

Dear Dave,

Just picked up *Cerebus* #291. Whoah! Shep!

One presumes that the "Elder Cerebus" is something you've been itching to draw for quite a while. The enthusiasm is palpable. You seem to be using larger dots on Cerebus.

Has Gerhard switched the type of pens he's using?

I'm deep into the first issue of a new mini-comic, *Cowboy Actor*, so fine-grained technicals of penciling and inking are all I'm seeing in the world at the moment, whether I'm looking at an actual comic book or the Sears Tower.

And with that, back to my day job.

But first, the prepared text.

Some thoughts on the latest installment of "Why Canada Slept", from *Cerebus* #291:

1.) You mention one of the founding fathers of the United States that you read about (but can't remember which one) who was summarily ostracized from his community for declaring that he was merely a Deist. This example seemed to have been offered by way of demonstrating how far we've fallen from that rarefied plateau of spiritual "correctness." This notion seems to be one of the major underpinnings of your assertions about the (quite literally, in your view) righteous nature of American-style democracy. Leaving aside that some of the founders (such as Jefferson and Franklin) openly derided organized religion where possible (and, it should be noted, with few repercussions), it seems likely you may have been referring here to Thomas Paine.

Have you read Paine's *Age of Reason* (c.1774)? An unabashed Deist, Paine nevertheless came out strongly against organized religion, and Scripture in particular (excepting the book of Job, where Paine did find some material worth exploring, as quoted here:

The Book of Job and the 19th Psalm, which even the Church admits to be more ancient than the chronological order in which they stand in the book called the Bible, are theological orations conformable to the original system of theology. The internal evidence of those orations proves to a demonstration that the study and contemplation of the works of creation, and of the power and wisdom of God, revealed and manifested in those works, made a great part in the religious devotion of the times in which they were written; and it was this devotional study and contemplation that led to the discovery of the principles upon which what are now called sciences are established; and it is to the discovery of these principles that almost all the arts that contribute to the convenience of human life owe their existence. Every principal art has some science for its parent, though the person who mechanically performs the work does not always, and but very seldom, perceive the connection.

It is a fraud of the Christian system to call the sciences human invention; it is only the application of them that is human. Every science has for its basis a system of principles as fixed and unalterable as those

by which the universe is regulated and governed. Man cannot make principles, he can only discover them.

Paine's observation was that Belief in the spiritual must be based on direct personal experience rather than obscure dogma, since the authenticity of obscure dogma can never be established beyond the demonstrably reproducible aspects of its claims. Here he is on the Koran and the Testament:

When I am told that the Koran was written in Heaven and brought to Mahomet by an angel, the account comes too near the same kind of hearsay evidence and second-hand authority as the former. I did not see the angel myself, and, therefore, I have a right not to believe it.

When also I am told that a woman called the Virgin Mary, said, or gave out, that she was with child without any cohabitation with a man, and that her betrothed husband, Joseph, said that an angel told him so, I have a right to believe them or not; such a circumstance required a much stronger evidence than their bare word for it; but we have not even this- for neither Joseph nor Mary wrote any such matter themselves; it is only reported by others that they said so- it is hearsay upon hearsay, and I do not choose to rest my belief upon such evidence.

It is, however, not difficult to account for the credit that was given to the story of Jesus Christ being the son of God. He was born when the heathen mythology had still some fashion and repute in the world, and that mythology had prepared the people for the belief of such a story. Almost all the extraordinary men that lived under the heathen mythology were reputed to be the sons of some of their gods. It was not a new thing, at that time, to believe a man to have been celestially begotten; the intercourse of gods with women was then a matter of familiar opinion. Their Jupiter, according to their accounts, had cohabited with hundreds: the story, therefore, had nothing in it either new, wonderful, or obscene; it was conformable to the opinions that then prevailed among the people called Gentiles, or Mythologists, and it was those people only that believed it. The Jews who had kept strictly to the belief of one God, and no more, and who had always rejected the heathen mythology, never credited the story.

Thomas Paine did reserve publication of *Age of Reason* until the end of his life -- ostensibly to avoid the backlash he presumed would (and did) follow its publication -- but it's worth pointing out that U.S. Presidents (like Jefferson and Lincoln) who have made scathing remarks about or critical assessments of the Scripture in public were not put to death. The affirmation of Deism (or rather, rightly, Theism, in this context) you see in the founding documents of the United States was in large measure a concession to a placeholder that was necessary to "justify" and "explain" *why* "these truths are held self-evident." As was seen in Rhode Island and New York after the Revolution, without Divine (or in that case, Royal) authority to support the pretense of their legal systems, it

was difficult to establish the authority of private property. Legally speaking. The authors of the documents themselves were almost unanimously "non-traditional" in their approaches to religion -- if not outright dismissive of Scripture in general.

2.) Anyone who is not a Conservative is a Democrat?

You attempt to clarify the concatenation of an armload of labels into the specious characterization of "Liberal" by stipulating the (your) dictionary's definition of the word "socialist" -- and seem to be claiming that generally any worldview which does not conform to what you're saying Conservatism *is* (like, for example, most actual American Conservatives -- though it seems clear you don't actually intend to catch them in your net) are overt Socialists. It is difficult to keep the terms straight, as they've essentially been stripped of meaning when you apply them universally to any person or concept that you disagree with on any singular point. How can you expect to be understood (unless you're only writing this stuff for people who will find it self-evident anyway, in which case one wonders about the utility of sating your complaints about not getting any letters) when you're picking and choosing between accepted definitions? This may move into the area of forensic debate again for you, since the issue I'm raising here is really your style of argument rather than the content; but again here the language used is a hurdle we have to cross before the actual content can be weighed. Are you saying that anyone who is not a Conservative (by your measure of Conservative) is a Liberal (also presumably by your unique measure of what constitutes a Liberal), or are you saying that there is a narrow definition of Liberal which applies to some non-Conservatives as well as overtly self-describing Liberals alike? The (my) dictionary seems at odds with your loose vacillation between the meanings of these words.

You do not seem to see anything "Socialist" about the commandeering of tax dollars to fund foreign wars. The omission of this dichotomy leads me to question the actual depth of your knowledge about American politics and history (as traditionally, "Conservatives" have objected to foreign wars and in many cases even the maintenance of a standing military -- remember that even by Kennedy's time his "Liberal" position that America should hike up our arms production was controversial). For example, every major war in the 20th century in which America participated was committed to by a Democratic President. If, as above, you are arguing for that much more inclusive definition of "Liberal," then something doesn't quite wash when you continue to use the less-inclusive definition of "Conservative" elsewhere.

In your last letter to me you said you were trying to remain polite, but did manage to accuse me of sophistry and (by allusion) "word games and mind games." I hope that's not intentional on either of our parts, but I do recognize that sophistry slips into even the best-intentioned arguments on account of the simple inability of the human mind to construct perfectly crystalline (or recognizable) models of reality. I just don't want to misunderstand you.

3.) It almost sounds like you think everyone living in Iraq is squatting in a mud hut obsessively starting over at the beginning each time they reach the end of a quick run through the Koran. Iraq is *not* Afghanistan, even while under the rule of Hussein. It's a modern country, with modern cities and modern technology. Average citizens have unfiltered access to the Internet (unlike China, which we've so far failed to invade in a bid to liberate its similarly brutally oppressed populace *or* to disarm their

nuclear/chemical/biological capabilities). You neatly bypass any distinction between the United States intervening in Iraq to defend themselves against WMD attacks and the United States intervening in Iraq to liberate its oppressed people. It is possible you don't see a distinction, but the difference is real. You saw sophistry in my letter but fail to recognize the earmarks of manipulation in the P.R. Material issued from the White House? It appears that, in spite of what you had to say about Susan Sontag, you postulate some acceptable threshold for betrayal to the "Sincere Moment" when circumstances dictate. How else to account for numerous examples of deception originating in the administration you continue to openly support?

See the enclosed excerpts from James Bradford's *Body of Secrets*, for some corroborating background on the covert activities of the United States, somewhat removed from the immediate epicenter of 9/11. Is forty years too soon to point out that the ship is leaking?

Overall, I've enjoyed "Islam My Islam" and "Why Canada Slept." Where I don't agree with some of your conclusions, the essays are generally informative (at least on what *The National Post* is reporting these days). I think with your exposition on the history of Islam in particular, a lot of people reading your book would otherwise never come into contact with the background of modern Arab culture. For that alone it's a worthwhile exercise (in the writing as much as in the reading, I'm sure).

From your response to Ralph Kidson in *Cerebus* #268's Aardvark Comment:

On a more serious note, the mention of Waco (et al) reminds me that I should mention how incredibly impressed I was by Gore Vidal coming forward and saying publicly that -- while he deplores Timothy McVeigh's bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City (as, I am sure, we all do) -- he stands with McVeigh in opposing the totalitarian abuse of federal power and the (let's face it) government-sanctioned murder of American citizens (particularly women and children) by the FBI and the ATF as ordered by Janet Reno (had the Attorney General been a man, I'm sure he would have been indicted for his responsibility in ordering such a massacre). Considering that I had pretty much written off Gore Vidal and anticipated that he would live out the rest of his life in decadent or semi-decadent pagan self-exile in Rome and environs, to see him come roaring back in his more admirable and (one hopes) natural role as a True Patriot of the Great and Ongoing American Experiment is inspirational in the extreme. That having been said, I fundamentally disagree with his assessment that Timothy McVeigh is "not crazy". The murder of women and children (under any standard of personal masculine honour, however degraded by feminist totalitarianism) has to be considered as insane. How does one, honourably and in a masculine fashion, respond when the Attorney-General of the United States commits just such an act with total impunity? Interesting question.

Over the last few months I've picked up and read the latest small-format books by Gore Vidal and Norman Mailer. I'm including them in this package in case you haven't had the chance to peruse them. I've read both (I'm giving higher marks to Mailer than Vidal, this time), and while I think that each raises valid points, I was somewhat disappointed with the quality of arguments offered within. They seemed to be appealing too often to an emotional response on the part of their readers -- and I think at this moment specifically an unfocused emotional response is not what's required to carefully parse the barrage of information being shot out of the media cannon. This put me in the curious position of having shared many of their underlying complaints; but disagreeing completely with the way they chose to present them. I'm curious to hear your impressions on these when and if you get around to it.

I have to confess that when I read you'd be running a correspondence with Chester Brown on his wonderful *Louis Riel*, I was very pleased.

Ray Earles