



Ilana Mercer and the Paleolibertarian Ideal

Former *National Review* contributor John Derbyshire has recently penned a review of Hans Hermann-Hoppe's latest book. Doubtless, the latter is a worthwhile read, for the Austrian school economist who authored it is a thinker as original as he is erudite. But it is not Hermann-Hoppe or his work to which I wish to speak here.

The point that needs addressing in Derbyshire's review pertains to, not so much Hermann-Hoppe, but the school of thought — the “paleolibertarianism” — with which the reviewer associates the latter.

VDARE.com contributor Arthur Pendleton once referred to paleolibertarianism as “the once-promising intellectual movement that stayed true to libertarian principles while opposing open borders, libertinism, egalitarianism, and political correctness.” It is with approval that Derbyshire quotes Pendleton on this score. Yet immediately afterwards, he laments the virtual extinction of this fine tradition, adding that “even persons knowledgeable about the pond life of dissident conservatism might pause when asked to name a current paleolib.”

However, all is not lost, Derbyshire assures us, for there is at least one proponent of paleolibertarianism left standing, and his name is — what else? — Hans Hermann-Hoppe. As it turns out, this much vaunted tradition “is not dead” after all. In fact, so “long as Hans Hermann-Hoppe is with us,” Derbyshire joyfully concludes, paleolibertarianism promises to be “flourishing” and “vigorous [.]”

Fortunately, for Derbyshire — and, for that matter, the rest of us who share his affection for “this once promising intellectual movement” — things are even better than he thinks: there is more than one paleolibertarian left.

In particular, there is one self-avowed “paleolibertarian” who regularly reaches a vastly larger audience than that reached by Hermann-Hoppe or any other academic writer, an audience composed of those who are “knowledgeable about the pond life of dissident conservatism” as well as of those who have no such knowledge. Interestingly — strangely? — Derbyshire and his colleagues at VDARE are among its members.

The name that is, if not above every other when it comes to all things paleolibertarian, at least near the top, is that of Ilana Mercer.





Written by [Jack Kerwick, Ph.D.](#) on October 1, 2012

For years, Mercer has authored a weekly column — “Return to Reason” — at the very popular World Net Daily website. The most casual perusal of her archives there readily reveals that she is as ardent a champion as any of that tradition that Derbyshire and Arthur Pendleton applauded for affirming “libertarian principles while opposing open borders, libertinism, egalitarianism, and political correctness.” But if, per impossible, this isn’t sufficient to convince the terminally ignorant, then perhaps the fact that Mercer also pens the “Paleolibertarian Column” at Russia Today (RT) just may do.

Of course, these aren’t the only two publications that have supplied Mercer with the opportunity to introduce paleolibertarianism to the world. Her work has appeared in a staggering plethora of places over the 15 years or so that she has been writing.

And she has authored two insightful books: *Broadsides: One Woman’s Clash with a Corrupt Culture* and *Into the Cannibal’s Pot: Lessons for America from Post-Apartheid South Africa*.

Peter Brimelow, VDARE.com editor, wrote the forward to the former. Derbyshire wrote a sterling review of the latter.

Brimelow and Derbyshire are men whose tastes are as refined as their intellects: Both of Mercer’s books, their marked differences in objectives, content, and structure notwithstanding, are exemplary exhibitions of thought that is at once clear and courageous. As such, they are richly deserving of the praise that Brimelow and Derbyshire bestow upon them.

But, presumably, there is — indeed, there must be — another reason to account for why Brimelow and Derbyshire — fans of the classical liberal tradition, both of them — were as enthusiastic as they were over Mercer’s works.

Simply put, for all of their differences in tone and emphasis, *Broadsides* and *Cannibal* are equally animated by one and the exact same conviction.

It is the conviction on the part of their author that a world in which men and women are free to order their lives in accordance with their own moral purposes, not those of the governments under which they live, is an ethical ideal worth aspiring toward.

It is the conviction that America’s founders were correct in perceiving an inseparable relationship between the liberty for which they risked their lives and a government divided — exponentially divided — against itself.

It is this conviction that explains why everyone who is familiar with Mercer’s thought locates it squarely within the classical liberal or libertarian tradition. Yet to look at it more deeply — though not much more deeply — is to see why it just as solidly compels us to locate it within libertarianism’s paleo strain.

Whether addressing a broad range of issues in an equally broad range of arenas — as she does in *Broadsides* — or shedding blood, sweat, and tears to draw the Western world’s attention to the systematic injustices to which her native South Africa is daily subjected — as she does in *Cannibal* — Mercer is forever cautioning readers against succumbing to the contemporary Western temptation to indulge in abstractions.

To put it another way, she has been laboring tirelessly to remind us of something that this generation of liberty’s defenders are all too ready to forget: Liberty is as dependent upon historical and cultural contingencies as is any other artifact. And it is just as fragile.

It is this insight on Mercer’s part that informs her opposition to America’s foreign policy of “spreading”



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democracy no less than her equally impassioned opposition to our domestic policy of promoting unfettered immigration from those cultures that know nothing of the habits of liberty.

Mercer articulates as systematic an account of paleolibertarianism as any to be found. Yet she is no mere system-builder. Rather, it is an intense self-consciousness — of her views, yes, but, just as tellingly, of her life experiences — that accounts for Mercer's unrelenting pursuit of the logic of the paleolibertarian ideal: an ideal of liberty brought down from the clouds to the nit and the grit of the history and culture from which it emerged.

John Derbyshire and all lovers of liberty should sleep comfortably. Yes, paleolibertarianism remains with us.

And as long as Ilana Mercer continues doing what she has been doing, it promises to remain with us for quite some time to come.



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