

Editorial

While superstition is anathema to philosophers like us, let's face it: 2013 was, true to all numerological portents, an ill-omened year for *Reason Papers*. Both of the journal's editors began the year with medical ailments that required surgery, delaying volume 35, number 1 by more than a month. Having gotten the issue out, Khawaja decided that the time was ripe to fall ill yet again, and then decided to take his time recovering from his illness, emerging from it at last in mid-February 2014.

The fall of 2013 also brought the dread plague of "financial exigency" to Khawaja's institution, which then became the basis of his college's zealous quest to divest itself of a fair proportion of its full-time faculty. In other words, having run out of money, the college began to *fire* people big time. In consequence, Khawaja spent a fair bit of the fall of 2013 preoccupied with the prospect of unemployment, only narrowly to escape the wrath of the bean counters. Meanwhile, Biondi, in exemplification of the maxim that no virtue goes unpunished in the academy, was given the equivalent of capital punishment for her time-consuming and labor-intensive service on a series of college-wide standing committees. That is to say: she was forced to become chairperson of her department, a gulag in which she remains imprisoned for the foreseeable future.

In a final blow, the Mises Institute, which had hosted *Reason Papers*'s server *gratis* for more than a decade, suddenly announced that it would no longer be able to do so, thereby jeopardizing the very existence of the journal. That induced a panic-stricken search by the editors to find a replacement server, which succeeded only as the year came to a welcome end.

Well, hardship, as the good Lord puts it, is followed by ease.¹ And fortunately, by all accounts—numerological, theological, and straightforwardly factual—2014 is proving to be a more provident year for *Reason Papers*, and not coincidentally, for its editors. As just remarked, in late 2013, we managed to migrate the journal's content from the Mises Institute's server to a new one presided over by a new webmaster, Blake Barber. We're very grateful both to Blake and (yet again) to Stephan Kinsella, who helped enormously with the transition from the one server to the other, a transition complicated by the editors' Luddite incomprehension of the technical details of the move. Have a look at the newly refurbished *Reason Papers* website for changes to our submission deadlines and the like. While you're there, feel free to check out the new look of the site, as well as the reorganization of the "Books for Review" page, and its transformation into a "Books and Films for Review" page.

¹ Qur'an, 94:6.

In practical terms, we've decided to dispense altogether with *Reason Papers* volume 35, number 2, publishing what was supposed to be our fall 2013 issue now, in July 2014, and re-labeling it volume 36, number 1. To keep to our twice-a-year publication schedule, we'll publish *Reason Papers* volume 36, number 2 late in December 2014, but from 2015 onward, we'll be publishing (roughly) in February and September of each year rather than in June and October as we previously had. Academic readers will immediately see the rationale for the changes: February and September publication dates allow us to use winter and summer breaks, respectively, to get the editing done.

If there's a silver lining in the star-crossed events of 2013, it may well come from the abrupt decoupling of *Reason Papers* from the Mises Institute's server. While we were grateful for the free hosting they gave us, *Reason Papers*'s presence on the Mises server was a decision made by our predecessors at the journal, and was one we followed by default, rather than by reason of any implicit or explicit alliance between the journal and the Institute. The marriage of convenience nonetheless continued to have misleading implications, suggesting as it did to some readers (despite our protestations) that *Reason Papers* was in some sense the "house journal" of the Mises Institute.

As it happens, one editor strongly disagrees with the Mises Institute's ideological agenda and activities; the other editor is mostly indifferent to them. More to the point, as we insisted in our inaugural editorial back in 2011, despite the prevalence of Objectivist and libertarian material in *Reason Papers*, we don't regard the journal as the instrument of any party, doctrine, or faction. In other words, *Reason Papers* is not an Objectivist, libertarian, or even broadly classical liberal journal in the way that, say, *The Objective Standard*, *Libertarian Papers*, or *The Independent Review* are, or that *The Journal of Libertarian Studies* was. Nor, like *The Journal of Ayn Rand Studies*, is *Reason Papers*'s editorial mission set by a specifically Rand-oriented agenda, or for that matter, a libertarian or otherwise doctrinal one. We've repeatedly insisted instead that *Reason Papers* is a general-interest, non-partisan interdisciplinary journal modeled to some degree on publications like *Arion*, *Critical Review*, *The Common Review*, *Democratija*,² *n+2*, *The New York Review of Books*, *Public Affairs Quarterly*, *Raritan*, and *Social Philosophy and Policy*—broader in scope than *Arion* or *Public Affairs Quarterly*, more formal than *Raritan*, less formal than *Social Philosophy and Policy*, less hip than *n+2*, and less narrowly ideological than *The New York Review*, but similar to all of them in its intention to occupy the difficult-to-

² *Democratija* was an online quarterly, now defunct, edited by Alan Johnson (a sociologist at Edgehill University, in Lancashire, UK), and dedicated to the discussion of "radical democratic political theory." It published sixteen issues between 2005 and 2009; its archives are now housed at the website of *Dissent* magazine.

characterize discursive space between specialized academic writing and high-level journalism.

As many readers will remember, recent symposia at *Reason Papers* have featured discussions of Sari Nusseibeh's *What Is a Palestinian State Worth?* and Jason Brennan's *The Ethics of Voting*.³ As remarked in a previous editorial, Brennan's book in effect stands to Nusseibeh's as theoretical framework to case study: where Brennan argues in an essentially American political context that some citizens ought not to exercise their right to vote, Nusseibeh offers a one-state solution to the Israel/Palestine dispute according to which Israel grants Palestinians civil rather than political rights, thereby precluding Palestinians' right to vote.

The two symposia in the current issue bear a somewhat similar theory-to-case-study relation to one another. The first, on *Democracy and Moral Conflict* by Robert Talisse (Vanderbilt University), concerns the so-called "paradox of democracy" which Talisse describes and hopes to resolve in the book:

Democratic authority owes to the ability of democracy to *justify* itself to its citizens But the liberties secured by liberal democracy ensure the emergence of a plurality of moral commitments among citizens. In [some] cases, it is not clear that any *moral* justification for democratic authority could succeed; proposed justifications of this kind will often look strikingly question-begging. So it seems that democracy produces the conditions for its own demise. It upholds a conception of political justification that it cannot satisfy precisely in those cases where a justifying story is needed most.⁴

What's striking about Talisse's resolution of the apparent paradox is its epistemic and discursive orientation:

[T]he folk epistemic commitments *we already endorse qua believers* provide reasons to sustain our democratic commitments—including, crucially, our commitments to pursuing only democratic means of effecting social change—even when confronted with collective decisions that we must regard as morally unacceptable.⁵

³ Symposium on Sari Nusseibeh's *What Is a Palestinian State Worth?* *Reason Papers* 34, no. 2 (October 2012), pp. 15-69; Symposium on Jason Brennan's *The Ethics of Voting*, *Reason Papers* 35, no. 1 (July 2013), pp. 11-57.

⁴ Robert Talisse, "Précis of *Democracy and Moral Conflict*," *Reason Papers* 36, no. 1 (July 2014), p. 16.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

The symposium begins with a précis of the book by Talisse, followed by commentaries by Joseph Biehl (Felician College) and Chris Herrera (Montclair State University), and ending with a response by Talisse.⁶

Our second symposium is a (regrettably belated) retrospective look at “Waco”—the popular name for the violent 1993 confrontation between the U.S. federal government and the Branch Davidians, a fundamentalist religious sect led by David Koresh and based at the so-called Mt. Carmel complex near Waco, Texas. The symposium begins with an editorial introduction by Irfan Khawaja (Felician College), and includes contributions by four eminent experts on this now half-forgotten event: Michael Barkun (Maxwell School, Syracuse University), author of *Culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America*; Paul Blackman and David Kopel (Independence Institute), co-authors of *No More Wacos: What’s Wrong with Federal Law Enforcement and How to Fix It*; and Dick Reavis (North Carolina State University), author of *The Ashes of Waco: An Investigation*.

“What,” we asked our symposiasts, “would you say that we’ve learned—or ought to have learned—from Waco two decades after the fact?”⁷ The answers are complex, but one relatively simple answer can be inferred from the juxtaposition of the Waco symposium and the one on *Democracy and Moral Conflict*. Waco is what happens when the folk-epistemic commitments we “endorse” as believers *don’t* provide “us” with reasons to sustain “our” democratic commitments. In this light, the Waco tragedy is a complex, vivid, life-or-death depiction of Talisse’s paradox of democracy in modern American life. What it depicts are the stakes involved in a collective failure to live up to the epistemic-discursive conception of politics that Talisse so ably defends. And “Waco” is just one token of a recurring type of event.

In a sense, *all* of democratic politics stands as case study to the theorizing and dramatics of ancient Athens. To that end, two items in this issue explore the resources of ancient Greek thought and drama for contemporary ethico-political concerns. Anne Mamary (Monmouth College) reflects on the hope that she finds in the work of the poets Plato and Aristophanes, articulating an ethics and aesthetics of hope with strikingly contemporary resonance. By contrast, in a review of Eugene Garver’s recent work on Aristotle’s *Politics*, David Riesbeck (Rice University) suggests that

⁶ The *Democracy and Moral Conflict* symposium was originally an Author-Meets-Critics session at Felician College (Lodi, NJ) sponsored by the Felician Ethics Institute (October 27, 2012), and organized by Joseph Biehl and Irfan Khawaja. Thanks to Rob Talisse, Joe Biehl, and Chris Herrera for permission to publish their work in *Reason Papers*. One presentation at the original event has been published elsewhere: Steven Ross, “Review of *Democracy and Moral Conflict*,” *Essays in Philosophy* 14, Issue 1, Article 9 (2013), accessed online at: <http://commons.pacificu.edu/eip/vol14/iss1/9/>.

⁷ We’d originally planned the symposium roughly to coincide with the twentieth anniversary of the event, but due to the delays mentioned in the text, we’ve ended up running the symposium on its twenty-first anniversary.

for Garver, what is illuminating about the *Politics* is its *distance* from twenty-first century concerns: Garver's book, Riesbeck suggests, "argues that the *Politics* remains valuable for us today precisely because the many glaring differences between Aristotle's world and our own help us 'better to see ourselves by contrast.'"

Our July 2013 issue featured the journal's first recent engagement with the topic of free will and, generally, with topics in the philosophy of mind. In that issue, Eyal Mozes offered a stringent critique both of Sam Harris's rejection of free will and of the conception of causality presupposed by that critique, defending agent causation as an alternative to it.⁸ Despite its eminent philosophical pedigree, agent causation has often struck hard-boiled physicalists as an obscure, mystical, and incoherent idea. Two reviews in the current issue demystify agent causality a bit, the first a discussion by Bernardo Aguilera (University of Sheffield) of Eric Marcus's *Rational Causation*, the second a discussion by Frank Scalabrino (University of Dallas) of James Swindal's *Action and Existence: A Case for Agent-Causation*. Both reviews stress the connection between agent-causation and the explanation of action, serving implicitly to tie issues in the philosophy of mind to issues in ethics and meta-ethics, and by implication to the journal's core interest in normative studies.

The topic of agent-causation bears an interesting relation to another well-represented topic in this issue: ethical egoism. An agent is not just an entity *capable* of action, but a metaphysically unified entity that *initiates* action. An egoist—on one interpretation of an intensely contested concept—is an agent who initiates action for the sake of unifying her agency, and thereby maintains her identity by the actions she initiates. So while an agent-causal philosophy of mind concerns itself with the metaphysical conditions under which an agent initiates action, ethical egoism asks and answers meta-ethical questions about what an agent *ought* to pursue in order to preserve her own agency qua human.

The *locus classicus* of contemporary ethical egoism is, of course, Ayn Rand, and two items in the current issue focus directly on Rand's ethical thought. Mark LeBar (Ohio University) reviews *Meta-Ethics, Egoism, and Virtue*, the first volume in the Ayn Rand Society Philosophical Studies (ARSPPS), a planned multi-volume series on Rand's thought sponsored by the Ayn Rand Society. On the whole, LeBar finds himself unconvinced by the ARSPPS effort: "though I am sympathetic with Rand's work as social criticism, whether there are new avenues for addressing contemporary metaethical issues to be found in her work remains to be seen." Meanwhile, Irfan Khawaja comes at Rand's egoism from just the reverse direction, taking issue with academic philosophers' treatments of Rand in textbooks and anthologies intended for undergraduates. Finally, Gary Jason (California State University,

⁸ Eyal Mozes, "Review of Sam Harris, *Free Will*," *Reason Papers* 35, no. 1 (July 2013), p. 161.

Fullerton) offers the first of a three-part series on the depiction of egoists and egoism in film.

Khawaja's discussion of Rand's treatment at the hands of contemporary textbook editors reminds us of the often overlooked role of reputation in philosophy. To be taken seriously in philosophy, one needs a reputation that certifies that one is *worth* taking seriously; a philosopher who lacks the relevant sort of reputation will go unread regardless of the brilliance (or supposed brilliance) of his arguments. Ayn Rand is one example of a philosopher currently lacking the sort of standing in the field that makes her worth taking seriously within it, but she's not the only one. Both Robert Nozick and Karl Marx fit the bill from opposite ends of the political spectrum. Both Nozick and Marx are, to be sure, taken seriously by a devoted coterie of libertarians and leftists, respectively, and both are (unlike Rand) accorded a grudging sort of tolerance in academic philosophy that occasionally borders on respect. But like Rand, both Nozick and Marx also tend to elicit eye-rolling condescension by mainstream philosophers.

The point is vividly put in this way about Nozick by Hilary Putnam:

I say I respect Bob Nozick's mind, and I certainly do. I say I respect his character, and I certainly do. But if I feel contempt (or something in that ballpark) for a certain complex of emotions and judgments in him, is that not contempt (or something like it) for *him*?⁹

All things considered, Putnam thinks it is.

And Marx doesn't do much better, at least within mainstream analytic departments. After all, the very description of analytic Marxism (by analytic Marxists) as "Non-Bullshit Marxism" implies that *non-analytic* (a.k.a. "dialectical") Marxism is little *more* than bullshit.¹⁰ The point is put somewhat more decorously in this way by David Miller in a review of G. A. Cohen's classic defense of analytic Marxism, *Self-Ownership, Freedom, and Equality*: "[T]he book is an outstanding example of the intellectual gains to be won by clear and rigorous thinking about questions that are usually blanketed by ideological fog."¹¹ The implication would seem to be that non-Cohenite Marxism is unclear, sloppy thinking blanketed by ideological fog. In any case,

⁹ Hilary Putnam, "Reason and History," in Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth, and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 165.

¹⁰ G. A. Cohen, *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defence*, expanded ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. xxv.

¹¹ David Miller, "My Body Is My Own," *London Review of Books*, October 31, 1996, reviewing G. A. Cohen, *Self-Ownership, Freedom, and Equality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), accessed online at: <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v18/n21/david-miller/my-body-is-my-own>.

even in its most accepted forms, analytic Marxism remains an outlier within analytic philosophy itself.

Predictably, this outlier status infuriates those who sense the subterranean contempt that their colleagues feel for them, and occasionally decide to write books intended to set those colleagues straight once and for all. Mark D. Friedman's *Nozick's Libertarian Project: An Elaboration and Defense*, reviewed here by independent scholar Danny Frederick, aims to rehabilitate Nozick's libertarianism. Meanwhile, Terry Eagleton's *Why Marx Was Right*, reviewed here by C. Upendra of the Indian Institute of Technology at Indore, aims to do the same for Marx and Marxism. Readers can decide for themselves whether the Nozick and/or Marx depicted by our reviewers deserve renewed respect or continued contempt.

Ironically, one and the same recent event seems, depending on one's perspective, simultaneously to confirm and disconfirm both Nozickian libertarianism and Marxian communism—namely, the global financial crisis that began in 2008. On the one hand, in demonstrating capitalism's persistent liability to depressions and its concomitants (mass unemployment, economic dislocation, etc.), the financial crisis seems to constitute a large-scale objection to libertarian capitalism on par with the Great Depression of 1929, and in so doing, offers comfort to Marxism. On the other hand, in demonstrating capitalism's persistent tendency to *survive* the depressions it's thought to create, the same crisis seems to raise difficulties for Marxism while offering comfort to libertarian defenders of capitalism. The dispute turns on the difficult question of the right causal explanation for the crisis itself. Eileen Norcross and William Thomas shed new light on that puzzle, reviewing books that discuss the precursors and aftermath of the financial crisis. Though not directly concerned with the financial crisis itself, Jared Meyer and Gary Jason offer reviews of books on allied topics—Austrian economics and business ethics, respectively.

As high school students and undergraduates in the late 1980s and early 1990s, both editors of this journal were indoctrinated by our mentors in the belief that the Port Huron Statement of 1962 represented the apex of moral idealism for young adults of our age, and that the leaders of the (by-then essentially defunct)¹² Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) ought forever to serve as our role models in moral and political affairs. This fulsome preface to the Port Huron Statement in a standard college anthology is typical of the party line we encountered in our own educators:

What remains most impressive from the Port Huron Statement . . . is its moderation, its faith that change can take place within the system, its conviction that social democracy could be achieved quickly and effectively, without revolution. The Port Huron Statement speaks

¹² A new SDS organization was formed in 2006; see <http://www.newsds.org/>.

eloquently to the idealism of a generation of student activists. Just as eloquently, it testifies to their innocence.¹³

Though as a high school/college student one of us wrote in defense of sanctions against *apartheid* South Africa and in defense of the (first) Palestinian *intifada*, and demonstrated against the Gulf War of 1991, neither of us ever found SDS or its activities all that “impressive.” Both of us were alienated by Mark Rudd’s nihilism, put off by the essential banality of the entire SDS program, and put off as well as by the axiomatic allegiance to the Left implicit in the SDS enterprise.

Recent years have seen the rise of an international student organization, Students for Liberty (SFL), loosely modeled on SDS, but distinctively libertarian in outlook, and unlike the old SDS, powerfully outfitted for electronic/virtual/social-media-oriented politics in the twenty-first century. Both comparisons and contrasts with SDS leap readily to mind. Like the SDS-ers, the SFL-ers, “bred in at least modest comfort,” are “housed now in universities,” and look “uncomfortably to the world” they inherit.¹⁴ What annoys them, however, is that they appear to be inheriting a hell of a lot of debt—debt they appear to want to repudiate by abolishing not just the “the welfare state,” but income redistribution as such. A proposal to abolish income redistribution wouldn’t have gotten very far at SDS, and yet there are interesting affinities between the SDS and SFL enterprises—a similar anti-imperialist strain, a similar political radicalism, a similar moral energy, a similar strain of youthful zealotry, and, in fact, a similar preoccupation with the politics of the Left.

From an old-fogey perspective of the sort occupied by the editors of this journal, SFL seems like an interesting phenomenon to observe, talk about, and interact with. This issue’s engagement with SFL consists of a review by Matt Faherty of the SFL pamphlet *After the Welfare State*. Faherty is a one-time SFL activist and 2014 graduate of the University of Chicago, where, as a history major, he wrote a senior thesis on the Treasury Secretaries of the

¹³ William H. Chafe and Harvard Sitkoff, eds., *A History of Our Time: Readings on Postwar America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 229. Though he doesn’t specifically mention SDS, Chomsky’s assessment of The New Left (in 1970) is similar: “In his manifesto of 1865, Bakunin predicted that one element in the social revolution will be ‘that intelligent and truly noble part of youth which, though belonging by birth to the privileged classes, in its generous convictions and ardent aspirations, adopts the cause of the people.’ Perhaps in the rise of the student movement of the 1960s one sees steps towards a fulfillment of this prophecy.” Noam Chomsky, “Notes on Anarchism,” accessed online at: <http://www.chomsky.info/articles/1970----.htm>. Thanks to George Abauza for directing us to Chomsky’s essay.

¹⁴ From the Port Huron Statement, excerpted in Chafe and Sitkoff, eds., *A History of Our Time*, p. 229.

Gilded Age. His review here is the first of a series of undergraduate articles and reviews we'd like to run discussing SFL's activist and outreach materials. We welcome reviews from outside of the libertarian/SFL fold as well as by SFL insiders, and welcome commentary on the movement for our Afterwords department. We can't promise ahead of time to be "impressed," but we can promise a fair and vigorous debate.

We're not superstitious, but it *cannot* be a coincidence that in strictly numerological terms, "2014" is a 20 plus two lucky sevens. Our lucky year?

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