



Written by [William P. Hoar](#) on June 3, 2022

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The Review

Monster on the Loose!



Govzilla: How the Relentless Growth of Government Is Devouring Our Economy - And Our Freedom

Govzilla: How the Relentless Growth of Government Is Devouring Our Economy – And Our Freedom, by Stephen Moore, (foreword by Senator Rand Paul), Post Hill Press: New York, 2021, 182 pages, paperback.

Originally a fictional creature in an eponymous Japanese movie, Godzilla (*Gojira* in Japan) is an enormous and destructive sea monster supposedly awakened and empowered by nuclear radiation. *Govzilla*, on the other hand, describes a different menacing entity: the gigantic U.S. government. This threat has become devastating, spreading by consuming prodigious amounts of tax dollars. It is all too real.

In his foreword to *Govzilla*, Kentucky Senator Rand Paul credits author Stephen Moore with zeroing in on the “exponential growth of government and urgency of rising up to defend limited, constitutional government.” While the Biden administration does get plenty of, and deserved, lambasting, it is not alone in this regard. Both Republicans and Democrats get taken to task in the book.

Currently, Moore is a senior economist at FreedomWorks. He previously served as an economic advisor to Donald Trump and as a member of *The Wall Street Journal’s* editorial board. A columnist and television commentator, Moore co-founded and served as president of the Club for Growth and worked as a fellow at the Heritage Foundation. After President Trump nominated Moore to serve on the Federal Reserve Board of Governors in 2019, the political left erupted viciously in opposition to that possibility, and Moore eventually withdrew from consideration. He is the author and co-author of multiple other books.

Expansive and Expensive Rulers

This expensive explosion of government has been going on for some time, as Moore points out throughout. And the growth has been dramatic: In 1800, the federal government spent \$43 (all figures



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here in 2021 dollars) for each person in the country; in 1900, that figure was \$225; by 2000, it had reached \$9,574; and, by 2020, that per-person spending hit an astounding \$20,633.

There's plenty of blame to go around. Writes Moore:

Under Trump and the Pelosi-Schumer Congress, we saw unthinkable expansions of governmental power during the pandemic.... Government grew faster than any other single industry during the COVID-19 crisis. In 2020, government was the number-one growth industry in America — with the output and spending of the state outpacing the output of all 10 million private firms and 150 million workers for the first time in American history.

After reviewing how long we have been taking the wrong fiscal direction, especially in more recent years, the author points out that the *Titanic* was already “headed to the iceberg.” Joe Biden, for his part, “just wants to speed up the ship!”

Book publication schedules can't keep up with all the details and vagaries of day-to-day politics (and altering recent numbers and varying forecasts do affect the benefits of this volume). Or — to dream a seemingly impossible dream — maybe the nation will be stricken with a paroxysm of common sense. If so, that would change the current gloomy economic prognosis.

Even the profligate Biden administration has experienced unexpected bumps in prospective expenditures within its own spendthrift party. But this is where we are headed, at least by some estimates: “Under the Biden spending plan, federal government spending would lurch to 50 percent of all national output over thirty years.” Revenues are not the problem, as the author observes; “spending is.”

The federal splurging has been accompanied by major indulging by local and state governments, though they generally have balanced-budget requirements. Such spending has risen fivefold since 1960.

Graphs in *Govzilla* depict how total government spending has been boosted — such as measuring it against our nation's economic output or by population growth. In the latter case, consider that in 1940, government spending was just \$1,000 per household. That number jumped, by 2020, more than 70 times, with total government spending reaching \$75,000 per household. “Very few American households,” comments Moore, “believe that they receive \$75,000 worth of public goods and services each year.”

Enduring Welfare State

On the other hand, there are many households that are on the receiving end. Moore also touches on such “entitlements” and income transfers. In 1980, as he recapitulates, the federal government redistributed about \$200 billion. By 2020, however, the total of income-transfer payments had grown to almost \$2.5 trillion — or 12-fold.

It is “ironic,” in the author's words, that when President Lyndon Johnson “created the modern-day welfare state, he stated that the ‘days of the dole are numbered in America.’ Well, we are well beyond day 15,000 and the welfare state is larger and has captured more Americans into its grasp than ever before.”

Uncle Sam these days finds it very difficult to keep his balance — because there are so many hands in



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his pockets. Very grasping hands.

Moore cites a study that he and University of Chicago economist Casey Mulligan published, which was sponsored by the Committee to Unleash Prosperity. The study found that, “thanks to Biden’s new welfare-state expansions, families can get up to \$100,000 in government benefits (tax free) without anyone working a single day all year!”



Worse, even the mountains of spending involved for such schemes don’t result in balanced budgets. Accordingly, that pushes spending even higher. The national debt and related interest payments keep growing. Net federal interest expenditures grew, recounts Moore, well beyond 40,000 percent between 1940 and 2020.

Who Wields the Scepter?

Sadly, if you are in business these days, it’s not your competition that you need to worry about the most. Rather, you probably need protection from your own government. If Washington isn’t taxing you to death (and beyond), and spending money that it doesn’t have, it is regulating you into penury.

Govzilla cites an excellent source while delving into the costs we are forced to pay in order to be regulated by the federal government: the Competitive Enterprise Institute and CEI’s annual *Ten Thousand Commandments*. Totals are on the rise again after a partial reprieve under the Trump administration. Here are some of Moore’s excerpts from the 2020 edition of the “Commandments,” which puts the cost of federal regulations beyond \$1.9 trillion:

- The total “is greater than the corporate and personal income tax combined.”
- On its own, the federal regulatory burden would be the eighth-largest economy in the world, right behind Italy.
- The annual estimated federal regulatory burden per household is in the neighborhood of \$14,500.
- Per household, that “amounts to 18 percent of the average pretax budget and exceeds every item in that budget, except housing.”
- In 2019 [pre-pandemic], “federal agencies issued 28 regulations for every bill passed” by



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Congress.

Though his party has a majority (at least for now) in the House and Senate, Biden is fond of bypassing Congress. He did just that in July of 2021 with an executive order aimed at what the Associated Press called “Big Business.” The order, recounts Moore, placed a new “regulatory spotlight on big tech, Wall Street, healthcare, and the service sector of the economy. It deals with every industry from drug stores to airlines to hearing aids to internet service.”

Hmm, that executive order does sound suspicious. If only we could find the proper meddlesome official to scrutinize it, the order itself probably needs an environmental impact statement.

As you can see, *Govzilla* has many merits. However, the book’s editing — or lack thereof in places — does a disservice to its author. This includes more than a few typos, misspellings (including of proper names), and slipshod attributions. Then there’s a *Washington Post* excerpt that is quoted, *in extenso*, twice; it’s an apt segment of a column by the late Charles Krauthammer calling for “abolition” of the words “billion” and “trillion” in favor of “thousand million” and “thousand thousand million” as a better way to convey the “enormity of the sums they are meant to denote.” It’s a noteworthy point — but it’s overkill (and presumably an editorial lapse) to put the entire 100-plus-word passage on pages 20 and 157.

When it comes to the book’s direction, though, the author illustrates capably the monstrous nature of fedgov, both in terms of what it does and its actual size. Not only is the federal government the nation’s largest employer, it is also the largest property owner. According to an inventory by the General Services Administration, the federal government owns and leases more than “376.9 million square feet of space in 9,600 buildings in more than 2,200 communities nationwide.” In addition, in terms of public land, the “federal government owns and manages approximately 28 percent” of the U.S. landmass.

How to Bounce Back

The book’s epilogue offers 21 potential reforms (in abbreviated fashion) that are aimed at restoring “freedom, prosperity and balanced budgets.” Some are more realistic than others, especially when you consider how far down the socialistic path we have gone.

The first suggested is a flat tax, which would give us a tax code that is “simple, fair and understandable.” If America has the lowest tax rates in the world, says Moore, “we win.” But why not eliminate the federal income tax? After all, the way to lower taxes is through less government, and the way to accomplish that is to eliminate and phase out unconstitutional programs. Unfortunately, Moore’s proposals fall far short of that. For instance, his wish list for reining in “Govzilla” includes such matters as requiring universities and colleges to freeze tuition costs for 10 years as a condition for receiving “any federal grants, aid, student loans, or other research grants.” But why accept the principle of federal aid to education to begin with?

Another strategy advocated to defeat “Govzilla” is a spending cap, limiting overall federal spending “to the previous year’s increase in population and inflation, with a two-thirds vote required in both houses of Congress.” But rather than capping big spending, the spending needs to be rolled back. Yes, the pushback would be extreme, but only by overcoming the pushback and reversing direction can fiscal disaster be averted.



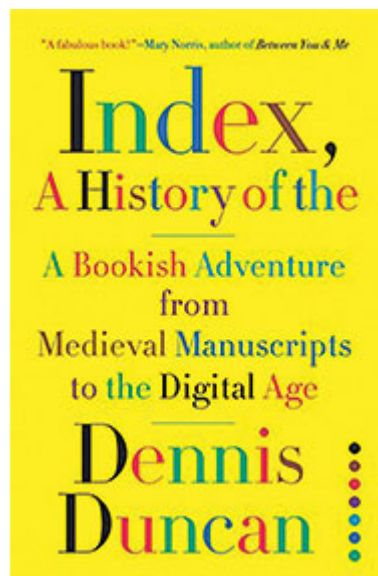
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Washington, alas, wants to control everything except its own spending.

William P. Hoar is a longtime writer for The New American and its predecessor magazines.

Book About the Back of the Book



Index, A History of the: A Bookish Adventure from Medieval Manuscripts to the Digital Age
Index, A History of the: A Bookish Adventure from Medieval Manuscripts to the Digital Age, by
Dennis Duncan, W.W. Norton: New York, first American edition, 2022, 352 pages, hardcover.

Don't shake your head, dear reader, if you are wondering how anyone could write an interesting treatise about those things that one finds in the backs of books. Think again — for British academic Dennis Duncan has done just that, and in a scholarly and often entertaining fashion. For the record, the volume was named a “Most Anticipated Book of 2022” by the Literary Hub site.

Duncan is a lecturer in English at University College London; his writing has appeared in several British publications, including *The Guardian*, *Times Literary Supplement*, and the *London Review of Books*. Aptly titled, *Index, A History of the* is accompanied by a deep dive into the past — because the history of the index is longer even than printing itself.

Granted, this volume may be more rewarding to a person somewhat afflicted with nerdish bibliophilia. Such a person might be prompted by the book, for instance, to pull from laden shelves a massive analytic concordance of the Bible for comparison purposes; or a special edition and guide to Thucydides' *The Peloponnesian War* to see how explanatory marginal notes work in conjunction with an index; or dig a bit more than Duncan does into a copy of *Curiosities of Literature* (one-volume first edition, 1866) and Isaac D'Israeli's decrying of the vanity of English writer and printer Samuel Richardson.

Fortunately, we know of such a person.

As it happens, the first thing that particular new reader did with *Index, A History of the* was to jump right to the end in order to scope out the volume's index. There, one finds that there are two of them provided — an abbreviated index done (rather poorly) by a software program, and another prepared (well and wittingly) by Paula Clarke Bain, self-described as a “professional indexer and a human being.” (We'll revisit this below, as we subsequently did, as dessert, after completing the book's main course.)



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The second thing that we checked, out of professional curiosity, was how the author treats the plural of the word *index*. Relying on the counsel of a Victorian bibliographer and Shakespeare (*Troilus and Cressida*), Duncan follows suit, saying, “Indices are for mathematicians and economists; indexes are what you find at the back of a book.” Roger that.

While the “index” itself has a history of some eight centuries, this volume goes beyond that into its roots (including inventories and tags that identified scrolls). Such could be found in the Great Library of Alexandria or in tables of contents used by Roman authors. After indexes were developed, preachers and teachers were among the first key users for Biblical passages. The account in review goes from European monasteries and universities, where indexes were composed by 13th-century scholars, right up to today’s Silicon Valley. If you’re counting, there are tidbits of this general subject covering around 2,200 years.

The foundations of current indexes — alphabetical order and pagination — are examined rather thoroughly. Duncan brings us back to what he calls “the axes” of the way we now think of indexing: “word versus concept; concordance versus subject index; specific versus universal.”

To show the nature of the detail involved in the book, consider that readers are provided with one entire chapter on page numbers. (As the author says, “an index without locators is about as much use as a bicycle without wheels.”) Still, many earlier indexers didn’t use numbers or alphabetical ordering, and did ordering conceptually. One “main player” in the book, Robert Grosseteste, used letters of the Greek and Roman alphabets, but also mathematical signs, modified zodiacal signs, dots, strokes, curves, squiggles, and tiny illustrations.

Grosseteste, as Duncan notes, was both lecturer and preacher (Chancellor of Oxford and Bishop of Lincoln) and “one of the great polymaths of the English Middle Ages”; he was also a poet, statesman, mathematician, and religious reformer. He devised the *Tabula* (a depiction of its opening, one of 40 illustrations in the book, is reproduced). A single incomplete copy survives in France. His “great table” was devised to bring, in Duncan’s words, “cosmos out of chaos by categorizing the concepts he encountered, whether in patristic or pagan writings, keeping similar ideas together, and storing their locations for future reference. An encyclopedic mind needs an encyclopedic index to provide it with structure.”





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Dennis Duncan

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One point of contention over the years, for various reasons, has been the location of the index. As its use became more prevalent, notes the author, “so too does the chance that readers will find it *first*.” Shakespearean examples are given, among others, over this concern. Yet, as Duncan points out, in the days of the early printed book, “the back-of-book index was often the front-of-the book index.”

The book is strewn with noteworthy anecdotes, which provide gems here and there if not always a consistent train of thought. There is, *inter alia*, a tale about Jonathan Swift and the indexing and reading habits of the time — a recurrent theme. One of Swift’s gripes was that people are no longer reading books. Sound familiar? Duncan quotes Swift on such lazy offenders:

Those are Men who pretend to understand a Book, by scouting thro’ the Index, as if a Traveller should go about to describe a Palace, when he had seen nothing but the Privy.

Another series of narratives involves politically related complaints about indexing in bad faith, at least from the point of view of the original writer. Such a practice led to a well-known quotation. As Thomas Babington Macaulay lay dying, he reportedly whispered one instruction to his publisher: “Let no damned Tory index my *History*!” A 19th-century Whig politician and historian, Macaulay was working on his fifth volume of *The History of England* at that time (1859). He was well aware that indexes could be, and had often been, weaponized. The object in such cases was to distort the reader’s understanding of what a book’s author meant, as Duncan relates in several sketches.

We also learn of the French priest and publisher Jacques-Paul Migne (1800-1875), who published editions of theological works, encyclopedias, and the texts of the Church Fathers, with the goal of providing a universal library for the Catholic priesthood. The main text of his *Patrologia Latina* filled 217 volumes, with four more (volumes 218 to 221) being indexes.

We end this review as we started the book, with the index (rather, indexes) of *Index*. The first of these, as noted above, is a computer-generated version. It would have included, if all had been allowed into print, several thousand entries. Such a resultant computerized index would still have required human editing. Overall, the results are sad, and the life of this version is cut short.

What is not sad is what happens when Dennis Duncan hands the stage over to “Paula Clarke Bain, our human indexer, to bring an end to the proceedings, and to show how things should be done.”

Bain, a member of the Society of Indexers, does just that, professionally, drolly, and jokily. We don’t want to spoil all the fun for those with inquiring minds willing to hunt through the index to find her treats sprinkled among the serious discerning entries. Still, a few representative ones do follow. For example, she sends users into circular cross-references as part of a literal wild goose chase. One goes to “chase, wild goose *see* goose chase, wild”; next from “goose chase, wild *see* wild goose chase”; then to “wild goose chase, *see* chase, wild goose.”

On page 330, we discover a prankish entry: “msiprints *see* misprints” — with the latter entry being a real reference to a book by Italo Calvino (1923-1985).

Indexer Bain wags right to the end — with the last entry of the closing page being capped by its finale: “Z, z, z ‘And so to bed’ [PCB].”



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