

**Title: Cory Clark, Tribalism in War and Peace**  
**Podcast: Half Hour of Heterodoxy**  
**Episode: 83**

### Transcript

[Welcome to *Half Hour of Heterodoxy*, featuring conversations with scholars and authors and ideas from diverse perspectives. Here's your host Chris Martin.]

**Chris Martin:** Cory Clark is my guest on this episode. She's the Director of Academic Engagement at Heterodox Academy. She's also a social psychologist and until recently was an assistant professor at Durham University in the UK. We'll be talking about a paper by her and Bo Winegard that was published in *Psychological Inquiry* this year called "Tribalism in war and peace: The nature and evolution of ideological epistemology and its significance for modern social science".

Hi Cory. Welcome to the show.

**Cory Clark:** Hi. Thanks for having me.

**Chris Martin:** We're here to talk about *Tribalism in War and Peace*, your new paper with Winegard, which came out in *Psychological Inquiry* for people who are unfamiliar with that. That's an outlet where there's a target article and about 10 to 15 people write commentaries on that and then you respond to those commentaries as well. So people who are interested in those can find those commentaries, those critiques on the website, of *Psychological Inquiry* too and this just came out before the social distancing guidelines and the pandemic. So there was a bit ...

**Cory Clark:** Back when people cared about things.

**Chris Martin:** Yeah, back when people cared about things. So it received a little attention and then other things happened to take the attention away from most of what we're doing, the more urgent things like life and death. But on the topic of this paper, tell me about the concept of tribalism you're using here.

**Cory Clark:** Yeah. So when we say tribalism, we really mean that – I think you could use another word which would be in-groupishness. But it's the tendency to be more favorable toward your in-group than your out-group, to evaluate information that supports your in-group more favorably than information that challenges it.

So it's kind of – any kind of tendency where you're treating individuals or information that increases the well-being of your in-group. You're kind of giving it favorability. So not evaluating information or people in an even-handed manner.

So a lot of this is related to bias. Do people have biases toward people who are members of their in-group and do they have biases toward information?

So really I think you could swap out the term with in-groupishness and not really lose anything. But I think tribal is just kind of a trendy term for the moment.

**Chris Martin:** Right, right. So you are – why did you choose “war and peace” in the title?

**Cory Clark:** Because we – so we have an evolutionary spin to this. We think tribalism evolved because of war really. Humans evolved in the context of intergroup conflict. So we think human social groups competed against one another. In order to survive, you had to defeat other groups, seize their territory and resources, and those groups would be the ones to survive, pass their genes on to modern humans.

We say war and peace because we think that though these tribalistic tendencies evolved in war contexts, now we live in a society that’s relatively peaceful and yet these tribal tendencies still exist. They’re still part of our human psychology. So now we see tribalism for example and the paper largely focuses on politics.

So political groups often are relatively peaceful. They’re not necessarily killing one another. But they are still competing for resources, for status. So these same tendencies that might have evolved for purposes of defeating others in war, now they’re for defeating others in times of peace.

**Chris Martin:** So your argument here is with social scientists and with the general public. Let’s start with the general public. So the idea here is that when the public affiliates with political parties or political causes, they can often be biased and because social scientists tend to be liberal, liberals are like a tribe.

So what evidence do you have currently that we can treat? So liberals and conservatives are ideological labels we attach on people. They’re each coalitions in many countries. In the US, conservatives are a little less of a coalition based on some political science research. But even they to some degree are a coalition for example in the US between the evangelical Christians and people who want lower taxes.

So what’s your argument for treating them like tribes?

**Cory Clark:** For treating political groups like tribes?

**Chris Martin:** Yeah.

**Cory Clark:** Yeah. So the US might be a little bit different from other countries in the way that we are used to big competing parties and people tend to align themselves with one or the other and they tend to be pretty loyal to that group. So you’re absolutely right. People might become a Republican. Maybe they become a Republican because they’re religious or maybe they become a Republican because they care about the economic side.

But nonetheless, we do see people who identify with the Republican Party tend to display these sort of tribal tendencies. So they have biases where they will treat their in-group politicians more favorably than their out-group politicians.

There's a lot of great work by Jarret Crawford and Mark Brant, Christine Reyna and some of that group where they just have people who identify themselves along the political spectrum liberal to conservative and the more groups are perceived to be liberal, the more intolerant conservatives are toward them and the more groups are perceived to be – I forgot what I said already. The opposite of that. The more groups are perceived to be liberal, the more intolerant conservatives are, whatever. I forgot which one I said.

**Chris Martin:** But they're symmetric.

**Cory Clark:** Yeah, exactly.

**Chris Martin:** With what you're saying. Yeah, they use the term "prejudice" most of the time. At least Brant and Crawford used the term "prejudice" which – and they were – it's not like the common use of prejudice, the way they're using it. I think it's the psychological sense of having cold or lack of warmth. Cold feelings or a lack of warmth, their sympathy towards that group. So they don't go into deserving this and that issue whereas in common parlance, prejudice usually means undeserved just like – so you're drawing on work by Brandt and Crawford here.

**Cory Clark:** Yes. So there have been a lot of studies like that that will do this with liberals or conservatives. They do this with Democrats or Republicans and we see that people have these preferences. They prefer their in-group more than their out-group. They treat their in-group better than their out-group. They evaluate the behavior of their in-group better than their out-group and we see this with liberals and conservatives. We see this with Democrats and Republicans.

You even see it on particular policy issues. So if you're – maybe you're pro-life. Then you would be more favorable toward people who are also pro-life. So they do look like groups in the same way other – like if you have – there are studies that are like the minimal in-group paradigm studies where you just label someone. You're green. This person is in group yellow and then people will be more favorable towards someone who's green and whenever you have these sort of group categories, when people identify with a particular group, they tend to demonstrate these – we call it "in-group favoritism". But they treat their in-group better than the out-group.

So I think to the extent that people – Republicans identify as Republican. You can expect them to display these tendencies and they seem to – and to the extent that Democrats identify with the Democratic coalition. You would expect them to display these tendencies as well.

**Chris Martin:** And one of your concerns is that there are double standards as a result of this. So what are some of the examples of the double standards that you point out?

**Cory Clark:** Yeah. So some of the double standards are the in-group favoritism I talked about. But what I think is more interesting and also probably more problematic is how people evaluate information. So a study I conducted a couple of years ago with my former adviser Pete Ditto and a bunch of my lab mates. We looked at political bias. So this is how people evaluate the exact same piece of information when it supports or opposes your political in-group.

So let's say you're looking – a classic example is Lord, Ross, and Lepper, 1979, where you're having people evaluate a scientific study and one of the study – or one of the studies people are evaluating is looking at states that had the death penalty. I think it was before they adopted the death penalty and then after they adopted the death penalty and then either crime rates go up or down.

So either this study supports or opposes the deterrent efficacy of the death penalty. Then you have people evaluate the methods of the study. So not evaluating the conclusion. It's not how plausible is this. But was this study conducted well? And the study was conducted exactly the same in both conditions. But either the results of the study supported or opposed your own political views on it for – on capital punishment.

So what they found was that people who opposed capital punishment evaluated the study as higher quality when the results opposed capital punishment and people who supported capital punishment evaluated that it's a higher quality study when the result supported capital punishment.

So we took I think 51 studies exactly like that and this is really looking at how people hold double standards when they're evaluating the exact same piece of information. So they're evaluating the exact same scientific study. They're evaluating the exact same policy and either it's supported by a Republican or Democrat. They're evaluating the exact same behavior and either a Democratic president performed the behavior or a Republican president performed the behavior, and looking at the extent to which they treat those two things differently.

So do they say it's less wrong for a Democrat to do something that might be morally questionable than a Republican? When we look at – when we combined all those studies together, we found that Democrats and Republicans or liberals and conservatives do that to roughly equal degrees. So both groups hold these double standards. Both groups are inclined to treat the exact same piece of information more favorably when that piece of information can be used to support one's political in-group.

**Chris Martin:** So one thing that concerns political scientists often is that Democrats are often treated as Republican – sorry, let me rephrase that. Democrats are often treated as liberal but only about 50 percent of Democrats are ideologically liberal. So especially in political research in the United States, it's important to differentiate those terms. So are there separate sets of studies comparing liberals and conservatives and Democrats and Republicans?

**Cory Clark:** Gather for purposes of – you know, with the meta analysis, a lot of it is about getting the numbers, right? So we combined – we treated Democrats, liberals and even liberal

policies as similar. So sort of stereotypical liberal policies. But there are studies that look at Democrats and Republicans only and liberals and conservatives only and I do believe we tested for moderation by that and didn't find anything. So that is to say that studies that looked at this with Democrats and Republicans versus studies that looked at it with liberals and conservatives, I think looked pretty similar.

But they – I could imagine a world where they didn't. But yeah, you make a good point. Not all liberals are necessarily – I think over time that has been changing where Democrats are more inclined to be liberal these days than they were in the past.

**Chris Martin:** I think it's about somewhere between 50 and 55 percent now of Democrats self-identify as ideologically liberal. I've not looked at the very latest numbers. But Matt Grossmann and David Hopkins wrote about that in their book *Asymmetric Politics*. I interviewed Matt about this on the podcast. I think it was like one of the first 10 episodes. We talked about his book around the time it came out.

So it is rising. I don't know what the very latest numbers are. But I think about 80 percent of Republicans identify as ideologically conservative, at least at the time of the writing of that book. That was the case.

So you predict that – well, before I get to that question, so there's also a literature on motivated numeracy. Sometimes it's called motivated innumeracy where people have a hard time solving a mathematical problem that does have a correct answer. If the – if it's a framed and unapplied context and the conclusion that you reach from solving the mathematical problem is that your ideological positions are not supported. So even people who are good at math just slow down. Do you cite that literature in your paper too?

**Cory Clark:** Yeah, that's Dan Kahan, right?

**Chris Martin:** Mostly him, yeah.

**Cory Clark:** Yeah. I think we must have included Dan Kahan's study in the meta-analysis and we talked about it and we also talked about – there's a sort of similar study. I think Gampa is the first author. One of my former lab mates Sean Wojcik is also on the paper and they do this with logical syllogisms.

So if A, then B. If B, then C, A. So they do that with political statements and they find something similar where people are more likely to get the logical syllogism. They're unable to evaluate the – what do you call it? The validity of the logical syllogism if the conclusion of that logical syllogism would be something that they wouldn't want to be true for their own political reasons. So that's similar too and we talk about that a little bit, so people have a harder time with even making sort of – drawing logical conclusions from information, one that challenges their beliefs.

We also do this with them. We talk about false memories. So people are more likely to have false memories for information that they would want to believe for political reasons. So it seems to be

– potentially affecting sort of people’s cognitive ability in some sense, which is really interesting. I think there’s not a lot of research looking at that. But I think it’s an area that’s sort of growing. So I’m interested to see what people do there.

**Chris Martin:** So what’s your implication for social scientists in the work they do here?

**Cory Clark:** Yeah. So this is the one where we’ve gotten the most pushback. Our suggestion merely is that social scientists are themselves humans. So social scientists have been saying these things that we’ve been saying for many decades. That people are tribal, that they have these in-group biases, that they treat their in-group members better than their out-group members, that they resist information that challenges their in-groups, and we take that same analysis and we apply it to social scientists themselves and we say, “Hey, social scientists are humans. We should expect them to have these same biases.”

Now that might not be a problem if the social sciences were not such a politically homogenous group because what that means is you would have different people kind of pushing back against one another. You know, in the peer review process. Maybe you get someone who’s sort of conservative, someone who’s kind of liberal and on a whole, they balance each other out.

But that’s not the case in the social sciences. We’re an overwhelmingly liberal group. So that can create problems because that means that what all reviewers and – or most reviewers let’s say and most editors would want to be true, it’s all the same thing. Everyone’s bias is pointing in the same direction.

So what we would expect based on all of the literature, everything we’ve been studying for decades is that liberal findings, findings that support a liberal perspective should be treated with a little bit more credulity. People should be a little bit more willing. They should maybe hold it to lower standards before accepting to publish that kind of work, and work that challenges liberal beliefs or liberal positions will be criticized more harshly. It will be harder to publish that kind of work.

So we should expect a sort of biased literature where social science supports liberal conclusions. Not entirely because that’s just the nature of the world but because everyone who’s participating in social science is liberal and they all have the same kinds of biases. So we think that because these are panhuman tendencies to evaluate information in these sort of biased ways or just not completely objective ways, ways that are sort of tainted by your political desires, your political meanings, that that could have – that could have affected the social sciences sort of broadly and the literature that currently exists.

**Chris Martin:** So do you have any recommendations for people to do?

**Cory Clark:** So we actually like specifically avoided making recommendations in the paper because I thought we didn’t really have any great ones. But we got better ones from the people who – the commentaries. So Phil Tetlock’s idea is to do more adversarial collaborations. Adversarial collaborations are where you get people who disagree with one another, to work on a

study together and they both kind of lay their cards out on the table. Say if we find this, I will agree with you and do this with them.

You know, pre-register the study and say what each scholar predicts and kind of do it that way. Linda Skitka suggests something similar. I think she says test competing hypotheses. That seems like a good idea. I think it's really hard for a couple of reasons. One is if we're talking about politically-relevant findings or potentially politically-relevant studies, one, there aren't that many conservatives around. So if everyone is trying to do these adversarial collaborations with conservatives, I don't know where you're going to find them.

So that's an issue. I also think that just sort of violates what our natural tendencies are. Scholars don't – not everyone. I shouldn't say that. But a lot of scholars, you know, we don't really want to falsify our own hypotheses. We want our hypotheses to be right and then we want to publish them and we want to like get them in the top journals and get status for those ideas.

So I think it's really – it's kind of a big ask to ask people to do that, to ask people to put their own theories and ideas on the line in that way. So I just – even though I think that's a really good idea, I don't know if that will ever become the norm or super popular because the incentives aren't there. There aren't great incentives to really challenge your own hypotheses. So this is why we sort of avoided giving suggestions. I think what we really wanted to do is get social scientists to simply consider this possibility. They've been making these claims about everyday people, as I said, for decades and of course we all acknowledge that we are humans ourselves.

So it's only natural that we should expect these things to exist in ourselves as well. What's interesting is that making people aware of biases doesn't really seem to do anything. So telling people, look, these biases exist and look, you might have these biases and look, even here is some evidence that you might have these biases and people are so like, “Yes, that explains why everybody else is so crazy,” and they can't see it in themselves.

So even though our goal here is sort of raising awareness of the issue, I don't necessarily have a lot of optimism that that's going to change anything. But I think maybe if we can make it cool to have intellectual humility, to decrease certainty, to be more open-minded and make those kind of cool things in science, then maybe there's some help.

**Chris Martin:** So one thing that has come up in recent years is the idea of using pre-registered studies to see whether findings that seem ideologically tilted replicate or just to find whether any studies replicate. Some of that is interesting. So there's the – there was the pre-registered replication with Katie Corker and Katherine Finnigan about stereotype threat among women and that was a pre-registered study and they found that stereotype threat did not affect women's performance in this high-powered study. So to some degree, it does seem like registered reports may at least help us figure out whether prior studies replicate. So do you feel like that is a reason to be helpful?

**Cory Clark:** Yeah. I think if people are willing to participate in those, then that will be really interesting and helpful and some people are. I guess my – I guess – I'm not trying to be

pessimistic about it because I do think it's a good idea. I just suspect that a lot of people are going to not want to participate in that sort of thing because what happens in science a lot of the time is your identity sort of gets wrapped up with your theory. A lot of time, we like name theories after the scientists who found them. So it's really hard to kind of keep the idea separate from the person, right?

And so the way science is currently set up, I think it doesn't incentivize people wanting to falsify their own hypotheses or really put their hypotheses up to difficult challenges. But I think with the Open Science Movement, people are being forced to do this more and more and I think that's a very good thing. I think the more we improve methods, the more we increase transparency, the better science is going to be in general.

So I think the Open Science Movement is going to do a lot for improving the quality of science and it's going to make it harder for these biases to work their way into published findings.

What's difficult is it doesn't – it's not going to help – questions that wouldn't be asked because everyone is liberal. What people are afraid to ask, maybe the topics that are taboo in social sciences, open science I don't think will necessarily help with that. But it will help – it will help increase the quality of the research that actually is done. It just won't help in – it won't increase research that isn't done for "reasons". Does that make sense?

**Chris Martin:** That makes sense. So in your paper, you talk about three phenomena of stereotype threat, which we just talked about implicit bias and growth mindset and about how scientists may have been more favorable – may have had more favorable attitudes towards these three theories for political reasons. Tell me a bit more about that.

**Cory Clark:** Yeah. So the thing that these three theories have in common is that they all forward environmental explanations. So implicit attitude is looking at people's sort of implicit biases about groups. So maybe this is associating women with the home and men with math. I don't actually remember what the gender one is.

But these are – it's associating people's sort of unconscious associations with actual performance outcomes and other groups with stereotype threat. It's sort of priming people's identities and how that might impede performance and then with growth mindset, it's the idea that if you think you can improve, people are more likely to improve in schooling.

So what you have in common with all three of these is sort of the idea that you can have these minor environmental features of situations that affect performance and we think that liberals are favorable to those kinds of theories.

So what you have with these three theories are – three theories that are some of the biggest outgrowths of social psychology, they're like three of the most famous theories that we have. They've been cited I think – I think between the three of them, between 7000 and 11,000 times, these papers, they've all won awards and they've all caused interventions to crop up in the real world.

So very, very successful theories and then with the replication crisis, we've been finding that all of them are much – the effects are much smaller than previously thought and I think with all three of them now, there's even some question as to whether they are even real, whether these effects are real at all.

So you have to wonder how is it that social scientists let these theories that were fairly – explaining very little in the real world would become so popular and would become champion to some of the greatest achievements of social psychology. We think potentially the reason for that is that social scientists wouldn't have appropriate skepticism about these kinds of theories and wouldn't challenge them because they would want them to be true.

**Chris Martin:** So when it comes to growth mindset, my understanding is that that has – the main issue there is that according to a recent study, it's the papers that have – Carol Dweck is a co-author that tend to show effectively ...

**Cory Clark:** You could do an analysis of that.

**Chris Martin:** I think someone did an analysis a couple of months ago. I don't remember where it was published, which was to me a little more damning than the findings related to the other two. So when it comes to the other two, what is the current status of the research on stereotype threat and implicit bias?

**Cory Clark:** Yes. So with implicit bias, there was a big meta-analysis that came out. Maybe it was – must have been last year with I think like over 600 studies or something. That meta-analysis found I think the association between implicit attitudes and prejudicial behavior was like point – I want to say R like 0.07. Maybe 0.08. Also with evidence of publication bias. So a very small effect that might be even smaller than that. They also found no evidence that changing implicit attitudes changes prejudicial behavior. So one thing people try to do is oh, if we can target these implicit attitudes and people won't be prejudiced anymore and – there's just not good evidence for that.

Now Calvin Lai I think and Patrick Forscher are the two authors on that one and Calvin says that he thinks that probably implicit attitudes, they are associated with prejudicial behavior within some contexts. So we need to identify which context those are. But on a whole, the relationship seems to be very small and that's again with evidence of publication bias. So it might be real. But to the extent that it is real, it's probably very small and probably only – only could explain outcomes in particular situations or perhaps for particular groups.

With stereotype threat, I think you have a bit more mixed findings. So there is some research that suggests that in some domains, stereotype threat might have some small impact on people's performance. But it's the same sort of thing.

Like evidence is very mixed. I don't – I think – I wouldn't say that it's completely – I don't have confidence that there's definitely nothing there. But if there is something there, it's very small and it's not explaining a large portion of variance and differences in people's performance.

I don't think stereotype threat is the reason that men very slightly outperform women in math and that's something that people wanted stereotype threat to do. They wanted that to be the explanation and I just don't think it's there. I think the reason we thought that that would be the answer for decades, when the science wasn't great, is because liberals would find that an appealing explanation.

**Chris Martin:** So over there, do you feel like the evidence points towards the Greater Male Variability Hypothesis?

**Cory Clark:** Yeah. I mean that's not really my area of expertise. So I probably shouldn't comment on that. But I will comment on just that liberals don't like that. So one thing I talk about is that paper that was disappeared. There was a cool article on it by Ted Hill. He tried to publish this – he forwarded a statistical model for the Greater Male Variability Hypothesis, how that might have evolved or how greater male variability might have evolved.

The paper was accepted and then subsequently rejected twice apparently. Yeah. Like formerly accepted and then scholars sent angry emails to the editors and said, "If you keep this paper in there, we're never publishing with you again." And that's really bizarre. That's weird behavior. Like this paper passed peer review and it was accepted for publication and I think the reason is that liberals don't like the greater male variability hypothesis because what that suggests is that at the absolute top ends of achievement, let's say in mathematics – let's look at field medalist winners. You're going to see more men than women and you're not going to see more men than women because of prejudice or discrimination impression were holding women back. It's going to be just because there are more men up there at the very top ends of achievement.

**[Crosstalk]**

**Cory Clark:** But I think the reason liberals don't like it is because of the top end. They're not so concerned with the bottom end. But yeah, so that's an example of the theory that I think wouldn't get the attention it deserves in the social sciences because the social sciences are liberal and liberals don't like those kinds of theories.

**Chris Martin:** Yeah. I mean I think that is a point that has been brought up several times. It kind of calls to mind the debate between personality and social psychology to begin with, why personality psychologists tend to be often on the West Coast because of the northeastern emphasis on situation as I'm in the – despite the long tradition of evidence suggesting that people do have somewhat stable personalities, the interest in situationism overall.

**Cory Clark:** Yeah.

**Chris Martin:** I think what's interesting there is that people like – I'm forgetting his name now. But John – well, people like John Rauthmann for example have been trying to differentiate between situational aspects and personality aspects and finding the variance that each of them contributes. So partly thanks to computational power. I think at least – that doesn't solve the political problem but it does allow us to separate the variance better into what variance it explained – variance that is explained by personality traits exclusively.

**Cory Clark:** Yeah. It's – I mean everything would be caused by a combination of person – the person in the situation. But I do think that liberals tend to prefer the situation side of it more for whatever reason. But yeah, more information, better science over time helps get rid of these problems. If there's resistance to those explanations, the data will win the day in the long run.

**Chris Martin:** So what are you planning on working on next?

**Cory Clark:** Oh man. Yeah. I have a lot of things going on. One thing I want to do and maybe I shouldn't be revealing this right here but whatever. We will do it. I want to do more direct testing of this in scientists themselves. So right now this is kind of a theory. We think scientists are humans. They have biases. They have liberal biases. That's probably affecting science. So I want to look at biases within scientists themselves. I also want to look at censorship in scientists. What are social scientists self-censoring? What are their genuine beliefs and what are they willing to say out loud?

So I have to find ways of getting social scientists to participate in my studies that we've been working on. I'm thinking of various ways to do that. So I'm saying I shouldn't say that out loud because people are listening to this and now they're going to be suspicious of like any emails I send your way. Like she's studying me right now. The answer is yes. But yeah, I think what we do is more systematic data and that's what I'm hoping to do. Yeah.

**Chris Martin:** All right. So while – so you now work fulltime for Heterodox Academy. So you're trying to get research events in that position or you're still collaborating with people at different universities?

**Cory Clark:** Yeah. I'm in a weird transition phase right now. So I started at Heterodox Academy I think – I don't actually know when I started. Sometime maybe in April or March. But I'm still at Durham and then I will have a research appointment in NYU. So I will be doing – I don't exactly know how – what my affiliation will be like. But I will be – I will still be doing the research side of things even though I will be working at Heterodox Academy as well. Yeah.

**Chris Martin:** Cool. Well, it has been good having you on the show. Thanks for joining us.

**Cory Clark:** Thanks for having me. It was fun.

**Chris Martin:** You can follow Cory on twitter at @Imhardcory. You can also find a link to her paper in the show notes.

If you have any comments about today's episode, you can contact me at [podcast@heterodoxacademy.org](mailto:podcast@heterodoxacademy.org) or tag me on Twitter [@Chrismartin76](https://twitter.com/Chrismartin76).

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