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## Trump Derangement Syndrome

David Boaz

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Back in 2003, the psychiatrist and columnist Charles Krauthammer declared a new psychiatric syndrome, "Bush Derangement Syndrome: the acute onset of paranoia in otherwise normal people in reaction to the policies, the presidency – nay – the very existence of George W. Bush." He had a point. But derangement can be generated by support as well as opposition for a political figure.

What do we say about conservatives – people who believe, variously, in limited government, free markets, Judeo-Christian values, and the importance of character in public life – who have been forced to utter absurdities in defense of Donald Trump? It's one thing to say that Hillary Clinton and her Supreme Court justices and her 4,000 bureaucrats are on net worse than Trump and whatever menagerie he brings to the White House. But when free-market conservatives find themselves enthusiastically defending the most protectionist presidential candidate since Pat Buchanan, or Christian conservatives are forced to say that personal character isn't really a big issue for them, I fear that derangement has set in. Take just a few examples in the past few days.

In Thursday's Wall Street Journal Karl Rove writes that Trump needs "a Republican House to pass his agenda." But his agenda is trade war, deportation, and banning adherents of the Muslim faith from entering the United States. Is that an agenda a Republican House would pass? Say it ain't so, Karl (or Paul).

Also in Thursday's Journal the Christian author Eric Metaxas writes that "God will not hold us guiltless" if we fail to vote for Trump. Metaxas oddly cites Dietrich Bonhoeffer as a Christian who also had to make a difficult moral choice: He joined a plot to kill Hitler. Is that really something Metaxas thinks God would consider wrong? As for voting for Trump despite his moral flaws, Metaxas tells us that God will ask "What did you do to the least of these?" I wonder where that leads: Perhaps "the least of these" are the Mexican and Chinese workers whose jobs Trump wants to destroy, the Hispanic immigrants he wants to deport, separating them from their U.S.-born children, the low-income Americans who will find it harder to afford T-shirts, sneakers, and smartphones, or the refugees fleeing war and devastation whom he would bar from the United States on the basis of their faith.

And then there's Ben Carson, who delivered himself of these thoughts at a college in Missouri:

"Ben Carson urged a conservative audience to be strong in their faith and stand by their beliefs in the face of 'ever-growing government.'

“Tyranny will reign otherwise, ‘and there will be mass killings once again,’ Carson told a crowd Friday. ‘The peace that we experience now will be a memory only. This is the nation that stands between peace and utter chaos.’

“Asked at a press conference how he thought such a grim future might come about, Carson referenced ‘the whole gay marriage issue.’

“‘Why must they change it?’ Carson said, referring to efforts to recognize civil unions as equal to traditional marriage. ‘I believe the reason is, if you can change the word of God in one area, then you can change it in every area. It’s the camel’s nose under the tent, and it will just be an avalanche of one thing after the other.’”

Maybe that’s not exactly Trump Derangement, just general derangement. But Carson was the second former opponent to endorse Trump, and he’s become an enthusiastic surrogate.

Finally, I note the comments of Rush Limbaugh this week. Limbaugh is often funny and sometimes has real insights lurking in his monologues. But the attempt to defend both conservatism and Trump for three hours a day seems to be getting to him. In particular, a guy who soared to the top of the talk radio business by attacking Bill Clinton and his “bimbo eruptions” now finds himself compelled to defend confessions of sexual assault. He fell into the abyss Wednesday with this meditation:

“You know what the magic word, the only thing that matters in American sexual mores today is? One thing. You can do anything, the left will promote and understand and tolerate anything, as long as there is one element. Do you know what it is? Consent. If there is consent on both or all three or all four, however many are involved in the sex act, it’s perfectly fine. Whatever it is. But if the left ever senses and smells that there’s no consent in part of the equation then here come the rape police. But consent is the magic key to the left.”

This is just sad. A conservative, a defender of traditional moral values, denouncing the idea that consent is required for sexual activity. This is what rank partisanship, red team/blue team mentality, and a failure to recognize when your party has taken a wrong turn leads to.

None of this should be construed as an endorsement of Hillary Clinton. I’ve been denouncing her statism since the 1990s. But I hope, for the sake of my conservative friends, that the Wall Street Journal was wrong when it wrote early in the Clinton years, “the personal virtue known as self-restraint was devalued. In the process, certain rules that for a long time had governed behavior also became devalued,” and thus there were going to be a lot of casualties. Because a lot of conservatives seem to be hurtling over the guardrails and defining deviancy down in their determination to justify anything – anything – the Republican nominee for president says or does.

*David Boaz is the executive vice president of the Cato Institute and has played a key role in the development of the Cato Institute and the libertarian movement.*