



Chris McDaniel v. Libertin-arians

By [Sean Parr](#)

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Explaining and defending libertarianism (my seemingly central preoccupation of late) is not a terribly difficult task as the philosophy of freedom is a simple and harmonious thing. But the innate consistency and beauty of libertarianism has not prevented it from being misunderstood or, worse, intentionally mischaracterized – even by those with whom I suspected the core concepts of liberty would likely resonate.

For instance, [David Boaz](#) – a Beltwaytarian with the Cato Institute – recently [offered](#) a bit of nonsense wherein the championing and propounding of same-sex marriage was declared to be something inherently libertarian. I will not attempt here to deflate this mistaken view, but I've [elsewhere](#) discussed that libertarians need not hold liberal positions on social issues. In addition to this gaffe, Boaz found it necessary to problematically define libertarianism as "the political philosophy that says limited government is the best kind of government" which, of course, is only incidental; there are principled reasons that libertarians seek the limitation of State action. These reasons (discussed below) are what libertarianism is all about. The importance of the insufficiency of Boaz's definition of libertarianism cannot be undervalued – for if a somehow-prominent, self-avowed libertarian like Boaz cannot be relied upon to carefully and accurately articulate precisely what libertarianism is how can someone like Mississippi state senator [Chris McDaniel](#) be blamed for his confusion about it?

McDaniel has been [esteemed](#) as "the Tea Party candidate with the best shot of knocking off an incumbent U.S. senator in a GOP primary this year." However, comments [recently surfaced](#) in which McDaniel, during a 2006 campaign for Mississippi governor, trashed libertarianism. Regarding a libertarian opponent of his who "sold campaign merchandise that showed her wearing a low-cut dress, along with the caption, 'more of these boobs,'" McDaniel stated: "If that's not the most typical Libertarian platform I don't know what is. The only thing that could probably make the campaign more Libertarian is a heroin needle in her arm."

Now, there are two possibilities here. Either McDaniel (1) intentionally misrepresented libertarianism for reasons of political expediency or (2) he was, at the time of his 2006 comments, ignorant of what

is entailed by libertarianism. I find the latter possibility more palatable – as it's not only the more likely option, but it doesn't go so far as to impugn the integrity of a decent man.

Recently, in an attempt to explain himself to libertarians and distance himself from these nearly decade old remarks, McDaniel [stated](#) that his comments owe merely to disappointment and frustration at the fact that the comedic and silly approach to politics exercised by his 2006 libertarian adversary, "in the eyes of many voters... minimizes and marginalizes a very complex political philosophy into nothing more than a movement of sex and drugs."

Never mind that it was McDaniel who, at the time of his gubernatorial campaign, confused libertarianism for libertinism.

If, in the eyes of many voters, libertarianism is viewed as a movement of sex and drugs then it is in no small part because those such as McDaniel, with the ability to reach and educate others on the freedom philosophy, opt instead to propagate an untruth (for reasons of disappointment or frustration, it makes no matter).

What then is libertarianism? It, in fact, is not "a very complex political philosophy." It is one that (simply) holds to the non-aggression principle: it is illicit for any individual (or group of individuals) to initiate, or threaten to initiate, aggression against the person or legitimately held property of any other individual (or group of individuals). Libertarianism, as [Llewellyn Rockwell](#) succinctly [put it](#), "is concerned with the use of violence in society. That is all."

So, libertarianism – far from promoting those disagreeable things which McDaniel has ascribed to it – says nothing at all about the sagacity of drug use among self-owners or the morality of adults engaging in a voluntary transaction the object of which is sexual acts, so long as such issues do not in any way entail the violation of the non-aggression principle. One could be dead-set in opposition to drug use and prostitution and still retain excellent libertarian credentials (take me, [\[1\]](#) for instance).

McDaniel might have spared himself the trouble and concomitant humiliation of having to clarify his excoriation of libertarianism by simply researching that branch of law in order to first discover what about it he finds so objectionable. Perhaps he would've found that it suits him just fine?

[John Stuart Mill](#) has [offered](#) some insight in this regard:

The greatest orator, save one, of antiquity, has left it on record that he always studied his adversary's case with as great, if not with still greater, intensity than even his own. What Cicero practised (sic) as the means of forensic success, requires to be imitated by all who study any subject in order to arrive at the truth. He who knows only his own side of the case, knows little of that.

There are implications of libertarianism's core propositions that any truth-seeker must honestly deal with; that any would-be opponent must form an argument against. These implications include the

reality that the law stops where violence ends.

Property rights. The non-aggression principle. Freedom of association. Deference to these is what characterizes a libertarian. However, it now seems that, in addition to maintaining those tenets peculiar to his philosophy, a libertarian must be a fellow who stands athwart not simply history, but – ever leery of those who would misstate his position – reason, accuracy, and sincere debate, yelling "Stop!"

NOTES:

- [1] Which is to say that I am a socially conservative libertarian who maintains that second amendment rights should be upheld, the movement for the government sanction of so-called same-sex marriage opposed, and abortion criminalized in all instances save for those in which the mother's life is at stake.

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