



Ron Paul Versus the Enemies of Reason

Readers of this column know that this isn't the first time that I have addressed the Paul Derangement Syndrome that has overtaken the good doctor's Republican critics. It also isn't the first time that I have singled out Levin as a textbook case of this disorder.

There is a reason for this.

That both the substance of Paul's thought as well as — especially! — the manner in which he tends to articulate it should elicit objections from his fellow partisans is an unremarkable phenomenon. Quite recently, I wrote an article in which I showed the respects in which my own political philosophical orientation — conservatism — is *fundamentally* at odds with that of Paul. The difference, though, between, say, Jack Kerwick and Mark Levin, is that Levin can't resist the impulse to couch his criticisms of Paul within a pile of abusive names that he reserves for the man; I, on the other hand, feel no such compulsion.



In other words, Levin is emblematic of the phenomenon to which I refer as the Paul Derangement Syndrome, a craze that renders otherwise reasonably sane (even if frequently misguided) Republicans into embodiments of raw, undifferentiated irrationality at the very mention of Ron Paul's name.

It is *this* phenomenon that succeeds in arresting so much of my attention as of late.

When the 18th-century philosopher Immanuel Kant alluded to "misology," it was the hatred of *reason* to which he referred. Well, if misology is the hatred of reason, then "the misologist" is *the person* who despises reason. Levin, I contend, represents a sizable number of self-proclaimed "conservatives" who are pathological misologists when it comes to Ron Paul.

Levin and company insist that they favor "limited government." Levin in particular (to his credit) never misses a moment to show that our current federal government is light years away from the government envisioned and ratified by our country's founders. This is the same person, mind you, who authored an immensely successful book, *Liberty versus Tyranny*, a work within which he conveys an impassioned defense of the *constitutional* republic bequeathed to us from our forbearers while launching an unrelenting attack against all "statists" — i.e. the advocates of "Big government." Any remotely reasonable person can only scratch his head and wonder why an "anti-Statist" like Levin would become as enraged as he does with, of all people, someone like Ron Paul, a person who is even *more* vehemently "anti-Statist" than Levin himself.

It is obvious to anyone who knows anything at all about Levin and the neoconservative-dominated



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Republican Party with which he identifies that above and beyond anything else, it is Paul's resolute disavowal of America's foreign policy that so upsets them. Long before the war in Iraq became as wildly unpopular with the country as it eventually did, Paul was sounding the alarm against what he and many others call "interventionism," a doctrine that, presupposing as it does "the exceptional" character of America, calls for it to assert itself militarily into societies around the world for the sake of transforming them into "democracies." Paul argues that not only is this project of exporting "Democracy" financially unsustainable, it is as well immoral and unconstitutional.

This alone is sufficient to make Paul *persona non grata* among establishment Republicans like Levin. But when Paul then failed to treat the prospect of a nuclear armed Iran with a degree of concern that Levin and others think is insufficient, he may as well have painted a target on his back for them.

Still, even if one disagrees with Ron Paul on these matters, even if one thinks that he is as wrong headed as anyone can be, the reaction of the Levins of the world to his position can only be judged unreasonable.

Although many champions of "limited government" seem to forget this, the military — the Army, the Navy, the Marines, and the Air Force — is a feature of the federal government. All military personnel, that is, are government employees. Moreover, the military is as much an object of government spending as Social Security and Medicare, and together these three government programs consume the vast majority of our federal expenditures. So, that Ron Paul and others of his ilk should talk about utilizing our military in a more cost-efficient way — even if this requires *cuts* in "defense spending"—is what we should expect from *anyone* who values a strong, but *more limited*, government.

To hear Levin, one could be forgiven for thinking that Ron Paul favored *abolishing* the military. But Paul has never suggested any such thing. Rather, *it is precisely because of his belief in a strong national defense that he staunchly rejects the nation-building enterprise upon which Republicans have embarked the nation.* This enterprise is an exercise in "social engineering" writ large. As such, in addition to being economically infeasible, morally dubious, and inconsistent with the U.S. Constitution, it is as well a profound affront to the sensibilities of the conservative imagination as it has known itself over the last couple of centuries.

How, we can only wonder, can a self-described conservative like Levin *not* affirm or even recognize the spirit of liberty that fundamentally informs Paul's protestations against, not the military itself, but the questionable — indeed, the *utopian* — purposes that the military has been enlisted to serve? Even one who loathes Ron Paul as fiercely as does Levin must know that my account of Paul's perspective here is correct.

If Paul was the pacifist or anarchist that Levin and his ilk have made him out to be, if he really didn't believe that America had any use for a military, if he thought that America had no enemies in the world that posed a real threat to her, or if (as President) he would leave America more vulnerable to external attacks than other presidential contenders and former Presidents, then he would not have supported the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001. And that he supported *the invasion* of Afghanistan and *not* the perpetual engagement to remake it into a "democracy" proves that it has never been the use of military force against America's enemies to which he objects, but the use of military force for the revolutionary (i.e. anti-conservative) end of *nation-building*.

How can Levin and his fellow champions of "limited government" not grasp this?

There are other considerations that reinforce my verdict that Levin and his ilk instantly turn against



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reason as soon as Ron Paul becomes the subject of discussion.

First, if they really think that the federal government should confine itself to the minimal set of functions specified by the U.S. Constitution, then, since Ron Paul is arguing for nothing more or less than just that, we must ask: From whence comes the venomous rage that they routinely unleash upon him? It is understandable and perhaps unavoidable that there should be quarrels over interpretative issues, but when such disputes transpire between those who allegedly share the same desires regarding the general size and scope of government, differences of opinion should never be as radical, and even total, as the response of Paul's detractors would lead us to believe they are.

What is it about Paul's vision of America, a vision in which "limited government" figures centrally, that so frightens Levin and his fellow neoconservative Republicans?

Second, it was during George W. Bush's tenure as President that Iran began pursuing a nuclear weapon. We knew this *then*. Bush is widely heralded by Levin and neoconservatives generally as a great "wartime" president. But if this commander-in-chief extraordinaire did *nothing* to impede Iran's engagements, if his invasions of *two* Middle Eastern countries not only did nothing to deter this, but perhaps even facilitated Iran's determination to arm itself, then why is Paul's position so unacceptable? How is it any worse, practically speaking, than that of Bush's? Furthermore, so far, in spite of some Republican rhetoric of the unacceptability of a nuclear armed Iran, I don't recall anyone stating specifically the course of action that they would like to take to stop Iran's pursuits. What, then, we are compelled to ask Levin, would a President Perry or a President Romney or even a President Santorum do vis-à-vis Iran that a President Paul would not?

Finally, Levin is good friends with Rush Limbaugh. For an alleged conservative to even question the conservative bona fides of the latter is to expose himself as a fraud, as far as Levin is concerned. (This is the most reasonable conclusion to draw. Levin praised Jeffrey Lord for his hit piece on Paul that was published in *The American Spectator*. Among "the proofs" that Lord submitted to establish that Paul was no kind of conservative consisted in an allusion to the fact that some of his supporters rejected the proposition that Limbaugh was a real conservative.) But Limbaugh has regularly, for years, had "black conservative" Walter E. Williams guest host his radio program. This is an inconvenient truth that makes Levin's misology all that much more salient. Williams, you see, considers himself a "libertarian," like Paul. He also regards Ron Paul as his "friend," endorsed him for President in 2008, and once said that if America's founders could visit our day and age, Congressman Paul would be among a tiny handful of people in *all of Congress* to whom they would speak. It is true that Williams admits to having some issues with Paul over foreign policy, but his only beef with Paul is that he thinks that "pre-emptive" war is conceivably justifiable. When it comes to "nation-building" — which is what we have been doing in Iraq and Afghanistan — he agrees wholeheartedly with Ron Paul.

So, we are left asking ourselves how Levin and, for that matter, Limbaugh, can look upon Williams as someone who is worthy to sit in for "the King of 'conservative' talk radio," a great "conservative" himself, while at the same time charging Ron Paul with insanity, recklessness, and all the rest.



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