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Incrementalating 102

In my travels I am often cornered by starry-eyed fans asking me in tremulous voices, “Incrementalator! How do you do it? How can you be a principled Libertarian while at the same time publicly advocating politically viable partial measures? It defies the fundamental laws of metaphysics!”

At this point, I am obliged to show off some of the items in my utility belt. “Here are my Fuzzy Logic Fog Bombs, very handy when encountering undead lawyers and lesser horrors. And here is my Mirror of Contradiction, it allows both A and not A to be true at the same time. It provided the margin of victory when Earth was invaded by the Randroids from Mars...” You see, just as a police officer has to break the speed limit when chasing down bad guys, a metaphysical super hero has to, well, bend the rules a bit...

“But what can I do?” is the usual response to this explanation. Ah yes, sometimes it seems like everyone wants to be a junior member of the League of Metaphysical Super Heroes. Very well, listen up.

Consider if you are a Libertarian running for political office (and you don’t have super powers): If you publicly espouse carrying out the entire LP platform, or even just the 85% you agree with, you are guaranteed to fail at the polls. Thus, running on the entire LP platform is equivalent to conceding the election to a non-libertarian. Even worse, those few votes you do receive are taken from the legacy party opponent which is closest to being a libertarian. We are left with a disturbing lemma: running as a pure libertarian is an endorsement of the greater of two evils.

It would appear that we then are left with an even more unpleasant theorem: the way for a truly libertarian candidate to advance the cause is to be dishonest. This can be rather painful for those Objectivist libertarians whose moral system consists of self interest constrained only by an extreme adherence to rules of self-consistency. (Brittle armor has limited effectiveness; just ask Captain Quartz!).

Fortunately, there is a false premise built into this dilemma: when you are running for public office, *you are not running as yourself*. A politician is a representative of other people. This is true as a candidate or as an office holder. In a republic, you are running to implement the will of the faction that voted you in office. You are not given a license to be god-emperor for a year or some such; you are not expected to do whatever you want. Rather, you are expected to implement the platform you ran on and emulate the values you exposed to the voters.

A politician is an actor. This is completely honest *if* the part played during the campaign is the same part played when holding office.

This is not to say a politician has no say on issues. To the contrary, an office holder does have more say than any individual she represents, but this is still

tempered by the will of the people as a whole that she represents. Your job as candidate is to find the subset of your beliefs that matches the will of enough people to win an election, and then try to carry out those beliefs while in office. Likewise, your job is to play the part of an idealized person that excites the admiration of the voters while still approximating yourself sufficiently so you can manage to continue to play your role during your entire term in office.

Granted, these are not easy things to do. But the rewards are great. When your term is done, you can go back to being yourself in a freer land. Or, you can run for reelection and up the ante for more freedom yet. Since reelection is generally easier than getting into office in the first place, you can then afford to expose a bit more of your true self during your second campaign. And once the people have experienced a few bits of the LP platform in action, the next few bits will seem far less radical.

And as a final reward, you will experience the intoxicating pleasure of being in power. Enjoy it, yes, but beware that it doesn't corrupt your true self. This is why I also have in my utility belt the Rotary Agonizer -- it hurts real bad...