

I believe in belief

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A [comment has been made](#) on my extract from the [Introduction to the Courageous State](#) that says:

Can I comment on two quotes:

Quote number 1:

“A Courageous State is populated by politicians who believe in government. They believe in the power of the office they hold. They believe that office exists for the sake of the public good. They know what that public good is.”

Quote no. 2, six paragraphs later:

“A Courageous politician knows that there is a great deal that he or she does not know, and knows that despite that they will have to act.”

Conceivably that might mean they don't actually know what the public good is, but they will act for the sake of it anyway. Or is the idea that politicians MUST know what the public good is, even if they know nothing at all about anything else?

I can't help feeling that logical inconsistencies like this should have been ironed out in the proof-reading process.

I am also a little concerned by the quasi-religious language. Beliefs abound, but on what are they based? Not much, it seems, except your definitions. What exactly qualifies you to define what politicians should believe?

I admit I find such a comment hard to respond to, because it is based precisely on the logic that The Courageous State sets out to challenge.

Neoliberal economics assumes a) we're rational b) consistent c) all knowing of the future (despite Tom Worstall's denials that this is so - and I explain why in the book) and are therefore, in effect d) automatons. The whole basis on which neoliberalism is

constructed cannot work without these quite absurd ideas - as Steve Keen and others have shown. This commentator's observation is based upon that neoliberal thinking that presumes us automatons without, for example, belief systems (even though, of course, belief in neoliberalism is itself a belief - and a wholly irrational one at that since there is no evidence to support it). That is why I find it very hard to respond to it, but let me try.

Firstly, the fact that a person knows what they think the public good is and persuades sufficient in a population that they share that view so that they are elected to office does not then mean they become omniscient. It means they know what they think. That's all. And I believe that possible. If I did not I could not have written a book about what I think. That's what the first quote is saying. They have a belief and want to deliver policy through holding political office in furtherance of that belief. Respectfully, I'd call that an observation of reality. More than that, knowing this and behaving in this way is the very least I expect of politicians - even though it is abundantly obvious that Cameron and Osborne (and others) fail the test.

And, secondly, I contend there is nothing whatsoever inconsistent with that politician knowing what they seek to do and the fact that they also know that the decisions they will have to make to implement policy to achieve that goal will be based on incomplete and inaccurate information meaning that at the end of the day the politician will have to use their judgement. Anyone but a fool, a neoliberal economist, and bank regulators before Adair Turner saw the light, appreciates the fact that we do not know the future and that the past is a very incomplete guide as to what it might be. In other words, what I have said in the second quote about decision making is actually a truism for all but these three groups. People do act despite simply not knowing what might happen. This is the state of uncertainty that neoliberals deny exists and which Keynes embraced.

So is there an inconsistency that should have been edited out? No: far from it! It is the belief of the politician that informs the decision when there is no clear knowledge on which it is to be based. That is the exercise of judgement that I want elected politicians to undertake in fulfilment of their mandate. It is, indeed, for that judgement that we elect them. What, I wonder, is so baffling about that?

Well, I suggest that to most people there will be nothing baffling at all, but, as this commentator shows, for those schooled in neoliberalism that whole exercise of normal human thinking and decision making has been utterly undermined by the false philosophy they follow which has, as I have argued in the book, left us with politicians who think it is their job to stand back and do nothing - as Cameon, Osborne, Clegg and Alexander prove daily.

There was, therefore no inconsistency to rule out. I very definitely meant what I said.

More than that, I believe in belief. I am also little short of amazed that anyone can

question my right to believe in belief, not least because not believing in belief requires a person to make a statement of belief, which makes the statement that the person does not believe in belief tautologically wrong as a result (like all logical positivist, and much neoliberal economic thinking).

What qualifies me therefore to make my statement of belief? The fact that I am human does! That's it. I believe in humanity in all its glorious and messy diversity, and its inconsistencies, irrationalities and simple lack of knowledge that go to make us the most amazing people whose potential to achieve is the focus of the book, which embraces all that messiness and more. No wonder neoliberals will hate it. And no wonder it offers what I think (there I go one, making a statement of belief) a better explanation of our economy than neoliberalism does.

I'll go further than that - for anyone who thinks we're human and not automatons this book offers an explanation of economics almost unknown in mainstream literature, which was written for automatons, for which we're now all paying the price.