

Urth Digest, Vol 57, Issue 16

The Urth list — 133 messages, 18 voices, 18 May 2009

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/5433>

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David Stockhoff — 18 May 2009, 21:29

There's no question that Robin Hood is a symbol, although usually satirical, of the redistribution of wealth at gun or swordpoint. Wat is that too and, necessarily, a demagogue---which is to say a psychopath, as far as I'm concerned.

I'm not saying you don't have something here, and I'm nearing the limit of what my memory will support in terms of offering alternatives. But I think your "fair analogy of socialism/welfare state" is more like a "fair parody of socialism/welfare state." Which is fine. But what seems more to the point---and you address it almost directly---is this:

But since that neighbor will never realize it is THEY who robbed him, they needn't be ashamed of the act.

Because the transaction is impersonal, not face to face, and formed on the group rather than the individual level, it instantly lends itself to corruption. Look how easy it is for Wat to manipulate the villagers. THAT'S the political (and psychosocial) point Wolfe is making, I think. Any system that is not based on individual contract is to some degree corrupt.

And finally, I agree with your quoted description of socialism. But it clearly has nothing to do with robbing anyone. Governments redistribute wealth all the time. Did you know that usury, which has been illegal since the Byzantine emperors, is now legal in the US? It's called "payday loans." They are illegal for a reason---and the government that can create them and make them legal, thus imposing and enforcing them on the poor, can reverse that to create a more just system. Incrementally speaking, that's socialism.

Message: 1

Date: Mon, 18 May 2009 04:34:28 -0500

From: James Wynn <crushtv at gmail.com>

Subject: Re: (urth) The Devil in a Forest

To: The Urth Mailing List <urth at lists.urth.net>

Message-ID:

<e8e9702e0905180234m1e40e111gcbefda93e0db2674 at mail.gmail.com>

Content-Type: text/plain; charset=ISO-8859-1

I said:

This novel is "about" many things, but the shadow of economic/social commentary lies long and dark over it. Wolfe starts with a hero of folklore known for "robbing the rich to give to the poor". But he starts the story from the perspective of "the rich".

David Sackhoff:

My only objection is that there doesn't seem to be any philosophical structure to Wat's thieving. He's a psychopath.

He's unwittingly controlled by evil Mother Clout, but he's not a psychopath. He's a demagogue. He cleverly pits one group against

another to enrich himself and to undermine any coalition against him.

How does he live safely in the woods as a thief? He pays out a portion of his robberies from "the rich" (peddlers, tradesmen, and pilgrims) to "the poor" (the charcoal burners and such who live in the forest). When it seems that the villagers will unite against him, he approaches them and announces that it is not necessary for them to go to the trouble of forming a private militia. He has decided to leave their forest to rob other places. But, oh wait, he's going to need "a stake" in order to leave, and so that means a small robbery of some pilgrim the villagers don't know who is richer than themselves. Why would they agree to this? Because he's going to give them a cut of the robbery. They don't even have to do more than stand there while he does the work. Not everyone is willing to accept this corrupt bargain, but enough are that the coalition against him is destroyed. But as soon as everyone has signed on, Wat tells them that there is no pilgrim after all. His plan is to rob one of the villagers--in fact, one of those who signed on to the robbery. But since that neighbor will never realize it is THEY who robbed him, they needn't be ashamed of the act. And the neighbors fall in.

Whether or not you agree with the analogy, tDiaF is --I contend-- intended as a demonstration of how social welfare is sold to the public. The argument is that if your neighbor came to your door and said "I need a retirement or guaranteed health care or financial support when I'm not making enough. So I've decided that you and some other neighbors will pay me a monthly stipend." You'd throw the guy out. If he came said, "I need these things and you might too; so we're going to go to the better off neighborhood and demand they pay into a kitty to support us", you'd consider it dishonorable to join in a plan like that. But when some third party says "I'm going to take from your neighbor to supply this kitty, and you'll never have to demand it from them and you'll never have to face them. You don't even have to *do* anything. All you have to do is support me in the privacy of your voting booth. And, after all, you know they can afford it"; in that case, enough people can be convinced to throw in with the plan. But many of the people who think it is someone else getting taken are actually the victims. Just as Wat admitted privately that there were not enough pilgrims and they would never be stupid enough to carry large sums through his forest, (the argument goes) there are not enough "rich" to make a viable social plan that is worth putting together in the first place.

You don't think this is a fair analogy of socialism/welfare state. Okay. Your disagreement is within the debate between libertarian/liberal economics and socialist economics over the last century and a half (see my final response below). The point is that Wolfe does, and has attempted to illustrate it in tDiaF. The bare majority of Americans who (directly) pay any federal income taxes at all today is the sort of arrangement that Wolfe is warning about here. It's an ingenious little fable. Is it propaganda? Sure. Propaganda can be well done. It can even be on the right side. I noted on this list not so long ago that I considered "Pan's Labyrinth" to be the best propaganda I'd seen in years (in that case for the Spanish Socialist Party of which I am no fan).

I said:

If this isn't a fable about the foolishness of depending on the beneficence

of the government, I can't imagine what would be.

David says:

Here, "government" = the people hired by the noblemen to keep order.

No more. I don't see any pretense of benevolence.

How does the government know that Wat is roving in the forest? Because the villagers have complained. Why does the government take the trouble and risk of rooting him out? Public beneficence (which is more extensive than public benevolence). It is Wat, not the soldiers, that is analogy of public "benevolence". It is a canny distinction on Wolfe's part to divide the activity of Wat from the activity of Ganelon while making them the same person.

David Sackhoff said:

First of all, by the time you've equated socialism with

"robbing from the rich and giving to the poor," you've already hanged socialism without a trial, because that means you don't know what it is.

All of which is perfectly correct but has little to do with actual socialism and more to do with paranoid Randian fantasies of it. In short, a straw man.

I appreciate that you don't approve of characterizing socialism as "robbing from the rich to give to the poor". I confess I'm not conversant with the various denominations of socialism. I offer the Wikipedia definition as currency:

"Socialists mainly share the belief that capitalism unfairly concentrates power and wealth among a small segment of society that controls capital, creates an unequal society, and does not provide equal opportunities for everyone in society. Therefore socialists advocate the creation of a society in which wealth and power are distributed more evenly based on the amount of work expended in production, although there is considerable disagreement among socialists over how and to what extent this could be achieved."

In the movie "Time Bandits", Terry Gilliam (no laizzes faire capitalist) has Robin Hood say, "Won't you stay and help us with our work? There's so much wealth to redistribute." So I don't think I (or Wolfe) have made a weird conclusive leap in associating Robin Hood with socialism.

J.

brunians at brunians.org — 18 May 2009, 21:41 · in reply to David Stockhoff

And finally, I agree with your quoted description of socialism. But it clearly has nothing to do with robbing anyone.

?

Obtaining money by threat of violence is not robbery?

And this wealth is obtained by armed robbery. What is a better word for it? Extortion, perhaps. We can call it extortion if you prefer.

•

Did you know that usury, which has been illegal since the Byzantine emperors, is now legal in the US? It's called "payday loans." They are illegal for a reason---and the government that can create them and make them legal, thus imposing and enforcing them on the poor, can reverse that to create a more just system. Incrementally speaking, that's socialism.

What sort of doublespeak is this? In what way did the government create them? In what way is the government imposing or enforcing them on the poor? Are there government agents going out into neighborhoods forcing people to take payday loans?

James Wynn — 18 May 2009, 22:10 · in reply to David Stockhoff

David Sackhoff said:

And finally, I agree with your quoted description of socialism.

But it clearly has nothing to do with robbing anyone. Governments redistribute wealth all the time.

This is answer that socialist economics gives to libertarian/liberal economics. The libertarian/liberal position is that governments do all sorts of things that are not ethical. Spain lawfully nationalized and redistributed all the property of Jews at one point. It doesn't make it ethical or just. The L/L position is that if an unrecompensed transfer of property is not right on a personal level, then it is not laundered because three out of five people voted that the fifth person had more than he needed.

Wolfe is making the L/L argument.

I'm grateful for this discussion, because when I read tDiaF I thought it was just a quaint, but obvious, morality tale. Now, I realize that it isn't so "on the nose" at all. It's actually a quite exquisite bit of propaganda (unlike say "Atlas Shrugged"). Truly masterful propaganda is one where the audience doesn't realize it's being propagandized.

J.

James B. Jordan — 18 May 2009, 23:17 · in reply to James Wynn

At 05:10 PM 5/18/2009, you wrote:

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"Propaganda" may be just the right term for Wolfe. Originally it was a term used by the Vatican for the propagation of the faith. It's come to have a cheaper meaning. But tDiaF ends with a miracle -- the only "fantasy" element in the book, and something Wolfe would claim is not "fantasy" at all -- and is designed to set out a Christian worldview.

Nutria

J.

Steven — 19 May 2009, 01:19 · in reply to Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

On May 18, 2009, at 5:57 PM, Dan'l Danehy-Oakes wrote:

Some of us call it "playing by the rules of the game." Money as such (that is a standardized and common currency) is a creation of a government and as such subject to rules set by that government. Attempts to pretend otherwise are the economic equivalent of solipsism.

I try to stay out of these debates and just listen because I learn a lot about Wolfian literature here. Really. But the idea that money is a governmental creation is a serious misapprehension. Money is a store of value. A symbolic representation, yes, but one fashioned by human intercourse, not by fiat. The devaluation of a currency is a gov't function and has been repeatedly witnessed as such through history but it's an illusion that money is subject to rules set by gov'ts. If it were then devaluations would never occur because a gov't could simply outlaw the problem.

Steve-- I read DinaF a long time ago and recall that it was marketed as a juvenile read - true or no?

Steven — 19 May 2009, 01:27 · in reply to Daniel D Jones

On May 18, 2009, at 6:05 PM, Daniel D Jones wrote:
Did you know that usury, which has been illegal since the Byzantine emperors, is now legal in the US?

Still illegal in the Muslim world, that bastion of social equity...but more commonly called 'interest' in these parts, not 'payday loans'. Now legal? Wha?

Steven

brunians at brunians.org — 19 May 2009, 01:32 · in reply to Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

This does not change the nature of the interaction, Dan'l. I do understand why one would want to deny the reality of the thing, of course.

Government is force. It is a dangerous servant and a fierce master.

-- George Washington

Political power comes out of the barrel of a gun.

-- Mao Zedong

Government is the monopoly on legitimate violence.

-- Josh Geller

Some of us call it "playing by the rules of the game." Money as such (that is a standardized and common currency) is a creation of a government and as such subject to rules set by that government. Attempts to pretend otherwise are the economic equivalent of solipsism.

--Dan'l

On Mon, May 18, 2009 at 2:41 PM, <brunians at brunians.org> wrote:

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brunians at brunians.org — 19 May 2009, 01:38 · in reply to James Wynn

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Really good propaganda will have people denying that it is propaganda.

I find it very interesting that many of the people who disagree with Wolfe's politics argue that it is not there. Socialism is, when it comes down to it, a process of pretending that the World is different from the way it actually is.

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James Wynn — 19 May 2009, 03:41 · in reply to James B. Jordan

"Propaganda" may be just the right term for Wolfe.
Originally it was a term used by the Vatican for the
propagation of the faith. It's come to have a cheaper meaning.

I use the term "propaganda" to mean "the attempt to persuade at the non-rational level". It has a bad rap because it is typically so inartfully done. The idea is to have the audience only stew in the well-seasoned juices of the argument so they rationally convince themselves at a later time. You have to demonstrate while exhibiting the self-control never to tell. "The Devil in a Forest" does that. If the work is essentially framed in a "message", rather than metaphor, the audience is forced to approach the propaganda on a rational level and it loses its much of its power. For example, Woody Guthrie's "This Land is Your Land" is fantastic Communist propaganda (if you know all the verses). Pete Seeger's stuff is hack-work--if he had a hammer, he'd hit you over the head with it.

...tDiaF ends with a miracle -- the only "fantasy" element in the book...

I even wonder whether it *is* the only fantasy element. There are subtle hints that the stories of Mother Clot being able to fly might not be mere superstition at all. And at least twice it is noted that she *is* unexpectedly light. It is a tip to the hat that Evil is also not merely a fantasy element. Still, certainly the only overtly non-rational event is the abbe's healing.

J.

David Duffy — 19 May 2009, 04:52 · in reply to James Wynn

On Mon, 18 May 2009, James Wynn wrote:

This is answer that socialist economics gives to libertarian/liberal economics. The libertarian/liberal position is that governments do all sorts of things that are not ethical...

Wolfe is making the L/L argument.

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In the same way, I think, that _Short Sun_ shows the shortcomings of the libertarian/propertarian/frontier mentality, in the absence of some higher ethic at work behind it.

David Duffy.

David Stockhoff — 19 May 2009, 13:51 · follows brunians at brunians.org

Daniel, you really don't know how things work, do you?

----- Message: 5 Date: Mon, 18 May 2009

18:05:22 -0400 From: Daniel D Jones <ddjones at riddlemaster.org> Subject: Re: (urth) Urth Digest, Vol 57, Issue 16 To: The Urth Mailing List <urth at lists.urth.net> Message-ID: <200905181805.22952.ddjones at riddlemaster.org> Content-Type: Text/Plain;

charset="iso-8859-1" On Monday 18 May 2009 17:29:58 David Stockhoff wrote:
And finally, I agree with your quoted description of socialism. But it clearly has nothing to do with robbing anyone. Governments redistribute wealth all the time.

Do you think that because it's done under the blessing of governmental authority it's any less a taking by force than were it the act of a highwayman? And the assertion that "it's done all the time" is quite orthogonal to the issue of whether or not it's justified.

Did you know that usury, which has been illegal since the Byzantine emperors, is now legal in the US? It's called "payday loans." They are illegal for a reason---and the government that can create them and make them legal, thus imposing and enforcing them on the poor, can reverse that to create a more just system. Incrementally speaking, that's socialism.

What sort of doublespeak is this? In what way did the government create them? In what way is the government imposing or enforcing them on the poor? Are there government agents going out into neighborhoods forcing people to take payday loans?

David Stockhoff — 19 May 2009, 13:58 · follows David Duffy

You certainly have a point about good propaganda. And although I don't think your counterargument that governments are often unethical really holds much water (fish sometimes fall from the sky, too), I think your summary of the "L/L" position is apt.

NOTHING is right simply because everyone agreed on it as a group. Had a single Abel-style "good" knight ridden into town in the middle of TDiaF, the story would have become much more

clearly propagandistic. (He would have had to kill everyone but the women and children, and he would not have been wrong.)

Message: 6
Date: Mon, 18 May 2009 17:10:12 -0500
From: "James Wynn" <crushtv at gmail.com>
Subject: Re: (urth) The Devil in a Forest
To: "The Urth Mailing List" <urth at lists.urth.net>
Message-ID: <5899990178F74F96B5591E3C25EA8D3B at eMachinePC>
Content-Type: text/plain; format=flowed; charset="iso-8859-1";
reply-type=response

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J.

David Stockhoff — 19 May 2009, 14:09 · follows David Stockhoff

Steven---

Interest rates of 35%, the max now allowed in the US, is usury, because it exceeds 20%. It is
most commonly found in credit card and payday loan
"fine print."

Message: 2
Date: Mon, 18 May 2009 21:27:13 -0400
From: Steven <mcquaryq at comcast.net>
Subject: Re: (urth) Urth Digest, Vol 57, Issue 16
To: The Urth Mailing List <urth at lists.urth.net>
Message-ID: <F7033598-E841-4F49-A456-78F04EE72F78 at comcast.net>

Content-Type: text/plain; charset="us-ascii"; Format="flowed";
DelSp="yes"

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Steven

David Stockhoff — 19 May 2009, 14:10 · follows David Stockhoff

If Mao said it, it must be true.

Message: 3

Date: Mon, 18 May 2009 21:32:54 -0400 (EDT)

From: brunians at brunians.org

Subject: Re: (urth) Urth Digest, Vol 57, Issue 16

To: "The Urth Mailing List" <urth at lists.urth.net>

Message-ID: <2061.72.171.0.145.1242696774.squirrel at brunians.org>

Content-Type: text/plain; charset=iso-8859-1

This does not change the nature of the interaction, Dan'l. I do understand why one would want to deny the reality of the thing, of course.

Government is force. It is a dangerous servant and a fierce master.

-- George Washington

Political power comes out of the barrel of a gun.

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Government is the monopoly on legitimate violence.

-- Josh Geller

David Stockhoff — 19 May 2009, 14:30 · follows David Stockhoff

I think there is more to it than just how sneaky his propaganda is. Sure, Wolfe is propagandizing, as always---but he doesn't just propagandize for a narrow segment of the political spectrum, and he rarely makes things as black and white and baldly allegorical as you seem to suggest. Rather, he asks questions and examines the moral aspects of the range of answers.

Almost by definition, an interpretation of Wolfe that keeps it simple---says "Wolfe is pro-gun," for example---is going to be inadequate, even if not flatly wrong.

In other words, don't lose the forest for the trees, even if there is a devil hiding in them.

Message: 5

Date: Mon, 18 May 2009 22:41:30 -0500

From: "James Wynn" <crushtv at gmail.com>

Subject: Re: (urth) The Devil in a Forest

To: "The Urth Mailing List" <urth at lists.urth.net>

Message-ID: <322A6386203C478F871C5C0BEAD76770 at eMachinePC>

Content-Type: text/plain; format=flowed; charset="iso-8859-1";
reply-type=original

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"The Devil in a Forest" does that. If the work is essentially framed in a
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fantasy element. Still, certainly the only overtly non-rational event is
the abbe's healing.

J.

brunians at brunians.org — 19 May 2009, 14:41 · in reply to David Stockhoff

Mao was a perceptive guy about some things. Power and how to use it, for instance. Decent
poet also, I'm told.

Not a very nice man, but pretty smart.

If three people as different as Mao, Washington and Geller agree about something, I'd say it's
time to sit up and take notice.

.

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Virus Database (VPS): 090518-0, 05/18/2009

Tested on: 5/19/2009 10:10:34 AM

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<http://www.avast.com>

brunians at brunians.org — 19 May 2009, 14:47 · in reply to David Stockhoff

Actually, "Wolfe is pro-gun" has the ring of truth to it, as does "Wolfe is a fiscal conservative". He has his point of view on things. People who agree with him generally have no trouble seeing it.

People who (a) like Wolfe's fiction and (b) hold political views very different from his tend to (I have noticed) jump through interesting hoops whilst explaining that Wolfe does not actually believe what everyone else seems to think he does. Anything but that. They will deny it at length. Like most things, this is amusing once it stops being annoying.

.

I think there is more to it than just how sneaky his propaganda is. Sure, Wolfe is propagandizing, as always---but he doesn't just propagandize for a narrow segment of the political spectrum, and he rarely makes things as black and white and baldly allegorical as you seem to suggest. Rather, he asks questions and examines the moral aspects of the range of answers.

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Tested on: 5/19/2009 10:30:07 AM

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Well, I'm really only referring to this one work as libertarian/liberal propaganda. When I said "Wat/Robin Hood is an interesting exemplar of the corrupting nature of socialism", I wasn't trying to stake a flag in the name of John Stuart Mill. I thought it was mildly obvious. If you don't see it even when pointed out, then that's kudos to Wolfe. Silk's explanation of why he doesn't collect everyone's weapons is also propaganda, but not so artfully done. Way too obvious.

On the other hand, James Jordan is correct when he says that Wolfe is a master propagandizer of Christian principles. Still, one could reasonably say the same of him regarding Gnosticism. Is the Sun Cycle to Gnosticism what The Chronicles of Narnia are orthodox Christianity?

J.

Lane Haygood — 19 May 2009, 15:10 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org

I'm a democratic socialist and a member of the US Communist party. I also do not believe in God. It doesn't affect me one way or the other that Wolfe is my opposite number on these positions, because his stories are still very, very awesome.

Good literature transcends factionalism.

Lane

Sent from my iPhone

On May 19, 2009, at 9:47 AM, brunians at brunians.org wrote:
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People who (a) like Wolfe's fiction and (b) hold political views very different from his tend to (I have noticed) jump through interesting hoops whilst explaining that Wolfe does not actually believe what everyone else seems to think he does. Anything but that. They will deny it at length.
Like most things, this is amusing once it stops being annoying.

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Almost by definition, an interpretation of Wolfe that keeps it simple---says "Wolfe is pro-gun," for example---is going to be inadequate, even if not flatly wrong.

In other words, don't lose the forest for the trees, even if there is a devil hiding in them.

Message: 5

Date: Mon, 18 May 2009 22:41:30 -0500

From: "James Wynn" <crushtv at gmail.com>

Subject: Re: (urth) The Devil in a Forest

To: "The Urth Mailing List" <urth at lists.urth.net>

Message-ID: <322A6386203C478F871C5C0BEAD76770 at eMachinePC>

Content-Type: text/plain; format=flowed; charset="iso-8859-1";

reply-type=original

"Propaganda" may be just the right term for Wolfe. Originally it was a term used by the Vatican for the propagation of the faith. It's come to have a cheaper meaning.

I use the term "propaganda" to mean "the attempt to persuade at the non-rational level". It has a bad rap because it is typically so inartfully done. The idea is to have the audience only stew in the well-seasoned juices of the argument so they rationally convince themselves at a later time.

You

have to _demonstrate_ while exhibiting the self-control never _to tell_.

"The Devil in a Forest" does that. If the work is essentially framed in a

"message", rather than metaphor, the audience is forced to approach the

propaganda on a rational level and it loses its much of its power.

For

example, Woody Guthrie's "This Land is Your Land" is fantastic Communist

propaganda (if you know all the verses). Pete Seeger's stuff is

hack-work--if he had a hammer, he'd hit you over the head with it.

...tDiaF ends with a miracle -- the only "fantasy" element in the book...

I even wonder whether it *is* the only fantasy element. There are subtle hints that the stories of Mother Cloot being able to fly might not be mere superstition at all. And at least twice it is noted that she *is* unexpectedly light. It is a tip to the hat that Evil is also not merely a fantasy element. Still, certainly the only *overtly* non-rational event is the abbe's healing.

J.

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<http://www.avast.com>

David Stockhoff — 19 May 2009, 15:15 · follows Lane Haygood

Exactly. And apparently it doesn't hurt to repeat that literature is not simply a conversion of ideology into story and plot. Insisting otherwise has long since stopped being amusing; it is now a minor irritation.

Message: 7
Date: Tue, 19 May 2009 10:10:37 -0500
From: Lane Haygood <lhaygood at gmail.com>
Subject: Re: (urth) The Devil in a Forest
To: The Urth Mailing List <urth at lists.urth.net>
Message-ID: <99BD246A-58EB-498A-B4E5-99C94186507E at gmail.com>
Content-Type: text/plain; charset=us-ascii; format=flowed; delp=yes

I'm a democratic socialist and a member of the US Communist party. I also do not believe in God. It doesn't affect me one way or the other that Wolfe is my opposite number on these positions, because his stories are still very, very awesome.

Good literature transcends factionalism.

Lane

Sent from my iPhone

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David Stockhoff — 19 May 2009, 15:21 · follows David Stockhoff

It's not a question of not seeing it---it's a question of seeing something else that is much more interesting. Wat's crimes are only one form of the corrupting nature of groups and thus the corruptable nature of humans. They are primarily criminal and only superficially socialistic, and thus can't really be held up as representative of socialism. They are representative of something, but, rather, they are an example of how men can be corrupted by the offering of group anonymity and free lunches.

Is war any different? Wolfe asks this question all the time. War is also an impersonal transaction between groups in which no individual need feel personally responsible.

Message: 6

Date: Tue, 19 May 2009 09:52:27 -0500

From: "James Wynn" <crushtv at gmail.com>

Subject: Re: (urth) The Devil in a Forest

To: "The Urth Mailing List" <urth at lists.urth.net>

Message-ID: <6989DB2D2FE34E278A9BB3E6E28D6641 at eMachinePC>

Content-Type: text/plain; format=flowed; charset="iso-8859-1";
reply-type=response

I think there is more to it than just how sneaky his propaganda is. Sure, Wolfe is propagandizing, as always---but he doesn't just propagandize for a narrow segment of the political spectrum, and he rarely makes things as black and white and baldly allegorical as you seem to suggest.

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artfully done. Way too obvious.

On the other hand, James Jordan is correct when he says that Wolfe is a master propagandizer of Christian principles. Still, one could reasonably say the same of him regarding Gnosticism. Is the Sun Cycle to Gnosticism what The Chronicles of Narnia are orthodox Christianity?

J.

John Smith — 19 May 2009, 15:39 · in reply to David Stockhoff

Judaism, Christianity and Islam have all, at times, condemned the lending of money at any rate of interest at all. Usury today means a very high rate of interest, especially a rate higher than that allowed by law.

Sometimes religions have presented philosophical reasons to oppose interest, like it being unnatural for money to breed money, but the underlying objection seems to be that interest charges hurt the poor.

However, if lenders cannot earn a return, they will not lend money at all. Compounding the problem for the poor, lenders charge higher rates for less credit-worthy borrowers. So you have some very high rates for credit cards and pay day loans. And if government completely bans high interest rates, the poor are forced to go to loan sharks, who are even more greedy than pay day lenders. No wonder economics has been called the dismal science.

To come back to Gene Wolfe, I think we all agree that Wolfe is a conservative. One of the great things about him, however, is that he is not an apologist for the status quo. He shows us the cruelty and corruption of today in his societies on Urth and Sainte Croix and the Whorl and Blue. He has a fearless vision of what we all face. When Nicholas complains that Dr. Island has lied, Dr. Island says, "if you are released you will have to deal with your society, which will lie to you frequently." That's a good thing to remember.

Best wishes,
Jack

--- On Tue, 5/19/09, David Stockhoff <dstockhoff at verizon.net> wrote:
From: David Stockhoff <dstockhoff at verizon.net>
Subject: Re: (urth) Urth Digest, Vol 57, Issue 16
To: urth at lists.urth.net
Date: Tuesday, May 19, 2009, 10:09 AM
Steven---

Interest rates of 35%, the max now allowed in the US, is usury, because it exceeds 20%. It is most commonly found in credit card and payday loan "fine print."

Message: 2
Date: Mon, 18 May 2009 21:27:13 -0400
From: Steven <mcquaryq at comcast.net>
Subject: Re: (urth) Urth Digest, Vol 57, Issue 16
To: The Urth Mailing List <urth at lists.urth.net>
Message-ID:
<F7033598-E841-4F49-A456-78F04EE72F78 at comcast.net>
Content-Type: text/plain; charset="us-ascii";
Format="flowed";
DelSp="yes"

On May 18, 2009, at 6:05 PM, Daniel D Jones wrote:

Did you know that usury, which has been illegal since the Byzantine emperors, is now legal in the US?

Still illegal in the Muslim world, that bastion of social equity...but more commonly called 'interest' in these parts, not 'payday loans'. Now legal? Wha?

Steven

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James B. Jordan — 19 May 2009, 17:53 · in reply to David Stockhoff

At 09:30 AM 5/19/2009, you wrote:

I think there is more to it than just how sneaky his propaganda is. Sure, Wolfe is propagandizing, as always---but he doesn't just propagandize for a narrow segment of the political spectrum, and he rarely makes things as black and white and baldly allegorical as you seem to suggest. Rather, he asks questions and examines the moral aspects of the range of answers.

To be sure. And remember, tDiaF is written for teens, not adults. I doubt if there is any teen fiction anywhere that does not try to educate in some direction.

In fact, I doubt if there is any fiction anywhere that does not come from some perspective, and therefore can be said to propagandize for that perspective.

For instance, I don't think Wolfe wrote the Severian quintet in order to propagandize, but it is certainly the case that he is presenting the notion that resurrection and a new world can only come on the other side of very serious destruction and judgment, brought about in response to serious malfeasance; and that it is the God who sent the Theanthropos long ago who does this kind of thing. It's not a Santa-claus cozy liberal Christianity, but it is a Christian viewpoint. A "severe Christian" who writes a story about serious matters is just going to write in this manner.

FWIW

Nutria

James B. Jordan
Director, Biblical Horizons
Box 1096
Niceville, FL 32588
<http://www.biblicalhorizons.com>

David Stockhoff — 19 May 2009, 18:09 · follows John Smith

I hardly think that state legislatures allowed payday loans because they sympathized with poor people suffering at the hands of loan sharks. After all, such people don't have an association lobbying on their behalf in state capitols across the USA, though they do have groups advocating against their further abuse. No, it's another case of following the money---not where it comes from, but where it goes.

However, that's beside the point. You are absolutely right about the way Wolfe treats current society. Science fiction was not invented, after all, to support the status quo.

To paraphrase James, you know that a novel's questioning of the status quo is successful when you don't even know it's going on.

Message: 4
Date: Tue, 19 May 2009 08:39:48 -0700 (PDT)
From: John Smith <jsmith2627@att.net>
Subject: (urth) Interest
To: The Urth Mailing List <urth@lists.urth.net>
Message-ID: <132371.66757.qm@web180205.mail.gq1.yahoo.com>
Content-Type: text/plain; charset=us-ascii

Judaism, Christianity and Islam have all, at times, condemned the lending of money at any rate of interest at all. Usury today means a very high rate of interest, especially a rate higher than that allowed by law.

Sometimes religions have presented philosophical reasons to oppose interest, like it being unnatural for money to breed money, but the underlying objection seems to be that interest charges hurt the poor.

However, if lenders cannot earn a return, they will not lend money at all. Compounding the problem for the poor, lenders charge higher rates for less credit-worthy borrowers. So you have some very high rates for credit cards and pay day loans. And if government completely bans high interest rates, the poor are forced to go to loan sharks, who are even more greedy than pay day lenders. No wonder economics has been called the dismal science.

To come back to Gene Wolfe, I think we all agree that Wolfe is a conservative. One of the great things about him, however, is that he is not an apologist for the status quo. He shows us the cruelty and corruption of today in his societies on Urth and Sainte Croix and the Whorl and Blue. He has a fearless vision of what we all face. When Nicholas complains that Dr. Island has lied, Dr. Island says, "if you are released you will have to deal with your society, which will lie to you frequently." That's a good thing to remember.

Best wishes,

Jack

brunians at brunians.org — 19 May 2009, 18:13 · in reply to Lane Haygood

'tends to'.

Once in a while you run into a leftist who is not completely out of touch with reality. Not too often.

Actually, that's not completely fair. Many leftists are in fact in touch enough with reality to carry on their daily lives. But if you talk to one often enough you will find that he believes stuff that just ain't so (like, the government issues money or theft is OK when it is performed by legal process, things like that).

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Lane

Sent from my iPhone

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Message: 5
Date: Mon, 18 May 2009 22:41:30 -0500
From: "James Wynn" <crushtv at gmail.com>
Subject: Re: (urth) The Devil in a Forest
To: "The Urth Mailing List" <urth at lists.urth.net>
Message-ID: <322A6386203C478F871C5C0BEAD76770 at eMachinePC>
Content-Type: text/plain; format=flowed; charset="iso-8859-1";
reply-type=original

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<http://www.avast.com>

Lane Haygood — 19 May 2009, 18:18 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org

That's funny. We say the same things about libertarians.

Sent from my iPhone

On May 19, 2009, at 1:13 PM, brunians at brunians.org wrote:
'tends to'.

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Message: 5

Date: Mon, 18 May 2009 22:41:30 -0500

From: "James Wynn" <crushtv at gmail.com>

Subject: Re: (urth) The Devil in a Forest

brunians at brunians.org — 19 May 2009, 18:22 · in reply to David Stockhoff

Socialism is criminal.

Socialism is the idea that theft is OK if it's done by the government.

The difference between war and socialism is that war is sometimes necessary.

It's not a question of not seeing it---it's a question of seeing something else that is much more interesting. Wat's crimes are only one form of the corrupting nature of groups and thus the corruptable nature of humans. They are primarily criminal and only superficially socialistic, and thus can't really be held up as representative of socialism. They are representative of something, but, rather, they are an example of how men can be corrupted by the offering of group anonymity and free lunches.

Is war any different? Wolfe asks this question all the time. War is also an impersonal transaction between groups in which no individual need feel personally responsible.

Message: 6

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Subject: Re: (urth) The Devil in a Forest

To: "The Urth Mailing List" <urth at lists.urth.net>

Message-ID: <6989DB2D2FE34E278A9BB3E6E28D6641 at eMachinePC>

Content-Type: text/plain; format=flowed; charset="iso-8859-1";

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Adam Thornton — 19 May 2009, 18:26 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org

On May 19, 2009, at 1:22 PM, brunians at brunians.org wrote:
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The difference between war and socialism is that war is sometimes necessary.

How do you define "criminal", or "theft", without a legal code against which to define those actions?

How do you enforce a legal code in the absence of a government?

How do you pay for a government?

What does this have to do with Gene Wolfe?

Adam

Jeffrey Brent McBeth — 19 May 2009, 18:29 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org

On Tue, May 19, 2009 at 02:22:14PM -0400, brunians at brunians.org wrote:
Socialism is criminal.

Socialism is the idea that theft is OK if it's done by the government.

It is only theft if it isn't consensual. The mistake that Socialists make is when they remove the consent.

The parallel problem with libertarianism is that a free market is an unstable state. (see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unstable> for a reasonable 50,000ft view of instability).

I don't have a solution to either problem beyond Bill and Ted's.

Jeff

"The man who does not read good books has no advantage over
the man who cannot read them."
-- Mark Twain

brunians at brunians.org — 19 May 2009, 18:29 · in reply to David Stockhoff

It's not illegal to be stupid.

It's also not illegal to take advantage of stupidity, within limits.

Many poor people use neither pay day loans nor loan sharks. These are not the stupid ones, and although I have no statistics to hand I would bet you that the majority of these don't die poor.

I hardly think that state legislatures allowed payday loans because they sympathized with poor people suffering at the hands of loan sharks. After all, such people don't have an association lobbying on their behalf in state capitols across the USA, though they do have groups advocating against their further abuse. No, it's another case of following the money---not where it comes from, but where it goes.

However, that's beside the point. You are absolutely right about the way Wolfe treats current society. Science fiction was not invented, after all, to support the status quo.

To paraphrase James, you know that a novel's questioning of the status quo is successful when you don't even know it's going on.

Message: 4

Date: Tue, 19 May 2009 08:39:48 -0700 (PDT)

From: John Smith <jsmith2627 at att.net>

Subject: (urth) Interest

To: The Urth Mailing List <urth at lists.urth.net>

Message-ID: <132371.66757.qm at web180205.mail.gq1.yahoo.com>

Content-Type: text/plain; charset=us-ascii

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Best wishes,

Jack

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<http://www.avast.com>

brunians at brunians.org — 19 May 2009, 18:32 · in reply to Lane Haygood

Really?

I have never met a libertarian who claims that the government issues money or that theft is OK when performed by the government.

I'd be more than happy to talk to such a creature, just to see how its mind works (or should that be "how its 'mind' 'works'").

.

That's funny. We say the same things about libertarians.

Sent from my iPhone

On May 19, 2009, at 1:13 PM, brunians at brunians.org wrote:

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In other words, don't lose the forest for the trees, even if there is a devil hiding in them.

Message: 5

Date: Mon, 18 May 2009 22:41:30 -0500

From: "James Wynn" <crushtv at gmail.com>
Subject: Re: (urth) The Devil in a Forest

Lane Haygood — 19 May 2009, 18:56 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org

No, I meant out of touch with reality.

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Good literature transcends factionalism.

Lane

Sent from my iPhone

On May 19, 2009, at 9:47 AM, brunians at brunians.org wrote:

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In other words, don't lose the forest for the trees, even if there is a devil hiding in them.

Message: 5

Date: Mon, 18 May 2009 22:41:30 -0500

From: "James Wynn" <crushtv at gmail.com>

Subject: Re: (urth) The Devil in a Forest

James Wynn — 19 May 2009, 19:08 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org

Really?

I have never met a libertarian who claims that the government issues money or that theft is OK when performed by the government.

I'd be more than happy to talk to such a creature, just to see how its mind works (or should that be "how its 'mind' 'works'").

I'm all for scientific inquiry, but if we going to have a persistent thread on the virtues of Socialism and Libertarianism divorced from direct references to Wolfe's books, then I'd prefer we change the title. I'm not sure I'm done with this particular discussion and I'd like to avoid having it zombified.

J.

David Stockhoff — 19 May 2009, 19:09 · follows James Wynn

Adam, please don't heckle the comedic stylings of our very own Josh Geller.

He's on a roll!

Message: 4

Date: Tue, 19 May 2009 13:26:11 -0500

From: Adam Thornton <adam at io.com>

Subject: Re: (urth) The Devil in a Forest

To: The Urth Mailing List <urth at lists.urth.net>

Message-ID: <ED8C3F46-B419-47B1-ABBE-B96AFC216322 at io.com>

Content-Type: text/plain; charset=US-ASCII; format=flowed; delsp=yes

On May 19, 2009, at 1:22 PM, brunians at brunians.org wrote:

Socialism is criminal.

Socialism is the idea that theft is OK if it's done by the government.

The difference between war and socialism is that war is sometimes necessary.

How do you define "criminal", or "theft", without a legal code against which to define those actions?

How do you enforce a legal code in the absence of a government?

How do you pay for a government?

What does this have to do with Gene Wolfe?

Adam

brunians at brunians.org — 19 May 2009, 19:09 · in reply to Lane Haygood

So do you just say and titter at each other or do you have some examples (you will note that I gave two examples of what I was talking about)?

Are you really a member of CPUSA, Lane? I thought that they were all gone, Gus Hall fucked off to North Korea when the Russian money was cut off.

It's sort of quaint, really. Like meeting a time traveller.

Are you one of those crusty old commies like my quasirelative Dave Wald (<http://www.sanjosepeace.org/mediagallery/album.php?aid=8>)? If you are younger than thirty or so you should be aware that you may not actually be a socialist, but a larval conservative: the process by which a young socialist becomes an old capitalist is widely known.

Peace and Freedom!

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No, I meant out of touch with reality.

Sent from my iPhone

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That's funny. We say the same things about libertarians.

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On May 19, 2009, at 1:13 PM, brunians at brunians.org wrote:

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In other words, don't lose the forest for the trees, even if there is a devil hiding in them.

Message: 5
Date: Mon, 18 May 2009 22:41:30 -0500
From: "James Wynn" <crushtv at gmail.com>
Subject: Re: (urth) The Devil in a Forest

David Stockhoff — 19 May 2009, 19:12 · follows brunians at brunians.org

Below

Message: 6
Date: Tue, 19 May 2009 14:29:10 -0400
From: Jeffrey Brent McBeth <mcbeth at broggs.org>
Subject: Re: (urth) The Devil in a Forest
To: The Urth Mailing List <urth at lists.urth.net>
Message-ID: <20090519182910.GC29453 at broggs.org>
Content-Type: text/plain; charset="us-ascii"

On Tue, May 19, 2009 at 02:22:14PM -0400, brunians at brunians.org wrote:

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It is only theft if it isn't consensual.

-----Correct.

The mistake that Socialists make is when they remove the consent.

-----That's a mistake no matter who makes it. Again, there is this persistent belief that socialism denies consent to the governed. Don't confuse it with communism.

brunians at brunians.org — 19 May 2009, 19:21 · in reply to James Wynn

Sure, why not?

I want to say that I am neither a socialist nor a big L libertarian. I sometimes call myself a Goldwater Republican, sometimes a Jeffersonian, sometimes a Machiavellian.

I think that government is, by its very nature, the enemy of human people and that it should be kept weak and never trusted.

I think that individuals are the best judges of how their money is to be spent.

I think that the use of public money, that is money obtained by armed robbery from the citizenry, should be restricted to a very few very specific areas of expense.

I am not necessarily opposed to social welfare schemes, but I would ideally like to see one that doesn't involve large scale theft. Such a thing might even be possible: the Mormons do it, after all.

"The way we do things in this country is you get to do whatever you like as long as you aren't preventing someone else from doing what they like."

-- Major General Barry Goldwater USAF

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or that theft is OK when performed by the government.

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J.

brunians at brunians.org — 19 May 2009, 19:23 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org

So do you just say

insert 'that': "do you just say that and titter at each other".

Brain ahead of typing gets. Blah.

and titter at each other or do you have some examples
(you will note that I gave two examples of what I was talking about)?

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Subject: Re: (urth) The Devil in a Forest

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It is only theft if it isn't consensual.

-----Correct.

The mistake that Socialists
make is when they remove the consent.

-----That's a mistake no matter who makes it. Again, there is this
persistent belief that socialism denies consent to the governed. Don't
confuse it with communism.

Please do explain how consensual taxation works: I am all ears.

Voluntary communism, like you find in monasteries, is something that I actually appreciate and
strongly approve of.

.

avast! Antivirus: Outbound message clean.

Virus Database (VPS): 090518-0, 05/18/2009

Tested on: 5/19/2009 3:12:35 PM

avast! - copyright (c) 1988-2009 ALWIL Software.

<http://www.avast.com>

Adam Thornton — 19 May 2009, 19:39 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org

On May 19, 2009, at 2:27 PM, brunians at brunians.org wrote:

Please do explain how consensual taxation works: I am all ears.

This one's easy.

The government provides services I find beneficial, such as police and fire protection,
maintained roads, public education, and so forth.

On balance, the amount I'm paying for those services seems broadly fair. Sure, there are
inefficiencies--waste, corruption, places money is spent where I think it shouldn't be and things

that don't get funded that I think should be--but I am much more in favor of it than I would be of a zero-taxation Hobbesian war of all against all. I lack the ruthlessness (not to mention physical conditioning) necessary to survive for long in *that* world.

Therefore, taxation is, at least for me, consensual. Sure, that doesn't mean I don't think it can improve--that's why I vote on local taxation-related ballot initiatives, for instance--but it represents something much closer to my ideal state than its absence would.

Adam

David Stockhoff — 19 May 2009, 19:39 · follows brunians at brunians.org

Well, let's see. I just voted for a tax increase. I have helped elect people who raised taxes, because they said they would raise taxes. As a result, I will pay more taxes. I want to pay more taxes.

Why? Because it's a deal. Because my city is broke. Because I believe in the public good. Because I'm not rich.

"Consent." It's not just the theme of a teen sci-fi novel.

Message: 5

Date: Tue, 19 May 2009 15:27:02 -0400 (EDT)

From: brunians at brunians.org

Subject: (urth) Gene Wolfe Fans Talk Politics (Again)

To: "The Urth Mailing List" <urth at lists.urth.net>

Message-ID: <13409.67.142.130.18.1242761222.squirrel at brunians.org>

Content-Type: text/plain; charset=iso-8859-1

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James Wynn — 19 May 2009, 20:01 · in reply to Adam Thornton

Josh said:

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Adam responded: This one's easy.

The government provides services I find beneficial, such as police and
fire protection, maintained roads, public education, and so forth.

Therefore, taxation is, at least for me, consensual.

Well, okay, Adam but if you change your mind about the cost-benefit of the services provided, they will take it from you anyway. The obvious conclusion is that your personal consent is irrelevant. That you have decided you like it right now is just a happy coincidence for you.

But that's just fee for service. In tDiaF, Wolfe is talking about something else. You don't support police, fire protection, etc. equally with your neighbors. Most people are benefiting from those services far beyond what they would receive if everyone paid the same percentage from their labor and property. This is a *transfer* of wealth from one citizen to another. This is what Wolfe is talking about when he compares socialism/welfare state with Robin Hood.

For example, the market value of health care is established given what people pay out of pocket, for insurance, and the amount the government subsidizes hospitals and such. If people were told that --in order to cover people not covered--they'll have to pay more or get decreased quality of care, they'd never go for it. The way it is sold is that *somebody else* is going to bear the increased costs: somebody who can "afford it." That is certainly "theft" by many common definitions.

You can say that "Well, we live in a society, and that's just the burden that rich people will have to bear to live in it with us. Fine. The Wall Street Journal has an article yesterday by Art Laffer on what the response of rich people is to that ultimatum.

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB124260067214828295.html>

They leave.

Just as the pilgrims left when Wat set up shop in the forest.

So the arrangement is unsustainable (if increased prosperity for all is the goal).

J.

Adam Thornton — 19 May 2009, 20:06 · in reply to James Wynn

On May 19, 2009, at 3:01 PM, James Wynn wrote:

Josh said:

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That you have decided you like it right now is just a happy coincidence for you.

Let us say, rather, that my personal consent is only relevant as part of the input to the process by which taxes are levied. In other words, I get one vote, and my personal preferences don't trump that.

I'm reasonably happy with that as emblematic of how a democratic society is supposed to work. And, as you say, if I don't like it, I am free to leave.

[...]

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And yet, I see very few millionaires moving to Mogadishu.

Why do you suppose that is?

Adam

Lane Haygood — 19 May 2009, 20:10 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org

I am. I became a Marxist during law school when I studied critical legal theory. It's an outgrowth of my abiding interest in German Idealism, phenomenology and Continental philosophy in general. In my practice as a lawyer (for the State) I apply the principles of critical criminology (a la Willem Bonger) to criminal prosecution, using the law and the power of collective society to bring about social justice. The economics of the situation are central to my thinking and my practice.

But, I realize that my viewpoint is not somehow privileged or right by fiat. I understand you and your position, and while I don't share it, I can't begrudge you your own choices. Politically, this is the beauty of democracy.

Sent from my iPhone

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Peace and Freedom!

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No, I meant out of touch with reality.

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On May 19, 2009, at 1:32 PM, brunians at brunians.org wrote:

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That's funny. We say the same things about libertarians.

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Message: 5
Date: Mon, 18 May 2009 22:41:30 -0500
From: "James Wynn" <crushtv at gmail.com>
Subject: Re: (urth) The Devil in a Forest

Go over to the "Gene Wolfe Fans Talk Politics (Again) thread. I'm reserving this one for actual discussions of "The Devil in a Forest". :-)

J.

From: "Lane Haygood" <lhaygood at gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, May 19, 2009 3:10 PM
To: "The Urth Mailing List" <urth at lists.urth.net>
Subject: Re: (urth) The Devil in a Forest

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Just as the pilgrims left when Wat set up shop in the forest.

Adam sez: And yet, I see very few millionaires moving to Mogadishu.
Why do you suppose that is?

Because the people there do not respect the integrity of private property?

You will find millionaires hiding out in the Bahamas. And many millionaires have left the "more equitable" welfare state of the U.K. for the "less fair" U.S. and Ireland. The flight of load-bearing citizens from NYC and California are test-tube examples of what happens when you increase benefits for all on the backs of a voting minority.

There is another reason America is not (yet) Mogadishu. V?clav Havel said that it's easy to get a Communist society from a Capitalist one. It's as easy as getting seafood from an exotic fish aquarium. You just boil the the aquarium. It's harder to go the other way. Those calling for increased social benefits from government are currently benefiting from a society that has (relatively) eschewed those things in the past. They are essentially living off the principle of an inheritance. People talk about how much Europeans *love* their free health care and education. But educated people there are quite anxious to come to the U.S. anyway. Why? Limited opportunity. It's not uncommon for Europeans to take their free Ph.Ds and go to work as waiters. It's not "How many millionaires are leaving?" The tradesmen (the rich) didn't leave the village in "The Devil in a Forest". The question is "How many new ones are coming? Is the rate of new ones being created here increasing or decreasing?"

Jerry Friedman — 19 May 2009, 20:28 · follows James Wynn

--- On Mon, 5/18/09, brunians at brunians.org <brunians at brunians.org> wrote:

I'm grateful for this discussion, because when I read tDiaF I thought it

was just a quaint, but obvious, morality tale. Now, I realize that it isn't

so "on the nose" at all. It's actually a quite exquisite bit of propaganda

(unlike say "Atlas Shrugged"). Truly masterful propaganda is one where the audience doesn't realize it's being propagandized.

Really good propaganda will have people denying that it is propaganda.

It depends on what you mean by "good". I suppose you could say that a really "good" thief or murderer doesn't get caught, but I think the quotation marks are appropriate.

Some propaganda helps bring about many deaths. The kind that people are describing in /The Devil in a Forest/ (which I haven't read) is presumably far less harmful, but I still prefer political arguments with the cards on the table.

I find it very interesting that many of the people who disagree with

Wolfe's politics argue that it is not there.

While a number of others know it's there but disagree with it.

Socialism is, when it comes down to it, a process of pretending that the World is different from the way it actually is.

There are lots of -isms and -ities in that category.

Jerry Friedman

John Smith — 19 May 2009, 20:33 · in reply to James B. Jordan

It may be written for teens, but from the discussion here, I need to go back and read it again. It seems to have many layers. I must have missed 90% of the meaning.

Best wishes,

Jack

--- On Tue, 5/19/09, James B. Jordan <jbjordan4 at cox.net> wrote:
From: James B. Jordan <jbjordan4 at cox.net>
Subject: Re: (urth) The Devil in a Forest
To: "The Urth Mailing List" <urth at lists.urth.net>
Date: Tuesday, May 19, 2009, 1:53 PM
At 09:30 AM 5/19/2009, you wrote:

I think there is more to it than just how sneaky his propaganda is. Sure, Wolfe is propagandizing, as always---but he doesn't just propagandize for a narrow segment of the political spectrum, and he rarely makes things as black and white and baldly allegorical as you seem to suggest. Rather, he asks questions and examines the moral aspects of the range of answers.

To be sure. And remember, tDiaF is written for teens, not adults. I doubt if there is any teen fiction anywhere that does not try to educate in some direction.

In fact, I doubt if there is any fiction anywhere that does not come from some perspective, and therefore can be said to propagandize for that perspective.

For instance, I don't think Wolfe wrote the Severian quintet in order to propagandize, but it is certainly the case that he is presenting the notion that resurrection and a new world can only come on the other side of very serious destruction and judgment, brought about in response to serious malfeasance; and that it is the God who sent the Theoanthropos long ago who does this kind of thing. It's not a Santa-claus cozy liberal Christianity, but it is a Christian viewpoint. A "severe Christian" who writes a story about serious matters is just going to write in this manner.

FWIW

Nutria

James B. Jordan
Director, Biblical Horizons
Box 1096
Niceville, FL 32588
<http://www.biblicalhorizons.com>

Adam Thornton — 19 May 2009, 20:36 · in reply to James Wynn

On May 19, 2009, at 3:25 PM, James Wynn wrote:

Because the people there do not respect the integrity of private property?

You will find millionaires hiding out in the Bahamas. And many millionaires have left the "more equitable" welfare state of the U.K. for the "less fair" U.S. and Ireland. The flight of load-bearing citizens from NYC and California are test-tube examples of what happens when you increase benefits for all on the backs of a voting minority.

Can one not make the case that societies in which people DO respect the integrity of private property are the result of those in which benefits for all are increased on the backs of a voting minority?

Basically: the difference between a mostly functional police force and a full-on social-services safety-net state is one of degree, not kind. And I hold that both those states are preferable to Somalia.

Adam

brunians at brunians.org — 19 May 2009, 20:43 · in reply to Adam Thornton

Let me explain what I mean by consensual and non-consensual:

The government wants you to pay taxes, which they are going to spend on whatever. You or I may approve of everything they spend it on, or we may approve of some of it, or we may approve of none of it. No matter: we must pay. If we do not, legal processes will be begun against us, and we may be forced to pay fines, or sent to prison or even (if we are extremely unlucky) killed.

What I would like you (or someone) to explain to me is how this process can be described as consensual. It seems to me much more like extortion by threat of violence.

I think that there are legitimate uses for tax money: you mention some of them (I don't think I would include public education among them, I don't think that the government should be involved too much in educating people), which are important enough that people should be forced to pay for them. I think that this practice should be kept to a strict minimum, and I would never distort reality to the extent that I would describe it as voluntary. It is an exercise of force.

Perhaps the word voluntary is better than consensual.

It is good and public spirited of you to pay your taxes voluntarily. But it's not like you really have an option.

.

On May 19, 2009, at 2:27 PM, brunians at brunians.org wrote:

Please do explain how consensual taxation works: I am all ears.

This one's easy.

The government provides services I find beneficial, such as police and fire protection, maintained roads, public education, and so forth.

On balance, the amount I'm paying for those services seems broadly fair. Sure, there are inefficiencies--waste, corruption, places money is spent where I think it shouldn't be and things that don't get funded that I think should be--but I am much more in favor of it than I would be of a zero-taxation Hobbesian war of all against all. I lack the ruthlessness (not to mention physical conditioning) necessary to survive for long in *that* world.

Therefore, taxation is, at least for me, consensual. Sure, that doesn't mean I don't think it can improve--that's why I vote on local taxation-related ballot initiatives, for instance--but it represents something much closer to my ideal state than its absence would.

Adam

brunians at brunians.org — 19 May 2009, 20:44 · in reply to David Stockhoff

Well, let's see. I just voted for a tax increase. I have helped elect people who raised taxes, because they said they would raise taxes. As a result, I will pay more taxes. I want to pay more taxes.

Why? Because it's a deal. Because my city is broke. Because I believe in the public good. Because I'm not rich.

"Consent." It's not just the theme of a teen sci-fi novel.

Message: 5

Date: Tue, 19 May 2009 15:27:02 -0400 (EDT)

From: brunians at brunians.org

Subject: (urth) Gene Wolfe Fans Talk Politics (Again)

To: "The Urth Mailing List" <urth at lists.urth.net>

Message-ID: <13409.67.142.130.18.1242761222.squirrel at brunians.org>

Content-Type: text/plain; charset=iso-8859-1

It is only theft if it isn't consensual.

-----Correct.

The mistake that Socialists make is when they remove the consent.

-----That's a mistake no matter who makes it. Again, there is this persistent belief that socialism denies consent to the governed. Don't confuse it with communism.

On Tue, May 19, 2009 at 02:22:14PM -0400, brunians at brunians.org wrote:
Please do explain how consensual taxation works: I am all ears.

Voluntary communism, like you find in monasteries, is something that I actually appreciate and strongly approve of.

avast! Antivirus: Outbound message clean.
Virus Database (VPS): 090518-0, 05/18/2009
Tested on: 5/19/2009 3:39:26 PM
avast! - copyright (c) 1988-2009 ALWIL Software.
<http://www.avast.com>

Adam Thornton — 19 May 2009, 20:46 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org

On May 19, 2009, at 3:43 PM, brunians at brunians.org wrote:
Let me explain what I mean by consensual and non-consensual:

The government wants you to pay taxes, which they are going to spend on whatever. You or I may approve of everything they spend it on, or we may approve of some of it, or we may approve of none of it. No matter: we must pay. If we do not, legal processes will be begun against us, and we may be forced to pay fines, or sent to prison or even (if we are extremely unlucky) killed.

What I would like you (or someone) to explain to me is how this process can be described as consensual. It seems to me much more like extortion by threat of violence.

It is my choice to go live somewhere else without these restrictions, if I like.

Like Mogadishu.

Adam

James Wynn — 19 May 2009, 20:47 · in reply to Adam Thornton

Basically: the difference between a mostly functional police force and a full-on social-services safety-net state is one of degree, not kind. And I hold that both those states are preferable to Somalia.

There are a remarkable number of false dichotomies in this short blurb. Welfare states engage in far more than police service. If you were to declare that large cities should only provide a police force, fire fighters, and road maintenance, you'd find yourself voting in lock-step with Josh. So put aside those as a justification. If you really believe that a "full-on social-services safety-net state" is important you should be happy to fund it to the same degree as your fellow citizens and laborers. I agree that such a system could not be compared to "robbing from the rich to give to the poor."

J.

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 19 May 2009, 20:48 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org

On Tue, May 19, 2009 at 1:43 PM, <brunians at brunians.org> wrote:
The government wants you to pay taxes, which they are going to spend on whatever. You or I may approve of everything they spend it on, or we may approve of some of it, or we may approve of none of it. No matter: we must pay. If we do not, legal processes will be begun against us, and we may be forced to pay fines, or sent to prison or even (if we are extremely unlucky) killed.

What I would like you (or someone) to explain to me is how this process can be described as consensual. It seems to me much more like extortion by threat of violence.

It's not very complicated, actually.

One chooses to be a member of a society. If one does not like that society, one leaves. If one chooses to remain, one has agreed to "play" by the rules of that society's "game." (Note: the US is not like the CCCP, where people needed permission to leave, and even then were stripped of most-to-all their possessions when doing so.)

The advantage of a democratic "game" is that the rules can be changed to suit the people "playing." Nobody will always get all the rules they want - that's the art of the compromise.

As it happens, one of the rules by which we choose to "play" is taxation. If you don't like it, strongly enough, you are encouraged to go live in Somalia.

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

brunians at brunians.org — 19 May 2009, 20:51 · in reply to Jerry Friedman

Good in this context means 'well (or competently) done'.

--- On Mon, 5/18/09, brunians at brunians.org <brunians at brunians.org> wrote:

I'm grateful for this discussion, because when I read tDiaF I thought it was just a quaint, but obvious, morality tale. Now, I realize that it isn't so "on the nose" at all. It's actually a quite exquisite bit of propaganda (unlike say "Atlas Shrugged"). Truly masterful propaganda is one where the audience doesn't realize it's being propagandized.

Really good propaganda will have people denying that it is propaganda.

It depends on what you mean by "good". I suppose you could say that a really "good" thief or murderer doesn't get caught, but I think the quotation marks are appropriate.

Some propaganda helps bring about many deaths. The kind that people are describing in /The Devil in a Forest/ (which I haven't read) is presumably far less harmful, but I still prefer political arguments with the cards on the table.

I find it very interesting that many of the people who disagree with Wolfe's politics argue that it is not there.

While a number of others know it's there but disagree with it.

Socialism is, when it comes down to it, a process of pretending that the World is different from the way it actually is.

There are lots of -isms and -ities in that category.

Jerry Friedman

brunians at brunians.org — 19 May 2009, 20:55 · in reply to Adam Thornton

It is my choice to go live somewhere else without these restrictions, if I like.

Like Mogadishu.

James Wynn has dealt well with this straw man.

You may, of course, go on repeating it as you desire.

.

James Wynn — 19 May 2009, 20:55 · in reply to John Smith

It may be written for teens, but from the discussion here, I need to go back and read it again. It seems to have many layers. I must have missed 90% of the meaning.
Jack

I recommend you take the opportunity to refresh you memory of the Robin Hood ballads and stories. The abbe' is Friar Tuck. Joselyn is Maid Marian. Mother Cloot the evil prioress who bled Robin Hood to death. I don't mean there is a one-to-one connection, of course. Wolfe twisted them all around the way he does. But the old narratives are there.

J.

brunians at brunians.org — 19 May 2009, 20:58 · in reply to James Wynn

Basically: the difference between a mostly functional police force and a full-on social-services safety-net state is one of degree, not kind. And I hold that both those states are preferable to Somalia.

There are a remarkable number of false dichotomies in this short blurb. Welfare states engage in far more than police service. If you were to declare that large cities should only provide a police force, fire fighters, and road maintenance, you'd find yourself voting in lock-step with Josh. So put aside those as a justification.

If you really believe that a "full-on social-services safety-net state" is important you should be happy to fund it to the same degree as your fellow citizens and laborers. I agree that such a system could not be compared to "robbing from the rich to give to the poor."

Indeed.

The Mormons have an excellent (and voluntary) social welfare system, which they pay for themselves, by tithing. I have often thought that something of the kind could be adapted for people who would like this kind of security and don't want to necessarily be Mormon.

.

brunians at brunians.org — 19 May 2009, 21:00 · in reply to Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

Tell us where money comes from, again, Dan'l. Now that the shock of seeing someone as intelligent as you say something that bogus is wearing off, I find it incredibly amusing on a number of levels.

.

On Tue, May 19, 2009 at 1:43 PM, <brunians at brunians.org> wrote:

The government wants you to pay taxes, which they are going to spend on whatever. You or I may approve of everything they spend it on, or we may approve of some of it, or we may approve of none of it. No matter: we must pay. If we do not, legal processes will be begun against us, and we may be forced to pay fines, or sent to prison or even (if we are extremely unlucky) killed.

What I would like you (or someone) to explain to me is how this process can be described as consensual. It seems to me much more like extortion by threat of violence.

It's not very complicated, actually.

One chooses to be a member of a society. If one does not like that society, one leaves. If one chooses to remain, one has agreed to "play" by the rules of that society's "game." (Note: the US is not like the CCCP, where people needed permission to leave, and even then were stripped of most-to-all their possessions when doing so.)

The advantage of a democratic "game" is that the rules can be changed to suit the people "playing." Nobody will always get all the rules they want - that's the art of the compromise.

As it happens, one of the rules by which we choose to "play" is taxation. If you don't like it, strongly enough, you are encouraged to go live in Somalia.

--

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 19 May 2009, 21:01 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org

On Tue, May 19, 2009 at 1:58 PM, <brunians at brunians.org> wrote:

The Mormons have an excellent (and voluntary) social welfare system, which they pay for themselves, by tithing. I have often thought that something

of the kind could be adapted for people who would like this kind of security and don't want to necessarily be Mormon.

This is a nice fallacy. It isn't that the Mormon system doesn't work, but that there's no coercion is a fallacy.

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 19 May 2009, 21:02 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org

Money can come from any number of places, but ultimately it needs the authority of something like government to make it work. You're smart enough to know that.

Meanwhile, by attacking that strawman you've avoided responding to my post below.

On Tue, May 19, 2009 at 2:00 PM, <brunians at brunians.org> wrote:
Tell us where money comes from, again, Dan'l. Now that the shock of seeing someone as intelligent as you say something that bogus is wearing off, I find it incredibly amusing on a number of levels.

.

On Tue, May 19, 2009 at 1:43 PM, ?<brunians at brunians.org> wrote:

The government wants you to pay taxes, which they are going to spend on whatever. You or I may approve of everything they spend it on, or we may approve of some of it, or we may approve of none of it. No matter: we must pay. If we do not, legal processes will be begun against us, and we may be forced to pay fines, or sent to prison or even (if we are extremely unlucky) killed.

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As it happens, one of the rules by which we choose to "play" is taxation. If you don't like it, strongly enough, you are encouraged to go live in Somalia.

--

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

brunians at brunians.org — 19 May 2009, 21:03 · in reply to Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

On Tue, May 19, 2009 at 1:58 PM, <brunians at brunians.org> wrote:

The Mormons have an excellent (and voluntary) social welfare system, which they pay for themselves, by tithing. I have often thought that something of the kind could be adapted for people who would like this kind of security and don't want to necessarily be Mormon.

This is a nice fallacy. It isn't that the Mormon system doesn't work, but that there's no coercion is a fallacy.

You have to tithe to be a member of the Church, sure.

What is voluntary is choosing to be a member of the Church.

.

James Wynn — 19 May 2009, 21:04 · in reply to Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

Adam sez:

It is my choice to go live somewhere else without these restrictions, if I like. Like Mogadishu.

Dan'l sez:

If you don't like it, strongly enough, you are encouraged to go live in Somalia.

I'm not sure where some people got the idea that Somalia was founded as a Libertarian/Liberal society, but I'm pretty sure it wasn't.

If the rich take your offer and go to a tax-haven state, then your "full-on social-services safety-net state" collapse or see a drastic decrease in services. You will also find it hard to get the load-bearing citizens back. Actually, it probably won't matter because you'll probably leave as well for places with more opportunity.

J.

brunians at brunians.org — 19 May 2009, 21:06 · in reply to Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

No, that's not the funny one.

The one where the government creates money, you know how it goes.

The other has been dealt with in other posts.

Do the funny thing again, I love it when you do that.

.

Money can come from any number of places, but ultimately it needs the authority of something like government to make it work. You're smart enough to know that.

Meanwhile, by attacking that strawman you've avoided responding to my post below.

On Tue, May 19, 2009 at 2:00 PM, <brunians at brunians.org> wrote:

Tell us where money comes from, again, Dan'l. Now that the shock of seeing someone as intelligent as you say something that bogus is wearing off, I find it incredibly amusing on a number of levels.

.

On Tue, May 19, 2009 at 1:43 PM, ?<brunians at brunians.org> wrote:

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The advantage of a democratic "game" is that the rules can be changed to suit the people "playing." Nobody will always get all the rules they want - that's the art of the compromise.

As it happens, one of the rules by which we choose to "play" is taxation. If you don't like it, strongly enough, you are encouraged to go live in Somalia.

--

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

brunians at brunians.org — 19 May 2009, 21:07 · in reply to James Wynn

Adam sez:

It is my choice to go live somewhere else without these restrictions, if I like. Like Mogadishu.

Dan'l sez:

If you don't like it, strongly enough, you are encouraged to go live in Somalia.

I'm not sure where some people got the idea that Somalia was founded as a Libertarian/Liberal society, but I'm pretty sure it wasn't.

Is easier than coming up with good arguments?

.

Adam Thornton — 19 May 2009, 21:09 · in reply to James Wynn

On May 19, 2009, at 3:47 PM, James Wynn wrote:

If you really believe that a "full-on social-services safety-net state" is important you should be happy to fund it to the same degree as your fellow citizens and laborers. I agree that such a system could not be compared to "robbing from the rich to give to the poor."

Of course, "fund it to the same degree," and "robbing from the rich to give to the poor," each themselves admit multiple interpretations.

One way of "funding it to the same degree" would be to demand a flat amount from each citizen.

This strikes most people as impractical, as, if each contribution were limited to that which could be squeezed from the poorest citizen, there would be effectively no revenue to pay for the service.

One way would be to impose the same percentage fee on each citizen, regardless of income. This is usually what Libertarians claim to like. However, such a plan ignores the (I think fairly important) observation that the marginal value of money decreases the more of it you have.

By that I simply mean--and I suspect that I am not alone on this list-- that I've lived on \$15,000, \$30,000, and \$60,000 a year. One would expect from the flat-percentage argument that the difference in lifestyle comfort between \$30,000 and \$60,000 would have been double the difference between \$15,000 and \$30,000. This is, in my experience, manifestly not so--indeed, quite the opposite. The difference between \$30,000 and \$60,000 was very minor compared to the difference between \$15,000 and \$30,000. That implies that the marginal value to me of each dollar between \$15,000 and \$30,000 was more than double the marginal value of each dollar between \$30,000 and \$60,000.

(By way of example: at \$15K, I shared a run-down house with several other people, ate ramen and similarly-priced but unexciting food--"eating out" meant fast food or very, very cheap restaurants, and even so, was done very sparingly--and very rarely bought books, and almost never new books. At \$30K, I and my partner had a rented house of our own, ate meat when we felt like it and occasionally ate out at restaurants with metal cutlery, and went to a new-book bookstore a couple times a month. At \$60K, we owned (for values of ownership meaning "had a mortgage on") a house similar to the one we had rented, ate meat when we felt like it and could go eat at nicer restaurants if and when we wanted, and went to the bookstore a little bit more often.)

Hence a third way would be to impose a tax that causes the same amount of inconvenience at all levels of income. This is approximately what progressive income taxes attempt to do. I would argue that current US taxation levels are somewhere between the second and third models.

"Robbing from the rich to give to the poor," is simply the same argument stood on its head, of course. Does taxation go from "legitimate" to "robbery" at a value derived from the absolute

dollar value of the tax, from a percentage of income across all income ranges, or to a degree of inconvenience across all income ranges?

Adam

Adam Thornton — 19 May 2009, 21:14 · in reply to James Wynn

On May 19, 2009, at 4:04 PM, James Wynn wrote:

Adam sez:

It is my choice to go live somewhere else without these restrictions, if I like. Like Mogadishu.

Dan'l sez:

If you don't like it, strongly enough, you are encouraged to go live in Somalia.

I'm not sure where some people got the idea that Somalia was founded as a Libertarian/Liberal society, but I'm pretty sure it wasn't.

I am merely offering Somalia as the closest approach to the ideal of a complete lack of functional civil society and to a Hobbesian all- against-all of which I am currently aware.

I don't think it was founded as a Libertopia. I think it does approximate the end state of a society in which there is not a government.

Adam

James Wynn — 19 May 2009, 21:18 · in reply to Adam Thornton

I am merely offering Somalia as the closest approach to the ideal of a complete lack of functional civil society and to a Hobbesian all- against-all of which I am currently aware.

I don't think it was founded as a Libertopia. I think it does approximate the end state of a society in which there is not a government.

Libertarians and classical Liberals do not call for the withering away of the state. That's some other political philosophy.

From an L/L stand-point, I could reasonably compare Somalia's economy-based on piracy to a Welfare State system. But then Gene Wolfe already did.

J.

brunians at brunians.org — 19 May 2009, 21:19 · in reply to Adam Thornton

Adam writes:

On May 19, 2009, at 4:04 PM, James Wynn wrote:

Adam sez:

It is my choice to go live somewhere else without these restrictions, if I like. Like Mogadishu.

Dan'l sez:

If you don't like it, strongly enough, you are encouraged to go live in Somalia.

I'm not sure where some people got the idea that Somalia was founded as a Libertarian/Liberal society, but I'm pretty sure it wasn't.

I am merely offering Somalia as the closest approach to the ideal of a complete lack of functional civil society and to a Hobbesian all-against-all of which I am currently aware.

But we (the people on the other side of the argument) are none of us arguing for a complete lack of functional civil society and a Hobbesian all-against-all. Were you under the impression that we were?

I don't think it was founded as a Libertopia. I think it does approximate the end state of a society in which there is not a government.

Perhaps someday you will choose to address the arguments that have actually been made.

John Watkins — 19 May 2009, 21:21 · in reply to Adam Thornton

Somalia is to libertarianism what *1984* is to communitarianism. A useful thing to keep in mind, but little else. In real life, communitarian states are as apt to resemble Germany, and libertarian states as apt to resemble Hong Kong.

On Tue, May 19, 2009 at 5:14 PM, Adam Thornton <adam at io.com> wrote:

On May 19, 2009, at 4:04 PM, James Wynn wrote:

Adam sez:

It is my choice to go live somewhere else without these restrictions, if I like. Like Mogadishu.

Dan'l sez:

If you don't like it, strongly enough, you are encouraged to go live in Somalia.

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I don't think it was founded as a Libertopia. I think it does approximate the end state of a society in which there is not a government.

Adam

David Stockhoff — 19 May 2009, 21:21 · follows John Watkins

The key term here is not "voluntary" and it's not "consensual." It's "consent"---as in "the consent of the governed." It's nothing like what you are thinking of.

Google that phrase. Some kinds of education must be self-motivated.

Message: 5

Date: Tue, 19 May 2009 16:43:50 -0400 (EDT)

From: brunians at brunians.org

Subject: Re: (urth) Gene Wolfe Fans Talk Politics (Again)

To: "The Urth Mailing List" <urth at lists.urth.net>

Message-ID: <10067.67.142.130.18.1242765830.squirrel at brunians.org>
Content-Type: text/plain; charset=iso-8859-1

Let me explain what I mean by consensual and non-consensual:

The government wants you to pay taxes, which they are going to spend on whatever. You or I may approve of everything they spend it on, or we may approve of some of it, or we may approve of none of it. No matter: we must pay. If we do not, legal processes will be begun against us, and we may be forced to pay fines, or sent to prison or even (if we are extremely unlucky) killed.

What I would like you (or someone) to explain to me is how this process can be described as consensual. It seems to me much more like extortion by threat of violence.

I think that there are legitimate uses for tax money: you mention some of them (I don't think I would include public education among them, I don't think that the government should be involved too much in educating people), which are important enough that people should be forced to pay for them. I think that this practice should be kept to a strict minimum, and I would never distort reality to the extent that I would describe it as voluntary. It is an exercise of force.

Perhaps the word voluntary is better than consensual.

It is good and public spirited of you to pay your taxes voluntarily. But it's not like you really have an option.

Adam Thornton — 19 May 2009, 21:29 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org

On May 19, 2009, at 4:19 PM, brunians at brunians.org wrote:

But we (the people on the other side of the argument) are none of us arguing for a complete lack of functional civil society and a Hobbesian all-against-all. Were you under the impression that we were?

I don't see how you can get from the position that all taxation is theft to the position that some governments are legitimate without giving up on the first one.

Adam

David Stockhoff — 19 May 2009, 21:32 · follows Adam Thornton

Somalia's economy is not "based on" piracy. It was based on fishing and herding before global shipping killed all the fish.

Read newspapers.

Message: 4
Date: Tue, 19 May 2009 16:18:52 -0500
From: "James Wynn" <crushtv at gmail.com>
Subject: Re: (urth) Gene Wolfe Fans Talk Politics (Again)
To: "The Urth Mailing List" <urth at lists.urth.net>

Message-ID: <EF26CCFB4C8740F1A67A8B703C61D950 at eMachinePC>
Content-Type: text/plain; format=flowed; charset="iso-8859-1";
reply-type=response

I am merely offering Somalia as the closest approach to the ideal of a complete lack of functional civil society and to a Hobbesian all-against-all of which I am currently aware.

I don't think it was founded as a Libertopia. I think it does approximate the end state of a society in which there is not a government.

Libertarians and classical Liberals do not call for the withering away of the state. That's some other political philosophy.

From an L/L stand-point, I could reasonably compare Somalia's economy-based on piracy to a Welfare State system. But then Gene Wolfe already did.

J.

Jerry Friedman — 19 May 2009, 21:33 · follows David Stockhoff

I'd be interested in a citation to Washington's writings for the quotation from his writings. It's widely quoted at Google Books with various differences in wording, but the first hit I can find is from 1878 (in the Congressional Record).

There are no hits on "Washington government force fire servant master" at yale.edu, which includes "The Papers of George Washington".

http://avalon.law.yale.edu/subject_menus/washpap.asp

But that may not mean anything, as some books date the quotation to 1785, and the Yale collection has nothing that early.

This site (which seems to support a right to gun ownership, but I just glanced at it) calls the quotation "bogus", along with many others attributed to the Founding Fathers.

<http://www.guncite.com/gc2ndbog.html>

The quotation from Josh Geller appears to go back to Max Weber and to be a compressed, indeed oversimplified, way of saying the government decides what violence is legitimate (including self-defense, which is legitimate violence not carried out by the government).

By the way, who is Josh Geller? (When I ask it that way, the initials are a little disturbing.)

Jerry Friedman

--- On Tue, 5/19/09, brunians at brunians.org <brunians at brunians.org> wrote:

From: brunians at brunians.org <brunians at brunians.org>

Mao was a perceptive guy about some things. Power and how to use it, for instance. Decent poet also, I'm told.

Not a very nice man, but pretty smart.

If three people as different as Mao, Washington and Geller

agree about
something, I'd say it's time to sit up and take notice.

.

If Mao said it, it must be true.

Date: Mon, 18 May 2009 21:32:54 -0400 (EDT)
This does not change the nature of the interaction,
Dan'l. I do understand
why one would want to deny the reality of the thing,
of course.

Government is force. It is a dangerous servant and a
fierce master.

-- George Washington

Political power comes out of the barrel of a gun.

-- Mao Zedong

Government is the monopoly on legitimate violence.

-- Josh Geller

Adam Thornton — 19 May 2009, 21:35 · in reply to Jerry Friedman

On May 19, 2009, at 4:33 PM, Jerry Friedman wrote:
By the way, who is Josh Geller? (When I ask it that way,
the initials are a little disturbing.)

If he is standing naked at the edge of a cliff, I for one don't want to....oh, wait, that'd be HR
anyway.

(Block? Giger?)

Adam

brunians at brunians.org — 19 May 2009, 21:36 · in reply to Adam Thornton

I said this in a recent post. I will expand upon it.

Taxation, the extortion of money from the citizens, is permissible for things that are necessary.
My list of necessary things includes the military and things related to the military, infrastructure
and certain kinds of research. I insist that the involuntary nature of taxation be explicit and
resist the inevitable attempts at expansion of the things-to-be-paid-for-by-taxation.

Of course, as a good Jeffersonian, I believe that from time to time it is necessary to shoot the
bastards and start over. We're not quite there yet.

.

On May 19, 2009, at 4:19 PM, brunians at brunians.org wrote:

But we (the people on the other side of the argument) are none of us arguing for a complete lack of functional civil society and a Hobbesian all-against-all. Were you under the impression that we were?

I don't see how you can get from the position that all taxation is theft to the position that some governments are legitimate without giving up on the first one.

Adam

brunians at brunians.org — 19 May 2009, 21:44 · in reply to David Stockhoff

Somalia's economy is not "based on" piracy. It was based on fishing and herding before global shipping killed all the fish.

The fishing went away because Somalia, lacking a government, lacks a Coast Guard (see my post about necessary things which may be paid for by taxation) and therefore every industrial fishing boat in the world went there to glom on their fish.

I think that bits of herding still go on.

Somalia has been a pit for centuries. How did the Italians do running it? I've been in favor of giving large chunks of Africa back to the colonial powers for some time now.

.

Adam Thornton — 19 May 2009, 21:48 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org

On May 19, 2009, at 4:36 PM, brunians at brunians.org wrote:
I said this in a recent post. I will expand upon it.

Taxation, the extortion of money from the citizens, is permissible for things that are necessary.

Ah. So "extortion" can, in your world, be a good thing, or at least a necessary evil.

This was confusing to me.

I prefer to consider taxation neither theft nor extortion, but rather more like dues: something I must pay in order to retain a member in good standing of a club whose benefits I enjoy. I can at any point choose to leave that club; if at that I insist on sticking around somewhere I'm still reaping its benefits, then I may find myself liable to experience unpleasant consequences, like being thrown in the pokey.

Adam

Lane Haygood — 19 May 2009, 21:51 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org

So your democratically-elected government gets to serve at the pleasure of a small but violent minority? I understand frustration with graft and waste, but calling for rebellion against a lawfully-seated state for carrying out the will of society?

At some point, you realize the value in cooperation, community and shared society. All civilization is based on this premise, that together a people can accomplish what one alone cannot.

The substitution of civil government/society with a profit driven market removes this universally-agreed as beneficial goal of cooperation and replaced it with a unilateral goal of profit. As wealth cannot be created ex nihilo, profit must arise from a producer taking more than a product is worth. This is only possible on a market where supply and demand are manipulated against the interest of the consumer.

Thus, the market is merely the latest iteration of the master-slave relation. It is the battlefield of class conflict. How does calling taxes imposed by a lawful sovereign equal theft, but the creation of profit not equal extortion by a self-selected, undemocratic oligarchy?

Individuals and individual liberty are only meaningful insofar as a civil legal system ensures they are protected. Authoritarian abuses by right and left ignore this. Free markets actively suppress it by economic manipulation.

Tell me again why I should kill lawfully-seated ministers of the civil government to preserve the rights of the people exploiting me?

Sent from my iPhone

On May 19, 2009, at 4:36 PM, brunians at brunians.org wrote:
I said this in a recent post. I will expand upon it.

Taxation, the extortion of money from the citizens, is permissible for things that are necessary. My list of necessary things includes the military and things related to the military, infrastructure and certain kinds of research. I insist that the involuntary nature of taxation be explicit and resist the inevitable attempts at expansion of the things-to-be-paid-for-by-taxation.

Of course, as a good Jeffersonian, I believe that from time to time it is necessary to shoot the bastards and start over. We're not quite there yet.

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On May 19, 2009, at 4:19 PM, brunians at brunians.org wrote:

But we (the people on the other side of the argument) are none of us arguing for a complete lack of functional civil society and a Hobbesian all-against-all. Were you under the impression that we were?

I don't see how you can get from the position that all taxation is theft to the position that some governments are legitimate without giving up on the first one.

Adam

brunians at brunians.org — 19 May 2009, 21:51 · in reply to Jerry Friedman

I'd be interested in a citation to Washington's writings for the quotation from his writings. It's widely quoted at Google Books with various differences in wording, but the first hit I can find is from 1878 (in the Congressional Record).

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The quotation from Josh Geller appears to go back to Max Weber and to be a compressed, indeed oversimplified, way of saying the government decides what violence is legitimate (including self-defense, which is legitimate violence not carried out by the government).

By the way, who is Josh Geller? (When I ask it that way, the initials are a little disturbing.)

Late twentieth - early twenty-first century aphorist.

"Never postulate conspiracy when stupidity will explain the known facts."

-- Geller's Second Law

.

brunians at brunians.org — 19 May 2009, 21:56 · in reply to Adam Thornton

I calls them like I sees them. I prefer to look straight at things and name them plainly, rather than search for more comforting, euphemistic ways to express plain reality. And I don't think that taxation is something we should be really comfortable with, even if a certain amount is necessary.

By the way, I devote zero effort to evading taxes, and even keep good track of the cash money I make so that I can accurately pay my quarterly taxes.

Extortion makes the world go round....

On May 19, 2009, at 4:36 PM, brunians at brunians.org wrote:

I said this in a recent post. I will expand upon it.

Taxation, the extortion of money from the citizens, is permissible for things that are necessary.

Ah. So "extortion" can, in your world, be a good thing, or at least a necessary evil.

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Adam

Adam Thornton — 19 May 2009, 22:00 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org

On May 19, 2009, at 4:56 PM, brunians at brunians.org wrote:

I calls them like I sees them. I prefer to look straight at things and name them plainly, rather than search for more comforting, euphemistic ways to express plain reality.

Ah, but here is our fundamental disagreement: I don't think "extortion" is any closer to "plain reality" than "dues."

I am, in fact, arguing that the reverse is true. But then I believe we probably, at heart, disagree on "plain reality."

Adam

brunians at brunians.org — 19 May 2009, 22:03 · in reply to Lane Haygood

You're familiar with Thomas Jefferson, right Lane? They taught you about him in law school or college or something, I am sure, and you are just pretending to be ignorant for rhetorical effect.

Go on with you: I am feeling favorably disposed towards you now and have no real desire to explain Jeffersonianism to you, almost certainly falling into one or more of your lawyerly traps along the way. I argue for fun, not blood and would prefer not to engage with a professional unless you tie one lobe of your brain behind your back or something.

...[W]hat country can preserve its liberties, if it's rulers are not warned from time to time, that this people preserve the spirit of resistance? Let them take arms. The remedy is to set them right as to the facts, pardon and pacify them. What signify a few lives lost in a century or two? The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time, with the blood of patriots and tyrants. It is its natural manure.

-- Thomas Jefferson

So your democratically-elected government gets to serve at the pleasure of a small but violent minority? I understand frustration with graft and waste, but calling for rebellion against a lawfully-seated state for carrying out the will of society?

At some point, you realize the value in cooperation, community and shared society. All civilization is based on this premise, that together a people can accomplish what one alone cannot.

The substitution of civil government/society with a profit driven market removes this universally-agreed as beneficial goal of cooperation and replaced it with a unilateral goal of profit. As wealth cannot be created ex nihilo, profit must arise from a producer taking more than a product is worth. This is only possible on a market where supply and demand are manipulated against the interest of the consumer.

Thus, the market is merely the latest iteration of the master-slave relation. It is the battlefield of class conflict. How does calling taxes imposed by a lawful sovereign equal theft, but the creation of profit not equal extortion by a self-selected, undemocratic oligarchy?

Individuals and individual liberty are only meaningful insofar as a civil legal system ensures they are protected. Authoritarian abuses by right and left ignore this. Free markets actively suppress it by economic manipulation.

Tell me again why I should kill lawfully-seated ministers of the civil government to preserve the rights of the people exploiting me?

Sent from my iPhone

On May 19, 2009, at 4:36 PM, brunians at brunians.org wrote:

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Of course, as a good Jeffersonian, I believe that from time to time it is necessary to shoot the bastards and start over. We're not quite there yet.

On May 19, 2009, at 4:19 PM, brunians at brunians.org wrote:

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I don't see how you can get from the position that all taxation is theft to the position that some governments are legitimate without giving up on the first one.

Adam

brunians at brunians.org — 19 May 2009, 22:05 · in reply to Adam Thornton

Reality is what doesn't go away when you stop believing in it.

-- PKD (I think).

.

On May 19, 2009, at 4:56 PM, brunians at brunians.org wrote:

I calls them like I sees them. I prefer to look straight at things and name them plainly, rather than search for more comforting, euphemistic ways to express plain reality.

Ah, but here is our fundamental disagreement: I don't think "extortion" is any closer to "plain reality" than "dues."

I am, in fact, arguing that the reverse is true. But then I believe we probably, at heart, disagree on "plain reality."

Adam

James Wynn — 19 May 2009, 22:06 · in reply to Adam Thornton

Adam, in "The Devil in a Forest", Wolfe presents the issue moral terms. If I'm benefiting from a service more than my neighbor, and also paying less for that service than my neighbor, why is that less shameful than just going to his door and demanding the money? Okay. Here are your three options:

Adam sez:

Of course, "fund it to the same degree," and "robbing from the rich to give to the poor," each themselves admit multiple interpretations. One way of "funding it to the same degree" would be to demand a flat amount from each citizen.

This is actually is the most fair way. But, that's asking way too much fairness from a society of Fallen human beings. On the other hand, if the poor don't like it, I suppose they could move to Mogadishu.

One way would be to impose the same percentage fee on each citizen, regardless of income. This is usually what Libertarians claim to like. However, such a plan ignores the (I think fairly important) observation that the marginal value of money decreases the more of it you have.

Marginal value decreases for whom? Not to the people who work to earn it. You're argument divorces the amount of money made from the people who created it. It assumes that a guy

making \$25K a year is exactly like the guy making \$250K a year except that one happens to make less. It ignores the risks the second guy took in capital, time, and effort in order to create that wealth. It also ignores the fact that the first guy gets far more BENEFIT from non-essential government services than the second guy. Some would say the differences therefore balance out so that both should pay the same rate.

The real reason has nothing to do with marginal values of money. It has to do with practicality. These services are proposed to get a majority of the voting public to like them. So you give out benefits to a larger number and have a smaller number pay the freight. No majority will not vote for 95% of government services if they are seen as fee-for-service. You probably wouldn't. David Stockhoff implied that he found the idea increased taxes appealing because he didn't think he'd pay the bulk of them (or any of them?).

Hence a third way would be to impose a tax that causes the same amount of inconvenience at all levels of income. This is approximately what progressive income taxes attempt to do.

How does a progressive tax provide "the same amount of inconvenience at all levels of income"? Or do you mean "we'll tax you more if you have more and we'll do the same to other guy who has more too"? What if we taxed every one making \$35K-\$50K at 95% and everyone else at 15%. Is that equally logical? But we don't just tax based on income either, do we? Because this is democracy in action. The law-makers cut breaks for certain voting blocks (home-owners, parents, college students, and retirees) while busting others (cigarette smokers and people who drive for a living).

"Robbing from the rich to give to the poor," is simply the same argument stood on its head, of course. Does taxation go from "legitimate" to "robbery" at a value derived from the absolute dollar value of the tax, from a percentage of income across all income ranges, or to a degree of inconvenience across all income ranges?

How can I describe a progressive tax? Say five citizens get together to fund a new well. Hmmm...they could all pay the same amount to dig it, or they could all pay the same percentage of their wealth, OR....they could vote that Moe here--who also has a lake on his property so he doesn't need the well---will pay for half of it because, after all, he can "afford it". How is that different from a two foxes and a hen voting on what to have for supper?

J.

David Stockhoff — 19 May 2009, 22:06 · follows James Wynn

Yeah, Mao and Washington would have found much in common.

--- On Tue, 5/19/09, brunians at brunians.org <brunians at brunians.org> wrote:
From: brunians at brunians.org <brunians at brunians.org>
Mao was a perceptive guy about some things. Power and how to use it, for instance. Decent poet also, I'm told.

Not a very nice man, but pretty smart.

If three people as different as Mao, Washington and Geller agree about something, I'd say it's time to sit up and take notice.

.

If Mao said it, it must be true.

David Stockhoff — 19 May 2009, 22:08 · follows David Stockhoff

Of course you have.

Message: 5

Date: Tue, 19 May 2009 17:44:27 -0400 (EDT)

From: brunians at brunians.org

Subject: Re: (urth) Gene Wolfe Fans Talk Politics (Again)

To: "The Urth Mailing List" <urth at lists.urth.net>

Message-ID: <4290.67.142.130.18.1242769467.squirrel at brunians.org>

Content-Type: text/plain; charset=iso-8859-1

Somalia's economy is not "based on" piracy. It was based on fishing and herding before global shipping killed all the fish.

The fishing went away because Somalia, lacking a government, lacks a Coast Guard (see my post about necessary things which may be paid for by taxation) and therefore every industrial fishing boat in the world went there to glom on their fish.

I think that bits of herding still go on.

Somalia has been a pit for centuries. How did the Italians do running it? I've been in favor of giving large chunks of Africa back to the colonial powers for some time now.

David Stockhoff — 19 May 2009, 22:11 · follows David Stockhoff

I always try to keep that in mind when I read your posts.

Message: 8

Date: Tue, 19 May 2009 17:51:36 -0400 (EDT)

From: brunians at brunians.org

Subject: Re: (urth) Gene Wolfe Fans Talk Politics (Again)

To: "The Urth Mailing List" <urth at lists.urth.net>

Message-ID: <10065.67.142.130.18.1242769896.squirrel at brunians.org>

Content-Type: text/plain; charset=iso-8859-1

By the way, who is Josh Geller? (When I ask it that way, the initials are a little disturbing.)

Late twentieth - early twenty-first century aphorist.

"Never postulate conspiracy when stupidity will explain the known facts."

-- Geller's Second Law

brunians at brunians.org — 19 May 2009, 22:12 · in reply to David Stockhoff

Yeah, Mao and Washington would have found much in common.

They wouldn't have disagreed about the nature of political power, that is for sure.

.

--- On Tue, 5/19/09, brunians at brunians.org <brunians at brunians.org> wrote:

From: brunians at brunians.org <brunians at brunians.org>

Mao was a perceptive guy about some things. Power and how to use it, for instance. Decent poet also, I'm told.

Not a very nice man, but pretty smart.

If three people as different as Mao, Washington and Geller agree about something, I'd say it's time to sit up and take notice.

.

If Mao said it, it must be true.

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Virus Database (VPS): 090519-0, 05/19/2009

Tested on: 5/19/2009 6:06:48 PM

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<http://www.avast.com>

brunians at brunians.org — 19 May 2009, 22:15 · in reply to David Stockhoff

It almost sounds like you have something personal against me. I am not sure why that should be. As far as I know, we have never met.

This is all good clean fun to me.

Keep it gay!

.

I always try to keep that in mind when I read your posts.

Message: 8

Date: Tue, 19 May 2009 17:51:36 -0400 (EDT)

From: brunians at brunians.org

Subject: Re: (urth) Gene Wolfe Fans Talk Politics (Again)

To: "The Urth Mailing List" <urth at lists.urth.net>

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Content-Type: text/plain; charset=iso-8859-1

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Late twentieth - early twenty-first century aphorist.

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-- Geller's Second Law

avast! Antivirus: Outbound message clean.

Virus Database (VPS): 090519-0, 05/19/2009

Tested on: 5/19/2009 6:11:52 PM

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<http://www.avast.com>

Pedro Pereira — 19 May 2009, 22:17 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org

Date: Tue, 19 May 2009 17:36:13 -0400

From: brunians at brunians.org

To: urth at lists.urth.net

Subject: Re: (urth) Gene Wolfe Fans Talk Politics (Again)

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I don't want to meddle too much on this discussion but your statements make me curious.

"My list of necessary things includes the

military and things related to the military, infrastructure and certain kinds of research."

YOUR list. Basically you're OK with extortion of money from its citizens by the government AS LONG as it according to what YOU think is necessary. This means that everyone in this list, from

what I gather, is OK with the extortion, the only thing that really changes is the degree of said extortion or, more realistically, as long as the money goes into what each one of us thinks it should go. This amounts to no real change in the nature of the political system itself whatsoever, just a change on the degree to which a state taxes and applies the money.

The problem resumes itself than to WHO gets to decide where the money goes? My guess is through voting, which is the system that is already in place. That entails no change in the nature of government at all. In the end that's what the US already has. It's up to you people to decide in how much do you want to be robbed and on what should the robbers put the money in.

Steven — 19 May 2009, 22:57 · in reply to Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

On May 19, 2009, at 5:01 PM, Dan'l Danehy-Oakes wrote:
The Mormons have an excellent (and voluntary) social welfare system, which they pay for themselves, by tithing. I have often thought that something of the kind could be adapted for people who would like this kind of security and don't want to necessarily be Mormon.

I was born and raised Mormon, left in adolescence. They shovel a heap of shame on any monies they pay out as welfare. A heaping pile. Not many of them have the stomach to accept under those conditions.

Steven Bowen
<http://bowenfinearts.com/>

Jerry Friedman — 19 May 2009, 22:58 · follows brunians at brunians.org

--- On Tue, 5/19/09, brunians at brunians.org <brunians at brunians.org> wrote:
Good in this context means 'well (or competently) done'.

Sure. To restate what I said more concisely, propaganda is one of those things that I don't prefer to be done competently.

Jerry Friedman

--- On Mon, 5/18/09, brunians at brunians.org
<brunians at brunians.org>
wrote:

I'm grateful for this discussion, because when I read tDiaF I thought it was just a quaint, but obvious, morality tale. Now, I realize that it isn't so "on the nose" at all. It's actually a quite exquisite bit of propaganda (unlike say "Atlas Shrugged"). Truly masterful propaganda is one where the audience doesn't realize it's being propagandized.

Really good propaganda will have people denying that it is

propaganda.

It depends on what you mean by "good". I suppose you could say that a really "good" thief or murderer doesn't get caught, but I think the quotation marks are appropriate.

Some propaganda helps bring about many deaths.

The kind that people are describing in /The Devil in a Forest/ (which I haven't read) is presumably far less harmful, but I still prefer political arguments with the cards on the table.

I find it very interesting that many of the people who disagree with Wolfe's politics argue that it is not there.

While a number of others know it's there but disagree with it.

Socialism is, when it comes down to it, a process of pretending that the World is different from the way it actually is.

There are lots of -isms and -ities in that category.

Jerry Friedman

Adam Thornton — 19 May 2009, 23:09 · in reply to James Wynn

On May 19, 2009, at 5:06 PM, James Wynn wrote:
Marginal value decreases for whom? Not to the people who work to earn it.

That's exactly what I was saying: for the people who work to earn it. At least, for *me*.

I was arguing from my own experience: the marginal value of the \$30,000 between an income of \$30K and \$60K was much, much less than of the \$15,000 between \$15K and \$30K.

You're argument divorces the amount of money made from the people who created it.

Well, in my case, yeah, it's the same guy. Modulo Heraclitus and stuff. So that factor is controlled for.

It assumes that a guy making \$25K a year is exactly like the guy making \$250K a year except that one happens to make less.

Yes and no. I mean, sure, there is a reason I eventually started getting paid more money: I was doing jobs that required skills that were rarer, or at least more valued by the people willing to employ me, and I had acquired those skills through experience and training. But on the other hand, I'm still in some important sense the me I was twenty years ago.

But I'm not arguing that I shouldn't be making more money; I'm arguing that taxation taking 25% of the \$60,000 of the top-earning me in my example hurts a lot less than taking 15% of the \$15,000 I was making as low-earning me. (Now, to be fair, I am nowhere near sure these represent even approximate actual tax rates when those were about my income levels, and I'm not about to go digging through my tax records to find out.)

It ignores the risks the second guy took in capital, time, and effort in order to create that wealth.

How so? Those risks are compensated in the increased pay, aren't they? I mean, by your argument, I should be doing four times the work to generate four times the income, right? I'm certainly not. My job now is **much** more interesting and much less unpleasant than when I was making crap wages. Jobs that involve serious physical labor--and are thus, in many senses, the hardest--tend to also be at the bottom of the pay scale. And sure, it took a lot of time and learning to get here, but the time spent **still** beat digging ditches.

It also ignores the fact that the first guy gets far more BENEFIT from non-essential government services than the second guy.

Some more, sure: I rode a lot more public transport when I was poorer than I do now. Far more, not so sure. I probably walk or ride a bike around in public parks **more** now since--again, in my experience-- higher-paying jobs tend to come with more flexible schedules. There are a lot of nonessential services I don't use, and never did, but I don't begrudge the fact that I'm funding them: some people DO get value out of their services and there's value to me in those people being happier.

Some would say the differences therefore balance out so that both should pay the same rate.

And I don't.

Should Moe pay for half the well? I don't know. What's the benefit to him of building the well at all? What are the downsides to him if the well is not built? Should the well's costs be recouped through a per-liter charge on its usage, with the costs repaid to the financiers of the project, or is it actually going to be presented as a common good? If the latter, how much does Moe value his participation in the society that he and his neighbors constitute? If the answer is "not that much," does he get to be sad if he then has to provide his own fire protection if he withdraws from their society?

Adam

Jordon Flato — 19 May 2009, 23:26 · in reply to Adam Thornton

I currently make above \$80,000. I have made a little more than that in the recent past, and MUCH MUCH less than that in the more distant past.

I'm certainly not speaking for everyone, but what I do now is MUCH MUCH easier and more rewarding than what I did when I earned \$7.50 an hour, or \$12.00 an hour.

I think it's a sad myth that those who make less money work less hard than those who 'generate' wealth. Some who hold that position have undoubtedly held menial jobs. Many have not. I think you must be disqualified from making a statement like that unless you've worked a

labor intensive low wage job.

I know that is an old canard. But I've found it true in my case.

And I've certainly 'earned' my way to where I am. I am from a very low income family, with no breaks given to me, and only through my own dumb luck and ingenuity have I reached my current position of relative economic security. However, I consensually pay my taxes, and appreciate the need of society to deal with all of it's members in an equitable and humanitarian way. When I was a child, I certainly benefited from the Welfare system. My mom was off and on it for some time (not because she didn't work hard, but because time were tough, and she had a hard time as a single mother providing for me). Now that I'm the one paying into the system, I'm grateful to be able to help people who were once in my position. Why should I not want to pay into the system that helped me get where I am today? If not for those welfare programs, I would not be able to be where I am, nor able to pay back into the system.

There is no system in place in the small town I grew up in for Private Education. Where would that come from? Would I have to rely on a Religious education? What alternative system are you proposing that wouldn't require a lifetimes worth of retooling/reinventing/locating private funding for that wouldn't hamper an entire generation of future 'wealth creators'?

And this worship of the free market makes my skin crawl. It is a great system, with a lot going for it. But it is as morally bankrupt and corrupt as the government, or more so. How is the Free Market any less oriented toward robbery?

In any event, I'm not going to be able to argue this in any coherent fashion at this point, so I should just back out.

On Tue, May 19, 2009 at 4:09 PM, Adam Thornton <adam at io.com> wrote:

On May 19, 2009, at 5:06 PM, James Wynn wrote:

Marginal value decreases for whom? Not to the people who work to earn it.

That's exactly what I was saying: for the people who work to earn it. At least, for *me*.

I was arguing from my own experience: the marginal value of the \$30,000 between an income of \$30K and \$60K was much, much less than of the \$15,000 between \$15K and \$30K.

You're argument divorces the amount of money made from the people who created it.

Well, in my case, yeah, it's the same guy. Modulo Heraclitus and stuff. So that factor is controlled for.

It assumes that a guy making \$25K a year is exactly like the guy making \$250K a year except that one happens to make less.

Yes and no. I mean, sure, there is a reason I eventually started getting paid more money: I was doing jobs that required skills that were rarer, or at least more valued by the people willing to employ me, and I had acquired those skills through experience and training. But on the other hand, I'm still in some important sense the me I was twenty years ago.

But I'm not arguing that I shouldn't be making more money; I'm arguing that taxation taking 25% of the \$60,000 of the top-earning me in my example hurts a lot less than taking 15% of the \$15,000 I was making as low-earning me. (Now, to be fair, I am nowhere near sure these represent even approximate

actual tax rates when those were about my income levels, and I'm not about to go digging through my tax records to find out.)

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How so? Those risks are compensated in the increased pay, aren't they? I mean, by your argument, I should be doing four times the work to generate four times the income, right? I'm certainly not. My job now is **much** more interesting and much less unpleasant than when I was making crap wages. Jobs that involve serious physical labor--and are thus, in many senses, the hardest--tend to also be at the bottom of the pay scale. And sure, it took a lot of time and learning to get here, but the time spent **still** beat digging ditches.

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Some more, sure: I rode a lot more public transport when I was poorer than I do now. Far more, not so sure. I probably walk or ride a bike around in public parks **more** now since--again, in my experience--higher-paying jobs tend to come with more flexible schedules. There are a lot of nonessential services I don't use, and never did, but I don't begrudge the fact that I'm funding them: some people DO get value out of their services and there's value to me in those people being happier.

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And I don't.

Should Moe pay for half the well? I don't know. What's the benefit to him of building the well at all? What are the downsides to him if the well is not built? Should the well's costs be recouped through a per-liter charge on its usage, with the costs repaid to the financiers of the project, or is it actually going to be presented as a common good? If the latter, how much does Moe value his participation in the society that he and his neighbors constitute? If the answer is "not that much," does he get to be sad if he then has to provide his own fire protection if he withdraws from their society?

Adam

Jerry Friedman — 20 May 2009, 00:05 · follows Jordon Flato

--- On Tue, 5/19/09, brunians at brunians.org <brunians at brunians.org> wrote:
I'd be interested in a citation to Washington's writings
for the quotation from his writings. It's widely quoted
at Google Books with various differences in wording,
but
the first hit I can find is from 1878 (in the Congressional
Record).

There are no hits on "Washington government

force fire servant master" at yale.edu, which includes "The Papers of George Washington".

http://avalon.law.yale.edu/subject_menus/washpap.asp

But that may not mean anything, as some books date the quotation to 1785, and the Yale collection has nothing that early.

This site (which seems to support a right to gun ownership, but I just glanced at it) calls the quotation "bogus", along with many others attributed to the Founding Fathers.

<http://www.guncite.com/gc2ndbog.html>

The quotation from Josh Geller appears to go back to Max Weber and to be a compressed, indeed oversimplified, way of saying the government decides what violence is legitimate (including self-defense, which is legitimate violence not carried out by the government).

By the way, who is Josh Geller? (When I ask it that way, the initials are a little disturbing.)

Late twentieth - early twenty-first century aphorist.

"Never postulate conspiracy when stupidity will explain the known facts."

-- Geller's Second Law

You sure he's not someone who modifies quotations and puts his name after them? That one looks like, "You have attributed conditions to villainy that simply result from stupidity," from Heinlein's "Logic of Empire". Wikipedia traces the idea back to Goethe's /Werther/, "...misunderstandings and neglect create more confusion in this world than trickery and malice. At any rate, the last two are certainly much less frequent."

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hanlon%27s_Razor

I don't think I'd trust Geller on quotations from George Washington either.

Jerry Friedman

brunians at brunians.org — 20 May 2009, 00:07 · in reply to Steven

Well, I'd think you'd have to minimize the shame-heaping aspects if you wanted to adapt the system for general use, but that doesn't mean it can't be done.

Doesn't change the principal, I don't think.

On May 19, 2009, at 5:01 PM, Dan'I Danehy-Oakes wrote:

The Mormons have an excellent (and voluntary) social welfare system, which they pay for themselves, by tithing. I have often thought that something of the kind could be adapted for people who would like this kind of security and don't want to necessarily be Mormon.

I was born and raised Mormon, left in adolescence. They shovel a heap of shame on any monies they pay out as welfare. A heaping pile. Not many of them have the stomach to accept under those conditions.

Steven Bowen
<http://bowenfinearts.com/>

brunians at brunians.org — 20 May 2009, 00:11 · in reply to Jerry Friedman

You're entitled to your opinion. I personally think of it as an art and the great propagandists as artists.

--- On Tue, 5/19/09, brunians at brunians.org <brunians at brunians.org> wrote:

Good in this context means 'well (or competently) done'.

Sure. To restate what I said more concisely, propaganda is one of those things that I don't prefer to be done competently.

Jerry Friedman

--- On Mon, 5/18/09, brunians at brunians.org
<brunians at brunians.org>
wrote:

I'm grateful for this discussion, because when I read tDiaF I thought it was just a quaint, but obvious, morality tale. Now, I realize that it isn't so "on the nose" at all. It's actually a quite exquisite bit of propaganda (unlike say "Atlas Shrugged"). Truly masterful propaganda is one where the audience doesn't realize it's being propagandized.

Really good propaganda will have people denying that it is propaganda.

It depends on what you mean by "good". I suppose you could say that a really "good" thief or murderer doesn't get caught, but I think the quotation marks are appropriate.

Some propaganda helps bring about many deaths.

The kind that people are describing in /The Devil in a Forest/ (which I haven't read) is presumably far less harmful, but I still prefer political arguments with the cards on the table.

I find it very interesting that many of the people who disagree with Wolfe's politics argue that it is not there.

While a number of others know it's there but disagree with it.

Socialism is, when it comes down to it, a process of pretending that the World is different from the way it actually is.

There are lots of -isms and -ities in that category.

Jerry Friedman

Adam Thornton — 20 May 2009, 00:12 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org

On May 19, 2009, at 7:07 PM, brunians at brunians.org wrote:
Well, I'd think you'd have to minimize the shame-heaping aspects if you wanted to adapt the system for general use, but that doesn't mean it can't be done.

Isn't that the engine that drives the whole thing?

Since I know you have a tendency to narrowly-construe if it suits your argument, I will amplify:

Traditional "extortionate" taxation uses the threat of incarceration and seizure of assets as the stick to drive the recalcitrant mule to puke up the carrot of tax revenue.

The Mormon model uses the fear of community shaming. Even I am not so naive about human nature to think this will work in the absence of a stick of some sort. I mean, I do it myself about

public radio (inter alia): most years, I feel like I **should** be giving my local NPR station some money, but I always have an excuse for not doing it, and uneasy guilt isn't quite enough for me to pull out the checkbook.

Adam

James Wynn — 20 May 2009, 00:30 · in reply to Adam Thornton

Adam opines

Should Moe pay for half the well? I don't know. What's the benefit to him of building the well at all? What are the downsides to him if the well is not built? Should the well's costs be recouped through a per-liter charge on its usage, with the costs repaid to the financiers of the project, or is it actually going to be presented as a common good? If the latter, how much does Moe value his participation in the society that he and his neighbors constitute? If the answer is "not that much," does he get to be sad if he then has to provide his own fire protection if he withdraws from their society?

We don't have to consider those things. Neither does Moe. We are more numerous than Moe. We're not negotiating with Moe. If Moe complains we'll denounce him as greedy and do what we want anyway. Moe can bend over and take the shaft.

It assumes that a guy making \$25K a year is exactly like the guy making \$250K a year except that one happens to make less.

Yes and no. I mean, sure, there is a reason I eventually started getting paid more money: I was doing jobs that required skills that were rarer, or at least more valued by the people willing to employ me, and I had acquired those skills through experience and training. But on the other hand, I'm still in some important sense the me I was twenty years ago.

You are not the same person at \$60K that you were when you made \$15K. You have skills that you were motivated to develop in order to earn more. You have a history of steady, reliable work that you were motivated to create out of a desire for money (not a desire for a better "public space"). Stop and consider that you are currently making more than the mean salary in this country. That didn't just fall in your lap. What if society were engineered so you could depend on making say...\$25K per year from the get go, and start taxing you more as you progress. There's a good chance your work history would be vastly different.

Your claim that your 25% of \$60K is less than 15% of \$15K suggests you think you're being over-paid. But consider that your perspective might be colored by the fact that you paid no income tax when you made \$15K, and now that you make \$60K, depending on your situation, you probably pay little or none as well. Someone else is making up that difference for you. Are you proud of that?

On the other hand, from then til now you almost certainly paid a significant Social Security ***flat tax***. What is not readily apparent is that your employer pays it as well. Making the cost of just hiring you and your fellow employees to be the largest expense they've taken on--which is passed on you as a consumer. Your welfare state is a self-justifying system, since it makes it more expensive just to get started in life and makes jobs harder to find.

J.

Daniel D Jones — 20 May 2009, 00:33 · in reply to David Stockhoff

On Tuesday 19 May 2009 09:51:30 David Stockhoff wrote:
Daniel, you really don't know how things work, do you?

I've managed to stay alive for over forty years, served twenty years and then retired from the armed forces, traveled to over thirty foreign countries, raised three kids, am helping to raise ten grandkids, and I've tried damn near anything you care to mention at least once, twice if I liked it. I think I've got a pretty good clue how things work. Is there something you need some advice on?

----- Message: 5 Date: Mon, 18 May 2009
18:05:22 -0400 From: Daniel D Jones <ddjones at riddlemaster.org> Subject:
Re: (urth) Urth Digest, Vol 57, Issue 16 To: The Urth Mailing List
<urth at lists.urth.net> Message-ID:
<200905181805.22952.ddjones at riddlemaster.org> Content-Type: Text/Plain;

charset="iso-8859-1" On Monday 18 May 2009 17:29:58 David Stockhoff wrote:

And finally, I agree with your quoted description of socialism. But it clearly has nothing to do with robbing anyone. Governments redistribute wealth all the time.

Do you think that because it's done under the blessing of governmental authority it's any less a taking by force than were it the act of a highwayman? And the assertion that "it's done all the time" is quite orthogonal to the issue of whether or not it's justified.

Did you know that usury, which has been illegal since the Byzantine emperors, is now legal in the US? It's called "payday loans." They are illegal for a reason---and the government that can create them and make them legal, thus imposing and enforcing them on the poor, can reverse that to create a more just system. Incrementally speaking, that's socialism.

What sort of doublespeak is this? In what way did the government create them? In what way is the government imposing or enforcing them on the poor? Are there government agents going out into neighborhoods forcing people to take payday loans?

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Tested on: 5/19/2009 9:51:31 AM
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<http://www.avast.com>

brunians at brunians.org — 20 May 2009, 00:36 · in reply to Daniel D Jones
Jackpot!

pulls up chair and listens

On Tuesday 19 May 2009 09:51:30 David Stockhoff wrote:

Daniel, you really don't know how things work, do you?

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retired from the armed forces, traveled to over thirty foreign countries, raised three kids, am helping to raise ten grandkids, and I've tried damn near

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David Stockhoff — 20 May 2009, 00:38 · follows brunians at brunians.org

No, thanks. But I suggest you try reading things that don't reinforce your existing beliefs. You may learn something.

Message: 3
Date: Tue, 19 May 2009 20:33:17 -0400
From: Daniel D Jones <ddjones at riddlemaster.org>
Subject: Re: (urth) Urth Digest, Vol 57, Issue 16
To: The Urth Mailing List <urth at lists.urth.net>
Message-ID: <200905192033.17313.ddjones at riddlemaster.org>
Content-Type: Text/Plain; charset="iso-8859-1"

On Tuesday 19 May 2009 09:51:30 David Stockhoff wrote:

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I've managed to stay alive for over forty years, served twenty years and then retired from the armed forces, traveled to over thirty foreign countries, raised three kids, am helping to raise ten grandkids, and I've tried damn near anything you care to mention at least once, twice if I liked it. I think I've got a pretty good clue how things work. Is there something you need some advice on?

John Watkins — 20 May 2009, 00:42 · in reply to David Stockhoff

David., is the assumption you're making about Daniel's reading habits warranted?

I am not a fan of the argument that those who disagree with one must simply not be readers. There are claims that justify that assumption, but most of them are not ideological in nature.

On Tue, May 19, 2009 at 8:38 PM, David Stockhoff <dstockhoff at verizon.net> wrote:
No, thanks. But I suggest you try reading things that don't reinforce your existing beliefs. You may learn something.

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Date: Tue, 19 May 2009 20:33:17 -0400
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Subject: Re: (urth) Urth Digest, Vol 57, Issue 16
To: The Urth Mailing List <urth at lists.urth.net>
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Daniel D Jones — 20 May 2009, 00:52 · in reply to Adam Thornton

On Tuesday 19 May 2009 17:09:43 Adam Thornton wrote:
"Robbing from the rich to give to the poor," is simply the same argument stood on its head, of course. Does taxation go from "legitimate" to "robbery" at a value derived from the absolute dollar value of the tax, from a percentage of income across all income ranges, or to a degree of inconvenience across all income ranges?

Taxation goes from "legitimate" to "robbery" when it's taken for an illegitimate purpose. Government has one legitimate function - to protect the rights of the individual. Everything else is illegitimate and taxes for those purposes are robbery.

Adam Thornton — 20 May 2009, 00:52 · in reply to James Wynn

On May 19, 2009, at 7:30 PM, James Wynn wrote:
We don't have to consider those things. Neither does Moe. We are more numerous than Moe. We're not negotiating with Moe. If Moe complains we'll denounce him as greedy and do what we want anyway. Moe can bend over and take the shaft.

...Except that Moe can afford better things than we can. Including weapons.

It assumes that a guy making \$25K a year is exactly like the guy making \$250K a year except that one happens to make less.

Yes and no. I mean, sure, there is a reason I eventually started getting paid more money: I was doing jobs that required skills that were rarer, or at least more valued by the people willing to employ me, and I had acquired those skills through experience and training. But on the other hand, I'm still in some important sense the me I was twenty years ago.

You are not the same person at \$60K that you were when you made \$15K. You have skills that you were motivated to develop in order to earn more. You have a history of steady, reliable work that you were motivated to create out of a desire for money (not a desire for a better "public space").

If you view me-as-a-person purely as me-as-a-device-for-earning-money, you may have a point. Though not, even then, a particularly good one. To start with, that's not really been my motivation for learning my skills. Sure, "to make enough money that I can have a comfortable and pleasant lifestyle" is a strpmg motivator, and I did not have that thing at \$15K. I pretty much **did** have it at \$30K. Much more of the motivation is that whatever-it-is-I-have-to-do-to-maintain-that- minimally-pleasant-lifestyle be as non-onerous as possible.

The interesting thing is that jobs that require I **think** more and better seem to pay more than ones where I don't have to. Despite the fact that sitting on my ass in front of a computer screen and thinking is much less strenuous work than digging ditches, waiting tables, or even shelving books.

Stop and consider that you are currently making more than the mean salary in this country. That didn't just fall in your lap. What if society were engineered so you could depend on making say...\$25K per year from the get go, and start taxing you more as you progress. There's a good chance your work history would be vastly different.

It would depend on how much I liked the life of doing nothing and living in mild poverty. So, yeah, it might. On the other hand: getting paid to find ways you could do the same IT tasks with much less expensive software is pretty fun, and shelving books isn't. (Yeah, I never had a **truly** menial job, and my only foodservice jobs were semipro bartending (that is, tending bar for private functions-- it's an excellent source of beer money (and, uh, beer) in grad school, especially since you're being paid a pittance but you also generally get to keep any tips, and there's no inventory control, so where's your incentive to not give proper damn pours (which, of course, influence tips?)), which was actually pretty fun too.)

Your claim that your 25% of \$60K is less than 15% of \$15K suggests you think you're being over-paid.

Actually, I specifically said that I didn't think I was being overpaid a bit farther down. I'm saying that a dollar means a lot more at \$12750 than it does at \$45000.

And certainly my current job, which largely consists of helping already rich entities get even richer by saving them money they pay in license fees to various software vendors to license the tools they need to perform their IT tasks, by finding them lower-cost alternatives and supplying glue to enable those alternatives to perform equivalent jobs, is worth much more to those rich entities than me-shelving-books is. Much more than 4 times as much, I'm sure.

But consider that your perspective might be colored by the fact that you paid no income tax when you made \$15K, and now that you make \$60K, depending on your situation, you probably pay little or none as well. Someone else is making up that difference for you. Are you proud of that?

How do I pay little or none now, and who's making up the difference? I lost the thread of your argument.

On the other hand, from then til now you almost certainly paid a significant Social Security ***flat tax***. What is not readily apparent is that your employer pays it as well. Making the cost of just hiring you and your fellow employees to be the largest expense they've taken on--which is passed on you as a consumer. Your welfare state is a self-justifying system, since it makes it more expensive just to get started in life and makes jobs harder to find.

On the other hand, it means if I don't find a job, I don't starve in the street, right? That's a trade I'll take. And as a business owner--yeah, been one of those too; not much fun--it's also a trade

I'll take. As you say, I get to pass on my costs, and if I fire someone, well, I'm probably not actually condemning them to starve. I'll pay a bit for that conscience-salve.

Adam

James Wynn — 20 May 2009, 00:55 · in reply to Adam Thornton

I said:

It ignores the risks the second guy took in capital, time, and effort in order to create that wealth.

Adam responded:

How so? Those risks are compensated in the increased pay, aren't they?

I mean, by your argument, I should be doing four times the work to generate four times the income, right? I'm certainly not. My job now is **much** more interesting and much less unpleasant than when I was making crap wages. Jobs that involve serious physical labor--and are thus, in many senses, the hardest--tend to also be at the bottom of the pay scale. And sure, it took a lot of time and learning to get here, but the time spent **still** beat digging ditches.

And Jordan responded:

I currently make above \$80,000. I have made a little more than that in the recent past, and MUCH MUCH less than that in the more distant past. I'm certainly not speaking for everyone, but what I do now is MUCH MUCH easier and more rewarding than what I did when I earned \$7.50 an hour, or \$12.00 an hour.

It sounds to me like you guys are over-paid. You should mention that your employers/customers.

Jordan:

I think it's a sad myth that those who make less money work less hard than those who 'generate' wealth. Some who hold that position have undoubtedly help menial jobs. Many have not. I think you must be disqualified from making a statement like that unless you've worked a labor intensive low wage job.

I have and I'll wager most of the people in the top 20% of wage earners have. In fact, many of those are ****performing**** menial jobs.

Jordan:

And this worship of the free market makes my skin crawl. It is a great system, with a lot going for it. But it is as morally bankrupt and corrupt as the government, or more so. How is the Free Market any less oriented toward robbery?

Jordan, you say you're making over \$80K per year. Have you risked bankruptcy to take your job? Have you sunk your retirement in your job? Because, that's the sort of thing that the top 20% have done. That's the sort of thing that people who employ the bottom 30% do.

We use words for all the time for things that don't exist. "Corporation" "Government" "Free Market". None of these things exist. They just words for people. The Free Market is not oriented toward robbery. That's ludicrous. They offer you something. You pay them for it. If the don't deliver you can take them to court and/or smear their names with future customers. But only the Government can FORCE you to do anything. Only the Government cannot be sued unless they say so. But that's the one you trust?

J.

brunians at brunians.org — 20 May 2009, 00:56 · in reply to Adam Thornton

On May 19, 2009, at 7:30 PM, James Wynn wrote:

We don't have to consider those things. Neither does Moe. We are more numerous than Moe. We're not negotiating with Moe. If Moe complains we'll denounce him as greedy and do what we want anyway. Moe can bend over and take the shaft.

...Except that Moe can afford better things than we can. Including weapons.

That's why we're using the democratic process to steal from him. Then we can send the cops after him if he still balks.

.

Adam Thornton — 20 May 2009, 01:02 · in reply to Daniel D Jones

On May 19, 2009, at 7:52 PM, Daniel D Jones wrote:

On Tuesday 19 May 2009 17:09:43 Adam Thornton wrote:

"Robbing from the rich to give to the poor," is simply the same argument stood on its head, of course. Does taxation go from "legitimate" to "robbery" at a value derived from the absolute dollar value of the tax, from a percentage of income across all income ranges, or to a degree of inconvenience across all income ranges?

Taxation goes from "legitimate" to "robbery" when it's taken for an illegitimate purpose. Government has one legitimate function - to protect the rights of the individual. Everything else is illegitimate and taxes for those purposes are robbery.

Concisely put.

What are the rights of the individual?

Adam

Daniel D Jones — 20 May 2009, 01:03 · in reply to David Stockhoff

On Tuesday 19 May 2009 17:21:26 David Stockhoff wrote:

The key term here is not "voluntary" and it's not "consensual." It's "consent"---as in "the consent of the governed." It's nothing like what you are thinking of.

Google that phrase. Some kinds of education must be self-motivated.

Google "US Civil War" and then come back and talk to me about "consent of the governed."

brunians at brunians.org — 20 May 2009, 01:12 · in reply to Adam Thornton

Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, according to one famous document. The first draft said 'life, liberty and property', and property is also very important. Some people think it might have been better to leave it as it was. This is not necessarily an exclusive list.

.

On May 19, 2009, at 7:52 PM, Daniel D Jones wrote:

On Tuesday 19 May 2009 17:09:43 Adam Thornton wrote:

"Robbing from the rich to give to the poor," is simply the same argument stood on its head, of course. Does taxation go from "legitimate" to "robbery" at a value derived from the absolute dollar value of the tax, from a percentage of income across all income ranges, or to a degree of inconvenience across all income ranges?

Taxation goes from "legitimate" to "robbery" when it's taken for an illegitimate purpose. Government has one legitimate function - to protect the rights of the individual. Everything else is illegitimate and taxes for those purposes are robbery.

Concisely put.

What are the rights of the individual?

Adam

David Stockhoff — 20 May 2009, 01:18 · follows John Watkins

John, you are the peacemaker, so I bow to your authority as such. I will make no more war against Daniel and his people.

But, really, if you don't know about something, you Google it. Why respond to a serious post with nothing but "WTF"?

Governments apparently have strange powers. The extreme right pretends to consider the government useless, a parasitic appendage, and yet they say it must be got out of the way before anything good can happen (but they never will). How is this possible?

Answer: They know only enough about the topic to keep themselves pissed off, and to identify one another in online forums, and to erect barriers of noise against everyone else who wanders along.

Message: 2

Date: Tue, 19 May 2009 20:42:07 -0400

From: John Watkins <john.watkins04 at gmail.com>

Subject: Re: (urth) Urth Digest, Vol 57, Issue 16

To: The Urth Mailing List <urth at lists.urth.net>

Message-ID:

<93d4039f0905191742k2c9494dcpfb2796713fa32179 at mail.gmail.com>

Content-Type: text/plain; charset="iso-8859-1"

David., is the assumption you're making about Daniel's reading habits warranted?

I am not a fan of the argument that those who disagree with one must simply not be readers. There are claims that justify that assumption, but most of them are not ideological in nature.

On Tue, May 19, 2009 at 8:38 PM, David Stockhoff <dstockhoff at verizon.net> wrote:

No, thanks. But I suggest you try reading things that don't reinforce your existing beliefs. You may learn something.

David Stockhoff — 20 May 2009, 01:20 · follows brunians at brunians.org

Oops, I spoke too soon.

Welcome, wingnut!

Message: 5

Date: Tue, 19 May 2009 20:52:18 -0400

From: Daniel D Jones <ddjones at riddlemaster.org>

Subject: Re: (urth) Gene Wolfe Fans Talk Politics (Again)

To: The Urth Mailing List <urth at lists.urth.net>

Message-ID: <200905192052.18366.ddjones at riddlemaster.org>

Content-Type: Text/Plain; charset="iso-8859-1"

On Tuesday 19 May 2009 17:09:43 Adam Thornton wrote:

"Robbing from the rich to give to the poor," is simply the same argument stood on its head, of course. Does taxation go from "legitimate" to "robbery" at a value derived from the absolute dollar value of the tax, from a percentage of income across all income ranges, or to a degree of inconvenience across all income ranges?

Taxation goes from "legitimate" to "robbery" when it's taken for an illegitimate purpose. Government has one legitimate function - to protect the rights of the individual. Everything else is illegitimate and taxes for those purposes are robbery.

David Stockhoff — 20 May 2009, 01:24 · follows David Stockhoff

Sorry, when did I say the American Civil War was justified? It was not. See, I've read up on it a bit.

BTW, in my last post, I meant to add a ";" after I called you a wingnut.

You're still a wingnut, but I don't mean it in a nasty way. ;)

Message: 6

Date: Tue, 19 May 2009 21:03:48 -0400

From: Daniel D Jones <ddjones at riddlemaster.org>

Subject: Re: (urth) Gene Wolfe Fans Talk Politics (Again)

To: The Urth Mailing List <urth at lists.urth.net>

Message-ID: <200905192103.49068.ddjones at riddlemaster.org>

Content-Type: Text/Plain; charset="iso-8859-1"

On Tuesday 19 May 2009 17:21:26 David Stockhoff wrote:

The key term here is not "voluntary" and it's not "consensual." It's "consent"---as in "the consent of the governed." It's nothing like what you are thinking of.

Google that phrase. Some kinds of education must be self-motivated.

Google "US Civil War" and then come back and talk to me about "consent of the governed."

Adam Thornton — 20 May 2009, 01:27 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org

On May 19, 2009, at 8:12 PM, brunians at brunians.org wrote:
Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, according to one famous document. The first draft said 'life, liberty and property', and property is also very important. Some people think it might have been better to leave it as it was. This is not necessarily an exclusive list.

However, in order to determine what the legitimate function of government, as defined as "to protect the rights of the individual," is, surely we need an exhaustive list, don't we?

Otherwise, who is to say that I am wrong if I declare that it is my right to take Alyson Hannigan and Summer Glau as my concubines? I suspect strongly that no one else on the list would agree with such an assertion that this was a legitimate right of mine as an individual, and I suspect even *more* strongly that the women in question would disagree vehemently.

Adam

Transentient — 20 May 2009, 02:24 · in reply to Adam Thornton

This thread was interesting for a very brief time and then it became annoying, and more annoying by degrees, until I realized that I cannot stand to read another word typed by, basically, any of you, though that is really the fault of the two or three of you who apparently have no useful lives outside of espousing entirely irrelevant political viewpoints using outdated social networking technology.

I hope you guys enjoy the next eight years of Democratic hegemony. Here's a hint: you might want to get off your asses and either try to take the GOP away from the Christian Right, or try to build an actual libertarian political party that might have some hope of bringing about this Jeffersonian utopia you crave, populated entirely by manly, bearded yeoman farmer-engineers. Or whatever it is that is supposed to be good about the world you want to have.

Thanks,
Cliff

Lane Haygood — 20 May 2009, 05:56 · in reply to Daniel D Jones

I go out for one nice dinner with my wife and look what happens!

In brief, let me say that anyone who is interested in actually listening to a commie pinko about

these things can e-mail me, respond at my blog (<http://citizen-lane.blogspot.com>) or just read up on your own at <http://www.marxists.org>. You might be surprised by how inauthentic a picture of socialism one gets from a US education, particularly in the realm of economics, where neoclassical liberalism rules the roost. We're not out of the shadow of McCarthyism yet.

Now, back to Wolfe. I bought "There Are Doors" at a used bookstore last week. I am thoroughly impressed.

brunians at brunians.org — 20 May 2009, 06:30 · in reply to Lane Haygood

Hey Lane, meeting you has been a real treat. I'm looking forward to getting to know you better.

I go out for one nice dinner with my wife and look what happens!

In brief, let me say that anyone who is interested in actually listening to a commie pinko about these things can e-mail me, respond at my blog (<http://citizen-lane.blogspot.com>) or just read up on your own at <http://www.marxists.org>. You might be surprised by how inauthentic a picture of socialism one gets from a US education, particularly in the realm of economics, where neoclassical liberalism rules the roost. We're not out of the shadow of McCarthyism yet.

Now, back to Wolfe. I bought "There Are Doors" at a used bookstore last week. I am thoroughly impressed.

O'Donnell, Tim BOSI — 20 May 2009, 09:20 · follows brunians at brunians.org

James,

I think the flight of wealthy Americans to Ireland is as we had until recently a special law here allowing artists to pay no tax. The law has since been done away with and we saw an outflux of some of our wealthiest citizens.

(Aside: Including U2 who went to another tax free haven. I find it a little annoying that Bono asks us to donate money to charity all the time when he is unwilling to pay his tax bill.)

As for Europeans fleeing to America because they are working as waiters in Europe, I think this is inaccurate.

In the pre-credit crunch days there were huge rates of employment in Ireland (about 97%) and across Europe

(averaging about 94%). In a recent poll run by my college following up on those who graduated 5 years ago 70% of my class were in industry, 25% were in further education and the rest were occupied in various ways.

Message: 1

Date: Tue, 19 May 2009 15:25:37 -0500

From: "James Wynn" <crushtv@gmail.com>

Subject: Re: (urth) Gene Wolfe Fans Talk Politics (Again)

To: "The Urth Mailing List" <urth at lists.urth.net>
Message-ID: <50586EEE2CA14862AA7A038867E0B211 at eMachinePC>
Content-Type: text/plain; format=flowed; charset="iso-8859-1";
reply-type=response

You can say that "Well, we live in a society, and that's just the burden that rich people will have to bear to live in it with us. Fine. The Wall Street Journal has an article yesterday by Art Laffer on what the response of rich people is to that ultimatum.

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB124260067214828295.html>

They leave.

Just as the pilgrims left when Wat set up shop in the forest.

Adam sez: And yet, I see very few millionaires moving to Mogadishu. Why do you suppose that is?

Because the people there do not respect the integrity of private property?

You will find millionaires hiding out in the Bahamas. And many millionaires have left the "more equitable" welfare state of the U.K. for the "less fair" U.S. and Ireland. The flight of load-bearing citizens from NYC and California are test-tube examples of what happens when you increase benefits for all on the backs of a voting minority.

There is another reason America is not (yet) Mogadishu. V?clav Havel said that it's easy to get a Communist society from a Capitalist one. It's as easy as getting seafood from an exotic fish aquarium. You just boil the the aquarium. It's harder to go the other way. Those calling for increased social benefits from government are currently benefiting from a society that has (relatively) eschewed those things in the past. They are essentially living off the principle of an inheritance.

People talk about how much Europeans *love* their free health care and education. But educated people there are quite anxious to come to the U.S. anyway. Why? Limited opportunity. It's not uncommon for Europeans to take their free Ph.Ds and go to work as waiters. It's not "How many millionaires are leaving?" The tradesmen (the rich) didn't leave the village in "The Devil in a Forest". The question is "How many new ones are coming? Is the rate of new ones being created here increasing or decreasing?"

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Daniel D Jones — 20 May 2009, 11:32 · in reply to David Stockhoff

On Tuesday 19 May 2009 21:24:44 David Stockhoff wrote:

Sorry, when did I say the American Civil War was justified? It was not.

See, I've read up on it a bit.

You seem to be implying that the current government is one which rules "with the consent of the governed." I was pointing out that it was, in fact, no such thing.

BTW, in my last post, I meant to add a ";)" after I called you a wingnut.

You're still a wingnut, but I don't mean it in a nasty way. ;)

Trust me, I've been called much worse than that and in a quite nasty way. I don't take offense easily. I do think it's sad, however, that simply believing in the freedom of the individual is so far from mainstream thought that it gets me called a "wingnut."

Daniel D Jones — 20 May 2009, 11:39 · in reply to Adam Thornton

On Tuesday 19 May 2009 21:27:30 Adam Thornton wrote:

On May 19, 2009, at 8:12 PM, brunians at brunians.org wrote:

Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, according to one famous document. The first draft said 'life, liberty and property', and property

is also very important. Some people think it might have been better to leave it as it was. This is not necessarily an exclusive list.

However, in order to determine what the legitimate function of government, as defined as "to protect the rights of the individual," is, surely we need an exhaustive list, don't we?

Otherwise, who is to say that I am wrong if I declare that it is my right to take Alyson Hannigan and Summer Glau as my concubines? I suspect strongly that no one else on the list would agree with such an assertion that this was a legitimate right of mine as an individual, and I suspect even *more* strongly that the women in question would disagree vehemently.

No, we don't need an exhaustive list. We need simple principles to define the terms. In short, you're free to do anything you like so long as you do no harm to me and mine. ("You," "me" and "mine" being generic terms, of course, and not necessarily referring to any specific individual.) If Alyson and Summer want to be your concubines, wonderful. If they decline, then attempting to force them clearly violates the above principle.

Daniel D Jones — 20 May 2009, 11:49 · in reply to Pedro Pereira

On Tuesday 19 May 2009 18:17:40 Pedro Pereira wrote:

Date: Tue, 19 May 2009 17:36:13 -0400

From: brunians at brunians.org

To: urth at lists.urth.net

Subject: Re: (urth) Gene Wolfe Fans Talk Politics (Again)

I said this in a recent post. I will expand upon it.

Taxation, the extortion of money from the citizens, is permissible for things that are necessary. My list of necessary things includes the

military and things related to the military, infrastructure and certain kinds of research. I insist that the involuntary nature of taxation be explicit and resist the inevitable attempts at expansion of the things-to-be-paid-for-by-taxation.

I don't want to meddle too much on this discussion but your statements make me curious.

"My list of necessary things includes the

military and things related to the military, infrastructure and certain kinds of research."

YOUR list. Basically you're OK with extortion of money from its citizens by the government AS LONG as it according to what YOU think is necessary. This means that everyone in this list, from what I gather, is OK with the extortion, the only thing that really changes is the degree of said extortion or, more realistically, as long as the money goes into what each one of us thinks it should go. This amounts to no real change in the nature of the political system itself whatsoever, just a change on the degree to which a state taxes and applies the money.

Not everyone, no. I don't believe government is a privileged entity. An act that is immoral for a citizen to perform doesn't become OK just because someone with a government title does it. Government authority is derived from the authority of its citizens by proxy. Government has only and solely the right to act in matters and ways which the citizens also have a right to act.

I believe that every man is his own and his only master. I have the right to do anything I please, so long as I do no harm to you and yours. If I do seek to do harm to you or yours, then you have the right to use force to stop me - to defend yourself.

Since you have the right to use force if necessary to, say, stop me from stealing your car, government can legitimately act as your proxy and institute a police force to stop auto theft. This same principle can be expanded and extended to determine the legitimate authority that government possesses. I have the right to defend myself from foreign invasion, so government can act as my proxy and institute a national defense. (Note that this justifies national defense, not a national foreign policy enforcement arm.) But I have no right to take your money by force in order to feed someone else, so government has no legitimate authority to do that either.

David Stockhoff — 20 May 2009, 12:28 · follows Daniel D Jones

You know more about this than I do, I'm sure. Do U2 pay NO tax, or do they simply move a large portion of it offshore every year, like any corporation? A loophole is a loophole, until it is closed.

And wouldn't that allow them to spend more on charities? Whether they do or not is a different question.

Message: 8

Date: Wed, 20 May 2009 10:20:00 +0100

From: "O'Donnell, Tim \BOSI\" <Tim.O'Donnell at bankofscotland.ie>

Subject: Re: (urth) Gene Wolfe Fans Talk Politics (Again)

To: <urth at lists.urth.net>

Message-ID:

<63FB9AC7E0AEC7459DBCC99DC44247CA031FA6A6 at BOSIDEXDB.Bankofscotland.ie>
Content-Type: text/plain; charset="iso-8859-1"

James,

I think the flight of wealthy Americans to Ireland is as we had until recently a special law here allowing artists to pay no tax. The law has since been done away with and we saw an outflux of some of our wealthiest citizens.

(Aside: Including U2 who went to another tax free haven. I find it a little annoying that Bono asks us to donate money to charity all the time when he is unwilling to pay his tax bill.)

As for Europeans fleeing to America because they are working as waiters in Europe, I think this is inaccurate.

In the pre-credit crunch days there were huge rates of employment in Ireland (about 97%) and across Europe

(averaging about 94%). In a recent poll run by my college following up on those who graduated 5 years ago 70% of my class

were in industry, 25% were in further education and the rest were occupied in various ways.

brunians at brunians.org — 20 May 2009, 13:34 · in reply to Daniel D Jones

I believe that every man is his own and his only master. I have the right to do anything I please, so long as I do no harm to you and yours. If I do seek to do harm to you or yours, then you have the right to use force to stop me - to defend yourself.

Since you have the right to use force if necessary to, say, stop me from stealing your car, government can legitimately act as your proxy and institute a police force to stop auto theft. This same principle can be expanded and extended to determine the legitimate authority that government possesses. I have the right to defend myself from foreign invasion, so government can act as my proxy and institute a national defense. (Note that this justifies national defense, not a national foreign policy enforcement arm.) But I have no right to take your money by force in order to feed someone else, so government has no legitimate authority to do that either.

Damn, clear thinking in 2009. Who woulda thunk it?

.

Adam Thornton — 20 May 2009, 18:10 · in reply to Daniel D Jones

On May 20, 2009, at 6:39 AM, Daniel D Jones wrote:

No, we don't need an exhaustive list. We need simple principles to define the terms. In short, you're free to do anything you like so long as you do no harm to me and mine.

If we don't create an exhaustive list, we're going to get an ever- cascading list of entitlements that become fundamental rights. I thought that was part of the problem we were trying to solve.

"Do no harm," is also tricky. I mean, every time I breathe, I'm using up oxygen that you **could** use. If I drive to the grocery store, I'm removing some gasoline from the global oil supply and thus making it just a little bit more expensive for a humanitarian aid convoy in Africa in five years.

Let's say I have a silver mine. You live below it on the mountain. I do all my mining and waste disposal on land I own, as is my right. However, my waste disposal makes YOUR well water undrinkable since water doesn't respect property boundaries. Am I within my rights to say, "hey, I'm doing lawful things on my own damn property--your well is not my problem!" ?

"No" harm is clearly not possible. What is the epsilon that is close-enough-to-zero-for-rights-determination-process, and who gets to decide it?

Adam

Steven — 20 May 2009, 21:58 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org

On May 19, 2009, at 8:07 PM, brunians at brunians.org wrote:
Well, I'd think you'd have to minimize the shame-heaping aspects if you wanted to adapt the system for general use, but that doesn't mean it can't be done.

Doesn't change the principal, I don't think.

Correct. What it does is minimize the outflow of funds for that purpose. Most of the money the church collects goes to mission outreach and new building projects.

Steven Bowen
<http://bowenfinearts.com/>

brunians at brunians.org — 20 May 2009, 22:11 · in reply to Steven

Which, again, would not necessarily interfere with modifying the system to provide social services on a voluntary basis.

On May 19, 2009, at 8:07 PM, brunians at brunians.org wrote:
Well, I'd think you'd have to minimize the shame-heaping aspects if you wanted to adapt the system for general use, but that doesn't mean it can't be done.

Doesn't change the principal, I don't think.

Correct. What it does is minimize the outflow of funds for that purpose. Most of the money the church collects goes to mission outreach and new building projects.

Steven Bowen
<http://bowenfinearts.com/>

Jeffrey Brent McBeth — 20 May 2009, 22:41 · in reply to Steven

On Wed, May 20, 2009 at 05:58:54PM -0400, Steven wrote:

Well, I'd think you'd have to minimize the shame-heaping aspects if you wanted to adapt the system for general use, but that doesn't mean it can't be done.

Doesn't change the principal, I don't think.

Correct. What it does is minimize the outflow of funds for that purpose. Most of the money the church collects goes to mission outreach and new building projects.

Perhaps things have changed a little since you were last active, here is more or less how things are now within the Mormon church.

"Fast Offerings", which are the funds the church collects for member welfare (and humanitarian) aid are separate from tithing. You are encouraged to pay a "generous fast offering" once a month, but you are never asked if you do so, and there are no regulatory penalties for not. These funds are kept separate from tithing funds, and never flow from the "fast offering" pile to the tithing pile. The standard metric is to donate the cost of two meals once a month. People are also encouraged to donate time to the churches many farms, canneries, and distribution centers (but there is no record keeping or accounting of that donation).

Tithing primarily goes to support the day-to-day operations of the church. Its buildings, construction, missions, etc. Tithing also assists in paying for out-of-church humanitarian. Money has gone from tithing to assist in short term needs, like the humanitarian aid after the typhoon in Indonesia. Once a year at the end of the year, you are privately asked by your ecclesiastical leader if you are a full tithe payer prior to receiving an accounting of your donations to show to the tax man (your answer does not affect the ease of getting that account). Once every other year, if you wish, you may apply for a two year pass to enter the temple. The temple is separate from weekly services, and in many areas of the world it is not uncommon for people to never go. As part of the process, you are asked privately (without recourse to records) if you pay tithing.

I've been on three sides of the coin. Receiving aid, giving aid, and administering aid (and so am hardly an innocent/unbiased bystander). Shaming people for receiving aid is strictly against church policies, and the member(s) that did that did wrong. All information concerning welfare receipt is also supposed to be kept strictly confidential by those administering and giving the aid. People are encouraged to find employment sufficient to support their families, and the congregations usually have a person trained to provide job-search support and many people trained in self-sufficiency techniques.

There are problems (as all human-run endeavours have), but by and large it seems work (from my view in the trenches). I've helped in poor congregations that have as much as 80+% of the families receiving aid, and while the strain on the bishop and relief society (the male and female leader respectively) is immense, it still seems to work.

But, we are way way off topic here, unless Gene suddenly switches affiliation :) Part of why I love reading him is that I feel he gives me insight into the nature of my own faith (I would include Chesterton in that same group)

Jeff

"The man who does not read good books has no advantage over the man who cannot read them."
-- Mark Twain

Steven — 21 May 2009, 22:13 · in reply to Jeffrey Brent McBeth

On May 20, 2009, at 6:41 PM, Jeffrey Brent McBeth wrote:
Perhaps things have changed a little since you were last active, here is more or less how things are now within the Mormon church.

Well, you got me. I remember the separate fast tithing now that you bring it up. It must amount to a small percentage of overall tithes. And sorry for smearing the good Mormon folk with that shame stuff - that was my perception at the time but it may have been skewed by youth or by the congregation I found myself reared in. Sorry.

Steve

brunians at brunians.org — 21 May 2009, 23:51 · in reply to Steven

For all the wierd stuff that gets bruited about about Mormons and Mormonism, it has always seemed a perfectly reasonable religion to me. The theology and founding history is a little wierd, but seriously folks, whose theology and founding history is **not** a little wierd, or more than a little? We all think our own isn't because we are used to it.

Mormonism also, remember, is a very young religion. It may very well be significantly different in a thousand years or more: one of the most admirable things about the Church is its ability to adapt to changing times.

On May 20, 2009, at 6:41 PM, Jeffrey Brent McBeth wrote:
Perhaps things have changed a little since you were last active, here is more or less how things are now within the Mormon church.
Well, you got me. I remember the separate fast tithing now that you bring it up. It must amount to a small percentage of overall tithes. And sorry for smearing the good Mormon folk with that shame stuff - that was my perception at the time but it may have been skewed by youth or by the congregation I found myself reared in. Sorry.

Steve

Jeffrey Brent McBeth — 22 May 2009, 11:49 · in reply to Steven

On Thu, May 21, 2009 at 06:13:28PM -0400, Steven wrote:

On May 20, 2009, at 6:41 PM, Jeffrey Brent McBeth wrote:

Perhaps things have changed a little since you were last active, here is more or less how things are now within the Mormon church.

Well, you got me. I remember the separate fast tithing now that you bring it up. It must amount to a small percentage of overall tithes. And sorry for smearing the good Mormon folk with that shame stuff - that was my perception at the time but it may have been skewed by youth or by the congregation I found myself reared in. Sorry.

Didn't feel smeared at all. There are bad eggs here, just like everywhere else. There are lots and lots that are well meaning but horrible with the implementation (we're all amateurs). It should also come as no surprise to anybody that has read any Douglas Hofstadter or Isaac Asimov (or has attended churches) that each congregation has its own personality that is more than the sum of its congregants.

I really wanted to pull things back to Gene Wolfe with that last sentence, but his books seem to me to concentrate so much on the individual, that group psychology and dynamics don't come into relief as much as with other authors.

Jeff

"The man who does not read good books has no advantage over
the man who cannot read them."
-- Mark Twain
