

David Lepper

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Re: **“Identity Cards”**

Dear David

Thank you for the letter of 1<sup>st</sup> August 2006, which I have just read. I would like to respond here to the first section of your letter concerning identity cards.

You say ‘I have never really understood the libertarian conservative argument which opposes the introduction of identity cards’. I am uncertain here whether you intend the statement is to be taken at minimal face value, or whether you are claiming that the point of view I am espousing is a libertarian conservative one.

I do not believe it is productive to continue to argue in the wrong categories, and so that we may recommence discussion on a level of mutual understanding of each other’s position, I have decided here to devote some discussion of what I believe is libertarian conservatism, and the categories of interpretation which I myself employ in framing my attitudes to identity cards.

In the first case (and in no case shall I resort to dictionary definitions here, although that might be a productive way to establish a common language) I interpret conservatism, per se, as attachment to the status quo. Now in some instances, such as the existence (which would require further definition of what I mean) of a democratic system in our country, and of trial by jury for criminal cases, I am, in this sense, a conservative. In others, for example preferring for there to be a referendum on the existence of the monarchy, which I believe to be an anomalous institution in our present age, or the direct election of members of the House of Lords, rather than the present arrangement, I would not be classified as a conservative, but rather its reverse, a radical perhaps.

You use the words ‘libertarian conservative’, so that libertarian qualifies the word conservative, that is, identifies the type of conservative you assume me to be. So we need to discuss what libertarian means.

To my mind, the most common assignation of libertarian is one of what I would describe as ‘economic libertarianism’, that is, a philosophy and way of thinking that would derogate state power in economic matters either entirely or substantially to individuals, for example by abolishing income tax and other state taxation, privatising all state institutions like schooling or the health service, enabling all trade and other

economic practices to proceed without intervention or regulation, including in employment, health and safety, and industrial pollution. Since I do not uphold any of these principles, nor do I envisage you assigning any of them to me, it is pointless to proceed in this letter analysing such a type of libertarianism further.

I will therefore assume you mean something different, namely libertarianism as personal freedom, perhaps without restraint. So what I assume you mean by a 'libertarian conservative', is someone who believes in maintaining such levels of personal freedom as exist at present.

Now I do not ascribe myself to an entirely individualistic philosophy. Although we are rooted in a personal consciousness, we are not 'atomised individuals' in the Thatcherite sense. Nor is our collectivity limited to the family. Above all, the existence of our language guarantees our behaviour as being in some sense collective. We are not exterior to influences of belief, culture and religion, including moral, scientific and political beliefs.

It is this sense of the collective or the social, beyond mere individualism, and an attachment to democratic processes, however misapplied in governmental action, or even in my own life, that defines me (in the European sense of the word) as a Social Democrat. The thought had occurred to me, but I do not think it is necessary, to discuss Rousseau and the Social Contract to determine what should be the basis of the content of political life. I wish to take a different route, so you can see where I am coming from on the issue of identity cards.

I wish to look at two philosophies with similar sounding names, but antagonistic world-views, and show how it relates my view with politics.

The first is 'external realism', which is my own view and has been espoused (but my interpretation may differ from his) by the philosopher John Searle. To be brief, although my sensory perception is internal to me, we are correct in ascribing the external world as fact. There is only one set of true facts. Scientific theories are social processes which map the theory (which can be an approximation - i.e. false at some level) onto fact. [Because of two bizarre and unsatisfactory interpretations of quantum mechanics, I prefer the de Broglie Bohm (deterministic) model of quantum mechanics. Consequently, since I do not accept the Copenhagen interpretation of quantum mechanics, I do not accept that the Universe depends on the existence of observers (it didn't, in the beginning).]

Since I believe in determinism, in an absolute sense I don't believe in free will. Free will to us is the appearance of free will. To some, such a point of view would have moral and legal, or more generally judgemental, consequences.

Another assignation I would make, arising from external realism, is the equality of the level of existence of other people with my own existence.

Since I believe in fact, and the existence of objective facts, it seems natural to ascribe to politics its relation to fact. Such is my lack of true knowledge of political circumstances, I am usually unable in detail to do this.

I am therefore often reduced to arguing on moral grounds or by reasoning from general principles, which is insufficient for making correct decisions. A general categorisation of political decision-making I would make in this context is the dichotomy between constructive and destructive action.

On moral grounds, arising from my upbringing, or for other reasons which I do not understand, I adhere to a personal role of long-range constructive action in politics. This has to recognise others on the same level as myself, and the role and integrity, but not infallibility, of group cultures external to my own. I also maintain that a rational view of the world exists, that it may be useful to find it, and the role of politics in all this is to optimise decision-making based on rational criteria to the constructive benefit of the community in its widest sense.

I will now range over what I regard (maybe in a Hegelian thesis/antithesis sense) to be the antithesis of this approach, namely 'political realism'. The adherents to this way of looking at power, such as Blair, Bush, Olmert and Milosovic, are as numerous in the present day as they have been historically in figures such as Stalin, Hitler, Churchill, Mao and others.

Political realism elevates to the political clique in power a philosophy enunciated by Schopenhauer at the personal level: 'the world is my will, my representation'. Always an instant contradiction, denying the birth of the self or its death, it stands in complete opposition to external realism. In denying the humanity of others, its direct consequence is the suzerainty of the fantasy of propaganda over the real, and the violent overthrow of 'subhumans' that rise against it.

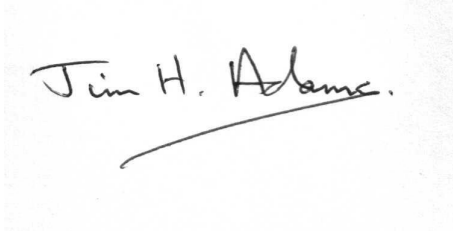
I will now relate this tirade to what I regard is the circumstances of ID cards.

On the level of '*quis custodiet custodiet?*' I would like to quote a section from this week's New Statesman. 'At a Downing Street reception not long ago, a guest had the temerity to ask Tony Blair: "How do you sleep at night, knowing that you've been responsible for the deaths of 100,000 Iraqis?" The Prime Minister is said to have retorted: "I think you'll find it's closer to 50,000".' The question of the morality and integrity of politicians is rarely academic and often real. On what level is it right to cede responsibility for the introduction and implementation of ID cards to *dirigistes* of the political realism variety? What moral system operates here, and on whose behalf? The relation between politicians and the electorate, always asymmetric, needs addressing. If the electorate cannot be trusted to be honest, and nor can the presumption of innocence on its part be presumed, on what level are politicians to be exempt from such strictures?

To be more blunt, why should we trust a crook like Berlusconi or a war criminal like Blair? The question of honesty and the use of deception in maintaining political control is not confined to the apex of politics. Are the political organisers of the Labour Party Conference in September to be trusted to host representative views of the Labour Party, or is it going to be a mobster stitch-up of lips like every other occasion this decade? For what reasons should the top levels of the civil service, or more subordinate members of the *apparatus*, be any less mendacious than the political elite which claims to control them?

The question of whether we are heading towards the creation of a *Stasi* state in Britain, based not on Soviet computers but modern ones, is a threat that is real and growing. Brown has already stated that he wants to extend the ID card system. It is the reason I shall not be voting for him in what we still believe is the coming leadership elections.

Kindest Regards

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jim H. Adams." The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal stroke.

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