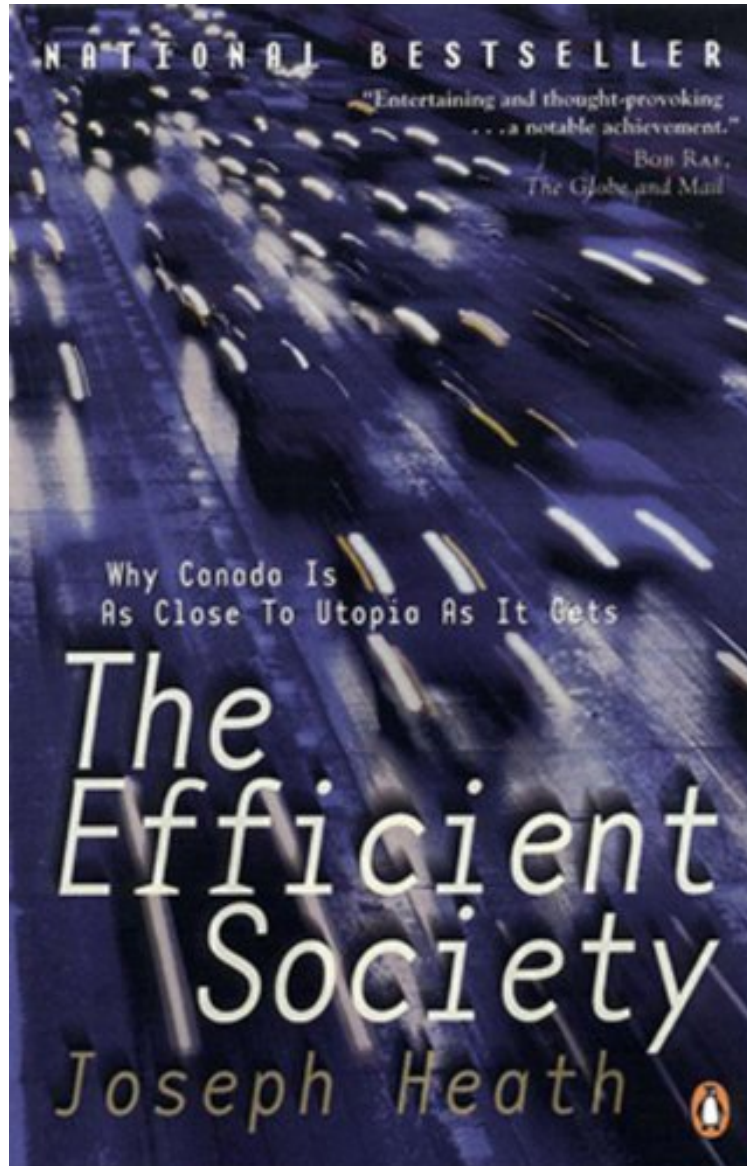


(Free) The Efficient Society: Why Canada Is As Close To Utopia As It Gets

The Efficient Society: Why Canada Is As Close To Utopia As It Gets

Joseph Heath

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Joseph Heath : The Efficient Society: Why Canada Is As Close To Utopia As It Gets before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Efficient Society: Why Canada Is As Close To Utopia As It Gets:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. The Dynamic Equilibrium of an "Efficient Society" By Baraniecki Mark Stuart Joseph Heath is a philosopher but "The Efficient Society" is really a landmark text in modern Political Economics. He takes an admirably unbiased look at the economics and politics of modern western societies using a

benchmark of "Efficiency" - being forms of organization that increase the wellbeing of citizens in a country rather than the more usual measure of per capita GDP. As he quite rightly points out, Canada has a lower per capita GDP than the United States but a higher level of wellbeing as shown by surveys, health and other social statistics. The GDP measure itself is shown to be faulty with the classic example being US healthcare that costs twice the amount of equivalent European systems while producing a less healthy population. At least half of US healthcare spending (component of GDP) is a complete waste of money. An "Efficiency" view of politics/economics has to conclude that markets are best suited to efficiently provide some goods, and governments best suited to provide others. The standard example of government intervention is pollution that isn't an easy fit in a tradeable market. It is simply more efficient to pass laws against pollution, in a similar way to laws against crime, given the general acceptance in efficient societies that crime is not a tradable activity (although in corrupt inefficient societies this is not nearly so clear). Following the same line, Heath sees well run government and private bureaucracies as essential to an efficient society. When things reach a certain level of complexity, a centrally controlled division of labour is essential to avoid chaos. How would Boeing build aircraft if every production unit had to trade with the others to obtain parts and information? This is not to say that the efficiency generated by free markets is popular or comfortable. On the contrary, free market competition is generally disliked and feared. Socialists see it as breaking the "togetherness" of society by generating the inequality of winners and losers, and from a different angle, the traditional administrative Guardians of society never liked "trade" in the first place, since they see it as diminishing virtue. Heath actually quotes Nietzsche, (in the marketplace) "They punish you for all your virtues. They forgive you entirely - your mistakes." He equally shows that free markets are in no way natural, and that in the advanced form in which they are found in Western societies, they rest on the careful legal construction of individual property rights and the civil law of contract. These laws have to be framed and protected by government and "Efficiency" requires this unnatural state of affairs be shielded against the natural desire of special interests to subvert the political/economic rules for their own advantage (best book on this is Olson's, "Power and Prosperity. Outgrowing Communist and Capitalistic Dictatorships"). He touches on some secular market trends such as increased automation where increased automation = fewer employees = increased private profit, while unemployment costs are dumped on society (good book here is Ford's, *The Lights in the Tunnel: Automation, Accelerating Technology and the Economy of the Future*), and the inevitability of market competition leading a "race to the bottom" in production costs which means offshore - once again a sellout of society from a traditional/nationalist or socialist viewpoint. Heath finally sees a careful welfare state capitalism as the best organization for an "Efficient" society. A minor point is a tangential attack on Ayn Rand as an exponent of savage capitalism, although on my reading (of "Atlas Shrugged") she is really taking aim at extreme state socialism/communism rather than glorifying entrepreneurs. There is a Nietzschean over man aspect to her heroes (as Heath points out) but the real target seems to be Nietzsche's "ressentiment" exemplified by the dead hand of state socialism.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Interesting and correct thesis. By D. Edwards. Reads like a philosophy textbook. As a U.S. citizen very discouraged by the backward conservative direction of much of U.S. society, I agree that Canada has evolved into a more livable and "efficient" society. Basically, this is the author's point, and he builds his thesis with much discussion of political philosophy. He makes his argument well, although with maybe a little redundancy from time to time. There are some flaws, including a glaring error in history when he states that the Jamestown colony of 1607 was in Massachusetts (which of course was actually in Virginia), and mentioned "pilgrims" related to this colony, when there were definitely no pilgrims - they were in Massachusetts. Hopefully these errors can be excused as poor editing, and the author knew better. But, although this injected a little doubt into my view of the accuracy of the author's research, I still enjoyed the book, and would recommend it to anyone interested in comparative political philosophies. It does bash the U.S. to some extent, but considering the size and outright bad policies of the U.S. conservative movement, it is well deserved. I deducted one star for the bothersome mistake in colonial history of North America.

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Only book I've ever read twice! By Muzz000. This is one of the best books I've ever read, and the only book I've ever been moved to write an review for. As the first reviewer said, it's really not about Canada. It's really about economics. It explains economics in a way that a bright non-economist can understand, and does so from a non-market-fundamentalist perspective. It's a primer for why and how the free market works, and those few places that it doesn't. It sounds mundane, but it's amazing. I cannot recommend this book highly enough!

In this fascinating account of what makes Canada such a successful society, Joseph Heath celebrates the much-maligned value of efficiency and asks some searching questions about the forces that threaten to undermine our quality of life. Canada is an efficient society, much more efficient than our neighbour to the south, where personal liberty takes precedence over collective well-being. This is one of the reasons, Heath argues, that the United Nations Annual Human Development Report consistently ranks Canada as the best place in the world to live. But this efficiency is under siege. Can we resist the allure of short-sighted tax cuts? Can we maintain our quality of life in the face of relentless pressure to increase our productivity - both at work and at home? This is a profound and important look at how government and business conspire to improve our lives - and at the dramatic changes that will decide our social

and economic future.