

sit there pleased with yourself for catching it but not able to eat it (p.417).

After reading this book you cannot help admiring Warren and his ability to keep getting up when he has been knocked down. His resistance and sense of humour is a characteristic shared by many Aboriginal people I have met. Unfortunately, many Australians have not had the opportunity or taken the time to really get to know many Aboriginal people. Warren's book therefore serves two purposes. It is not only a story of his life, but also something of a history lesson about the experiences of Aboriginal people in Australia. Readers of this book will definitely be the wiser for it. Hopefully they will also come away with a much deeper appreciation and understanding of what it means to be an Aboriginal person in Australia and the challenges they have had to overcome.

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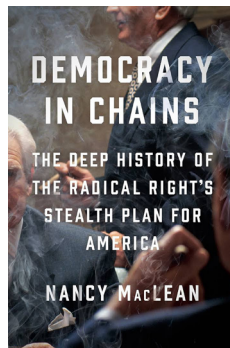
**Democracy in Chains:
The Deep History of the
Radical Right's Stealth
Plan for America**

By Nancy MacLean

Scribe, 2017, 368 pages,

\$35.00

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**Reviewed by
Jeremy Shearmur**

Nancy MacLean is a respected historian based at Duke University in North Carolina. Her *Democracy in Chains* has been mostly well-received, especially by those on the political left. (See, for example, Rebecca Onion's uncritical interview in *Slate*¹ and the British columnist George Monbiot's review 'A Despot in Disguise: One Man's Mission to Rip Up Democracy'.²) MacLean tells a

striking story which inter-relates the work of the public choice Nobel Prize-winning economist James Buchanan, the Koch brothers (who are well-known as financial supporters of libertarianism, and more recently for spending a huge amount of money influencing the Republican Party), and the Tea Party. In addition, she tries to link Buchanan with racism and entanglement with unsavoury aspects of Virginian state politics. She also offers some surprising readings of other scholars, including economist and blogger Tyler Cowen.

The book is a strange piece of work. MacLean obtained access to Buchanan's papers, and has also worked in various archives. But she seems to me to misunderstand badly what was going on, and she has come in for significant criticism for misinterpreting some of the material on which she relies. (Three useful studies are Michael Munger, 'On the Origins and Goals of Public Choice: Constitutional Conspiracy?',³ Brian Doherty, 'What Nancy MacLean Gets Wrong About James Buchanan',⁴ and Henry Farrell and Steven Teles, 'Even the Intellectual Left is Drawn to Conspiracy Theories About the Right. Resist Them'.⁵)

It might be worthwhile, first, to say something about the Koch brothers—Charles and David—and their connections with the Tea Party. (Useful background here are Daniel Schulman's *Sons of Wichita* (2014)—to which MacLean refers—and Jane Mayer's overtly hostile *Dark Money* (2016)).

Charles Koch is a brilliant entrepreneur who built up Koch Industries into a hugely successful private company. He has also been a passionate and hardline libertarian, and has put a great deal of money into the support of libertarianism in various forms. This involved a range of activities from the political, through public policy work, to the academic, the latter including the funding of the Institute for Humane Studies (IHS) at which I worked for about five years. In more recent years, under the prompting of a long-term advisor Richard Fink, and making use of opportunities for political funding opened up by the *Citizens United* Supreme Court case (2010), the Kochs have become involved in the promotion of activism directed at members of Congress, and have funded an organisation which played a significant role in supporting the Tea Party. From this they moved on to the coordination of high-powered donors to, and to becoming important

players in, the Republican Party. This has given them a much higher profile. While their concern has continued to be with liberty, these activities have taken them away from their earlier emphasis on libertarianism.

MacLean in part argues that Buchanan's work plays a key role in this whole story. But here she seems to me simply mistaken. Schulman's well-researched book on the Koch brothers does not even mention Buchanan—while those intellectuals who are mentioned range, rather, from people on the anarchist end of the libertarian spectrum, through Ludwig von Mises, to Friedrich Hayek whose views about the proper role of the state were more complex and who gave it a more extensive role. James Buchanan's focus was narrowly professional. His political views were in some ways close to Hayek's. However, while he was sympathetic to classical liberalism, his approach was distinctive. (For a useful overview, see Geoffrey Brennan's 'James Buchanan: An Assessment'.⁶) Indeed, Buchanan was critical of inherited wealth, in some ways sympathetic to John Rawls, and (pace MacLean) had misgivings about education vouchers because he thought they would give rise to segregation on the basis of class, culture and race. His work was typically of a semi-technical character, and his key concern was to apply the sort of analysis common in neoclassical microeconomics to the understanding of political phenomena. In part, he wished to explain politics; in part to explore constitutional and organisational arrangements which might improve our existing ways of doing things. Buchanan received a Nobel Prize in economics for his efforts in these fields.

Work of this kind—Dennis Mueller's *Public Choice III* (2003) offers a useful overview—has made its mark in both economics and political science. Similar kinds of studies under the label of 'rational choice' have become very common and are pursued by scholars with a wide range of personal and political views. There has been ongoing controversy about the pros and cons of such an approach: Donald Green and Ian Shapiro's *Pathologies of Rational Choice Theory* (1996) is a lively critique. There are also important continuities between Buchanan's work and Hobbes and Hume in the history of political thought.

Buchanan thought that public choice offered an important research program for politics and public

policy. He was particularly critical of the idea that we should treat government as a benevolent, omniscient despot, which could be relied upon to act in the public interest (for example, in the case of 'market failure'). Rather, he and his colleagues thought that we should model political institutions and processes of all kinds as involving people who acted on the basis of their own values and concerns. The work of public choice theorists involved the creation of different kinds of explanatory models on such a basis. It has highlighted the way in which many procedures within democracies can be expected to lead to unexpected and problematic results, while their work on constitutional issues has suggested ways in which some of these problems may be avoided.

With this behind us, let us return to MacLean's book. She suggests in part that Buchanan's work is the hidden secret behind the Kochs and the Tea Party. This is simply incorrect. Buchanan's Center for Study of Public Choice was concerned with technical academic work, and with an outreach program for graduate students in economics. The ideas of Buchanan and of others associated with him are interesting and important for those concerned with the study of political science. They are also something from which MacLean (who is Pollyannaish about democracy and anything motivated by the political intentions she favours) could have learned a lot. But their political thrust is mixed (for example, ideas about 'rent seeking' in politics are important as a tool for the critical analysis of corporate lobbying).

Buchanan's 'constitutional political economy' would be of little appeal to many libertarians. His analysis is not based on individual rights, and its state-focused character has no attraction for the more anarchist-inclined among them. Buchanan himself was friendly towards individual libertarian scholars when he thought that they were doing good work, and would sometimes give talks for IHS. But his focus was very much on his own distinctive and quite narrow academic agenda. His Center received support from individuals and foundations, but Koch support seems (from published sources) to have played only a minor role.

Above all, and here I can speak both on the basis of archival and other research as well as personal

experience, while intellectual ideas have played an important role in the libertarian movement (but much less so in more recent lobbying and the Tea Party), the key popular influences have been Mises, Ayn Rand and to a degree Murray Rothbard. Snippets of ideas from public choice made their way into the wider political vocabulary. But Buchanan's work would have little appeal here either in its character or in its political thrust. Brian Doherty's excellent *Radicals for Capitalism* (2008) mentions that Buchanan once spoke to the strongly libertarian Freedom School, and that he participated in some Volker Fund conferences; but that is it.

MacLean, however, not only gives Buchanan what seems to me a false role in relation to recent political developments, but also tries to smear him through associations with racism and unsavoury aspects of Virginian State politics. She refers to a range of documents, but as Buchanan's papers are not currently open to scholars (her access seems to have been a matter of chance), her work on these can't be evaluated. It will be important that her story is examined carefully, because—as a number of well-informed bloggers and commentators have pointed out—what she makes of published sources leaves a lot to be desired.

All told, this book—and its reception—is symptomatic of the current dire state of politics in America. MacLean does not seem able to take seriously the idea that people with whom she is in political disagreement have ideals which differ from hers and which are just as genuinely held. In addition, she does not seem to understand that well-intentioned actions may have problematic consequences. She tends, rather, to simply assume that her values are right, that the academics with whom she agrees (and the financial sources that support their work) are right about everything, and that anyone who disagrees is mistaken or motivated by sinister interests. What has been perhaps most striking is that in the face of a lot of detailed criticism of her argument, she has reacted not by showing that her critics are wrong, but by arguing that there is a conspiracy against her conducted by people who enjoy financial support from the Kochs. (See also, since this was initially written, her question-and-answer reply to critics but note the discussion which follows.⁷) What is needed instead is serious and respectful engagement

in which all participants assume that they may have something to learn from those with whom they disagree.

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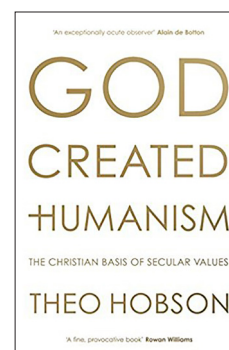
Endnotes

- 1 http://www.slate.com/articles/life/history/2017/06/james_mcgill_buchanan_s_terrorizing_vision_of_society_is_the_intellectual.htm
- 2 <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/jul/19/despot-disguise-democracy-james-mcgill-buchanan-totalitarian-capitalism>
- 3 *Independent Review* (forthcoming, Winter 2018), <http://www.independent.org/issues/article.asp?id=9115>
- 4 <http://reason.com/archives/2017/07/20/what-nancy-maclean-gets-wrong-about-jame>
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- 6 <http://oll.libertyfund.org/pages/geoffrey-brennan-james-buchanan-an-assessment-march-2013>
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God Created Humanism: The Christian Basis of Secular Values

By Theo Hobson
SPCK, 2017, 198 pages
ISBN 978-0-281-07742-7

Reviewed by
Robert Forsyth



This deceptively simple book raises one of the most profound questions of today; what is the moral ideal that underlies the West and how can it robustly stand in a world where it is so contested and challenged. Theo Hobson is aware that part of the problem is that we are not even sufficiently conscious of the moral vision at the heart of our politics and culture. 'We in the