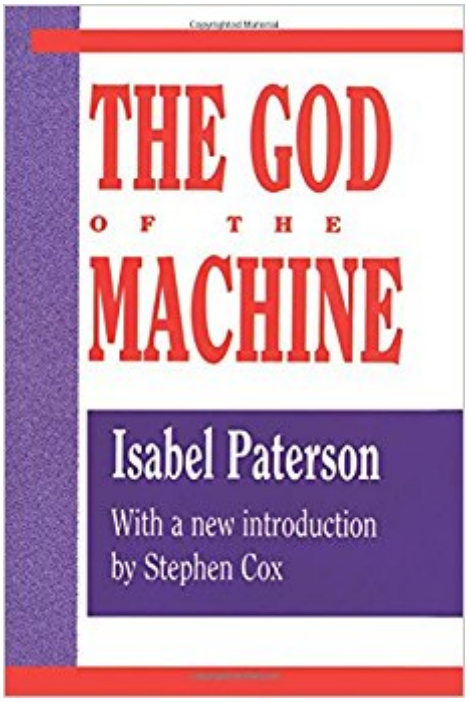
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God Of The Machine (Library Of Conservative Thought)



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Synopsis

The God of the Machine presents an original theory of history and a bold defense of individualism as the source of moral and political progress. When it was published in 1943, Isabel Paterson's work provided fresh intellectual support for the endangered American belief in individual rights, limited government, and economic freedom. The crisis of today's collectivized nations would not have surprised Paterson; in The God of the Machine, she had explored the reasons for collectivism's failure. Her book placed her in the vanguard of the free-enterprise movement now sweeping the world.Paterson sees the individual creative mind as the dynamo of history, and respect for the individual's God-given rights as the precondition for the enormous release of energy that produced the modern world. She sees capitalist institutions as the machinery through which human energy works, and government as a device properly used merely to cut off power to activities that threaten personal liberty.Paterson applies her general theory to particular issues in contemporary life, such as education, .social welfare, and the causes of economic distress. She severely criticizes all but minimal application of government, including governmental interventions that most people have long taken for granted. The God of the Machine offers a challenging perspective on the continuing, worldwide debate about the nature of freedom, the uses of power, and the prospects of human betterment.Stephen Cox's substantial introduction to The God of the Machine is a comprehensive and enlightening account of Paterson's colorful life and work. He describes The God of the Machine as "not just theory, but rhapsody, satire, diatribe, poetic narrative." Paterson's work continues to be relevant because "it exposes the moral and practical failures of collectivism, failures that are now almost universally acknowledged but are still far from universally understood." The book will be essential to students of American history, political theory, and literature.

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Customer Reviews

Ã¢â ¬Å“[T]his is a brilliant and extraordinary book. . . . It is brilliant in the perceptiveness, the incisiveness, the power, the scope of its analysis that presentsÃ¢â ¬â •in carefully chosen, dramatically illuminating essentials the history of manÃ¢â ¬â„¢s long quest for freedom, from ancient Greece to World War II. It offers an unforgettable experience: a panorama of the centuries, as seen from the elevation of a truly grand intellectual scale.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ayn Rand, The Objectivist Newsletter Ã¢â ¬Å“The God of the Machine remains a classic of individualist thought. But it is not a pale historical artifact, locked in its time of origin. It is focused on the great continuing issues of civilization, which it confronts with the authority of Paterson's special character and experience. . . . [Paterson] was not merely a theorist; she had the creative imagination that brings theory to life and challenges the imaginations of others. There was nobody quite like Isabel Paterson, and there is nothing quite like The God of the Machine.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â •Stephen Cox, Reason Ã¢â ¬Å“Published by PutnamÃ¢â ¬â„¢s in May 1943, The God of the Machine displayed profound insights about the development of human freedom since ancient times and about the workings of a successful social order, all expressed in a lively style. . . . Paterson develops a consistent, comprehensive, courageous world view. She denounces conscriptionÃ¢â ¬Â¦ paper moneyÃ¢â ¬Â¦ hypocritical businessmen who covet government subsidiesÃ¢â ¬Â¦ and the New Deal Wagner Act which helped establish labor union monopolies. Reflecting on the Prohibition debacle, Paterson ridicules the notion that government can set moral standards for anyone. She joyfully celebrates private property, free markets, enterprising immigrants and gold money. What fun youÃ¢â ¬â„¢re going to have discovered, or rediscovering, this sensational book.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â •Jim Powell Ã¢â ¬Å“In her classic The God of the Machine, Isabel Paterson asks a devastating question: what gives you the steam-mill? Why have some societies had enormous scientific and material development while others stagnated? . . . PatersonÃ¢â ¬â„¢s search for an answer, articulated via a sustained metaphor of the Ã¢â ¬Ëœengineering principlesÃ¢â ¬â„¢ of political economy needed to sustain the Ã¢â ¬ËœflowsÃ¢â ¬â„¢ of productive human energy, takes her from ancient Greece and Rome to Medieval Europe to the American Founding. . . . PatersonÃ¢â ¬â„¢s one-time protÃƒÂ©gÃƒÂ© Ayn Rand said of The God of the Machine:

Ã¢â ¬Ëœ It is a sparkling book, with little gems of polemical fire scattered through almost every page, ranging from bright wit to the hard glitter of logic to the quiet radiance of a profound understanding.Ã¢â ¬â„¢ PatersonÃ¢â ¬â„¢s wit, logic, and understanding still cast light today, and The God of the Machine remains a source of illumination for modern readers seeking a better understanding of the preconditions for development and freedom.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â •Cato Institute, Libertarianism.org

Isabel Paterson (1886-1961) was a journalist, critic, and author of nine books. She is considered to be one of the founders of American libertarianism.Stephen Cox is professor of literature and director of the Humanities Program at the University of California, San Diego. He is the author of The Woman and the Dynamo: Isabel Paterson and the Idea of America.Ã Â Ã Â Ã Â

Difficult to read because of her metaphors about everything. The ideas seem very solid and right on & so true of today's government people. More libertarian than just conservative. It so closely follows Ayn Rand's beliefs except for the disagreement over Religion as a basis of society. I had to drag through it but certainly worthwhile.

Heavy reading, but I've never run across a better presentation of the evils of socialism and the benefit and true freedom of a market economy.

In "The God of the Machine" Isabel Paterson provides a concise historical explanation of how human energy spawned the rise of all great nations, and how government interference via taxation, regulation, and conquest necessarily led to the fall of those nations. Of course, as she explains, the evils of government are a direct result of the wants and desires of otherwise good and decent people. She creatively and accurately labels such individuals as The Humanitarian[s] with the Guillotine!

An interesting pro-liberty, pro-free market book & from an historical perspective I liked her insights into the totalitarian dictatorships of her day: Russia, Japan, & Germany and the contrasts she made between their centrally planned economies and the consequences (of war and stagnation} they led themselves into as a result.

Reading this book feels a little weird to a modern person--it's not just a book about human progress,

it’s a snapshot of the time that the author lived in, so the text can feel a bit dense and packed with unfamiliar metaphors. However, there’s a lot of fascinating observations and conclusions here that no one should miss out on--the thinking you will do while reading this book can only benefit you.

"Most of the harm in the world is done by good people, and not by accident, lapse, or omission. It is the result of their deliberate actions, long persevered in, which they hold to be motivated by high ideals toward virtuous ends... ...when millions are slaughtered, when torture is practiced, starvation enforced, oppression made a policy, as at present over a large part of the world, and as it has often been in the past, it must be at the behest of very many good people, and even by their direct action, for what they consider a worthy object." (The God of the Machine)"The hand-mill," wrote Karl Marx, summarizing his theory of historical materialism, "gives you society with the feudal lord; the steam-mill, society with the industrial capitalist." On his view, the cultural and political forms that appeared in any given society were mere "superstructure," determined by the society’s material and technological "base."This highly reductionist view of history has been enormously influential, but in her classic The God of the Machine, Isabel Paterson asks a devastating question: what gives you the steam-mill? Why have some societies had enormous scientific and material development while others stagnated? Or, as education scholar Andrew Coulson has wryly put it, why did Athens give us philosophy, mathematics, literature, and the natural sciences, while neighboring Sparta gave us little more than the names of a few high school football teams?Paterson’s search for an answer, articulated via a sustained metaphor of the "engineering principles" of political economy needed to sustain the "flows" of productive human energy, takes her from ancient Greece and Rome to Medieval Europe to the American Founding.Paterson begins in the ancient world, considering popular explanations for the ascendance of Rome and, in particular, their victory over Carthage in the Punic Wars. Military discipline? Carthage’s was more rigorous and severe. Strategic aptitude? But the strategically brilliant Napoleon routed by one loss, while Rome lost many major battles on the road to victory, and the Carthaginian general Hannibal was widely regarded as a military genius. Sea power? But Carthage had a huge naval advantage early on, with Rome catching up only long after the beginning of the conflict.Rome’s advantage, Paterson suggests, lay far from the battlefield, in its superior political structure. Carthage had expected the tributary peoples on Rome’s boundaries to join the Carthaginian armies and rise against their masters; they did not. As Paterson observes, the Roman Empire was not really a military empire, in that its control over the periphery was not maintained by force of arms alone: "conquered" people found that Roman citizenship came with benefits. The secret to both Rome’s expansion and its ability to harness the productive ability of its

people, argues Paterson, was Roman law. Whereas all peoples have followed rules, Paterson sees in Rome the origin of law in its modern sense: an abstract set of principles, with their own internal logic, independent of the will of any particular ruler. She notes that despite strong local pressure to imprison or execute the apostle Paul, the Roman authorities were unable to do anything in the absence of a specific charge once he invoked his rights as a citizen. Rome also found a way to channel public "inertia" through the veto power of the Tribunes, which provided a feedback loop that prevented the imposition of laws intolerable to the plebes without giving them any affirmative power to create new law.Like many historical theorists, Paterson identified a series of stages through which societies move. Her innovation was to see the structural features that characterized each stage as a mechanism for channeling the corresponding stage of technological development. Custom and taboo could provide the basic stability needed for early development, but were ill suited to contexts marked by high levels of innovation. The counsel of respected members of the community could provide greater flexibility, but only for relatively small social groupings. To deal with what F. A. Hayek called "an extended order," and Paterson described as a "long circuit of energy," formal hierarchy and, at still higher levels, abstract and neutral law were needed.Turning Marx on his head, Paterson saw political ideology as the "base" and the technological level as "superstructure." Totalitarian regimes could achieve advanced technology only by parasitism on previous innovation, or free societies elsewhere. "Production methods," she wrote: will catch up with advanced political ideas; whereas if an advanced physical economy develops within a political framework that cannot accommodate it, production must either be choked down again or it will destroy the political entity, being subverted to the wrong ends. The Phoenician civilization, for example, disintegrated because in attempting to stifle trade as productive technology advanced, they "effected a hook-up of an energy circuit which their political mechanism could not accommodate."It was, writes Paterson, the merger of the Roman concept of law with the Christian focus on the freedom and salvation of the individual soul and the Greek ideal of truth pursued through reason that allowed a mercantile "society of contract," with the United States as its prime example, to emerge in the West from a feudal "society of status." The negative force of contract law ’negative because given content only by the voluntary agreements of persons, and invoked only when one of the parties is dissatisfied’ ensures the stability of the "circuit" through which productive energy flows. That "negative" character means that the stabilizing power of contract does not impede productive flexibility. The indispensable corollary of contract, she later explains, is privately held property, which eliminates the braking effect of centralized authority on innovation. Paterson contrasts feudal "status" societies. Like later planned economies, these locked workers in to

particular roles, preventing adjustment to changing circumstances or in accordance with new ideas.With that distinction in mind, Paterson considers antitrust law, and concludes that, far from preserving the competition associated with contract society, it tends to resurrect the society of status. In his 1970 book Power and Market, the libertarian economist Murray Rothbard called her treatment here "[o]ne of the few cogent discussions of the antitrust principle in recent years." After exposing several infamous "monopolies" as either chimerical or the product of government privilege, Paterson turns her attention to the putative remedy for monopoly. Laws banning practices "in restraint of trade," she argues, are meaningless: nobody can know in advance precisely what they forbid. Producers who charge more than their competitors, Paterson observes, can be accused of price gouging. Those who charge less are guilty of predatory pricing and unfair competition. Those who charge precisely the same must surely be engaged in price fixing. Any of these accusations might therefore be leveled against a firm by a competitor, making "status," or political power, crucially important to commerce. According to Paterson, the malleability of the notion of "anticompetitive" practices means that in effect, firms will seek prior approval before innovating, merging, or splitting and selling off subsidiaries. The effect, ironically, is to inhibit competition.Readers with an interest in monetary policy, or public education, or wartime economics will find separate chapters, brimming with insight, on each area. But it is Paterson’s broader ideas that made The God of the Machine a classic, and among the most enduring of these has been her image of "the humanitarian with the guillotine." The opening paragraph of the chapter by that name begs to be quoted:Most of the harm in the world is done by good people, and not by accident, lapse, or omission. It is the result of their deliberate actions, long persevered in, which they hold to be motivated by high ideals toward virtuous ends’ [I]n periods when millions are slaughtered, when torture is practiced, starvation enforced, oppression made a policy, as at present over a large part of the world, and as it has often been in the past, it must be at the behest of very many good people, and even by their direct action, for what they consider a worthy object.In a few pages, Paterson makes a powerful case against the tendency, still all too common, to judge policies by their intentions rather than their effects. She points out that because capitalism channels selfish motives to the public benefit, the most widely beneficial actions will often appear morally ugly, because motivated by greed. The philanthropic impulse itself, she warns, can become a far more pernicious form of greed’desire for the satisfaction of acting as savior to the helpless masses. From the French Reign of Terror to the communist Gulag, Paterson observes that there are few atrocities that don’t begin with a noble motive.Paterson’s one-time protegÃƒÂ© Ayn Rand said of The God of the Machine:It is a sparkling book, with little gems of polemical fire scattered through almost every

page, ranging from bright wit to the hard glitter of logic to the quiet radiance of a profound understanding. Paterson's wit, logic, and understanding still cast light today, and The God of the Machine remains a source of illumination for modern readers seeking a better understanding of the preconditions for development and freedom.From the Cato institute

This is a key book for anyone interested in the history of 20th century libertarian thought. If you are new to libertarianism there are more readable authors such as F.A. Hayek. Some parts of the book such as the first chapter are truly lyrical. However, the bulk of the book is diminished by Paterson use of the terminology of electrical power transmission as a metaphor for economic systems. It's not that one necessarily disagrees with her, its that the reader has to stop and decypher the metaphor. Maybe in 1947 when the book was published the metaphor was required to communicate her views, but I don't think so. I think there was straight forward language available to communicate what she had to say. There certainly is today.So, if you are already familiar with libertarian thinking (whether you agree or not) this is an important book. If you are not so familiar the book could feel obscure rather than enlightening.

"The God of the Machine" is an important and enjoyable work for people interested in capitalist economics.The book covers a series of historical periods from the Classical World up through the United States with a purpose of showing that capitalism (contract society) moves society forward and socialism does not.While the writing style flowed smoothly and is not at all like a textbook, this is partly because Isabel Paterson believes in an "energy circuit" that causes human progress. This is where she diverges from Ayn Rand. Both ladies considered capitalism to be the correct way forward for mankind. However, Paterson uses religion to back up this belief while Rand builds solid arguments using only reason to back up this belief.The introduction by Stephen Cox provided useful biographical information about Paterson.John Christmas, author of "Democracy Society"

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