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## Conservatives and "Personal Autonomy"

[Michael C. Moynihan](#) | December 10, 2009

At the Cato Institute blog, David Boaz [calls out](#) *Washington Post* columnist Kathleen Parker for [assuming](#) that, because he is a Republican, former Sen. Rick Santorum must be "pro-limited government." A little bit of Googling and Boaz digs up this gem from a 2005 interview [with NPR](#):

One of the criticisms I make is to what I refer to as more of a libertarianish right. You know, the left has gone so far left and the right in some respects has gone so far right that they touch each other. They come around in the circle. This whole idea of personal autonomy, well I don't think most conservatives hold that point of view. Some do. They have this idea that people should be left alone, be able to do whatever they want to do, government should keep our taxes down and keep our regulations low, that we shouldn't get involved in the bedroom, we shouldn't get involved in cultural issues. You know, people should do whatever they want. Well, that is not how traditional conservatives view the world and I think most conservatives understand that individuals can't go it alone. That there is no such society that I am aware of, where we've had radical individualism and that it succeeds as a culture.

Most conservatives understand that individuals can't go it alone? Societies are doomed to failure if governments refuse to "get involved in the bedroom"? If you can stomach it, Boaz also points to [this video](#) in which Mr. Limited Government "denounced America's Founding idea of 'the pursuit of happiness'" and rails against the "mantra of the left: I have a right to do what I want to do."

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**prolefeed** | 12.10.09 @ 4:49PM | #

It is statist douches likes Santorum and Bush that drove people into voting for Democrats, thinking they'd actually be better, and instead got us, well, everything Reason has been railing about since January.

[reply to this](#)

**sage** | 12.10.09 @ 4:53PM | #

*Kathleen Parker for assuming that, because he is a Republican, former Sen. Rick Santorum must be "pro-limited government."*

YES! I get to be the first to say it:

That's a frothy bit of wishful thinking.

[reply to this](#)

**Thanzor** | 12.10.09 @ 5:01PM | #

That video is one of the most incoherent things I have ever seen.

[reply to this](#)

**Nancy Pelosi** | 12.10.09 @ 5:12PM | #

Are you serious? Are you serious?

[reply to this](#)

**alan** | 12.10.09 @ 5:04PM | #

Well, let me put it in a way your rat sized little brain can understand, Santorum. Unless you enjoy being tied down and wearing a gimp mask, you better stay clear of my bed. Other than that, consider it an open invitation.

[reply to this](#)

**Old Bull Lee** | 12.10.09 @ 5:06PM | #

Damn it sage, you beat me there by minutes!

[reply to this](#)

**Tony** | 12.10.09 @ 5:11PM | #

If our first black president screws it up, at least we could get our first president named after the byproducts of anal sex.

[reply to this](#)

**Anomalous** | 12.10.09 @ 5:22PM | #

Just put

"dan savage" santorum

into your search engine and you will be rewarded.

[reply to this](#)

**briareus** | 12.10.09 @ 5:49PM | #

**Santorum**

*Santorum* 1. The frothy mix of lube and fecal matter that is sometimes the byproduct of anal sex. 2. Senator Rick Santorum.

[reply to this](#)

**Pitdown Man** | 12.10.09 @ 5:23PM | #

All Santorum related stories on

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**Pitdown Man** | 12.10.09 @ 5:24PM | #

Damn it! Where's the pic of Santorum's kids?

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**Pablo** | 12.10.09 @ 5:27PM | #

Trying to find it. It's somewhere on this site. It was just a stroke of luck that someone had a camera ready at that moment. Once in a lifetime shot.

[reply to this](#)

**Warty** | 12.10.09 @ 5:28PM | #

<http://reason.com/blog/2006/11.....mmy-and-sw>

[reply to this](#)

**Warty** | 12.10.09 @ 5:30PM | #

Jesus, highnumber is a genius.

[reply to this](#)

**Cabeza de Vaca** | 12.10.09 @ 5:43PM | #

& he has way too much time on his hands.

[reply to this](#)

**Citizen Nothing** | 12.11.09 @ 10:29AM | #

I'm kinda' happy now I didn't post on that thread.

[reply to this](#)

**capitol l** | 12.10.09 @ 10:14PM | #

I have to pay for those little whiners education even though they live in VA, cry on, cry on. Surprised he didn't haul the dead baby up there too, I mean, he slept with the damn thing.

[reply to this](#)

**P Brooks** | 12.10.09 @ 5:26PM | #

Would somebody please drop a piano on that guy?

Or at least thrash him senseless?

[reply to this](#)

**SusanM** | 12.10.09 @ 11:23PM | #

I think he's already at senseless. Really though, it's no surprise to anyone from PA. One local newspaper always made sure to print pictures of him with his right arm stretched out in rather obvious symbolism (yeah, he was just waving or something, but the paper always knew which frame to use!)

[reply to this](#)

**Colin** | 12.10.09 @ 5:26PM | #

This idiot, who lost his last senate election by 20 points, really thinks he could be elected president?

It's hard to name a Republican more repugnant than him. As Bob Kerrey once famously quipped, "Is 'Santorum' latin for 'asshole'?"

[reply to this](#)

**Warren** | 12.10.09 @ 5:27PM | #

Yo! Fuck Kathleen Parker in the ass with Rick Santorum's dick.

[reply to this](#)

**VM** | 12.10.09 @ 5:28PM | #

yessir. those are certainly yummy salty ham tears.

[reply to this](#)

**Pro Libertate** | 12.10.09 @ 5:29PM | #

Legend has it that there is some lost blog post on Santorum, with a thread that will never die. Personally, I think that's crap.

[reply to this](#)



1 Tip of a flat belly:

Cut down 3 lbs of your belly every week by using this 1 weird old tip.



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**Old Bull Lee** | 12.10.09 @ 5:39PM | #

It's not just crap, it's a mixture of lube and...well, google it and you'll see.

[reply to this](#)

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**Pro Libertate** | 12.10.09 @ 5:51PM | #

Nah, it's a myth. No point in wasting my time looking for it.

[reply to this](#)

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**briareus** | 12.10.09 @ 6:07PM | #

its here, above.

[reply to this](#)

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**Pro Libertate** | 12.10.09 @ 6:17PM | #

No, I refuse to believe your doctrinaire lies.

[reply to this](#)

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**Dave** | 12.10.09 @ 5:38PM | #

Santorum has the charisma of oatmeal. Even Romney will be able to whip up crowds better.

[reply to this](#)

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**creech** | 12.10.09 @ 5:47PM | #

Santorum had his ass handed to him in his first race for Senate when the League of Women Voters allowed the Libertarian candidate, Dan Ernsberger, to appear in the televised debate. Ernsberger made Rick look the fool, but Santorum still managed to fool the Penna. voters. Obviously Santorum hasn't gotten over the beat down so he keeps erecting libertarian straw men.

[reply to this](#)

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**briareus** | 12.10.09 @ 6:08PM | #

Thank you for that bit of analysis. It puts some other things I have been thinking about Santorum into better context.

[reply to this](#)

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**Jordan** | 12.10.09 @ 6:24PM | #

They have this idea that people should be left alone, be able to do whatever they want to do, government should keep our taxes down and keep our regulations low, that we shouldn't get involved in the bedroom, we shouldn't get involved in cultural issues. You know, people should do whatever they want.

Not sure why regressives find this guy so repugnant. Throw in a bit about "Two Americas" and this could have been said by John Edwards.

[reply to this](#)

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**Attorney** | 12.10.09 @ 6:33PM | #

As a conservative, I want to make clear that (1) Santorum does **not** speak for me, and (2) real conservatives (as opposed to Congressblobs and other power-addicted opportunists who claim to be conservative) are most definitely **against** big government.

[reply to this](#)

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**wayne** | 12.10.09 @ 8:33PM | #

as long as "conservative" is considered synonymous with "republican" you will be tarred with the same brush.

[reply to this](#)

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**Stormy Dragon** | 12.10.09 @ 9:34PM | #

Yes, yes, no true Scotsman, etc.

[reply to this](#)

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**Jersey Patriot** | 12.10.09 @ 7:09PM | #

So, the Republicans are thinking Sarah Palin and Rick Santorum so far. Obama's got to be thinking "no dead girls, no live boys."

[reply to this](#)**Mad Max** | 12.10.09 @ 7:22PM | #

I've read Santorum's book *It Takes a Family: Conservatism and the Common Good*, and he is a big-government kind of guy. He's also a big-federal government kind of guy. He seems to think that American-style individual and virtue are in conflict.

I am more in sympathy with the ideas of **Frank Meyer**, a conservative philosopher (and a strategist for the conservative movement, although his philosophical legacy is in my view more enduring than his political legacy). In works like *In Defense of Freedom*, Meyer argued that (as he would put it) virtue is the \*end,\* and freedom is the \*means.\*

Virtue is meaningful only if it's freely chosen, and abandoning virtue ultimately means abandoning freedom.

I wouldn't suggest that things work this way in every country, but it strikes me as a great summary of the American freedom philosophy which has served this country so well. Americans have been at their most virtuous (intact families, sexual morality, deferred gratification, the whole nine yards) when they relied on themselves and civil society (families, voluntary associations, and other non-coercive, non-governmental structures) rather than letting the government boss them around. Contrariwise, as virtue drops, support for big government goes up. (For instance, increased divorce and illegitimacy means more court intervention in family matters, more troubled children who have to be repressed by the state, more demand for welfare, and so on and on).

[reply to this](#)**anonymous** | 12.10.09 @ 10:47PM | #

Anarchy without virtue is precisely what most people think of (fearfully) when they hear the word "anarchy".

[reply to this](#)**Apostate Jew** | 12.11.09 @ 12:25AM | #

When was this magical time of which you speak?

[reply to this](#)**wayne** | 12.10.09 @ 8:34PM | #

MM,

I agree with this, except that it seems to me virtue is the means and freedom the end.

[reply to this](#)**Mad Max** | 12.10.09 @ 9:09PM | #

I admit that we have somewhat of a disagreement on that score, but we both seem to have noticed the mutual dependence of freedom and virtue.

[reply to this](#)**healthscarequotes** | 12.10.09 @ 8:57PM | #

"You know, the left has gone so far left and the right in some respects has gone so far right that they touch each other."

i *do* enjoy thinking of mary matalin and james carville in the bedroom, so thanks for this.

[reply to this](#)**Kevin** | 12.10.09 @ 9:57PM | #

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the good people of Pennsylvania for removing this jackass from the United States Senate.

To a larger point, this is why I believe that social conservatism & fiscal/limited government conservatism are incompatible. Most social cons believe in a large, activist, intrusive government (Bush, Santorum, Bill Kristol, and yes-Limbaugh).

Those who believe in limited government and still vote Republican will continue to be the placeholder for the social conservative agenda at the continued expense of small, limited government.

Yes Mr. Santorum-What I or anyone else does in our private lives is none of your (or the

government's) damn business.

[reply to this](#)

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**John C. Randolph** | 12.11.09 @ 5:05AM | <#>

Well, since Santorum doesn't believe that we should do what pleases us most, is he going to give up being a power-grubbing scumbag? Obviously, his greatest pleasure comes from pushing other people around.

Like my Dad said many times, scratch a liberal, find an autocrat.

-jcr

[reply to this](#)

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**John C. Randolph** | 12.11.09 @ 5:07AM | <#>

Oops, I miscategorized Santorum. He's scumbag puritan, not a scumbag liberal.

-jcr

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