

# OCCUPY!

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## THE AUTONOMOUS MAN AND THE DECLINE OF THE WEST

(Knowledge and Politics, Part I)

Archie P. Jones

You have all heard the cliché about circular reasoning: reasoning from the Bible is circular reasoning, because it begins from Scripture and appeals to Scripture to prove the validity of Scripture. This was probably among the favorite clichés of your logic professor, or your "The Bible as Literature" professor, or if he knew anything about logic, your plain old prof. Naturally, the use of other examples of circular reasoning is about as scarce as hen's teeth. But, after all, it **is** true, isn't it, that those who reason from Scripture's principles are guilty of the philosophical "sin" of circular reasoning, while those who judge all things (including Scripture) by reason are not guilty? Right?

Wrong. As Cornelius Van Til has pointed out, **all** human reasoning is necessarily circular. Yes, Virginia, even that of your professors and textbooks! However irreverent or insulting it may be to your prof, no matter how condescendingly he sneers, how hard he pounds the lectern, whether he questions your intelligence, your virtue or your ancestry or, worst of all, lowers your grade, it is true: All men are finite, not infinite, and thus ignorant, not omniscient. Man's finitude is measured not only by the span of his life but also by the inability of his mind to comprehend all that exists in the universe. Because man is finite he must necessarily assume as true many things which he has not proven to be so—and cannot so prove. It matters not that one has the intellect of Plato, the knowledge of Hegel, and the scientific ability of Einstein, nor that one utilizes the most sophisticated scientific equipment to extend the range of his senses. **All human thinking is necessarily presuppositional.** Man's finitude requires him to **presuppose**, to accept **on faith**, in the absence of proof (*a priori*), certain ideas, upon which, as in the axioms of geometry, all subsequent reasoning is based.

Let us notice several things about presuppositions, and about the man who claims to avoid circular reasoning by testing all things by reason. First, presuppositions are **pre**-supposed, not proven; they are **a priori** assumptions, **not** conclusions. Second, presuppositions are essentially, and inescapably, **religious** in their nature. Religious because they are taken on **faith**. And religious because they explicitly or implicitly provide answers (or attempted answers) to the fundamental questions which have always faced man, questions of the origin, destiny, and purpose of man's life, and thus questions concerning the existence and attributes of God, or of the divine. Third, *the man who claims to judge all things by reason is himself guilty of circularity*, for he, too, like his less fashionable "religious" brethren, assumes that which he cannot prove: he, too, uses his vaulted reason on the basis of presuppositions. **Rationalistic man literally lives by faith: faith in reason.**

Now, this is indeed discouraging to the typical humanist, especially if he is a Philosophy major! Disrespectful though it be, let us consider further the central presupposition (though assuredly not the only one!) of the humanist, and especially of the modern humanist. Having already established the nasty fact that he who claims to judge all things by reason actually uses his reason, just like the rest of us, on the basis of presuppositions, we might suspect that his life, like that of those of us who acknowledge our share of Original Sin, has its even darker side. Socrates said to one of his students, "I will dance naked before you," meaning that he would reveal to his student his most hidden thoughts. We shall permit modern humanistic man to don a loin cloth, but we should not be amazed if some of the parts of his dance before us descend beyond the nude to the pornographic. Though our limited finances enable us to observe only part of the action, we shall see enough to enable us to determine the general content of the dance.

### Presupposed Autonomy and Problems of Knowledge

The man who claims to judge all things by his reason obviously must presuppose the **autonomy**, or self-sufficiency, of his reason. When one presupposes the autonomy of his reason, he at the same time presupposes **the irrelevance of God**. If man can figure everything out on his own, what need has he of God? This, of course, is by no means a modern development, for the essence of Original Sin, as recorded in Gen. 3:5 is the attempt to "be as gods, knowing (i.e., determining for yourselves) good and evil," a goal summarized in the dictum of the ancient philosopher, Protagoras: "Man is the measure of all things." To be sure, Plato and Aristotle presupposed the existence of a god, but Plato's god was unknown and finite, and could not speak intelligibly to man, and Aristotle's god was similarly unknown, limited and anchoretic—posited as a necessary principle to set in motion the universe and to hold things together within it. The gods of the ancients could not speak to man. Even if they had so spoken, their words could not be reliable, for, unlike Judeo-Christian God, they were presupposed to exist in an ultimately *chance*, and thus by definition *irrational, universe*. If God is, as the Bible holds, all-knowing (omniscient) and all-powerful (omnipotent), then He is in ultimate control of things, and can speak reliably to man.

Would-be-autonomous man denies the existence of such a God, and in so doing involves himself in a fundamental contradiction. First, he presupposes that the universe is rational, or intelligible to man's reason, or to man's reason plus the methods of empirical science. His initial problem is that this is a presupposition, not a conclusion. Nor can it be proven empirically, for the empirical of "scientific" method limits itself to that which can be

apprehended through the senses, to the material world. Thus (among other problems) the empiricist **cannot know** 1) that the events which man observes through his senses are not influenced or controlled by beings or "forces" which are not apprehensible through the senses, and 2) that man can be sure that he knows **anything until he knows everything**,—which is impossible, even for professors—for he cannot know that the events he observes are the results of causes until he knows everything. The leading philosophers of science are now discovering what they should have known if they had studied Philosophy: empirical science cannot prove anything, and moreover it cannot even **disprove** anything. We can have moon-shots and, sadly enough, such things as Chemistry and Physics courses, only on the presupposition that we do indeed live in an intelligible, rational universe, and thus that the universe is indeed ruled by the God of Scripture.

The autonomous man will try to escape this conclusion, of course, probably by baring his presupposition that the universe is a uniformity of natural causes working within a closed system—one closed to divine intervention. But this can neither be known empirically nor made compatible with his desire for "freedom" and his consequent presupposition that the "universe" in which he and any finite gods which he cares to posit inhabit is ultimately a **chance** universe.

To live in a "rationally intelligible," yet chance "universe" is to live in a contradiction, a meaningless environment, for *if chance is king nothing is predictable* and one can never know whether that which has been observed to occur throughout recorded history will continue to occur one second from now, nor whether the whole thing will fly to flinders tomorrow morning. A finite god in a chance—irrational—universe can guarantee nothing; such a god can be, at best, our senior partner in exploring the incoherent, meaningless surroundings of man.

"Ah," the would-be autonomous man replies, "but you neglect Plato and Aristotle (among others), who were not empiricists in the sense of which you speak, for they maintained that what is really real and enduring in the cosmos are the universals (Plato's forms, Aristotle's ends), especially the universals of the Good, Truth, Justice, Beauty." True, and, from the viewpoint of the well-being of individuals and of society these doctrines may be good (depending on their content). But empiricists have always criticized teleological philosophers—those who say that there exist objectively verifiable principles of justice, morality, etc.—on the grounds that these thinkers presuppose the existence of a **priori** "ideas" or "ends" which cannot be seen or known to exist in the physical world. In fact, the rationalism of Plato and Aristotle, which presupposed the existence of universal metaphysical (non-physical) principles of justice, was followed by the emergence of a school of thinkers who, recognizing the **a priori** nature of these metaphysical principles, attempted to determine their existence through sensory (empirical) evidence. The attempt, of course, failed, for on sensory evidence alone, divorced from the conscience, one cannot know that which is non-sensory (nor that which is nonsensical!). And, worse yet, the problems inherent in evaluating the evidence of one's senses lead to the conclusion that one cannot be sure that he knows anything! Thus, **would-be-autonomous rationalism has led**—in the ancient, medieval, and modern history of Western thought—invariably to would-be-autonomous empiricism, and so to **skepticism**: to doubt about man's ability to know anything, much less how he should live.

"But," says the would-be-autonomous man, "**you** presuppose the existence of God, and philosophers have never been able to agree on a proof of God's existence." Right again, but this proves the point, for **would-be-autonomous philosophers** cannot agree on whether they can know anything, and, what's worse, **cannot, on their own terms, know that they know anything**. Would-be-autonomous man begins by asserting the non-verifiability of God

and ends with the fact that he cannot legitimately assert or verify anything. *The scripturally-grounded Christian on the other hand, can, on his own terms, know something*, for his world-and-life-view is founded on the biblical truth that "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth His handiwork..." The existence of the sovereign God of Scripture renders the universe rationally comprehensible, for God is in ultimate control of things. "*Autonomous*" man can know things, but only when he becomes a smuggler: only when he smuggles into his world-and-life-view unstated Biblical assumptions which are contrary to his own views and opinions.

### Autonomy, Morality and Politics

Modern "autonomous" man assumes that man is the measure of all things. Yet, starting from the presupposition of his own autonomy man can know nothing—so long as he is consistent. Consideration of these problems may seem non-sensical to the person who proceeds from "common sense," but, as Voegelin has reminded us, Western man's conception of common sense is the product of the two main traditions of the West, the Judeo-Christian and the Greek—principally the former—and is thus the product of specific philosophical and (therefore) religious views.

*The history of modern thought, and specifically of modern political thought, is the history of the increasingly visible departure of "autonomous" man from the Judeo-Christian tradition, a departure which manifestly assumes the form of rebellion or revolution in the great modern political philosophers—Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Hegel, Marx—and which becomes "progressively" visible in the mainstream of their lower-level disciples—the Positivists, Pragmatists, Communists, Fascists, other varieties of Socialists, and contemporary "liberal" advocates of the "secular city" of elite-controlled economic and social engineering.* This rebellion against the (dominantly) Christian world-view of the West is also increasingly evident in the lesser—and more truly radical, because it breaks with the regnant veneration of the state by the majority of the "intellectuals" of our age—stream of modern thought: the individualistic heritage of Rousseau and his disciples, the Romantics, the Beatniks, the Hippies, the Anarchists, the Existentialists, the "Objectivists," "Anarcho-Capitalists," etc.

Modern man begins from his "autonomous" self, rebels against the idea of God, and then proceeds to give the rest of us creatures his **own** "revelation". But, beginning from himself he can know nothing for sure—certainly not moral principles. So his attempted "philosophy" of "legislation" for the remainder of mankind is merely the product of his inevitable return to himself, which is, in fact, merely his attempt to universalize his subjective **desires**, to impose on others his own groundless preferences. There are two main directions in which "autonomous" man heads, but starting, as he must, from himself there are a seemingly infinite number of paths down which he may dance on these wide, dead-end roads.

Modern man dances down these roads in the name of at least two things: Freedom, and Science, although the former becomes the guiding presupposition of the latter. The notion of man's autonomy contained the presupposition that there cannot be a God such as is spoken of in the Old and New Testaments, and so led to the assumption that man is Free: Freedom is the absence of external restraint (Hobbes); Freedom is the ability to do what (ever) you **will** (Rousseau). Man is free because in the absence of God there can be, as Machiavelli (the founder of modern political thought) taught, **no objective moral order**. Freedom is the new god-word of modern man, but this freedom is the freedom of an animal—the absence of external restraint, the ability to gratify one's desire, **all of one's desires**—not the freedom which is liberty under God's law, nor the freedom the purpose of which is to be virtuous. Man's ideal is reduced to Johathan Livingston Seagull.

The dancing flight of man-qua-seagull does not, and cannot, proceed as the crow flies. "Autonomous" man's implicit or—increasingly, in the modern era—explicit rejection of an objective moral order knowable by man and deriving from God makes man "free," but this freedom is the freedom to do *everything*. In the supposed absence of objective principles of justice and morality, freedom is understood in terms of *will*; reason is reduced to instrumental reason—to calculation of the easiest means of gratifying one's desires. Freedom is thus understood as *power*: the power of man to overcome "fortune," or the difficulties imposed on him by his environment. As early as Machiavelli we see freedom as the will to power.

One of the crucial problems faced by "autonomous" man, in his supposedly standardless universe is that different individuals and groups have different wills, and, unfortunately for him, different power. If man is free to do anything, then the weak are doomed to suffer anything, and the cries of the suffering can strike no objectively sympathetic ear.

Niemeyer has pointed out that modern man in this condition can become the *micro-self*, the weak or lazy individual who "drops-out" of involvement in the larger world and reduces his "world" to dimensions he can control—that of himself alone, or to "me and my girl"—"justifying" his actions by deifying the relativistic term, "life-style." for the *micro-self*, one way of living is as good as another, and in principle one cannot distinguish between saint-hood and cannibalism. Each individual must be free to gratify his own desires, since he has no objective relationship to justice or to any other individual. Thus, we see many libertarians, properly the advocates of individual liberty versus the various social and economic planners of our day, advocating also the legalization of the murder of innocent babies (abortion), and, in this day of tremendously growing worldwide Communist power and aggressiveness, private armies. An argument could be made for not fighting the Reds until they have landed in Massachusetts and New York, but similar arguments have been used to delay our defensive measures until they reach Texas; and, for that matter, why fight them at all, unless they concretely threaten your personal micro-world?

The argument for individual freedom needs to be heard in our day of standardless coercion and self-defeating (and frequently self-serving) "altruism," but many, lacking common sense and denying objective standards of morality, extend the argument beyond its proper bounds. The argument for the *micro-self*, as Hobbes, the second great teacher of modern men, knew, is destroyed by the fact that all men are not *micro-selves*, and by the unpleasant fact that man's very nature leads him, if he is motivated by the desire to avoid death and by the desire for comfort, to the awareness of the necessity of his **controlling all things**, and thus to a state of war with all other men. The *micro-self* cannot be sure of the continued existence of his micro-world until he controls the real world and the other men who live in it.

Fortunately, not all *micro-selves* reach this conclusion. Camus, the Existentialist, has, however, traced the modern lineage of what Niemeyer has called the *mega-self*: the strong "autonomous" man who seeks to impose his subjective desires on the universe, and especially on other men. If there are no objective standards of morality then it is just as legitimate to torture, coerce or murder as it is to give aid, solace and comfort.

Not a few modern **mega-slaves** have chosen the former alternative. De Sade, from whose teaching and activity we get the word "sadism", Max Stirner, and the Surrealists taught that the individual should do whatever he desires to those who are weaker and ended up in Hobbes's war of each against all, themselves the potential prey of those who are stronger or more cunning. Stirner, the Surrealists and many of our New Leftist luminaries taught that all the institutions of society must be destroyed, one's parents murdered, etc., in order that the individual might be free to do whatever he wills.

While Sade, Stirner, & Co. were radically individualistic, most of the ideological intellectuals of our time have been, on the bases of their own subjective preferences, collectivistic. After all, **if there are no standards, then collectivism is just as "true," "good" and "beautiful" as individualism.** This group includes especially those claiming to be "Scientific," desiring to use the empirical method to discover the "laws" of man's psychological behavior (B. F. Skinner, John Dewey), man's social behavior (Auguste Comte, the founder of "Positivism," Lester Frank Ward, the god-father of American Sociology), or man's economic behavior (Marx & Co., the largest and most successful multinational corporation) in order to be able to control the future development of society and create a realm of perfection on earth.

Not a one of these gurus can, in his own terms, produce any moral principle in terms of which he can limit the actions of the disciples on those who, lacking adequate power to resist, must be the "matter" to be manipulated by the men who possess their own recipes for our "salvation." A generally milder form of this arbitrary coercion is seen in what Russell Kirk has called the "standardization without standards" imposed upon American citizens by the quasi-paternalistic socio-economic planners who inhabit the Congress, the federal bureaucracy and many federal judicial outposts.

But the quintessence of this arbitrary collectivist coercion of others, and of this nihilistic destruction of the beliefs and institutions of Western Civilization, was reached in National Socialism and Fascism. Both of these ideologies were, of course, kissin' cousins of Marxism, but the even more fundamental fact is that both were based on the modern postivistic ("You can't know values.") and pragmatic ("Everything is changing, hence there are no universal truths.") denial of the existence of moral law. Since there are no objective moral standards, they taught, we shall create a *myth* (for the National Socialists, the super race; for the Fascists, since Mussolini showed Marx's concept of the class to be inadequate, the nation), which we manipulators of men know to be untrue (one should not, of course, tell this to one's prospective storm troopers), and impose it on others, out of our will to power. For, in the absence of standards of value, we are free to do whatever our power and deceitfulness permits.

The dance of man-would-be-seagull—who is frequently led by his logic and his "liberated" desires to become bird of prey—is not ended. It began when modern man proclaimed himself autonomous and thereby began a process of gradual but continuous **revolution against the Biblical heritage** upon which Western Civilization has been grounded. The revolt of "autonomous" man inevitably leads to the destruction of man, and, at the same time, of those traditional Western institutions and beliefs which worked to preserve the true freedom and dignity of the individual. The decline of the West is not inevitable. There are signs of the realization of this on the part of some, but until we return, to coin a phrase, to our strongest roots we shall repeatedly fall victim to the frequently "well-intentioned" catastrophies produced by the disciples of the "autonomous" man described by Edmund Burke:

The greatest crimes do not arise so much from a want of feeling for others as from an over-sensibility of ourselves and an over-indulgence to our own desires. . . . They (the 'Philosophes') explode or render odious or contemptible that class of virtues which restrain the appetite. These are at least nine out of ten of the virtues. In the place of all this they substitute a virtue which they call humanity or benevolence. By these means their morality has no idea in it of restraint or indeed of a distinct and settled principle of any kind. When their disciples are thus left free and guided only by present feeling, they are no longer to be depended on for good and evil. The men who today snatch the worst criminal from justice will murder the most innocent persons tomorrow.

# THE END OF PLANNING

The Idea of Central Planning and America's Fuel Crisis: Conclusion (!)

Archie P. Jones

The theory and practice of central planning of an economy, or even of an aspect of an economy, is doomed to failure by the absurd impossibility of the notions upon which planning is based. The idea of central planning presupposes omniscience on the part of planners and passive captivity to determinism on the part of the planned. But planners, too, are finite and fallen men, whose perverted desire for dominion is rendered incapable of realization by the inability of planners to attain their claimed omniscience, as well as by the impossibility of eradicating others' desires of their own dominion. Plan to centrally control fuel allocations and you produce fuel shortages, not free market efficiency and justice in distribution. Plan to control prices of fuel and—as forty centuries of wage and price controls have unmistakably shown—you decrease incentives to exploration, sale of existing reserves, and production, yielding not adequacy of fuel, but shortages, unrest, "black markets," and popular receptivity to demagogues. Plan for central government solutions to economic problems and you'll produce diverse economic and social disorders. Claim to be as God, omniscient, and He'll make manifest the magnitude of your ignorance.

When would-be planners either concede or learn of their ignorance, the idea of omniscience is still not abandoned. Rather, after the supposed "scientific" model of autonomous human success in acquiring knowledge, **present relative ignorance is conceded, but only for the present** or short-run future. Sooner or later, it is supposed, planners will find the philosophers' stone, enabling them to turn the dross of a multitude of past governmental snafus into a planned golden future. The science ideal, of course, requires both total control of all "factors" in the economy's performance and scientific experimentation. The result, for the planned, is reduction to the status of subhuman things and a loss of freedom. The result for the economy is decreased personal rewards and incentives to performance, lower productivity, and declining morality and instability, which in turn yields less risk-taking and long-term productive investment, less economic growth, less vertical mobility for individuals and less future economic, political and international security for Americans.

Nor can the pragmatic philosophy of eternal chance and change rescue the theory or practice of planning. A "universe" of chance and chance-produced change is a God-less chaos, not a rational universe; an irrational flux of events can yield no objective knowledge of economic events or laws, nor of any moral principles to guide planners' plans or experiments. The more the planner teaches the philosophy of his planning state the more he teaches lawless manipulation of men and institutions by government and lawless living by citizens. And note well that when he applies planning to one sector of an economy he **establishes a precedent and pseudo-principle** which will be **used to justify planning in other sectors** of the economy, and ultimately, as we are today seeing, to justify planning in all sectors of the economy and life. Precisely because the planner is fundamentally incapable of planning to do anything other than substitute his plans for those of the planned, precisely because pragmatic planning is grounded on the sands of change, planning must produce that counterproductive economic instability which it is the tendency of a godly economics to avoid.

The principles at stake in the fuel controversy transcend the matter of energy production and national energy-sufficiency.

Energy is obviously crucial to the functioning of the economy, and governmental central planning has manifestly discouraged domestic production, while encouraging and increasing our dependence on imported oil. What, then, is to be done about central planning of energy production? \*

The answer, strangely enough, lies in the influence system which is the very essence and engine of the planners' "welfare state." The influence system is a perverse engine for undermining biblical morality, a device created to enable some to live at the expense of others, to enable the unscrupulous to acquire prominence and power through catering to the greed and envy of unscrupulous voters, and to enable planners to effect their radical transformation of economy and society. It is an engine for the fulfillment of perverse forms of man's desire for dominion. But precisely because the influence system is an engine of popular government, it is equipped with a steering wheel, brakes, and a reverse gear. Its momentum is at present great, but there are indications that, with respect to its functioning as a whole, there is growing sentiment among its ultimate operators, the majority of American voters, to slow, or perhaps avert altogether, the rate of its rush toward the precipice.

Obviously, what is needed is enough folks dedicated to acting on the proposition that **the engine must be stopped**. But, in the long run, what is truly needed is men dedicated to the **dismantling of the influence system** and to replacing it with a godly system of government and politics. The pragmatism of most of the "conservative" intellectuals and politicians, the pragmatism of most professing Christians, will, at best, do nothing more than slow the rate of our demise, for their aim is but to slow down the welfare state, not to abolish it. Lacking—indeed, eschewing—the infallible standard of biblical law, the most the conservatives and socially anti-nomian Christians can do is follow the drift of humanistic thought; they have no absolute standard other than the contentless "love" of which Arminians of all hues speak to guide them, and "love," in one sense or another, has certainly been utilized by the "welfare state" radicals to justify all manner of central plans and to produce all manner of ills. The Framers of the Constitution, whose approach was far more Christian than that of most contemporary Christians, sought to promote justice, not contentless "love." By leaving individuals free to lead their own economic, social and religious lives, by eschewing the contentless "love" which justifies central planning, they achieved a far greater degree of both love and justice. This should not be surprising. The Framers of the Constitution were overwhelmingly Christian men, and recognized Christianity in a number of ways in their work. Moreover, as B. F. Morris' great study, **The Christian Life and Character of the Civil Institutions of the United States** (Philadelphia: 1864), shows, early American government before and after the Constitution was administered by men who had a distinct appreciation of the necessity of faith in God and of adherence to his law to both avoid His judgment and receive His continued blessings.

We who would avoid further government-created energy crises and, worse yet, further government-created civilizational crises, must never suppose that the differences between ourselves and our enemies, the planners, are mere differences over means. As the great Presbyterian theologian, James Henley Thornwell said of another controversy, the division is fundamental and theological.

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