

Thoughts on a biblical economic worldview or Godonomics

By Graeme Leach

This seventh extract moves on to the question of how our fallen nature comes to idolise the state.

Fallen minds and the spiritual dimension

The false idol of statism

We live in a secular world where the saviour state is seen as man's best hope. In *Christianity and the State* (1986), the Christian Reconstructionist, Rousas Rushdoony states: 'When Christ is demoted or limited, His Kingdom and Crown Rights are limited and demoted. There is then a shift in sovereignty from God to man, which means the triumph of the state. The state as the new sovereign becomes god walking on earth'. God is dead, long live the state.

In a fallen world there is the ever-present issue of guilt and how this manifests itself politically. Rushdoony contends that, 'the politics of guilt therefore is not directed as the Christian politics of liberty, to the creation of Godly justice and order, but to the creation of a redeeming order, a saving state'. For the statist the state is the agency of love, and perfection comes from the state alone.

There can be little doubt that the rise of Government has run hand in hand with the abandonment of Christianity in favour of humanism. This shift has been accentuated by an evolutionary worldview which sees 'nature red in tooth and claw', with a harsh evolutionary survival of the fittest in the economic realm which has to be tackled by statist intervention. Rushdoony states that 'the philosophy of statism is anti-Christian to the core [because] humanism today has a militant plan of salvation by statist action'. Essentially man is to be rescued from poverty, want, ignorance and disease by the messianic saving state.

This is completely consistent with the prideful original sin in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:5) to be 'as God'. Rushdoony also states that: 'The state outside of Christ is Satan's instrument for the furthering of his plan to substitute the will of the creature for the creator'. For Christians a moral world based on 'autonomous man' is surely an oxymoron. If law doesn't come from

God then neither will sovereignty or government. Culture and society are religion externalised, and the source of law in any society is the god of that society.

Addressing the Paris Chamber of Deputies in 1878 the conservative deputy, Comte de Mun stated that: ‘The Revolution puts human reason as sovereign in place of the law of God. From this flows all the rest – especially the pride and rebellion which is the source of the modern state. The state has taken over everything, the state has become your God’. 1 Samuel 8:7 makes it very clear that statism is a rejection of God: ‘And the Lord told him: Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected but they have rejected me as their king’. What applied to kings then applies to big government today.

The parental role for the state

The Nobel Laureate, James M. Buchanan, was the driving force behind the public choice school of economics, which showed that market failure alone was not a justification for state intervention. You had to consider the consequences of state failure as well. Buchanan argued that whilst collectivist command and control socialism - of the means of production - fell with the Berlin Wall, people are still highly susceptible to wanting more government¹. Buchanan argued that in the 21st century the defining feature of interventionism will be parental socialism: ‘With paternalism, we refer to the attitudes of elitists who seek to impose their own preferred values on others. With parentalism, in contrast, we refer to the attitudes of persons who seek to have values imposed upon them by other persons, by the state or by transcendental forces’.

One of his best papers, to my mind, was also perhaps one of his shortest, showing that great things can come in small packages². It’s a warning sign for the 21st century, that although collectivist ideas have fallen into disrepair, interventionist statist policies could survive and thrive in the coming decades, because people are afraid to be free.

Buchanan distinguishes between 4 sources of state intervention: managerial socialism, paternalistic socialism, distributionist socialism and parental socialism. Managerial socialism focuses on controlling the commanding heights of the economy and has clearly fallen into

¹ As show in the manifesto of the British Labour Party in the 2019 General Election and polling which shows extensive public support for the nationalisation of utilities.

² *Afraid To Be Free: Dependency as Desideratum*, J. M. Buchanan, Public Choice, 2005

disrepute. Paternalistic socialism is the philosophy of ‘elites know better’ and whilst this motivation will never go away completely, it is a comparatively weak force. Distributionist socialism is all about the equalization of post-tax incomes and remains constrained by the electoral reality that turkeys won’t vote for Christmas. People won’t vote for an ever-higher tax burden. But one motivation remains strong i.e. parental socialism.

Buchanan argues that when classical liberalism emerged from the Enlightenment, it failed to offer psychological security and that this shortcoming is still a powerful motivation for state intervention in the 21st century. He sees a failure in classical liberalism to provide an alternative to the socialist parental role for the state: ‘Although collectivist ideas have everywhere fallen into disrepute ... socialism nevertheless will survive and be extended in the new century. That gloomy prospect looms, not because socialism is more efficient or more just, but because ceding control over their actions to others allows individuals to escape, evade and even deny personal responsibilities. People are afraid to be free; the state stands in loco parentis’.

Buchanan is not making a spiritual point, but his argument surely has a spiritual dimension when looked at through a biblical lens. Buchanan³, has argued that: ‘If we loosely describe socialism in terms of the range and scope of collectivized controls over individual liberty of actions, then “socialism” will survive and be extended. This result will emerge not because collectivization is judged to be more efficient, in some meaningful economic sense, or even because collectivization more adequately meets agreed upon criteria for distributive justice, but rather because only under the aegis of collective control, under “the state”, can individuals escape, evade and even deny personal responsibilities. In short, persons are afraid to be free ... socialism, as a coherent ideology, has lost most of its appeal. But in a broader and more comprehensive historical perspective, during the course of two centuries, the state has replaced God as the father-mother of last resort, and persons will demand that this protectorate role be satisfied and amplified.’

The implications are stark. In a secularized world lacking the transcendental influence, replete with family breakdown, there is still a need to fill the parental role. This parental role is manifested in the welfare state. People are afraid of a survival of the fittest in the economic realm. Consequently, Buchanan argues that people will seek order rather than uncertainty, and the order that the state provides will be seen as worth of the sacrifice in liberty. The key feature

³ *Afraid to be free: Dependency as Desideratum*, J.M. Buchanan, Public Choice, 124, (2005).

of parentalism, is that people seek to have values imposed on them, by parents or a transcendental force. Consequently, state intervention from parentalism is not confined to the material realm alone (the welfare state) but the non-material world as well (e.g. subjective wellbeing and the so-called 'happinomics' literature), in the form of all manner of political correctness.