

**Where are we
going?**

**Philosophy in the
Anthropocene**

**5. The Individual
and the Communal**





‘The nine most terrifying words in the English language are “I’m from the government, and I’m here to help.”’

Brit
acco
men

The
Con

FUTURE

Millenni
evidenc

PERSONOLOGY PSYC



By Christian Jarrett
17th November 2017



BEING RICH MAKES YOU MORE SELFISH, FINDS STUDY

It's official, the well-to-do are self-centred

Sarah Young | @sarah_j_young | Monday 18 December 2017 16:30 |



Wealthy people experience more positive emotions when focused on themselves, new research suggests. Or to put it another way; being rich makes you self-centred and selfish.

passionate debate among psychologists: are today's young people more "Generation Me", or "Generation We"?

indy100 TRENDING

Psychological science suggests that people are becoming more individualistic over time. Individualism, which relates to how independent and self-reliant (and Collectivistic people (and societies) tend to be group-oriented, and tend to work together instead of apart. with research that shows a rise in narcissism

"Tragedy of the Commons" - Garrett Hardin (1968)

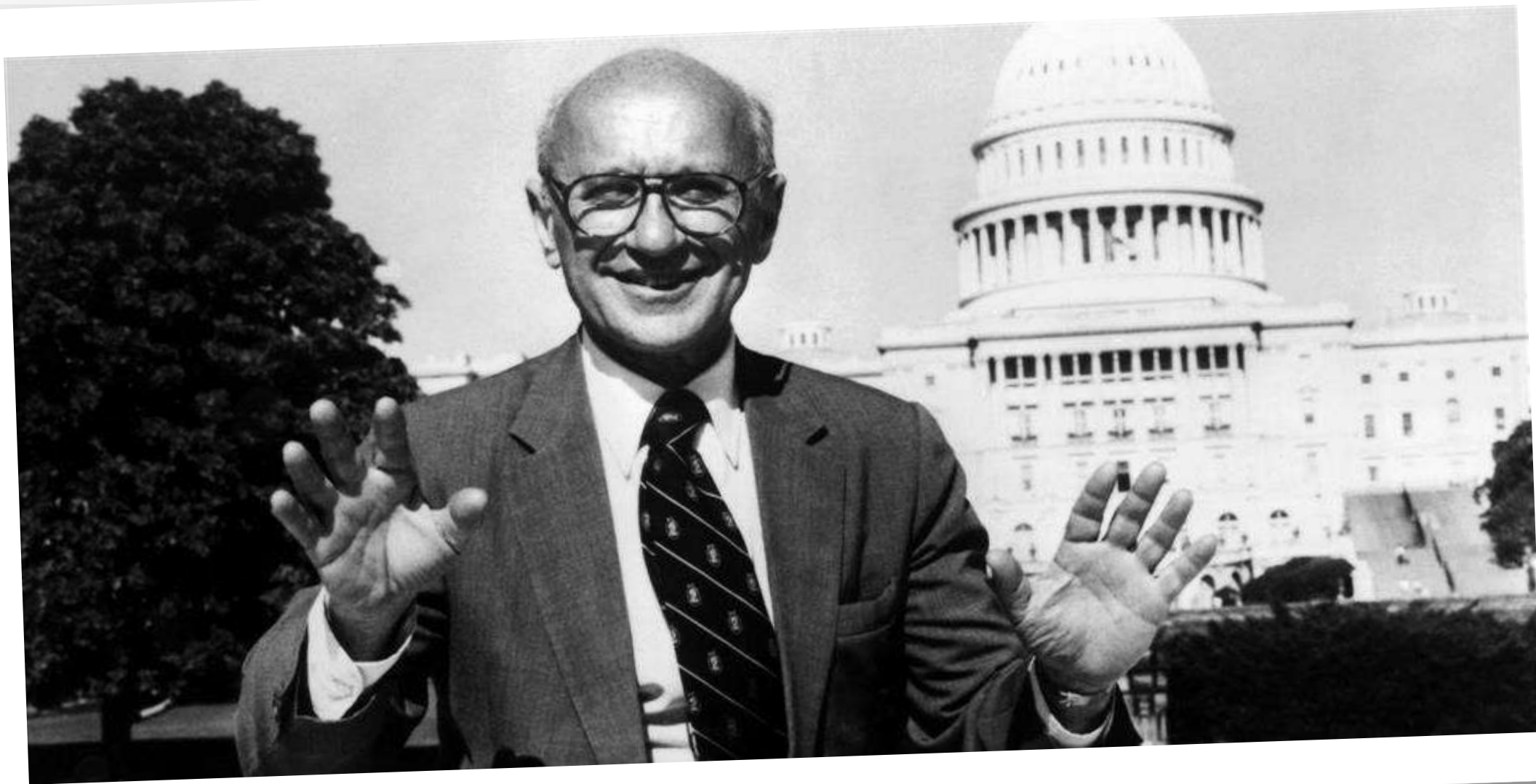


Unfortunately, individualism today is often accused of promoting selfishness and greed at the expense of the common good. Some argue that individualism perpetuates economic inequality, motivates corporate and political corruption, and leads to the fragmentation of society. Such accusations could not be more false.

The true individualist is neither selfish, disconnected, nor corrupt. The individualist understands that each person can best achieve their own ambitions by working collaboratively with others in a way that benefits not only themselves, but society at large. And since each individual's self-interest motivates them to act for the benefit of others, individualism makes altruists out everyone in society.

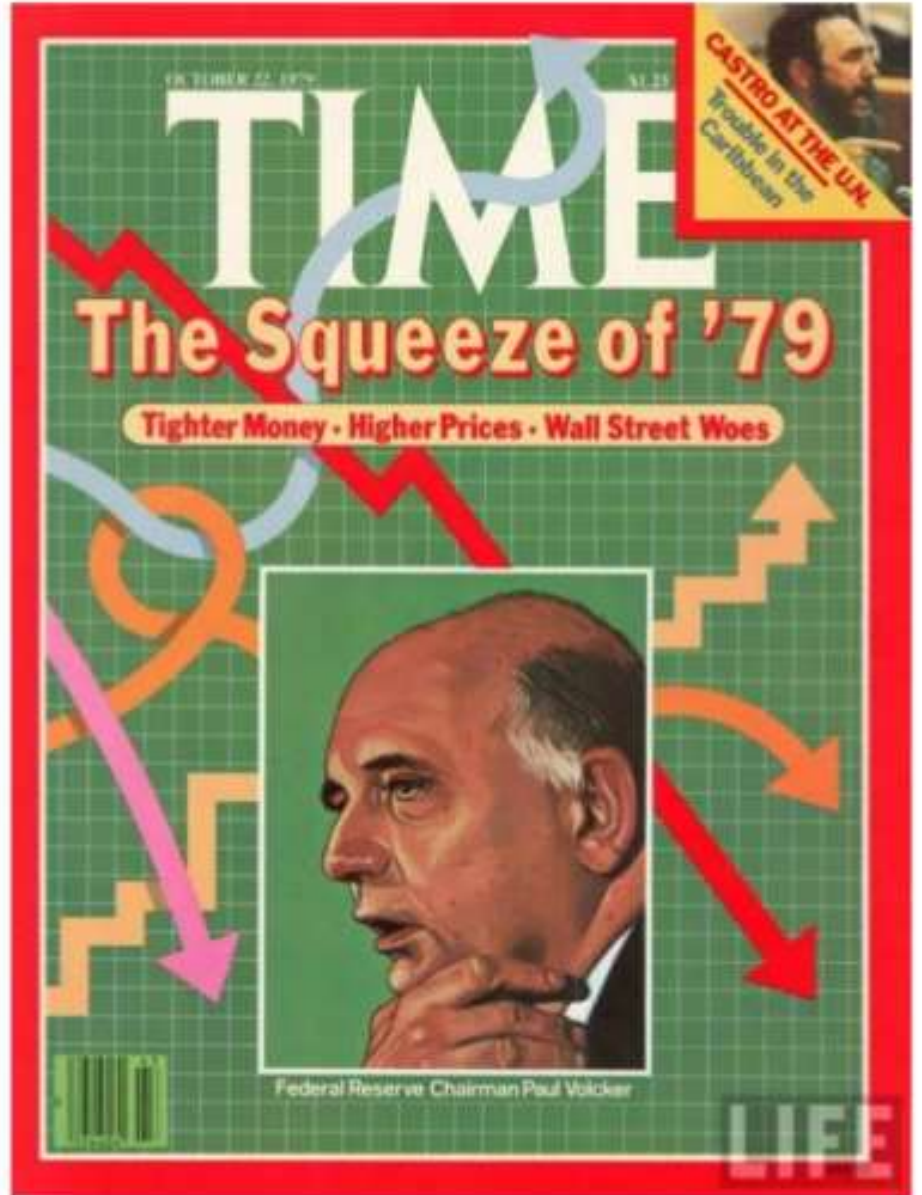
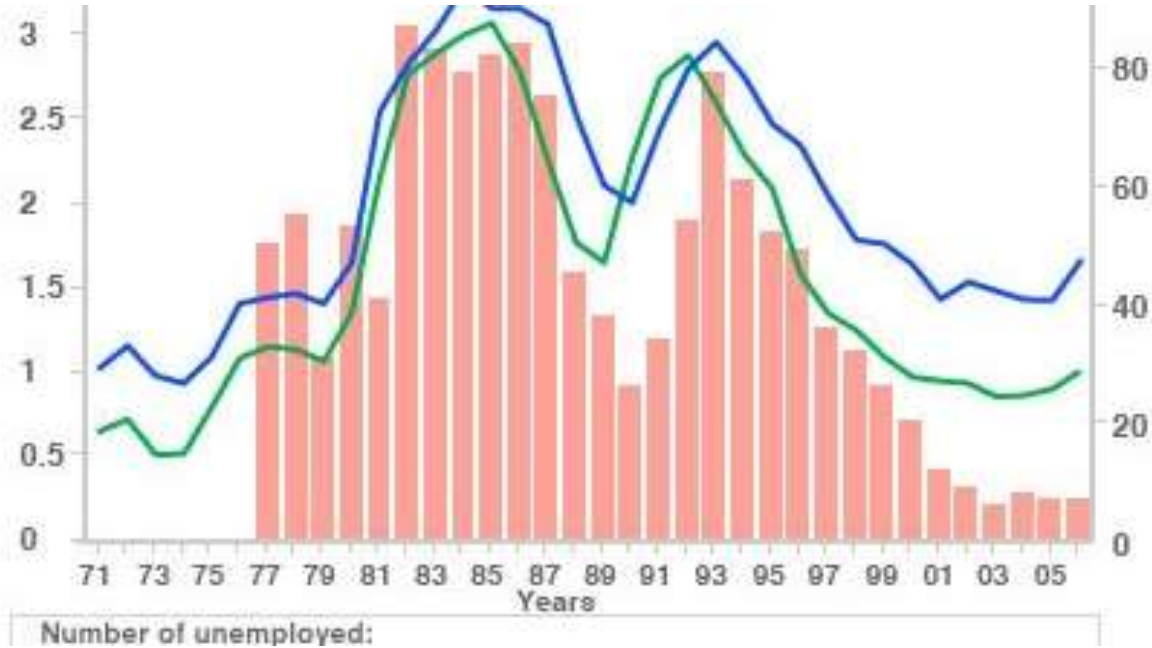
Since the self-interested actions of individuals create social progress, the common good is best served when each individual is liberated and empowered to pursue their own aspirations. To truly thrive, a society must liberate its members from the burdensome regulations and social pressures that result from collectivist approaches



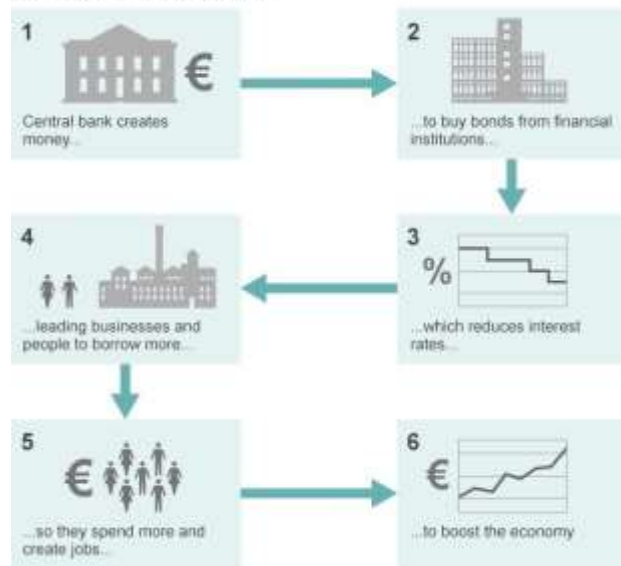


Introducing Milton Friedman (1912-2006)

- One of the most influential thinkers of the 20th century
- Nobel Prize for economics, 1976, advisor to Reagan and Thatcher
- *Capitalism and Freedom* (1962): half a million sales since
- 'Classical Liberal' position: Free markets, minimal state intervention
- Chicago School – anti-Keynesian, 'monetarism': tackling inflation by controlling the money supply
- 'Volcker shock' and shift from Gold Standard (1979-82): massive unemployment, economic contractions in UK, deindustrialisation

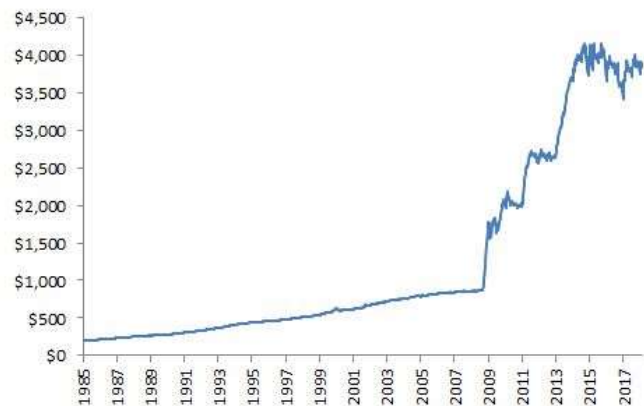


Quantitative Easing: The theory

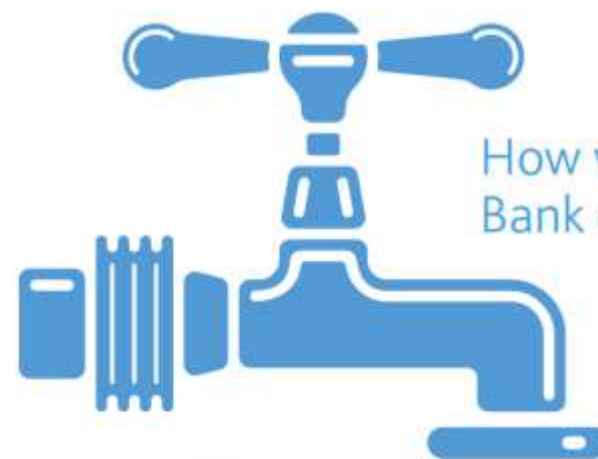


The money supply explodes

U.S. monetary base, billion \$



Source: FRED



How will changes from the Bank of England help you?

We are introducing a new package of measures to support the economy:

£10bn

Corporate Bond Purchases

We're buying up to £10bn of bonds issued by companies, lowering their cost of borrowing and allowing them to issue more debt to fund investments.

0.25%

Bank Rate

We've reduced Bank Rate from 0.5% to 0.25%, which will reduce payments on loans, encouraging households and businesses to spend more. This will help to reach the 2% inflation target sustainably.

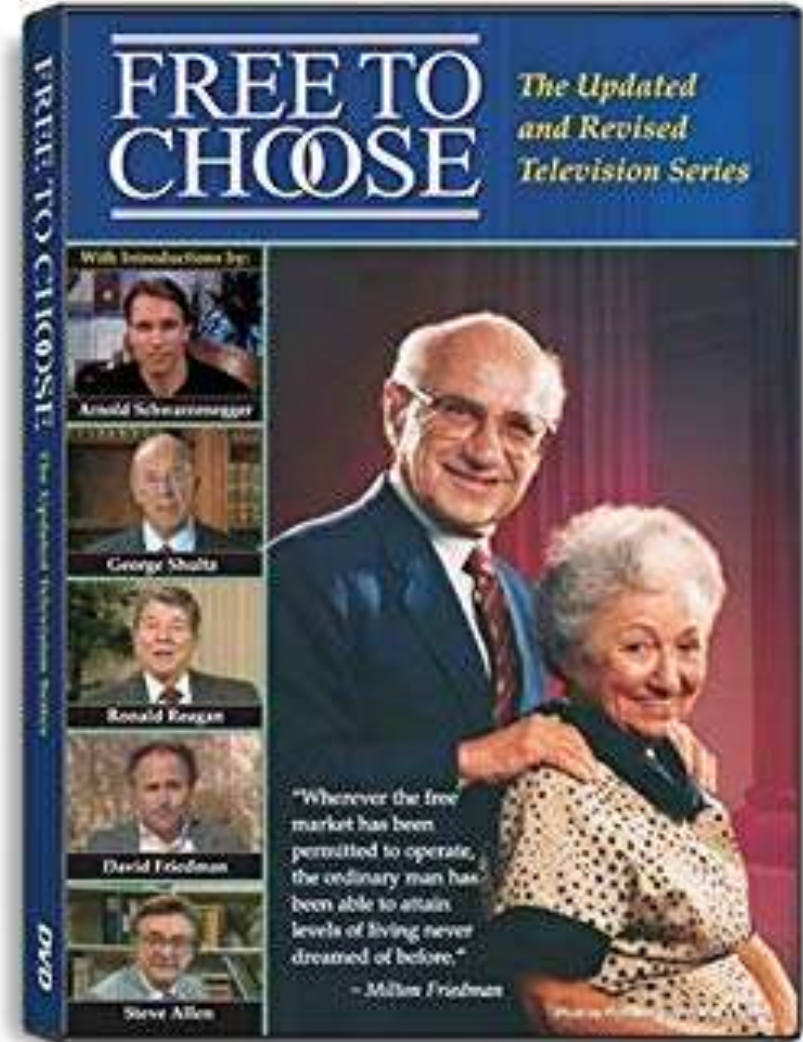
£435bn

Government Bond Purchases

We're buying an extra £60bn of government bonds. This is designed to reduce the longer-term cost of borrowing, encouraging companies to invest and helping to support growth and employment.

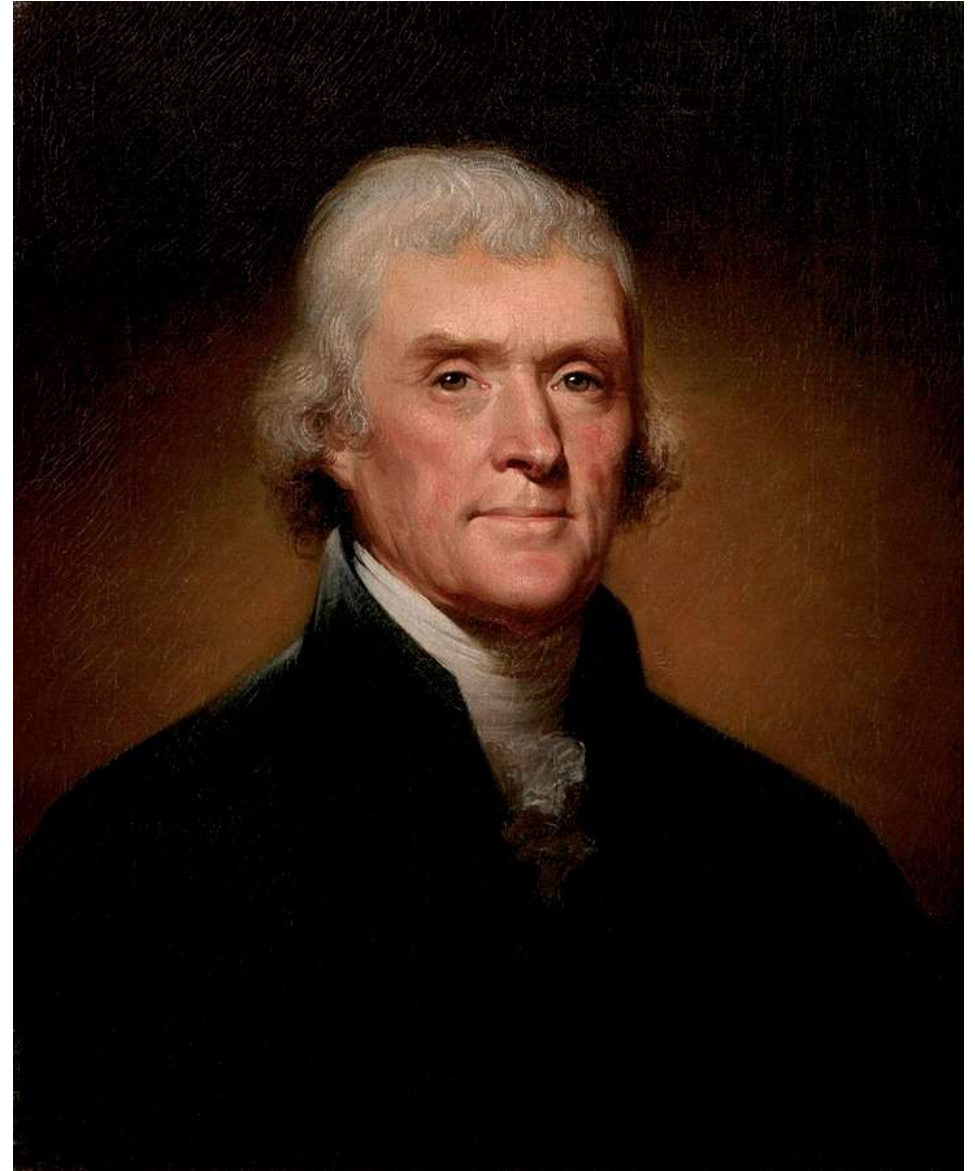
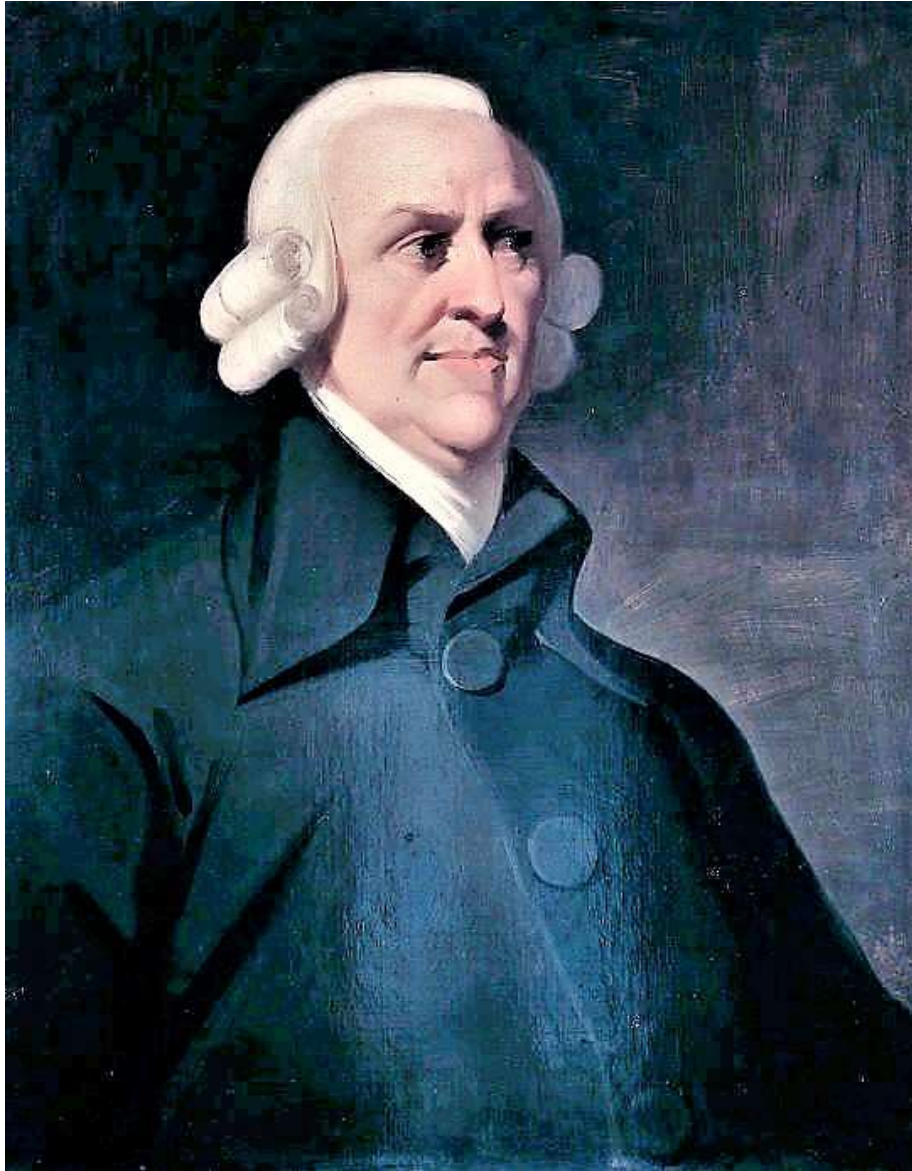
Term Funding Scheme

Our new Term Funding Scheme will encourage banks to pass on cuts in Bank Rate to customers. It will do this by providing funding for banks at interest rates close to Bank Rate.



Free to Choose (1980)

- Friedman retires from Chicago in 1977. Over next three years, he and his wife develop a ten-part TV series for PBS
- Reaction to J.K. Galbraith, *The Age of Uncertainty* (1977) for BBC, making socialist arguments for progressive government control
- Concise, popular introduction to his liberal position: free markets, attack on government control of prices, welfare and central planning
- Lecture, followed by debate with panellists
- Reagan, Schwarzenegger and others appear in 1990 re-broadcast



1776 – two sources

1. Adam Smith, *Wealth of Nations*

“as Adam Smith put it, an individual who "intends only his own gain" is "led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention. Nor is it always the worse for the society that it was no part of it. By pursuing his own interest he frequently promotes that of the society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it. I have never known much good done by those who affected to trade for the public good.”

2. Thomas Jefferson, “Declaration of Independence”

‘We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights; that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.

... It proclaimed a new nation, the first in history established on the principle that every person is entitled to pursue his own values.

Over to you

Let's explore the argument: excessive state intervention removes incentives for effort, investment or saving (24).

1. What is Friedman's underlying argument? Why does he think state controls of pricing are undesirable?

2. Then, are you convinced? What positive and negative consequences do you see from such a view?



‘If your income will be the same whether you work hard or not, why should you work hard? Why should you make the effort to search out the buyer who values most highly what you have to sell if you will not get any benefit from doing so? If there is no reward for accumulating capital, why should anyone postpone to a later date what he could enjoy now? Why save? ... The only alternative is command.’ (23)



Challenging Friedman's premises

‘The combination of economic and political *power* in the same hands is a sure recipe for tyranny’. (3)

Can economic and political power be considered separate?

‘The combination of economic and political freedom produced a golden age in both Great Britain and the United States in the nineteenth century. The United States prospered even more than Britain. It started with a clean slate: fewer vestiges of class and status; fewer government restraints; a more fertile field for energy, drive, and innovation; and an empty continent to conquer.’ (3)

‘Gentlemanly capitalism’, social class, prior wealth from slavery



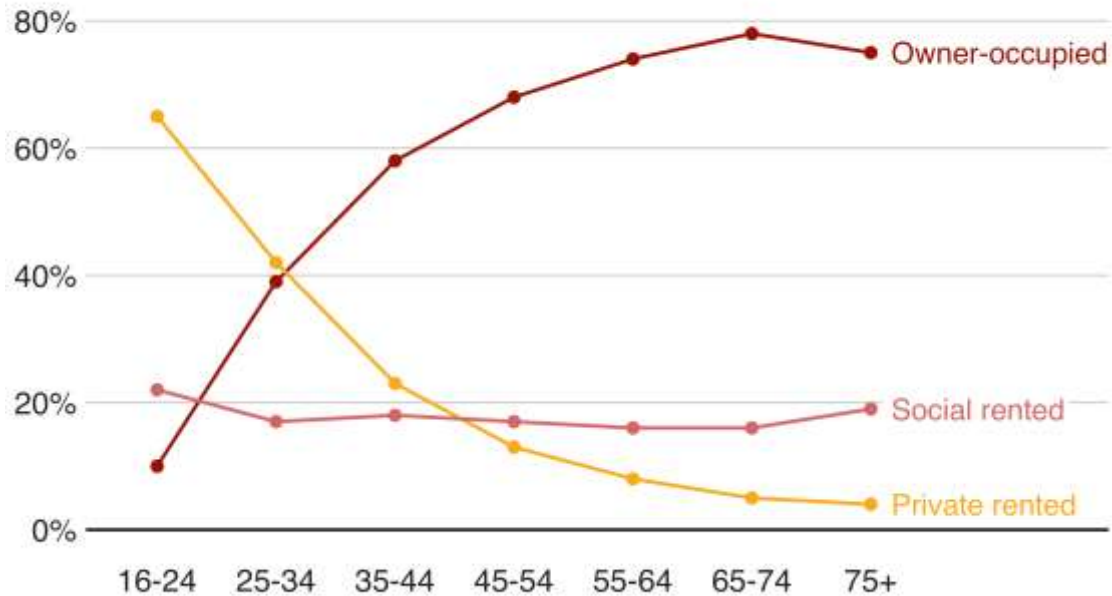
Individualism overcomes collectivism?

‘we continue to grant ever more power to government, to authorize a "new class" of civil servants to spend ever larger fractions of our income supposedly on our behalf. Sooner or later—and perhaps sooner than many of us expect—an ever bigger government would destroy both the prosperity that we owe to the free market and the human freedom proclaimed so eloquently in the Declaration of Independence.

... We have the opportunity to nudge the change in opinion toward greater reliance on individual initiative and voluntary cooperation, rather than toward the other extreme of total collectivism.’ (7)

Young people are much more likely to rent

Housing tenure by age band

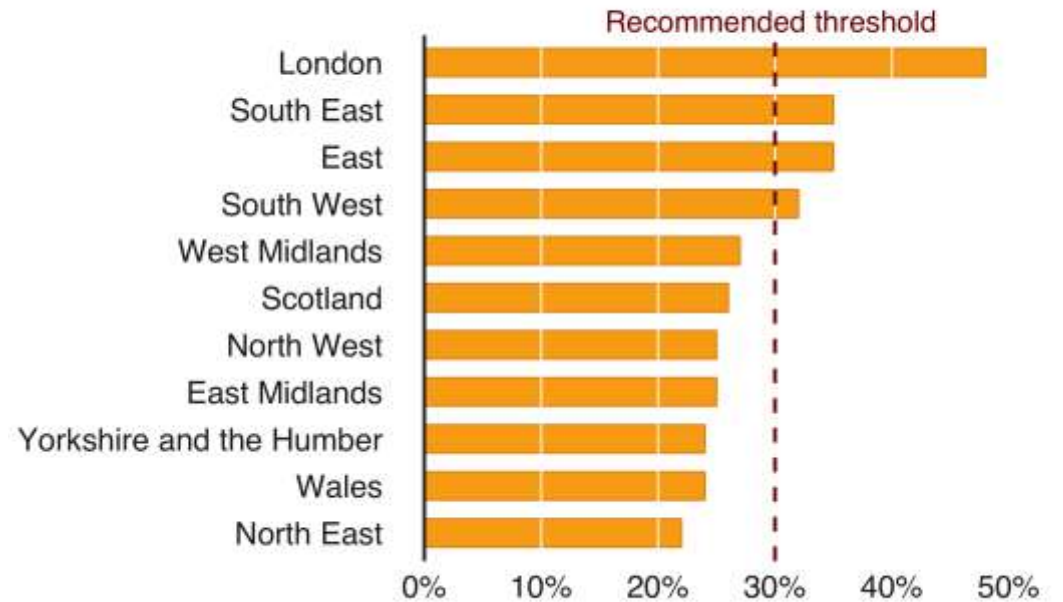


Source: House of Commons Library

BBC

London rents nearly half of wages

Average 1-bed rent as proportion of income



Source: VOA, ONS, and Scottish and Welsh governments

BBC



‘Our society is what we make it. We can shape our institutions. Physical and human characteristics limit the alternatives available to us. But none prevents us, if we will, from building a society that relies primarily on voluntary cooperation to organize both economic and other activity, a society that preserves and expands human freedom, that keeps government in its place, keeping it our servant and not letting it become our master.’ (37)



Spinoza's *Ethics*, Part 4

- Individuals are dwarfed by more powerful forces
Axiom: 'There is no singular thing in nature than which there is not another more powerful and stronger. Whatever one is given, there is another more powerful by which the first can be destroyed'.
- By nature, we're predisposed to pursue our appetites
- These pursuits and the inevitable adversity encountered result in sad passions – anger, hatred, fear
- While passions make us contrary to one another, reason offers one basis for agreement, mutual understanding and common effort
'Nothing is more useful to man than man' (p18)



From self-interest to society (Proposition 35)

‘When each man most seeks his own advantage for himself, then men are most useful to one another. For the more each one seeks his own advantage, and strives to preserve himself, the more he is endowed with virtue, or what is the same, the greater is his power of acting according to the laws of his own nature, i.e., of living from the guidance of reason. But men most agree in nature, when they live according to the guidance of reason. Therefore, men will be most useful to one another, when each one most seeks his own advantage.

... Men still find from experience that by helping one another they can provide themselves much more easily with the things they require, and that only by joining forces can they avoid the dangers that threaten on all sides’.

Over to you

Let's turn to the lengthy Proposition 37:
How does Spinoza set out the origins of society?

What is the role of the collective (society, the state) in establishing the power of individuals?

In order, therefore, that men may be able to live harmoniously and be of assistance to one another, it is necessary for them to give up their natural right and to make one another confident that they will do nothing which could harm others

... By this law, therefore, Society can be maintained, provided it appropriates to itself the right everyone has of avenging himself, and of judging concerning good and evil. In this way Society has the power to prescribe a common rule of life, to make laws, and to maintain them—not by reason, which cannot restrain the affects (by P17S), but by threats. This Society, maintained by laws and the power it has of preserving itself, is called a State, and those who are defended by its law, Citizens.

... in the Civil state, of course, it is decided by common agreement what is good or what is evil.





Rounding up on Spinoza

- Tradition of 'possessive individualism' in early modern British political thought – Hobbes, Locke – emphasising rights of the individual and private property (C.B. Macpherson)
- Individualist or collectivist?
- Individual self-interest is realised through working with others
- Without mutual assistance and protection, we are at the mercy of each other's appetites and passions; without raising capabilities, few can usefully become adults
- There is no freedom outside of the state – the true purpose of the state is freedom

Steven Pinker: 'The way to deal with pollution is not to rail against consumption'

The feather-ruffling Harvard psychologist's new book, a defence of Enlightenment values, may be his most controversial yet

● [Read an extract from](#)



Andrew Anthony



BY
[JOHN GRAY](#)

NewStatesman

POLITICS CULTURE WORLD SCIENCE & TECH LONG READS MAGAZINE CONFERENCES EVENTS SPOTLIGHT

BOOKS

22 FEBRUARY 2018

Unenlightened thinking: Steven Pinker's embarrassing new book is a feeble sermon for rattled liberals

To think of this book as any kind of scholarly exercise is a category mistake. The purpose of Pinker's laborious work is to reassure liberals that they are on "the right side of history".

Take-home Questions:

Is individualism necessarily a bad thing for social progress?

What does it reflect? Our societies, or technology, the neglect of communal structures, or human nature?

What forms of individualism might be more empowering than others?

What forms of collectivism do we think we should defend, champion, or rediscover?

Next week: Nussbaum on care and vulnerability

We turn to contemporary philosopher Martha Nussbaum, who deals with human emotions, fragility and vulnerability in a powerful, sometimes reflective way across her works.

While people increasingly live longer lives, have we forgotten how to talk about our ageing, need for care, passing away, and responsibility to others?

Two readings:

1. *The Fragility of Goodness*, excerpts from Chapter 1 – on how our vulnerability should be incorporated into ideas of human flourishing – rather than traditionally be seen to endanger them. Total self-sufficiency isn't just illusory, it's a harmful belief
2. *Aging Thoughtfully* – excerpts of the Intro and Chapter 7 – a recent co-written book with Saul Levermore, on society, politics and ageing

Any questions, email dan.taylor@marywardcentre.ac.uk