



## Rick Santorum is right

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Now that Rick Santorum has emerged as a viable alternative to Mitt Romney, he will have to face a media onslaught that very few candidates can handle. But this time, it's not just the liberal media he'll be up against; the libertarian right is making their opposition heard as well.

In his "victory" speech in Iowa, Santorum stressed his middle class upbringing and the need for America to return to its moral principles. Noting the importance of strong families, he also made a connection between traditional values and poverty. But Santorum's emphasis on social conservatism — one of the primary contributors to his second place finish in the Hawkeye state — has almost singlehandedly re-ignited the culture wars.

MSNBC contributor and Washington Post columnist Eugene Robinson called Santorum's handling of the birth of his stillborn child "weird" while a group of college students in New Hampshire booed the former senator off stage for his opposition to gay marriage.

Meanwhile, David Boaz, executive vice president of the CATO institute, referred to him as someone who had "[dismissed limited government](#)" all together. Why? Because in a 2006 interview with NPR, Santorum said the "whole idea of personal autonomy...[the] idea that people should be left alone, be able to do whatever they want to do...is not how traditional conservatives view the world." Adding that "there is no such society that I am aware of, where we've had radical individualism and that it succeeds as a culture."

Boaz concluded that Santorum was "wrong that we've never had a firmly individualist society where people are 'left alone, able to do whatever they want to do'....it's called America."

Sorry, David. But *you* are wrong.

Here are the facts.

While the United States was founded on the idea of religious freedom, America was never intended to become a libertarian, live and let live, dreamworld.

In George Washington's farewell address he made sure to stress the importance of morality: "Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports. In vain would that man claim the tribute of patriotism, who should labor to subvert these great pillars of human happiness, these firmest props of the duties of men and citizens."

The Founder's recognized that only in a republic where people acknowledge their rights are gifts from their Creator could a society flourish. In a 1776 letter to George Wythe — a Virginia delegate to the First Continental Congress — John Adams wrote "happiness of the individual is the end of man...[but] the happiness of man, as well as his dignity, consists in virtue."

Furthermore, Boaz's assertion that America is a place where "people are left alone, able to do whatever they want" is also false — and philosophically dangerous.

Consensual cannibalism, selling kidneys, polygamy, prostitution, cocaine use, drinking raw milk — something Ron Paul [actually advocates for](#) — are illegal, and for good reason. But libertarians would argue that the ownership of our bodies allows for such activities.

While it should be acknowledged that liberty is to be cherished and preserved whenever possible, we do not "own" our bodies in the same way that we "own" automobiles, clothing or other material possessions. The human person is a creature comprised not only of a physical form but also of a transcendent, or immortal, being. In other words, we are embodied persons. In abusing the material makeup of the human person, the individual necessarily tears at the integrity of his or her underlying dignity. And when the state legalizes activities which do just that, the effects can be disastrous.

That being said, here are three reasons why Rick Santorum is right about the threat of radical personal autonomy.

First, extreme individualism, aided by a neutral state, leads to cultural decay and bigger government.

In a recent [article](#), Chuck Colson noted that our founders "created a country that respected individual rights and liberties, but always in the context of the people." And "in the context of those communities, we prospered like no other nation on earth."

However, "in recent times, not only in America but throughout the Western World, "individual autonomy," the code word of modern liberalism, has become ascendant outside the context of community. And not surprisingly, as radical individualism grew, the power of government grew as well, especially in the 20th Century."

Now, in a strange way, Colson concludes, "people are flocking to virtual, online communities." But "they can't perform the function of providing meaning and fellowship in the same way [as real communities]. And they certainly can't serve as intermediate structures between the individual and an all-powerful government."

Colson is right. If you look at those communities which have elevated individual autonomy over the natural law you'll find an ever present and ever growing state.

Take, for instance, the trickle down morality the feminist movement has had on impoverished communities. Inner city children now have a 70% chance of being born to a single mom. The father, who is entirely absent in many cases, is replaced by an all encompassing welfare state who serves as the primary provider of housing, transportation and breakfast, lunch and after-school meals.

Second, freedom is not an end in and of itself. It is a gift and is to be used appropriately.

Modern liberalism presupposes that there is no objective truth. As such, the government should serve merely as a tool through which choice it to be extended as much as possible so that the individual can pursue his or her own conception of the good insofar as he or she doesn't harm anyone else.

But there is a critical error in making the claim that there is no knowable "good." The claimant is making a statement which supports the notion that the only thing that is absolute is that there are no absolutes — a philosophical impossibility! Therefore, he cannot stand on any firm ground knowing whether or not his claim is actually true. Everything is relative.

Sadly, many young people today suffer from the delusion that as long as the government stays out of

everyone's way everything will be fine. Barack Obama won the youth vote in 2008 by running on a social liberal platform while Ron Paul is currently playing off the desires of young adults to keep government out of their lives as well.

In doing so, however, young people are insisting on a future where choice is elevated to the highest good. Arbitrary and infiniteness choice, however, is not freedom. It is slavery. A slavery of the mind to limitless options wherein man is not some noble autonomous agent capable of directing himself toward a subjective definition of the good, but an object, an aimless wanderer, a means to an end, sifting through a sea of momentary preference attempting to stay afloat by racing after an ever elusive state of satisfaction.

Georg Weigel, a senior fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center, refers to the proper use of freedom in this way:

"Learning to play the piano can be a tedious business...at the beginning, every piano student experiences those exercises as a burden, a constraint. After a while, though, what we once experienced as constraining seems liberating. Mastering those exercises has equipped me to play anything I want."

"Anyone, of course, is free to pound away on a piano, making a haphazard noise, but...this is a rudimentary, savage sort of freedom, which cloaks an incapacity to play even the simplest pieces accurately and well. Those who have done their exercises have really mastered the art of playing piano, and by becoming artists they have acquired a new freedom."

Finally, human nature demands that the state enforce certain obligations in order to fulfill the common good.

Man is a social being. He is not meant to nor can he exist in a solitary environment. Neither, however, is man intended to live in a community dominated by an apparatus as expansive as the federal government.

This means, among other things, that his freedom is to be enhanced so that he can live virtuously. But how is his freedom enhanced? By making sure that the products he buys are safe, by making sure the water he drinks has passed inspection and by ensuring that the education he receives meets a certain standard. However, in order to fulfill these goals, elected officials must rely on the coercive capabilities of the federal government — as Santorum undoubtedly has.

Recognizing this, those on the right, most notably Red State.com editor Erick Erickson, have been [highly critical](#) of Santorum's perceived big government conservatism.

Though Erickson may be right to an extent, Santorum's overarching argument is that of British Prime Minister David Cameron's. Namely, the belief that "state multiculturalism has failed" and that "a genuinely liberal country" does not just stand neutral between different values, but rather, "believes in certain values and actively promotes them."

Unfortunately, contemporary liberals — and a growing number of conservatives — are unable (or unwilling) to recognize this.

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