

REASON, THE FOUNDATION OF LIBERTY

*Freedom is integral with natural philosophy,
yet alien to supernatural belief systems*

"The legitimate powers of government extend to such acts as are injurious to others. But it does me no injury for my neighbor to say there are twenty gods, or no god. It neither picks my pocket nor breaks my leg." — Thomas Jefferson

With the recent emergence of Ron Paul as a cultural force, as the spearhead of a diverse, modern new movement toward Constitutional Liberty (CL), there's a tendency to see his persona as the CL message, itself. Fortunately, Dr. Paul is quick to persuade us that he is solely a humble, modern courier of a valid political-economic message that has been around a long time; he even goes further to assure us that accepting the CL message[1] does not require embracing his own particular Christian viewpoint.

Fair enough. Unfortunately—or maybe fortunately—you can't separate a person's philosophy and his/her politics so neatly... at least not in the minds of the voting public. The other day a member of my golf league, upon seeing my Ron Paul cap, commented, "I can't support a man for political office, especially a medical doctor, who doesn't accept [the theory of] Evolution."

I was taken aback. Does Ron Paul truly dispute Darwinian evolution?!

I knew, for the longest time, the otherwise pro-liberty Dr. Paul maintained a contradictory rejection of women's reproductive freedom (though he would make no federal law prohibiting abortion). I thought this misogynistic embrace of state-forced birth to be a simple aberration of little real political effect—in a Ron Paul administration, abortion would remain effectively legal and accessible. [We all have mental anomalies: I fully believe I'll be able to break par in golf on a regular basis.]

But if a leading CL messenger like Dr. Paul believes in Biblical creation, that blows the nuts clean off the buggy. He may as well believe in Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny... and hey, doc, how about bleeding your patients to cure cancer?! The argument for CL is undercut—i.e. political freedom becomes unscientific—if a noteworthy advocate of liberty feels the justification of freedom stems from an anthropomorphic phantom that created the world (in seven days) and runs our world and our lives. There isn't any way to sugar coat so fundamental a void of reason.

Sadly, my golf buddy was right about Ron Paul's belief in creationism. Here's the podcast. Even though Dr. Paul protests the question's relevance, a viewer knows that rejection of the scientific method has strong implications, in particular, for how a political man will face issues that require technical knowledge. For example, if one disregards evidence of basic anthropology what's to keep one from denying that anthropogenic carbon is building up dangerously in the atmosphere?

*Here, I'm noting that far too many of my libertarian friends have a logic disconnect about the reality of global warming. [The question of what a social system should do about catastrophic climate change is quite a separate consideration, and I'll grant there are currently too many statist jumping on the bandwagon of central government micro-control. This will change: solutions will become market- and rights-driven.] IMHO, my review of Tim Flannery's excellent tome *The Weather Makers* [also my review of *the slipshod and irresponsible Unstoppable Global Warming*] lays out the short version of rationality vis a vis the fact of hazardous, anthropogenic global warming.*

Before moving off the Ron Paul situation to a more general consideration of the humanistic value of natural reason[2], let me just state for the record: We don't live in a moral or social vacuum, and a culture plays out in the here and now with enormous inertia. People are not going to abandon their inherited belief systems overnight, and the vast majority—Ayn Rand's less than charitable (yet ideologically accurate) term for them is "ballast"—simply accept uncritically what various 'authorities' have programmed into them.

Thus, even in this age of the approaching Singularity, it will take several years, possibly a decade or two, for supernatural belief systems, particularly supernatural Christianity, to fade out. And the remarkable Ron Paul-led movement toward Constitutional liberty is so fundamentally valuable as to make any vestige of

irrational Christianity in Ron Paul's own feelings a trivial handicap to the CL movement. As Jefferson put it:

"The legitimate powers of government extend to such acts as are injurious to others. But it does me no injury for my neighbor to say there are twenty gods, or no god. It neither picks my pocket nor breaks my leg."[3]

Fast reverse to the Free State Project and my early participation in it. During those years of 2005 and 2006, I wrote a panegyric of sorts entitled *New Pilgrim Chronicles*, a book I self-published on Lulu. In my ode to the Free State movement, I covered not only what it was like to move to New Hampshire (as a 50-something single man), but also how my philosophical and political thinking was changing in this new cauldron of activism. In wretched excess I laid out several paragraphs of overwrought prose contra faith.

And it cost me. For in December 2006, Dr. Mary Ruwart, quintessential America 'libertarian industry' leader and author of the revolutionary *Healing Our World*, declined to endorse my book, stating it disrespected people of faith.[4] [Actually, I never condemned people, I only had a boulder in my shoe about a form of human consciousness, superstitious faith, which I see as destructive of life and happiness. But I agree with Mary that the next edition of the book—due in September '08—will be much better without these antifaith pages.] In the first edition, I made most of the points that needed making; let's see if I can repeat the substance of those comments here in a kinder, gentler form:

Rand, whose individualistic, egoistic reason I found inspiring from the gitgo, claimed that liberty was the necessary yet not sufficient condition for life. By the same token, reason—which when you get right down to it is the divinely selfish art of making sense of things—is the necessary yet not sufficient condition for liberty. It takes a lot of thinking and hard work to create a society in which individual rights are observed (the founding of America did not occur by mobs chanting "Freedom Now!"); even then you can't guarantee some cabal of power or some external aggressor won't come in and take your freedom away.

Specifically, the original United States Constitution containing the Bill of Rights represents a triumph of reason in politics. It's taken a helluva beating through the centuries, but it still reads as fresh as the day it was born. This connection of the Constitution to reason is a major factor in my formulation of Constitutional Liberty as the message of the century, and I know it's a winning combination. We need to recognize that the CL movement is a coalition... and there will be good people in this coalition who believe in the Great Pumpkin or whatnot. Yet we who understand that freedom makes sense must continually sell freedom to others based on reason, science, and logic.

As a rearguard action, we can open the doors to honest discussion of reason vs. faith among well-intended people in the freedom movement. This is a debate only reason can win, and I've covered some of the argument in other pages [a], [b], [c], [d], [e]... Let me lay down a first salvo paraphrased from the original edition of NPC:

As Ayn Rand and Aristotle tell us: reason is the faculty for discovering, perceiving, and integrating the facts of reality. Life and, therefore, morality require the commitment of people to know, i.e. to use reason to discover the truth of things. We can spend a lot of time arguing exactly how to define reason, but most of us know it when we see it... or when we use it. Reason, the art of knowing things, is first and foremost our tool of survival.

Faith, by the general definition, is the acceptance of ideas or propositions without sensory evidence or logical demonstration. People of superstitious faith are literally liable to believe in anything. There are no standards of logic, evidence, or fact to validate one set of faith-based propositions relative to others. [Faith is why a handful of people still accept the official explanation of 9/11.]

Faith is the "because I say so" of philosophy, and people of faith are held virtuous to the extent they unquestioningly obey whoever/ whatever is doing the saying-so: a deity, a king, a commissar, a führer, the Bushwhacker... or even the Great Pumpkin.

Thus at the root, as human beings desirous of flourishing in the galaxy, we need to take a stand for intellectual quality over mindless acceptance of utter crap. As Thomas Jefferson put it: "I have sworn eternal hostility toward every form of tyranny over the mind of man." q.e.d.

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[1] Increasingly, I'm becoming a vocal advocate of CL. When you tell most people you're a libertarian or you advocate radical liberty, they look at you funny and back away. When you assert, "I'm a staunch advocate of Constitutional liberty, particularly the Bill of Rights," most Americans find that phrase wholeheartedly agreeable. Try it! For my own CL definition, please consult this link.

[2] When you tell most people that you're an advocate of reason, you tend to draw blank stares. Then there are those, chiefly orthodox Randians, many of whom have taken the term "reason" and turned its definition into a cult loyalty test. As with note #1—moving from use of "libertarian" to "Constitutional liberty"—I've increasingly been comfortable advocating natural reason—the simple respect for nature and the biological imperative for using our unique conceptual ability to noodle things out based on hard evidence and facts—from more proprietary or moralistic interpretations.

[3] From an interesting site named Reason and Reverence.

[4] From the beginnings of the modern libertarian movement, I've noted a persistent—in my view, highly self-limiting—"celebrity hoarding syndrome." The typical "success" in our niche libertarian market doesn't want to lend his enthusiasm or support to others who contribute something creatively different from what he, himself, has done. "Free State Project? Can't work." "Reason Magazine? Bunch o' sellouts." "Libertarian Party? Sets liberty back for generations." "New Pilgrim Chronicles? Disses religion."

I think we need to get over this ego-inflated exclusionary process. We can't afford to withhold meaningful attaboys and moral support for the miniscule number of other kindred souls rowing in the same general direction. It makes me think of Ben Franklin's sentiment, "Gentlemen, we must all hang together, or we shall certainly hang separately."

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