



PROTHEAN INSTITUTE COMMENT  
APRIL 2026

---

## The Substrate Liberty Forgot

*Why Javier Milei — the world's most prominent libertarian — just told two parliaments that he was wrong and liberty alone isn't enough.*

---

On 1 March 2026, opening the Argentine Congress, Javier Milei said something no libertarian president had ever said in office: morality is a matter of state. Three weeks later, at Bar-Ilan University in Israel, he previewed the epilogue to his next book and dropped the non-aggression principle as the supreme value of his politics. The most prominent libertarian head of state in the world has now publicly conceded that liberty by itself is not enough to govern a society.

The conventional reading is betrayal or opportunism. Both miss what is actually happening. Milei did not change his mind because he found religion under the pressure of office. He changed his mind because, when you actually have to govern a society, the libertarian framework runs out of answers. It cannot tell you what to do when ten percent of your country's next generation is being unmade every year by the unforced choices of self-interested adults. It cannot tell you why some communities thrive and others collapse on the same constitution. It cannot tell you what counts as the good life. It was never designed to. It was designed to operate on top and beside a moral substrate that previous generations had already built and were maintaining.

### 1. What Milei Actually Figured Out

For fifteen years Milei had repeated the Rothbardian formula in almost every speech: unrestricted respect for your neighbour's life project, grounded in non-aggression and the right to life, liberty, and property. The state is a neutral arbiter. Cultures, religions, and moralities are private matters the public order does not touch. This is the formal libertarian position.

Milei has now publicly abandoned that arrangement. The libertarian rhetoric remains as packaging. The operational core has shifted. Abortion is now framed as a civilisational pathology, not a property dispute. Immigration is reframed as cultural imposition where assimilation fails. "Western civilisation" and "Judeo-Christian values" are now defended objects, not private preferences. The Catholic conservative core that always sat alongside the libertarian formula has been promoted from optional to primary.

---

***This is not a libertarian who lost his principles. This is a libertarian who tried to govern a real society and discovered that the framework had nothing to say about the things that actually matter — family, transmission, trust, meaning. The framework assumed those things were already in place. They aren't. So the framework either incorporates them or is incomplete.***

---

## 2. Why This Matters For Everyone Else

The Western libertarian moments that worked, did so because their underlying societies maintained a strong and cohesive social fabric. The Reagan-era was able to leverage libertarian policies to relax economic constraint and unlocked productive capacity that overregulation had been suppressing. The output was real. But the input — the moral substrate that made self-interested people produce broadly cooperative outcomes when freed from state coordination — was inherited, not produced by the reform.

Forty years later, this social fabric has been eroded across every Western country. Family formation has fragmented. Religious practice has collapsed and trust in institutions has fallen by every measure. A second libertarian wave entering this environment now meets a population whose unforced choices, added together, no longer produce wholesale beneficial outcomes. The framework has nothing internal to address this, because the framework was always quietly running on the cohesive social fabric.

This is why Milei reached the wall first. He inherited an Argentina in deep coherence collapse — chronic inflation, broken institutional trust, fertility decline, mass

disillusion with the political class. The libertarian programme of liberalisation, deregulation, and dollarisation addressed immediate symptoms. But it could not address the social fabric substrate, because libertarianism by construction has no theory of social cohesion. The Bar-Ilan epilogue is the moment of recognition that without the substrate, liberalisation either fails or simply releases the next stage of disintegration. Prothean Institute's *Lost Coherence* whitepaper documents the structural mechanism in detail. The Milei pivot is what that mechanism looks like when a libertarian head of state runs into it in real time.

### 3. The Movement Will Follow

Milei is not just any libertarian. He is the most prominent libertarian head of state in the world, the figure international libertarians have looked to as the operational test case for their ideas in office. When the test case publicly concedes that liberty alone is not enough — not in a footnote, not in a private interview, but in front of the Argentine Congress and again at Bar-Ilan — the rest of the movement has to reckon with what he found. Some will reject the pivot and accuse him of betrayal. Some will quietly absorb it. Over a four-to-eight year horizon, every libertarian-coded political project across the West will reach the same wall, and each will either openly adopt the moral substrate it formally disavowed or oversee an acceleration of the disintegration its reforms were meant to arrest. The prediction does not depend on the personal disposition of the leader. It depends on the structural fact that the libertarian framework has no internal mechanism for substrate maintenance, and that the cultural and demographic pressures the substrate held back are no longer being held back by anything else.

Some have already started. Vivek Ramaswamy's *national libertarianism*, elaborated at the National Conservatism Conference and at AmericaFest in 2025, names civic cohesion as a precondition of liberty — the same recognition Milei has now made operational in office. Topher Field's *Good People Break Bad Laws* is at a starting point on the same path. A forthcoming Prothean comment, *Good People Need Good Codes*, sets out the next steps Field will need to take as he evolves too.

This is not an argument against liberty. Liberty is a real and primary good in any thriving society. The argument is against the libertarian mistake of treating liberty as the floor of civilisation. It isn't. It's what civilisations with a sound floor are free to build on top. The most articulate libertarian voice in the world has just told us, in front of two parliaments, that liberty alone is not enough. The serious response is not to call him a hypocrite. It is to ask why this was the answer the office produced, and what it means for the political projects still in their first innocence.

## About Prothean Institute

The Prothean Institute is an independent strategic research organisation dedicated to understanding, preserving, and renewing the foundations of thriving societies.

Our mission is to develop political, cultural, and social frameworks that are deeply aligned with the structures, instincts, and emotional architectures that sustain human flourishing across generations.

All Prothean policy recommendations and strategic analyses are grounded in strict epistemic rigour and the reality of real-world conditions and human nature. Idealism, where entertained, is explicitly noted as distinct from core analysis. We reject abstractions untethered from reality and seek to equip leaders with tools that work in the world as it is — not as we might wish it to be.

This is the first comment in an ongoing series of short analytical responses to current political and cultural events, drawing on the Civilisational Architecture framework. A forthcoming comment, *Good People Need Good Codes*, applies the framework developed here to Topher Field's *Good People Break Bad Laws* and *Good Christians Break Bad Laws*. The series order of the underlying whitepaper programme is: *Lost Coherence* (published, March 2026); *Thus Spake Ilos* (forthcoming); *The Threshold*; *The Cage We Built*; *The Invisible Path*.

References. Milei, J., remarks before the Argentine Congress, 1 March 2026; honorary doctorate address, Bar-Ilan University, March 2026. Madison, J., *Federalist No. 51* (1788). Hayek, F. A., *The Road to Serfdom* (Routledge, 1944). Ramaswamy, V., "National Libertarianism," address to the National Conservatism Conference, Washington DC, July 2024; remarks at AmericaFest, Phoenix, December 2025. Field, T., *Good People Break Bad Laws* (Self-published, 2023). Prothean Institute, *Lost Coherence: Unified Social Energy and the Structural Conditions of Civilisational Flourishing* (Prothean Institute, 2026).

*Author: James Ilos | Prothean Institute | [protheaninstitute.com](https://protheaninstitute.com)*