

[« Open Thread](#)[Be careful what music you listen to and what you eat when you're in the forest, amigo. »](#)

James Roberts mans the barricades

Last week, [I wrote about the excellent discussion](#) on the war on drugs going on over at Cato Unbound. I'm pleased to see that discussion has recently been picked up by El Paso's [Newspaper Tree](#).

Remember the Heritage Foundation "economist" that I talked about last time — James Roberts? Well, he returned with a new response called [To the Barricades — for Freedom!](#), which is apparently his way of saying that we must all band together to incarcerate massive segments of our population for participating in consensual activity, so that we can be free... to... band together to incarcerate...

I know, I don't understand it either. But he thinks it's important.

...a culture war [has] been raging against western civilization with increasing intensity for decades. In fact, the entire 233-year history of the United States is a testament to the fight against the dark forces that would enslave humanity. Now is not the time to give into them.

He starts out the piece whining that people have been mean to him in this series.

When the ad hominem attacks begin, it is a cue to the reader that the debate opponent is finding himself on the losing end of the argument. I would expect the assaults if they were coming from the left, but it is disappointing to see them coming from an ally on the right.

The "ally on the right" is presumably Ted Galen Carpenter, a VP at Cato Institute. Here Roberts shows something remarkable — that he believes all conservatives are supportive of government imposed morality. Sure, the sado-moralists have grown in power and number on the far right, but there's still a huge core of conservatives with fiercely libertarian beliefs.

But Roberts can't believe that anyone with principles would fail to join in his condemnation of some drugs, and his sure sense that a massive criminal bureaucracy (and a massive *criminal justice* bureaucracy) is the way to deal with them.

I love the way he finds to defend alcohol, while maintaining his zero-tolerance certainty about other drugs.

The drugs differ greatly from alcohol, with which people have had centuries of experience. Indeed, beer and wine were drunk in European towns and elsewhere in the Middle Ages because the water back then gave people dysentery. So over hundreds of years, people built up a tolerance for alcohol and created social institutions that could deal with its consequences. Many even developed DNA resistance to alcoholism. However, the citizens, social organizations, and cultures of Mexico and the United States have no collective behavioral or physiological experience to draw upon in order to deal with the effects that psychotropic drugs will have on society, especially the young, if taken by masses of people on a routine basis.

Moreover, while alcohol can damage one's health in many ways, it is not likely to lead to lung cancer and emphysema. How will governments condone marijuana smoking while maintaining sanctimonious campaigns of opprobrium against the use of tobacco, which poses a far lesser threat to social order?

Wow. Eat your heart out Fred Astaire. That's some fancy footwork, there, Jim.

And, of course, nothing he says has a bit of evidence attached to it, such as when he imagines the "newly disabled and diseased drug addicts (and their broken families) that legalization will create."

Ted Galen Carpenter does a great job of responding with [Cracks in the Drug War Fortress](#)

The allegation by James Roberts that he has been the victim of ad hominem attacks is bizarre and unhelpful. Until his latest post, the discussion on Cato Unbound has been both civil and substantive. Since I seem to be the principal target of his complaint, I want to point out that I criticized his use of logic and evidence, not his character.

One persistent, troubling feature of his essays is his tendency to counter arguments that no one has made.

Carpenter's essay is an excellent rebuttal, worth reading.



August 28th, 2009 by Pete | [Permalink](#)

6 comments to James Roberts mans the barricades



paul
August 29th, 2009 at 4:25 am

If Roberts thinks that Cato is "an ally on the right", he's got another thing coming. Ally on economic rights, sure, but other conservative issues do not cross over. Cato is libertarian, and they do not agree with much of the mainstream conservative agenda. They are always anti-war, anti prohibition, and in favor of small government and individual rights. The drug war and the drug warriors are pro big government and anti individual rights.