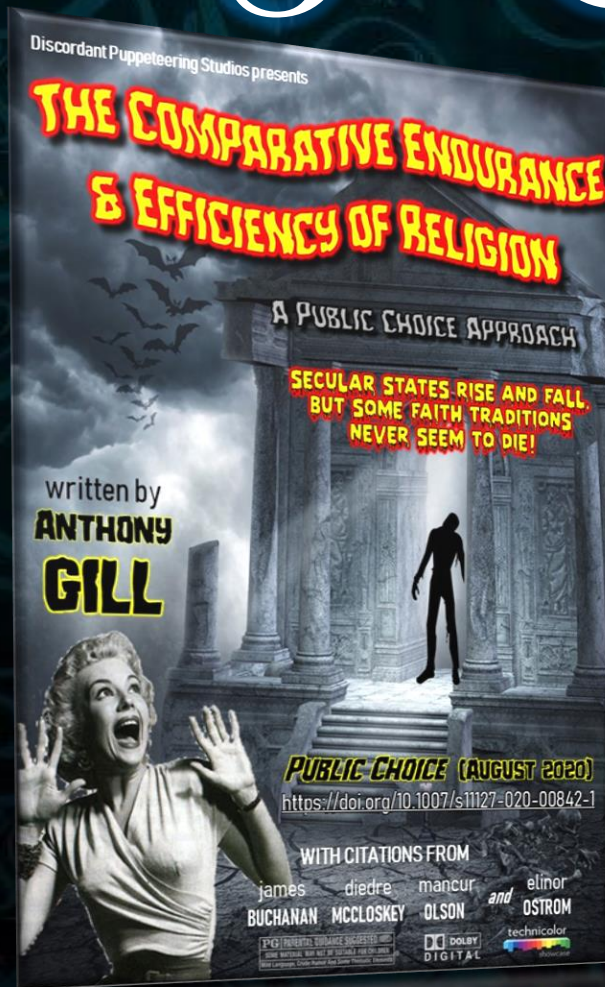


The Comparative Endurance & Efficiency of Religion

... Or Why I Might Just Be a Christian Anarchist.



A Saturday Go-To-Meetin' Presentation by **Anthony Gill**
University of Washington

It's about the question, stupid.



Have an interesting question.

Motivating Observation



All the major religious traditions
have outlasted every secular regime
or dynasty by significant margins.

Gojoseon Dynasty (c. 2000 years)

Roman Empire (c. 1000 years)

Zhou Dynasty (c. 800 years)

Classic Mayan (c. 700 years)

Egyptian 18th (c. 300 years)

Hinduism (c. 5000 years)

Judaism (c. 3300 - 4,000 years)

Buddhism (c. 2500 years)

Christianity (c. 1700 - 2000 years)

Islam (c. 1400 years)

Why?

Answer(s)



Religious institutions are a form of civil society governance that avoids the classic paradox of government because:

Provide valuable public goods (esp. social order);

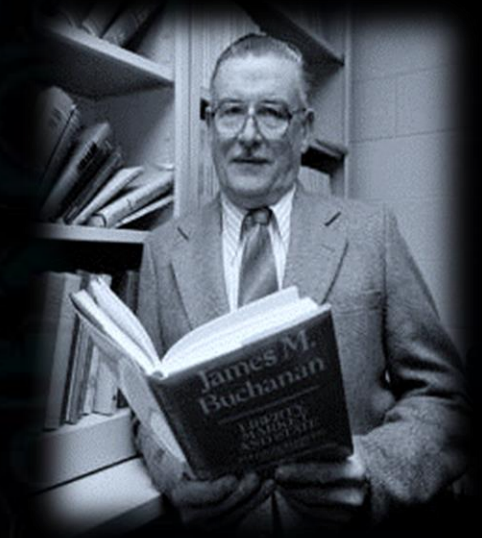
Promote federalism and shared community governance (along with possibility of easier exit);

Presence of neutral final arbitrator.

The Paradox of Gov't

Buchanan's Paradox

The “protective” state entrusted with neutral enforcement of the initial social contract develops its own self-interest, and, as a “productive” state, alienates the citizenry over time.



Olson's Conundrum

The “sins” of the human executors become the failings of the secular regime.

But what if...?

*“If man could but design a God who would punish for violations of man-determined rules, and would, at the same time, constrain his own impulse to power, [then] stability and progress in social order might be insured. Only under some such scheme of things could the enforcer of the basic constitutional contract be made genuinely external to the parties whose separate interests are to be protected without, at the same time, being granted power for potential exploitation on his own behalf. ... **If all men should accept such a God on faith, on the ‘as if’ assumption that such a God exists, and if all men behave accordingly, formal law embodied in the agencies of what we have called the protective state need not be observed.** Abiding by the rules in existence, and secure in the prediction that otherwise would follow the same rules, an individual could survive and prosper in an orderly regime of social intercourse provided that the rules themselves were tolerably efficient.”*

*~ James Buchanan, *The Limits of Liberty*, p. 165.*



What if?!

Why is religion,
as a form of governance,
so enduring?



1) Religions provide public goods

Religious groups provide a set of cultural values, norms, and rituals that help to coordinate human behavior.

(functions as a protective state).

Reduces uncertainty (the biggest transaction cost) and promotes social interaction (i.e., trade).

Other social services, too
(aspects of a productive state).

Golden Rule
.....
"Do unto others as you would have them do unto you"
Matt. 7:12



2) Federalism, Ownership, & Exit

Local and repeated participation in maintenance of religious culture gives “citizens” ownership of governance.

Collective action more effective.

Local knowledge harnessed to more effectively solve social problems.

Cultural exit easier than geographic exit; (dissenters can craft alternative space rather than topple institution).



3) Judgement Beyond Humans

A broadly-shared belief of God and sacred texts allows humans to fail without calling into question the “social contract.”

Buchanan’s neutral arbitrator.

Knowledge only need to be “as if” there was a God (coordinated belief).

Role of iconography, symbols.

*And if you listen very hard
The tune will come to you at last.
When all are one and one is all
To be a rock and not to roll.*



Questions, Comments, Thoughts, and Angst!

