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## **Invisible Hands: Intelligent Design and Free Markets**

**Mark Wexler\***

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### **Abstract:**

This paper investigates the tension, then compatibility of two versions of the invisible hands—free market and intelligent design—in the thinking of fiscal and religious conservatives. The work demonstrates how the secular premises of the invisible hand of the free market meets the theistic version in creationists' advocacy of intelligent design. These invisible hands arguments depict the left as guided by the hubris of blinded experts. Blind experts are deluded. They claim to be able to improve upon the invisible hand of free markets and the great designer. The popular appeal of those invoking invisible hands positions is that they are in touch with a reassuring way finder. If faithfully protected from incursions, the way finder will retain its resilience and yield better results than would be the case if the blinded experts were empowered.

**Key Terms:** Invisible hands; Free markets; Intelligent design; Spontaneous order; Creationism.

## **Introduction:**

The ongoing attempt of the political right to couple economic and religious positions creates a tension between two different uses of the invisible hands metaphor. Free-market advocates strongly believe that complex collective behavior is most effectively coordinated without central planning or governance (Baumol, 2002; Brown, 1997). In fact, this is the notion of the invisible hand most people think about when characterizing economic conservatives and their free-market libertarian deliberations (Aydinonat, 2008; Phillips-Fein, 2009). The invisible hand of Adam Smith (Kennedy, 2009) strained through Hayek's spontaneous order (Boettke, 1990) and enlivened by Friedman's agile free market (Friedman, 2002) is the platform from which the fiscal conservatives build their position.

Those on the political right ardently argue within a libertarian worldview that the public good is best served when government planners and regulators are influenced, indeed captured, by proven market winners (Bo, 2006; Etzioni, 2009). This regime of deregulation (Baldwin and Cave, 1999) and privatization (Hefetz and Warner, 2004) not only rewards risk takers and entrepreneurs, it enables personal freedom for those unconstrained by the strong, visible but inept hand of government planners and regulators. Moreover, keeping centralized government hands off the steering wheel drives the economy towards greater efficiency. The public, as a whole, benefits. The hero of the tale of the logical necessity of decentralized authority is the invisible hand or more realistically the absence of the all too visible hand of regulators and planners (Frye and Shleifer, 1997; Martin, 1990).

In this paper I would like to draw attention away from this well worn depiction of the right's fiscally conservative invisible hand. My focus in this paper remains the invisible hand. However, I argue that the right has two versions of the invisible hand. One stems from the aforementioned free market version. In this it is argued that complexity is best coordinated without centralized planning or design. The other invisible hand emanates out of the notion of intelligent design (Carey, 1998; Dembski, 2002; Ruse 2004). Within the reach of the invisible hand of intelligent design complexity is best coordinated with otherworldly (Maienschein, 2007; Numbers, 2006), but nonetheless, centralized planning. The question posed in this work is not one probing the intellectual adequacy of either position but their compatibility.

To accomplish the task, the paper is partitioned into four sections. The first one entitled "Dueling invisible hands," enlarges upon the inconsistency of the secular, experiment-based version lauded in free markets when it is placed on the same platform as the sacred, faith-based version in intelligent design. In the second, "Shaking invisible hands," outlines how the right in placing reverence upon that which cannot be engineered—the market and the Lord—these two versions of the invisible hand of the right point toward the hubris of blinded expertise. The third section, entitled "The hubris of blinded expertise," explores what regulators and life scientists, in the eyes of the right, have in common. The work closes with a reminder to those studying ideology that metaphors like the invisible hand are not static but evolve and bring together those who may not agree with one another but are willing to suppress this in order to deal a blow to a shared enemy.

### **Dueling invisible hands:**

There is an inconsistency in the simultaneous evocation of the free market form of the invisible hand and the theistic version implicit in intelligent design. The political right appears confused and divided. In the very secular insistence that humans experiment and innovate in free markets (Aune, 2001; Grossman and Helpman, 1993), the invisible hand confronts the sacred, theologically-centered notion of intelligent design (Fuller, 2007; Guant, 2000). Indeed, the free market and the complexity that ensues is a human creation. Innovators are rewarded for experimenting with the accepted and the routine (Floricel and Miller, 2003; Von Hippel, 2005). Markets advance as successful experiments, those deemed useful by purchasers, are selected over those perceived as less valuable.

The micro-behaviors of individual buyers and sellers when aggregated in markets and guided by the invisible hand, result in unintended consequences (Aydinonat, 2008; Khalil, 2000). Suppliers of goods and services are rewarded for innovation; purchasers select that which adds value. When Gordon Gekko in the original Wall Street movie simplified the hard core position of the free trader, in his greed is good rant, he points towards the manner in which greedy individuals seeking to maximize their returns create a wealthier state or nation. In a world of unintended consequences and rampant change, centralized rule-based authority with its very visible hand, plays havoc with experimentation (Bozeman, 2000; Laffront, 1991). Innovators, those playing with the rules and getting results, are not rewarded. The nation, as a result, is impoverished rather than enriched.

Free or unregulated markets license experimentation. It does not matter if the experiment is conscious or accidental. Those who do things differently and get better results are applauded and rewarded. Speculation, risk taking and innovation are the behaviors that are driven away when adherence to the rules is strongly reinforced. The free market is an ongoing experiment in which skillful navigators wrestle with competitors efforts to derail them. In meeting the challenge of ongoing and unremitting competition these successful change agents are rewarded (Baumol, 1996; Eckhardt and Shane, 2003). They learn to seize opportunity. The derailed are pushed to the side in the creative destruction (Cowan, 2002; McKnight, 2001) required of a dynamic and resilient system. Indeed, the invisible hand calls for an ongoing openness to opportunistic experimentation.

Because intelligence is emergent, experimentation is licensed in the free market version of the invisible hand. The best is yet to come. Successful individual experiments, when attracting attention, are diffused, copied and adopted (Rogers, 1995; Swanson and Ramiller, 2004). To be “smart” in the free market is not only to know the trends or what is next, but how best to capitalize upon this knowledge (Alvarez and Barney, 2007; Shane, 2003). In this emergent intelligence, those who either get the future wrong or fail to take advantage of it, fight a rear guard action. Their days as “winners” are numbered. In free markets, knowledge the source of emergent intelligence, like vegetables have a limited shelf life. As the innovative firm or product gets closer to obsolescence (Langlois and Robertson, 1995; Sorensen and Stuart, 2000), demand wanes. Value diminishes. In the rush to produce that which attracts a greater demand, a premium goes to those who push the edge and experiment.

The invisible hand of free markets does not license knowledge for knowledge's sake. Emergent intelligence is pragmatic. It claims to get better results and aims to prove this not in the laboratory or in a controlled experiment but in the reality of the uncontrolled free market. The evidence of the "results" is in the demand for ideas, products and services that pass this test. The invisible hand puts ideas, products and services to the test of continuing demand in the midst of competition (Cosimides and Tooby, 1994; Moore, 2006). Those that get in the way of the invisible hand, those who think they can plan better and beat the market are confusing a mixture of self confidence and wishful thinking.

The invisible hand of intelligent design, on the other hand, outlaws experimentation (Forrest, 2004; Peterson, 2002). It locates intelligence in God's plan and celebrates those who place their faith in this unfolding plan (Moreland, 1998; Witham, 2002). In attempting to put evolutionary theory in its place, intelligent design expresses a discomfort with emergent intelligence. There is a nonhuman, indeed omniscient, central planner in intelligent design's invisible hand. The planner is responsible for and coordinates complexity. The "invisible hand" arises as the central planner's future for the planet is known to the planner but not those on it (Recker, 2010; Susskind, 2006). To be smart in intelligent design requires both acknowledging and placing one's faith in the great designer.

Intelligent design competes with emergent intelligence not solely in the realm of creationism versus evolutionary theory (Hazen, 2005; Isaak, 2007) but also in its understanding of what it means to experiment (Pennock, 2003; Plantinga, 2001). The invisible hand of the free market is a pragmatic. This is the secular world of trial and error. Accidents make a difference. Chance is

no bit player. The invisible hand is an aggregation of individual level experiments, rife with accident and chance. Despite this it is lodged in the merit due to successful competitors. However, the mechanism for aggregating the free market and distributing merit, the invisible hand itself, remains unknowable. In fact, all we know about the invisible hand is that when unfettered markets work more efficiently. Moreover, advocates of the free market version of the invisible hand claim to have data which both establishes the superior performance of free markets and begins to sound a warning as the invisible hand is made dysfunctional (or too visible).

On the other hand, in intelligent design the invisible hand is a principled and sacred notion (Behe, 2003; Holden, 2004). It is bound in faith. It is tied to one's observation of the pervasiveness of the sort of complexity that is incompatible with either chance or accident even when aggregated over time (Davies, 2006; Monton, 2006). Intelligent design addresses the role of the great designer with reverence. The unfolding nature of the design in intelligent design explains change but does not place it solely or even primarily in human and all too visible hands. Change is best served when humans defer to the intelligence of the intelligent designer and avoid confusing this with their own.

Intelligent design unfolds in the invisible hands of the great designer. Rather than speak to the spontaneous order of free markets (Nadeau, 1998; Witt, 1997) it addresses the great chain of being of intelligent design (Kuntz and Kuntz, 1987; Lovejoy, 2009). The world is not static. It changes to the beat and rhythm of this great design. As in Hegel's "unfolding of the idea," there

is a great code. But as life's events unfold, they adhere to the order in the great chain of being. Mankind occupies a relatively important role in the great chain of being but is not at the top.

Humanity understands but part of this code. Efforts to play the role of the great designer or to interject human reasoning as the core element in the design, creates problems (Goggin, 1984; Peters, 2003). These either delay the realization of the intelligent design or worse cause it to spin off course. As the visible hand of regulators throws markets into disequilibrium, so too, the visible hand of stem cell researchers, cloners and those toying with the basics of life throw intelligent design into gyrations (Kitzinger and Williams, 2006; van den Belt, 2009). Visible hands borne by experts are not nearly as smart as these "so called" experts would have one believe.

Being smart in intelligent design entails doing the designer's bidding. Just as emergent intelligence uses market success to distinguish good from poor options, intelligent design relies upon faith and a grassroots belief in the wisdom of common sense. Those with faith recognize the need for humility and ego-deflation in dealing with the complexities that are in the designer's plan. The faithful, with ego well in hand, know better than to assume that their thinking can and should improve upon the unfolding plan of the great designer. Common sense trumps the expertise of those who can coordinate or design complexity.

### **Shaking Invisible Hands:**

While much can be made of the incompatibility of the dueling invisible hands, the strong call to the common sense of results unites them. While the hands are invisible, the results are not. The

proof of the existence of the invisible hand, fiscal conservatives insist, rests less on the word of experts than upon the results of free and unfettered markets. The proof of the existence of intelligent design, in turn, rests not in scientific theories of biological evolution but in the results, all about each and every one, of the Lord's design (Dembski, 2002; Long, 2010). The unifying theme in the two versions of the invisible hands is their shared opposition to human expertise as "the" privileged means of navigating complexity.

There is a form of humility in both versions of the invisible hand. Human intelligence is not the mechanism for the direct control of markets. This is due to unintended consequences of self-interested behavior (Nozick, 1994; Ullmann-Margalit, 1978). The invisible hand selects intelligence from a changing parcel of ongoing experiments. Both the experiments and the number of them in one's repertoire are constrained in regulated markets where the visible hand of the regulator fixes far too rigid a selection tree. It is the flexibility of the spontaneous order, the ongoing adjustments of the invisible hand that outshines the performance of squadrons of well paid and highly educated expert planners.

The invisible hand in free markets works without expertise. That which makes one smart, at least from the free market perspective, is not the ability to navigate complexity oneself or indeed to have intelligent agents (government/ financial planners) act on one's behalf; rather it is faith in the agility and adaptability of the unconstrained invisible hand. Faith in a mechanism which operates invisibly, devoid of intention is not treated as a mystery. It is tied to an empirical examination of data. Market activities are studied carefully. Small disequilibria are, over time, met with more and better information and pushed towards equilibrium (Fama and MacBeth,

1973; Jensen and Meckling, 1976). The faith here is grounded in empiricism but is not directed by human intelligence.

Advocates of free markets use the metaphor of the invisible hand to show the foibles and error-proneness of planners and regulators. In their view, this is because results come not by controlling markets but granting the invisible hand free rein. The regulator's claim to possess privileged insight, namely an array of best practices and preferred outcomes, is problematic. Those making this claim when taken seriously nip innovative behavior in the bud. In the grip of this call to make the invisible hand visible, the freedom of the individual and the dexterity of the economy are endangered.

Similarly, the invisible hand of intelligent design is wary of the privileging of human expertise. It too relies upon an invisible and omniscient mechanism. It too takes umbrage with know-it-all experts. Intelligent design wars with those who espouse natural selection and evolutionary biology (Brauer and Brumbaugh, 2001; Tierney and Holley, 2008) to not only explain how the world as it is experienced it came to be but also that scientific knowledge is not be used to do the work of the great designer. While the invisible hand of the market wars with regulators and centralized planners, the invisible hand on intelligent design levels its sights on those who would explain the complexity of life as a function of natural selection and mutation.

To those who champion the invisible hand of intelligent design, to be smart is to know the relationship between the limits of human intelligence and that of the great designer. Evolutionists and humanists (influenced by them) fail to realize that human intelligence is part of the great

design. It is not, despite temptation, in control of it. The heady mixture of knowledge and sin, a sort of apple in the Garden of Eden, suggests that those who fail to realize the limits of experts' efforts to artificially clone and replicate life or in other ways act as if they had access to the great design are sadly deluded and dangerous.

Moreover, arguing with the sadly deluded and dangerous is not the sort of activity which a sensible individual should engage. While the mechanism or the means used by the great designer is unknown, it is clearly visible by all those who live with their eyes wide open and are not blinded with rule based rituals, measurement rites and hard earned skill of the experts. This blind expertise is a dangerous condition. It leads those so afflicted to believe that they are correct and can improve upon the great designers unfolding plan. It is this confidence— the desire to take the reins of leadership out of the hands of those with contrary views—that make the blinded expert far more than a mere nuisance.

As the expert regulator/planner adversely impacts free markets so too do those who purport to use evolutionary science to improve upon the great chain of being. The invisible hands metaphor when applied to free markets and intelligent design shake hands (rather agreeably) in their joint recognition of expert cognition as well intended but leading to detrimental consequences.

Experts are dangerous. In the invisible hand of free markets, regulators despite wanting the best for the public and using state of the art methods in economics, planning and design do more harm than good. Likewise, researchers and physicians informed by state of the art evolutionary science despite the best intentions are dangerous. Regulator/ planners and evolutionary informed researcher/ physicians suffer, so the right believes, from the hubris of blinded expertise.

### **Hubris of blinded expertise:**

Those who make invisible hands visible do so because they know better. Regulators and planners can, they believe, anticipate and ameliorate the fallout from market failures. They rein in those with a propensity towards wild speculation and irrational exuberance. They must be constrained. If not, innocent third parties will get hurt. Those with leading edge evolutionary knowledge in genetics and the life sciences can, they insist, improve upon irregularities and problems in the great design by anticipating design failures and informing individuals how to avail themselves of medical and scientific advances. To be smart in either version of the invisible hand is to suspend the hubris of assumed expertise and have faith in that which while invisible, yields results.

The hubris of the expert violates this premise. It believes that to see and measure the mechanism is to both understand and control it. The mechanism in markets, according to the invisible hands, is that the unintended consequences of aggregating buy and sell decisions in unfettered markets while capable of short term failure is far superior to investing in expert control and planning. The mechanism in intelligent design is the unfolding plan of the great designer. It, like unfettered markets, has short term costs and problems but if left to its own devices, is a much better steering mechanism than guidance by the willy-nilly controlled experiments and presumed intelligence claimed by the very experts who are, if their claim is heeded, given power and authority.

The rhetorical power of the appeal to the downfall of those following the blinded expert rests in both its populism and its appeal to a plausible and reassuring version of order. Populism, the appeal to the public-at-large and not a version of the elite, is one of the devices used by the right in establishing the legitimacy of its position. This is far more than a manifestation, as the left would have it, of anti-intellectualism. The populism of the invisible hands defines the platform upon which the term “intellectual” sits in pragmatic rather than bureaucratic terms. Intellectuals are defined incorrectly (as the left would have it) when the proof of their value added rests in credentials or positions in a title-ridden bureaucratic agency. Those who get results are, within the pragmatic declension of the right, those who are genuine or actual leaders. Those who get results have faith in invisible hands.

Blinded experts possess the credentials and pedigree of the intellectual but largely fail to get results. Their claim to be on the cutting edge is overstated. For the most part they are captured by the conventions of their precedent-bound methods and speak only to those already immersed in these conventions or willing to defer to them. They are an elite. They are out of touch with the public. Regulator/ planners are not in close contact with those for whom they claim agency. Indeed the regulator/ planners call for inclusion and enhanced public participation is largely an afterthought to decisions largely already put into play. Their hubris is all the more ironic because they are not only convinced that they are part of the solution but as well that they are the loyal agent of a needy and dependent public.

Those, in the eyes of the religious right, who would use science to improve on or repair what is in the realm of the great designer, are dangerous. They are emboldened by their credentials and

the positions they occupy in the rarified world of big science and government-funded research. Like the regulators they have lost touch with the public. Like the regulators/ planners who give lip service to the view that the people know best, the researchers and physicians, in the eyes of the religious right, who believe that they can play God, fail to understand that paternalism—we know what is in your best interest—works poorly when the proof rests in the claim, not in the results. Good intentions even when backed by state-of-the-art training do not compensate for a failure to deliver results.

The results of the ongoing efforts of regulators/planners to improve upon the emergent intelligence of free markets is found wanting. Planned cities do not stand up to those that have evolved along ancient trading paths over several centuries of individual decisions made by generations of everyday citizens. Those who would design a future life to be free of this illness and discomfort are part and parcel of the ongoing effort at piecemeal engineering. The appearance of a plan or design is overstated. The problem is not that with the intentions of regulator/planners or genetic researchers and physicians but with their failure to recognize and act as if they acknowledged and took seriously their limitations.

Order prevails once one accepts the operation of the invisible hand. Human intellect, particularly when sharpened by years of bureaucratic training, is unable to deal with the Zen-like appearance of spontaneous order or to feel comfortable with the placement of the human species in the great chain of being. In the invisible hand of intelligent design, human intellect is part, but not in charge, of the great chain of being. The fall occurs when humans fail to understand their role in the great design and attempt to hijack it. As nature-bound environmentalist seek to find a

fit between design and the natural, those imbued with the intelligent design seek to find a fit between the sacred, that which is off limits, and the secular—that which is in play. It is their view that this line is transgressed by those who are acting as if theirs was the will of God and his or her domain was in play.

The order in the invisible hand is the resilience or capacity to recover after a failure, trauma or setback. It is not the order of “the perfect”. Mistakes and errors will happen. Invisible hand arguments both in the free market and intelligent design format insist that as hands become visible, or as the hubris of blinded expertise emerges, resiliency is impaired. Once one moves from free to regulated markets it becomes harder and harder to recover from layers of regulatory red tape. Like eating of the Tree of Knowledge in the tale of Eden it is hard once one assumes control of the invisible hand of intelligent design to give it back. One begins to act as if there is no sacred domain. In intelligent design being born again speaks to the conscious and difficult effort to return to acknowledging the centrality of the sacred. In so doing one learns to check one’s version of the blinded expert at the door. This is rewarded with a sense of certainty— an understanding that even in the midst of uncertainty there exists the background order of the invisible hand.

In the hubris of the blinded expert what is violated is the ability to access or re-access this background order. Placing faith in the unintended consequences of aggregating buy and sell decisions, over time, heralds a trusting laissez-faire attitude toward the ability of markets to heal themselves. This is endangered with the empowerment of regulator/planners. As in intelligent design, it is not that free markets (or the great design) are perfect. They are not. Markets, even

when free, will fail; suffering and catastrophes even when adhering to the great design will occur. However in both versions of the invisible hand staying with it rather than rushing to ameliorate conditions by making the invisible hand visible will return the impaired system to order more quickly and reliably.

The reassuring element in the background order is that it serves as a lodestar or navigating device. Like the slogan “keep it simple stupid,” (kiss), it carries a useful message in a package which wards off the prolix claims of experts. It is simple. It is clear. When in great doubt, one knows what to trust and why. Faith in invisible hands promise that, in keeping this adage in mind, one will rarely drift too far from a recoverable and desirable reality. It is accessible. It is hopeful. It is relatively easy to hand down from generation to generation. What it speaks to is the fear, especially prevalent in periods of economic and social tumult, of getting lost and worse having to rely on those, who are also lost but do not seem to know it. Invisible hands, in the minds of those who adopt right-wing ideologies, are permanent, popular and accessible way finders. They point the way towards a reassuring accessible future. They also point toward whom to avoid in keeping one’s relationship with invisible hands.

### **Conclusion:**

While the use of the invisible hand metaphor as applied to free markets and intelligent design oppose one another regarding the centrality of planning and the celebration of experimentation, they are in concert with regard to the blinded hubris of the expert. However, is the latter a position that stands up to close scrutiny? It gathers its strength from failure to recognize the

limits of human intellect and in so doing the fall which accompanies this form of hubris.

Moreover, the fall—the inefficiency of regulated markets when planner/regulators are empowered or the invocation of paradise lost when geneticists/stem cell researchers are empowered—would not occur, were neither heeded nor empowered.

The logic to avoiding the “fall” is that the right, in speaking to invisible hands, bypasses and thus avoids the hubris of blinded leaders. Is this so? In order to know both the value of efficient markets and how they operate a cadre of experts with varying credentials working in fields as diverse as policy studies, financial management, economics, regulatory law, business strategy have taken to giving advice. The experts who gather to bolster and support the invisible hand of intelligent design derive their expertise from an understanding of the theological doctrine, sacred texts, family studies especially stressing family values and those who with religious passion claim to be in touch with traces of the unfolding plan of the great designer. Indeed, upon closer inspection, it seems that to know whether one is or is not following the invisible hand requires experts.

The question now becomes—whose experts— the right’s or the left’s is blinded more by hubris? The invisible hands experts ask the public to believe in that which they cannot see but which if left to operate in line with the instructions of the experts will, in time, turn out just right. The right hides the role of the expert. It speaks as if the experts were mere spectators providing a play by play account of the operations of the invisible hand. The expert, as knower in the invisible hands position, is passive. The invisible hand as mechanism (free market) or the great designer (intelligent design) is active. The tacit position here is that passive knowers are not experts.

Passive knowers do not take the lead. It is the invisible hand, not them, that produces results.

Those who do not take the lead, it follows, can not suffer from hubris.

Are the experts in the rights' two versions of the invisible hand actually passive? Or, are they active advocates for a worldview which they attribute to a higher (intelligent design) or more complex source (free market)? Do the experts speaking for and on behalf of the invisible hand channel its position or do they interpret the invisible hand so as to meet their own psychological and or material interests? After all those who advocate for the invisible hand are not responsible for the outcome? When one poses these questions to the right it is hard to get an answer because there is little accountability in the absence of responsibility.

Interestingly the absence of invisible hands positions on the left holds that its experts, at least as portrayed by the right, are responsible for things that go awry. The agent is the expert, not as in the right, the invisible hand (seen and known by the expert). When all is well with the world, it is assumed by the right that the invisible hand is either in place or is so strongly entrenched as to overcome and correct the stumbling misapprehensions of the blinded leftist experts. The position is much like the youthful quip accompanying coin tosses... "Tails I win; heads you lose". The truth of the matter is that where there is the claim of expertise there is the likelihood of error. The error is not due to the emergence of expertise but the reliance upon it by those who in accepting the expert become passive and no longer poke, prod, and worry the issue under examination.

The invisible hands arguments create a version of the expert which remains hidden. The nature, will and existence of the invisible hand are channeled by a group of experts. These passive

experts instruct the public on how and where to achieve the positive outcome of adhering to the invisible hand. They know who endangers the operation of the invisible hand. Indeed in extolling passivity or obeisance, to an invisible hand, these passive experts speak a very strange but highly effective activist language. The edict of this activism is simple. Keep the blinded expert of the left from positions of power and authority and the invisible hand will have its day. Fail to do so and one puts the future in danger.

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\*Mark N. Wexler PhD  
University Professor of Business Ethics & Management  
Segal Graduate School of Business  
500 Grandville Street, Office 3520  
Vancouver, British Columbia Canada V6B 1H7  
Tel 788-782-7846  
E-mail [wexler@sfu.ca](mailto:wexler@sfu.ca)