

Regarding the Free Thinkers in Cyprus: A Short Critique (Online Article)

Historical Note

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Content

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Cyprus as a state had always had religion integrated in its politics, its education and its social structure. The separation of church and state, although officially recognized in a liberal parliamentary democracy, is far from a reality in Cyprus. In a state where the minister of education has to be approved by the archbishop, where the church intervenes regularly in political matters that do not involve private religious worship, where the politicians use regularly religious language to express their political positions, where children are baptized due to social pressure and are taught religious myths as fact and forced to attend religious propaganda, being an atheist or a religious skeptic is a form of self-marginalization from the broader society. From primary school to our regular adult lives we are forced to come in terms with a situation where even a moderate skeptical discussion on religious matters is difficult. It was in this environment that the Cypriot Free Thinkers were formed and evolved, and indeed gained broader support from a group of people that shared with them the skepticism towards religious belief, the support of scientific investigation or even the detest of the power and influence that religion holds in Cypriot society.

It is however a sad event when a group that starts off with a specific task loses tract and starts to promote something completely different. Today the Cypriot Free Thinkers act no longer as a pressure group on religious matters and social matters that are perverted by religion, but mostly as an American libertarian group on the line between right-wing libertarianism and anarcho-capitalism. At what point and through what procedure this shift from a pressure group to an ideological group took place, I am not really sure. One wonders, however, what Ayn Rand, Margaret Thatcher, von Mises, von Hayek and Murray Rothbard have to do with religion (the argument that some of these people were agnostics or atheists does not matter. So were Marx, Lenin, Bakunin, Chomsky, Stalin and Simone de Beauvoir). Indeed, what do government economic interventions, the gold standard, the ethics of self-interest and the opposition to socialism and feminism have to do with atheism and the promotion of scientific investigation? The Free Thinkers nowadays share through their Facebook page more libertarian slogans/quotes and anti-leftist propaganda than actual news concerning science, the religious power in Cyprus and its effects on our society or serious information on religious skepticism and scientific methodology.

It is of course a great irony to see a group which so strongly promoted the scientific method as the only reliable methodology towards the acquiring of knowledge to support an ideological position in

politics grounded on a methodology that is openly against the scientific method. Right-wing libertarian thought is grounded on a specific school of thought within economics, the Austrian school of thought. Notable people from this theoretical framework, among others, are Carl Menger, von Mises, von Hayek (whose work strongly influenced in its turn Thatcher), Murray Rothbard, Ron Paul and Robert Murphy. The Austrian school's fundamental difference that sets it apart from other schools of thought is not its policy suggestion (they share quite a lot on that with classical liberals and of course, the Chicago school) but on methodology. Criticizing the scientific method as irrelevant and inappropriate with regards to economics and the study of society in general, they propose as a methodology what they call praxeology. What this in fact means is easier to let von Mises, the most celebrated thinker of this school of thought, to explain: "Its statements and propositions are not derived from experience. They are, like those of logic and mathematics, a priori. They are not subject to verification and falsification on the ground of experience and facts. They are both logically and temporally antecedent to any comprehension of historical facts. They are a necessary requirement of any intellectual grasp of historical events." – Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action*, (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1966), p.32

Thus Mises and the Austrians have taken economic theory back to 1677 when Spinoza's work the *Ethics*; following the same exact methodology; was published, and when the empiricists had still to shake the waters in the philosophy of knowledge and eradicate forever the dominance of the rationalists. And while in sociology and anthropology attempts are being made to bridge the biological with the social, while even in economics some economists are trying to integrate psychological research in economic thought, where in genetics (specifically in epigenetics) the importance of the environmental factors and thus the historically formed social conditions are more and more important in understanding human development and throughout the social sciences historical and archeological information is used more and more as evidence in an attempt to understand the whole social experience and its variations through time, social environment and material conditions, the Austrians are still searching for the phantom of the self-evident truths from philosophies that have long died out in serious research. (If one wants to look further on the Austrian position on methodology, there is an excellent short book by another important Austrian school thinker named Hans-Hermann Hoppe, titled *Economic Science and the Austrian Method*).

I am personally no good friend of Libertarian thought. I have however discussed in depth with libertarians both in person and over the internet. They were people well read, polite and while holding strong opinions they were more than open to have mature and fruitful discussions. Unfortunately the Cypriot Free Thinkers talk with arrogance, often use personal attacks, avoid answering long responses directly and generally are unable to have friendly and useful discussions with people that do not belong close to their ideological point of view. Thus the group has already started to look and act more like a political cult and less like an inclusive pressure group open to discussion, alteration of views and careful intervention in the affairs that it was set up to intervene in.

The Free Thinkers have thus so far managed the following. Firstly, they have lost support from people that are indeed very skeptical of religion and sensitive towards its intervention and influence in our society, through their obsession of turning the group from a pro-scientific pressure group on the effects of religious influence in society to an ideological island of libertarian thought, anarcho-capitalist rhetoric and pro-capitalist propaganda. Secondly, they have absorbed through the above actions strong elements that are against the original focus on scientific methodology and investigation, through the constant use of Austrian school theories and approaches, the denial of the historical evidence for theorizing and understanding society and thus the conscious overlooking of a huge amount of solid and confirmed evidence and the use of a priori rhetoric and logical argumentation which has long been thrown in the trash bin when it comes to serious scientific investigation. The group can thus no longer be considered as one that has as a focus the promotion of

the scientific method and the marginalization of religion in society. Sadly, the Free Thinkers is a closed ideological political group having all the characteristics it needs to be described as such. A fully developed political ideology (libertarianism /anarcho-capitalism), the promotion of propaganda in favor of that ideology, the promotion of propaganda against ideologies that contradict its point of view (socialism, feminism, communism, left-wing anarchism) and the tendency to open up respectful discussions only within its chosen circle while marginalizing people from political or theoretical positions that are far from their point of view.

Had the Free Thinkers been at least honest and responsible, they would have formed a Cypriot Libertarian group with anti-religious views, leaving the Free Thinkers to function for what they were originally intended to function for. Unfortunately this does not seem to be their goal for the Free Thinkers group, leaving Cyprus once again with no anti-religious pressure group, but with another useless, unorganized and close-minded political faction.

PS: I apologize to those who have worked hard for that group to exist, but the critique had to come from somewhere.

Thank you for reading.

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