



The FDA, the LP, and More
Guest: Dr. Mary Ruwart
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Dr. Mary Ruwart is the author of Healing Our World in an Age of Aggression.

WOODS: Some time ago on [my Facebook page](#) I put out a request for a list of books that have been most influential in people's thinking, books that made all you guys into libertarians. And you know, Dr. Ruwart, I had a bunch of people who said *Healing Our World* was that book. It is just a relentless, non-stop, killer presentation. It just never stops making the case, in one area after another, answering objections, anticipating objections, making the positive case.

When I read a book like this I want to know about the author. How did this person arrive at these opinions? How did this person get to such a comprehensive worldview? Did you become a libertarian after you became a scientist? Did it have anything to do with your scientific work or had you always been a libertarian from the time you were a young girl?

RUWART: No, I was basically a liberal, I guess you could say, before I entered college and read Ayn Rand. I had a lot of resistance at first, not because I didn't agree with most of what she said, but because I felt, you know, I had been brought up Catholic. I had gone to Catholic school. I felt we should love our neighbor and part of that was helping them. Then I had the realization that if we put a gun to somebody's head and take their money by force to give to somebody else, that was less loving than them selfishly not giving anything to another. So that really woke me up, and that really was the end of my first phase, shall we say, of conversion to libertarianism. Now *Healing* actually is the result of the next phase of my "conversion," which was many years later, many years. So I became a scientist and a libertarian pretty much—well, I guess I was a scientist in high school even, so let's say I was a scientist first, to answer that part of your question, but then I was reading about our foreign policy one day, and all of a sudden there was an inspiration, some people might call it revelation, but an integration of all of the things around loving your neighbor, around libertarianism, around pragmatic results, that cause and effect were intimately related, so if you used aggression you got aggression as your result, even if that wasn't what you wanted, and it all came together in a knowing that took me five years to translate into *Healing*.

WOODS: Now the book's title, *Healing Our World in an Age of Aggression*, really lays out what the strand of thought is throughout the whole book that, just as you said, you take every single issue, and you show that when you employ aggression in this area, you get deeply unsatisfactory results. So it's almost as if you're saying, look, you deserve to get bad results when you use bad means, and by an interesting happenstance when you use morally acceptable means, you get wonderful results. What you're doing here is going through systematically, whether it's money and banking or pollution or small business or foreign policy—case after case, you show that aggression boomerangs on the perpetrator. Take a couple of these and show us how this aggression paradigm works out.

RUWART: Well, first, one of my favorites is the FDA. We have FDA regulation because we want to be protected from selfish pharmaceutical firms who may try to poison us because they don't really care—all they care about is money. But the reality is, these regulations, especially the ones we implemented in 1962 in the wake of the thalidomide tragedy, those increased the time it takes for a life-saving drug to get from the lab bench to the marketplace from about five to fifteen years. So people literally die waiting for life-saving drugs. When I was involved within AIDS research, the AIDS community hired black-market chemists to make the drugs we were working on. By the time the FDA gave us permission to test in humans, every AIDS patient in the country who wanted our drugs had already had them and had developed resistance. So we had

to wait for new diagnoses before we could actually do the tests. People don't realize that regulations that take choice away from the consumer actually harm the consumer.

WOODS: Well, what about those who would say that although it's true that unavoidably the FDA is going to want to wind up keeping some effective drugs off the market either permanently or at least for a length of time, at the same time it does protect us from dangerous drugs that may have killed people? So maybe at the very least it's a wash.

RUWART: Well, actually, it's not a wash. It's just the opposite. You see, most of these problems we have with drugs are not due to sloppy manufacturing, although there have been occasions of that. Most of them are due to the fact that we really don't know enough science to know if something is going to be a problem. Because when we test them, we can only test them in so many people before we market, and we're so different genetically, for example, and in the foods that we eat and things of this nature. So what happens is a small group of people react poorly to some drugs. Every single time—even penicillin, which saves so many lives, has killed a number of people because people are allergic to it. So there really isn't any way, first of all, to have a drug with no side effects or no problems, usually major problems in a few people, and oftentimes there's no way to predict that. So adding 10 years to development time doesn't really give us much protection at all. In fact, because it increases the cost so much and the time so much what ends up happening is potentially new life-savings drugs aren't developed because it's so difficult to please the FDA. And I have an example of that from my own experience if you think your listeners would want to hear it.

WOODS: Yeah, I am sure they would.

RUWART: So I even got a call from the FDA because they said, "We just found out, Dr. Ruwart, that you have a patent in prostaglandins and liver disease, using prostaglandins to treat liver disease. Is that true?" And I said, "Yes." And they said, "Well, we're really excited because 100,000 people die every year of liver disease, and there's nothing for it." So they wanted to help us develop this drug as much as they could, but the problem is when you develop a cure for a disease that's never been cured before and especially for one like liver disease where it takes a long time to get it and probably a long time to cure it, you don't know how much drug to give how often. You don't know what you need to look for. You certainly can't take a piece of people's liver out all the time. So by the time you would attempt to cure people, if you didn't do it so well that it turned out to be of great statistical significance, which is another way of saying that it's not by chance, then you would have to start all over again, and by the time you got the drug to market, your patents run out, it goes generic, and you can't recover your costs. So this is what that long timeline does. It increases costs so much the company is not willing to take a chance, even when they think have a cure for a disease that's never been cured before.

WOODS: What about the subject of medical licensing? I think a lot of people could understand why licensing may not be so important when it comes to flower arranging, hair dressing—and there are states that have licensing requirements for those occupations. But when it comes to medical care, people are afraid that some quack is going to operate on them. What would people do in the absence of official licensing?

RUWART: What you'd do is you'd turn to certifications, which has got a lot of similarities to licensing in that usually, to get a certification from a professional group, you have to meet certain requirements, but the beauty of it is you always have a choice as a consumer. So you could go to a physician that had certifications, and you'd feel much more comfortable, of course, because you know they've been tested in some way. But let's say if somebody comes up with a cure for cancer, or claims they do, you're terminal, you go to these certified physicians. They say, "We don't have anything for you." At least you have the option of going to somebody who offers you a different choice. Now, they may be a quack or they may be somebody who is on to something, of course, you don't know, but at least you have that choice, and today we don't have that choice. The cancer patients, after they saw what the AIDS patients did, actually sued the FDA, trying to get permission to buy drugs from pharmaceutical companies when they had been tested for safety but not for effectiveness in people. The Supreme Court ruled that the right to life guaranteed by the Constitution does not include saving our lives with non-approved drugs. The Supreme Court refused to hear it, so that ruling stood. We are not allowed to try to save our lives, even if we're terminal, with drugs the FDA hasn't approved.

WOODS: They made a similar statement in the case involving Angel Raich and medical marijuana, that there is no fundamental right to prevent excruciating pain. Now obviously life is more important than preventing excruciating pain, but it's the same mentality that would say such a thing. I can't believe they

could look at that piece of paper they've just written and say, yeah, let's release that. That's our ruling. There's no such right to do this.

Let me ask you one other tricky one. Of course, drugs is a tricky one for a lot of people to see. I think most people think that the FDA and all these alphabet soup agencies are on the job preventing all danger and harm from coming to them and making sure that everything that's effective winds up reaching them, and this is of course, not true. But another tricky one for many people is education. You have, I think, a very effective chapter on the subject of education. People think that if it weren't for the state, people would not be educated. They think of the state as an ally of knowledge, and yet I can see an incentive on the part of the state, frankly, not to want to spread knowledge. What's your take?

RUWART: Well, there have been many people who have made that accusation, Tom, because you know, the idea of freedom and thinking for yourself and standing up to the state when they are not doing the right thing, for example, is a concept that the state's not very eager to teach. So, yes, there is some motivation there. I think the biggest problem with education and people's understanding of it is they don't realize that back when we were considered the most literate nation on earth around the early 1900s, there really wasn't much in the way of public education. That just wasn't, you know, popular. So what happened is people learned in different ways. Usually parents taught their first child to read and that first child taught the younger ones to read, and actually knowing how to read was a requirement before you could even go to school. Today we graduate people from high school who can't really read. So there's a big difference. Downstairs in my library I have a math book, an eighth- or ninth-grade math book from the 1920s. It shows you how to calculate your mortgage payment. I am willing to bet that most high school students, high school graduates today, even most college graduates can't do that.

WOODS: Right.

RUWART: The level of training and knowledge has been dumbed down, so people are easily duped—which is really, really sad. And thank God for the Internet, because the Internet allows an alternative as children or adults to learn a lot faster and a lot more than we ever could before. We have access to all the knowledge. That's great.

WOODS: Well, I think people would say, though: what about poor children and their parents are irresponsible? What are they going to do? Whereas in the state system, where we have no compunction whatsoever about just yanking them out of the house and forcing them into the local school, we can make sure that kid turns out okay.

RUWART: Well, actually the biggest predictor of a child's success in school is how supportive their parents are for education. So in the case you're describing, the children aren't supported, and even if you pull them out of the house and put them in a school, they are very, very likely not only not to learn because their parents don't consider it important, but they may disrupt the classroom and keep other children from learning, too. If you're not supported in your family culture to learn, it's not something you're likely to do.

WOODS: I want to switch topics now and talk a little bit about the Libertarian Party. First of all, how long have you been involved in the Libertarian Party? I am sorry to ask something that might indicate your age, but it is sort of important.

RUWART: It's okay; I have been involved since the early '80s.

WOODS: Okay, so we're going on 30-plus years, I guess.

RUWART: I know; it sounds like a long time when you say it.

WOODS: I want to ask about your thoughts on where the Libertarian Party is today. There's been a lot of debate about whether the Libertarian Party should try to appeal to the general public more by having a platform that's not so radical, or whether it should stand by a more radical platform and just let the chips fall where they may. Where do you come down on that particular question? And then we'll look at the broader issue.

RUWART: Sure. I am glad you asked that, because actually I have a lot of ideas about this. One of the things is that I believe we should continue to be radical. You know, back when I was a candidate in the '80s we talked about abolishing the IRS, and ending the drug war. We were the only people doing it, and we

didn't have all these studies available that are cited in *Healing Our World*, for example, showing that the drug war kills more people than the drugs themselves. It didn't have a lot of information on how much time and effort we put into doing our taxes. So we had nothing then, and yet we were very effective in sharing that idea. It's amazing to me that Ron Paul, who was very, very radical in most ways, really attracted a lot of people and yet the tendency for the Libertarian Party is to kind of backpedal at this point, which is a big mistake in my opinion. Why should people vote for us if we're—to use a phrase that's often used—Republican-light, for example? If we're not radical, why should they vote for us? And they might as well vote for the lesser of two evils. So I think it's time to be even more radical. Just think now when we see that being radical attracts attention; people want consistency. They want principle. They are really tired of politicians who continually lie to them, and really if we're radical libertarians, and we pretend to be something else, then we're lying, too.

WOODS: I have never heard a good answer to that question of why people should vote libertarian, if really it's just the same thing as the Republicans plus legal pot. That really isn't enough to make somebody vote for a party that in the short run has little likelihood of winning the presidency, for example. Let me ask you also about current trends in the party. It seems like over the past couple of cycles the dominant wing of the party, let's say, has favored the idea that we should have a well-known politician, or at least somebody who's been elected to office before, who can carry the banner, because that way we'll get more attention. The person may not be a plumb-line libertarian, but it will get more attention for the Libertarian Party, and that's got to be good in the long run.

RUWART: Well, I don't think so because it dilutes our brand. You see, this is the problem. If our standard bearer isn't really a libertarian, if they are not running on the non-aggression principle—and basically, in the last two presidential elections, I think our candidates have been in that position. They don't run on the non-aggression principle. So they don't tell people what we stand for, and here's what's bad about that. What's bad about it is it doesn't give people a fervent reason to embrace us. Now, when I was running for city commission back in the early '80s, it was supposed to be a non-partisan race, but the media wanted to discredit us so they called us libertarians. We had to defend every libertarian position that there was, running for city commission where most of them didn't apply. We didn't win that race, but here's what happened, and this is a message I hope your listeners will be able to embrace. What happened is, after the election, when the city of Kalamazoo tried to take property by eminent domain and do a rail consolidation program where they were going to have—in our little city of Kalamazoo we're going to have all these railroad bypasses and things. We had a meeting, not just the libertarians, but the community had a meeting with people who didn't like this idea, and a gentleman came up to me, and before he said a word to me put \$200 in cash in my hand, which was a lot of money back then, and he said, “Dr. Ruwart, they are trying to take the bicycle shop that my brother and I built, by eminent domain, and Dr. Ruwart I know your employer is going to get some of this land, but you, Dr. Ruwart, are a libertarian, so I know you are on my side. So please take this money and fight for me and my brother and all the other people that are getting their land taken. Please fight this for us.”

So if I had been more experienced at that point of time, I would have seen that this is the route the party should have gone because we did fight the eminent domain and we won, and if we were ever going to conquer the wasted vote syndrome, it would have been by that kind of action. That person would have voted for me for sure if I had run for city commission again, and they had such faith in me, even though I had a huge conflict of interest, because I had been principled throughout the campaign. I had been consistent, and we are good at that. We roll back taxes, eminent domain, locally, and we don't even elect a single libertarian to do it. But today the party thinks that we should focus all of all of our attention on winnable races. And you know, think about it, even if we won a seat in Congress, what would that do for us? All we have to do is look at Ron Paul and see that even though it's a wonderful thing to have a watchdog in Congress, it doesn't really roll back the government. He really hasn't been able to roll back much, if any. We don't need to elect people to roll back big government. We already have the power to do that, and that, I think is what the party should be doing.

WOODS: What is the goal of the Libertarian Party?

RUWART: Well, it's changed over time. Initially it was to, using political action, change the direction of the country to a more libertarian direction. Now, there is definitely, I would say, a general consensus that our goal is to elect libertarians. Unfortunately, because of the wasted vote syndrome, probably the only way we are going to elect libertarians is to become like the others and accept, for example, funding from special interests, which we'll have to kind of repay if we get elected by passing legislation that favors them and hurts

the consumer. That's not what we're supposed to be doing. So getting elected that way does nothing for us. It's, you know, basically losing your soul.

WOODS: Well, I am afraid, for the sake of the Libertarian Party that 2016 could shape up to be a real disaster because if they try that strategy again, when you have a field that's going to have a Rand Paul in it and a Ted Cruz—who talks the talk sometimes—then a libertarian who is five percent different is going to be even less relevant than he would be in a normal election year.

RUWART: Well, and you've made a good point, which I am not sure maybe everybody heard, so I want to point it out. The politicians often say what we want to hear, but then they get in office and they do the opposite. I talked to somebody who had helped run Ronald Reagan's campaign, and they said they went out and surveyed people: what did they want to hear? And what they wanted to hear was lower taxes, less government. So that's what he said. Now, of course, when he got in office that didn't necessarily hold. So, you know, it's kind of scary. But people will, if politicians especially will say what they think we want to hear. That doesn't mean they are going to walk the walk, and that's another reason that it's so important in my mind that the Libertarian Party run candidates who do walk the walk, because otherwise we're going to become just as distrusted as the other politicians are.

One question I always got as a candidate was, "How do we really know you're different?" And what I used to say before the last presidential campaign was that our presidential candidates frequently qualify for matching funds, but they don't take them. And if we're not willing to take your money to get elected, we aren't going to be taking it once we are. Of course, in the last presidential campaign, Gary Johnson did—not only accepted matching funds, he went after them. So that was sad.

WOODS: I do want to ask one more thing that does involve mentioning a name. That's Michael Badnarik, who was the nominee in 2004. He gave a speech, I don't know how many years ago, in which he basically washed his hands of the party. He said it was dysfunctional, and I don't think he's been involved in it since. Do you have any comment on that?

RUWART: Well, I think I did hear that speech, and certainly in any group of people, any family, any business, there's dysfunction. I guess everybody has to decide at which point that dysfunction makes what they are doing not worth it. I feel very fortunate in that I can be in the party and not necessarily be a candidate because I can do my writing and speaking and teaching without having to be a candidate, and so I can stay in the Libertarian Party comfortably to do that. But I do have a problem supporting financially the Libertarian Party if it's going off in the wrong direction, and this is something I think that has happened with a lot of people. They haven't even wanted to support it by maintaining their status of a party member.

WOODS: And of course, if those people stop being involved, then of course it just becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy that you get more and more of the Bob Barr types in the party. If everybody else is gone, that's what's left.

RUWART: In some ways, Tom, it's almost inevitable. I hate to be pessimistic on this, but if you think about the way our political party is structured is based on state law, and federal law, and so we have to follow these laws, and when we do, it shapes us in a certain way and helps bring those who are power hungry to the top, even in our organization. So it's been a challenge to prevent this from happening and prevent unprincipled people from taking over the party. I am pleased to say that I think we manage mostly to do that, and so, until maybe the last decade—and that's good, because up until about a decade or maybe two ago, we were the main entry point into the movement. Now that's no longer true. So if the Libertarian Party fails in its mission to stay principled at this point in time, at least liberty has spread enough that it's not going to die because the Libertarian Party slipped on the ice, so to speak. But I would like to see the party be strong because they can be. You know, if they just would focus on this local activism we're talking about—and I want to mention it's not just at the local level. It happens at the state level, and we're seeing the repercussions. Steve Kubby in California, an LP member, and the LP there were the ones that got the first medical marijuana bill passed, and look at what's happened. Now we have two states that have totally decriminalized it. So at the state level we can do really effective things, and even at the national level, ClintonCare was defeated primarily because of the libertarians. I recognized about 80 percent of the people who spoke out against it and wrote in the *Wall Street Journal* and other really influential publications. So I think that's something that the Libertarian movement can really take credit for and hasn't up to this point. We have power, and if we use it effectively we can roll back big government without electing a single person. I am not against electing anybody. If

somebody can run and get elected, I say go for it. But why wait to roll back big government? Let's do it now.

WOODS: Dr. Ruwart, if people want to find out more about you and your work, is there an easy for them to do that online?

RUWART: Yes, they can go to my website at Ruwart.com. They can actually download the 1992 version of *Healing Our World* for free, and there's some of my *Short Answers to the Tough Questions* there as well, and naturally, of course, if they want to buy my books and CDs, they can do that as well.