

Unwin also noted several societies in which sexual restrictions were upheld for three consecutive generations—the Athenians, Romans, and English—and in his view, “these restrictions led to significant societal growth and advancement” (Unwin 1934). Further, when sexual restrictions are put in place, Unwin (1933) observes, “ardent men explore new lands . . . thoughtful men begin to look beyond the horizon that their fathers regarded as the limits of the world. Commerce is extended; foreign settlements are established; colonies founded.” He also identifies “Pauline absolute monogamy” with the Protestant Reformation and further claims that the successes of the modern Western world are the consequence of this approach to sexual expression. Unwin (1934) notes that when sexual opportunity is minimized, economic and cultural advances are the result and “the one outstanding feature of the whole story is its unrelieved monotony.”

When it comes to providing counterfactuals to these claims, Bose examines two key historical episodes—the mutiny on the HMS *Bounty* and the Soviet revolution. The sexual license that pervaded these situations led to what Bose called a “living hell” in the case of the former and a deliberate destruction of marriage and the family in the latter. In both cases he details how they quickly experienced “economic and societal decline” (Bose 2024). After detailing their economic aftermath, Bose explains the causes and consequences—both economic and legal—of the work of Alfred Kinsey.

The third chapter goes into the lurid details of Kinsey’s work and its fraudulent nature. Frankly, the descriptions of the inner workings of Kinsey’s so-called experiments are not for the faint of heart. He rightly alludes to the impact of the grotesque Marquis de Sade as a forebear of the sexual revolution in the West. Here is an area of disappointment in this work: Bose doesn’t fully develop the lineage of de Sade’s legacy on sexual ethics and its impact on family life. Importantly, Bose does acknowledge that Kinsey’s

work deliberately sexualized children, noting that his report “dismissed child molestation as non-existent, asserting that children are sexual and erotic beings from birth” (Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin 1948). As a result of his work, an important legal shift occurred. Per Bose (2024; emphasis added), “the post-Kinsey era marked a significant shift in the legal perspective on human sexuality. The introduction of the ‘Model Penal Code’ by the American Law Institute (ALI) in 1962 was based on ‘scientific authority’ rather than religious teachings. In this era, *consent became the determining factor for the legality of sexual activities.*”

Here is the crux of much economic and libertarian discussion. If sexual action is consensual, then it must be the case that both parties believe that they will benefit from the action. As such, any intervention into such actions will diminish overall utility. Many libertarians therefore conclude that any institution that prevails upon sexual actors to alter their preferred courses is guilty of coercion. Bose questions the strictly private nature of sexual acts, reminding the reader that prior to Kinsey’s influence, sex acts were viewed in America and elsewhere as public moral issues. David Allyn’s (1996) work, cited by Bose, notes that the Kinsey studies led to the privatization of morality and that “in the post-WWII era, experts abandoned the concept of ‘public morals,’ a concept which had underpinned the social control of American sexuality from the 1870s onward. In the 1950s and 1960s, however, sexual morality was privatized, and the state-controlled, highly regulated moral economy of the past gave way to a new, ‘deregulated’ moral market.” This change in the legal landscape suggests that Bose desires to challenge the standard libertarian viewpoint. He avoids asking the question directly but clearly implies the following question to the reader: If there is a real-life cause-and-effect relationship between sexual acts outside of traditional Christian marriage and the violation of property rights through economic interventionism—even if indirectly—are sex acts outside of these boundaries truly victimless crimes? In a footnote, he cites North’s (1990) claim that “from a Christian perspective, there is no such thing as ‘victimless crimes.’ As every person ‘who entices another to sin is bringing that person under God’s negative sanctions . . . God therefore threatens the whole community for its failure to impose civil sanctions against such crimes.” Acknowledging that not all liberty-minded thinkers agree, Bose also refers to Hayek’s (1973) view that consensual sex acts “should not concern a judge.”

In an abrupt shift from theoretical discussion about the Unwin thesis and the impact of the Kinsey report, Bose pivots to a methodological and empirical chapter that assesses sexual freedom in the United States from 1960 to 2010. Bose and coauthor Ari Kornelis construct a sexual freedom index using two subvariables, as illustrated below.

Table 2. Variables used for developing the Sexual Freedom Index and the category of each variable

Sex Crimes Freedom sub-Index	Bestiality, Abortion, Sodomy, Fornication, Pimp laws, Prostitution laws, and Age of Consent.
Marriage Protection Freedom sub-Index	Adultery, Homosexual marriage and its recognition, Polygamy, Divorce, Cohabitation, Miscegenation, and Marry close blood.

Source: Bose (2024, table 4-1).

The sexual freedom index produces an unsurprising result: it's undergone a dramatic increase since 1960. Bose cites the changing preferences of cultural and political elites as driving these changes, with the Kinsey report as a basis for the altered legal environment. After describing these results using the index, Bose presents a chapter entitled "The Paths to Prosperity" in which he contends that when institutions of various kinds restrict sexual license, economic growth is more likely. He also provides other explanations for economic development, beginning with the institutional approach as explained by Douglas North and his followers. Bose then provides Jared Diamond's (1997) geographic explanation as laid out in the well-known *Guns, Germs, and Steel*. In a less than politically correct section, Bose (2024) provides the costs and benefits of colonization, pointing out that some colonized countries, like the US, Canada, Australia, Hong Kong, and Singapore, "prospered, while others remained impoverished, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa." Demographics and the importance of culture and religion are also recruited as making contributions to economic growth. McCloskey and Carden's (2020) work citing the importance of bourgeois values in creating widespread wealth is held up as another important ingredient in growing wealth, reminding us that "when wealth creation was no longer seen as contemptible, then it would be created to a grander extent." Finally, a more obscure but still important caveat is Bose's claim that the introduction of clocks and timekeeping drove the success of industrial, capitalist societies.

Following the section that addresses time and the cultural views surrounding it, Bose provides perhaps his most important contribution to the entire discussion. Chapter 7 is entitled "Time Preferences and Its Link to Economic Freedom and Sexual Freedom." Those familiar with the Austrian school of economics and its leading lights may recall that Professor Hans-Hermann Hoppe's simple observation that certain sexual practices are rightly understood as demonstrating high time preference rates wasn't well received. Nevertheless, Bose repeats this sensible statement. For readers who believe that all the action is in the footnotes, page 95 provides the following: "Someone who commits adultery prioritizes their immediate happiness without considering the long-term consequences for their family and community. Individuals in homosexual relationships, being biologically unable to have children, will lack a cross-generational perspective. Those who engage in sex before marriage demonstrate a lack of restraint, opting not

to wait for the more secure bond of marriage. Additionally, the castration of transgender youth, which results in sterility, will lead to higher time preferences as time horizons are shorter” (Bose 2024).

Bose wisely follows these remarks with the question of whether time preferences can be changed. He specifically cites Hoppe (2001), who reminds the reader that people are formed by “external, biological, personal, and social or institutional” factors. Bose (2015) claims that political ideology may also be among the factors impacting time preference rates, noting that it is “a key factor driving the sexual freedom index.” Leftist ideology, he argues, is tied to higher time preference rates, while rightists exhibit lower time preference rates. As a result, leftists prefer sexual freedom over economic freedom and vice versa for those with right-wing ideology.

In the seventh chapter, Bose provides biblical illustrations of the imprudence of high time preference rates. In doing so, he skillfully avoids moralizing and provides well-known narratives that cite the folly and consequences of a lack of patience and a desire for immediate gratification. Bose charges Adam and Eve with impatience in hastily eating from the tree of knowledge and describes Abram’s hasty decision in producing a male heir and Esau’s hunger overcoming his desire for a long-run inheritance and fatherly blessing. He summarizes New Testament teachings on marriage and sexuality by pointing out how Saint Paul’s writings essentially call for patience and exclusivity in the heterosexual bonds of matrimony. He illuminates the radical departure that Christianity’s sexual ethics displayed in contrast to the Roman world, in which only women were expected to remain monogamous, while men were veritable free agents. Bose contends that in calling Christian men to the standard of being the “husband of one wife,” Paul set the stage for both men and women to become a “unified entity with a shared future orientation allowing for the effective taking of dominion.” He further explains that this radical monogamy “reduces conflicts when there is a mismatch in time preferences and further, it also extends time horizons especially when children and grandchildren are involved. As children are the projection of the family into the future, they will carry on the family name and Christian capital into the future (Psalm 127:4–5)” (Bose 2024).

Bose’s discussion of millennialism concerns another interesting determinant of time preference rates that is of interest to many Christian theologians. He argues that the postmillennialists, “with their optimistic outlook, tend to have longer time horizons. In contrast, Premillennialists, who anticipate the imminent return of Jesus Christ, have a more short-term oriented perspective and are also pessimistic about the future.” Perhaps it’s no coincidence that as the premillennialist Protestant denominations have gained relative popularity in the US throughout the twentieth century, increasing time preference rates in both economic and sexual matters have also prevailed.

In chapter 8, Bose provides a psychological explanation of modern elites' calls for an increase in sexual freedom as ideological cover for their own guilty consciences. While this thymological exercise doesn't address the validity of the book's central thesis, it does provide an intriguing diversion. Indeed, there is a high time preference rate that seems to prevail among said elites, as embodied in Keynes's infamous quote, "In the long run we're all dead."

Speaking of Keynes, Bose points to his homosexual lifestyle and oft-ignored pedophilia that characterized his life in the Bloomsbury group and their trips to the Middle East to "corrupt little boys" (Dobbs 1960). Bose further contends that his personal rejection of Christian sexual ethics was a complement to his personal bias toward high time preference rate activities and that his economic views were informed and indeed driven by such a bias. According to Bose, there were other notable intellectuals whose personal vices—and underlying guilt—drove their philosophies, including Margaret Mead, Charles Kinsey, Sigmund Freud, and, perhaps most infamously, John Money. What came as a surprise and disappointment is that Bose doesn't provide sections with insights into the lives and views of the Marquis de Sade and Michel Foucault—two key individuals whose attitudes, actions, and ideologies follow a similar pattern.

Bose's volume is well worth the read. It offers a meaningful counter to Horwitz's claim that a flourishing, classical liberal society sees increases in both sexual and economic freedom. The key mechanism that Bose puts on display is that of increased time preference rates. Austrian economists have long recognized that a society with increasing impatience will consume its capital stock, leading to economic degradation. Bose shows—convincingly—that a rejection of Christian sexual ethics is a feature of a high time preference society. When this characteristic is on the rise, personal and indeed societal outlooks are shortened. Further, he makes the keen observation in his final chapter that inflation and interventionism also play a role in the erosion of traditional approaches to sex and families. "Without a Christian character that fosters lower time preferences, there is a risk of decapitalization as short-term thinking begins to dominate. Economic systems and conditions such as socialism [interventionism?] and inflation are seen as forces that decapitalize society. Therefore, maintaining a Christian character is essential for sustaining capital and ensuring societal progress" (Bose 2024). Of course, this raises the question of how the Romans and Athenians maintained their societal growth prior to the rise of Christianity. Despite the potential difficulty in answering this question, the longer history of economic growth that has characterized the Christianized West seems to have led to a more universal and dramatic increase in living standards across all groups, and there's little doubt that Bose would contend that Pauline radical monogamy has something to do with that pattern. For those who dismiss his thesis that sexual and economic freedom are at odds, perhaps a closer inspection of our current state of affairs in the West is in order.

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