

Title: Christian Gonzalez and Ian Storey, The Elusive Definitions of Conservatism and Liberalism

Podcast: Half Hour of Heterodoxy

Episode: 84

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: This is a special one-hour episode featuring Christian Gonzalez and Ian Storey.

Christian Gonzales is a research assistant at Heterodox Academy. He's a senior at Columbia University and he has written for various conservative publications like National Review and City Journal. Ian Storey is a staff writer for Heterodox Academy. He's a political scientist and a candidate for Masters of Divinity at Union Theological Seminary. Christian classifies himself as a conservative; Ian classifies himself as a liberal.

In this episode we'll explore whether it's possible to define conservatism and liberalism.

I thought we would start by talking about definitions of conservatism and liberalism that don't work very well. We talked about beforehand about this. So first, conservatism can be defined or conservatives can be defined as people who like hierarchy or order as such.

So Christian, do you want to take a stab explaining why you feel like that's inadequate?

Christian: Yes. So, not all people who would describe those on the right are motivated by a desire to preserve order. Some people on the right are perfectly willing to cause disorder if it means that they will achieve some other value, in particular for example, libertarians who proposed that we abolished the welfare state are willing to deal with the disorder that that would cause, but they care more about things like individual freedom and unleashing the power of the market more than they do about order.

So I wouldn't say it's order of such but there are strains of conservatism that do play a high value – that do really value order more so than what most people on the left I would say. So the Burkean tradition does care about order but it's not quite the best way to describe the right I would say.

Ian: I line up quite closely to Christian on this. I think it always gets slippery when you start talking about the fundamental values of conservatism because like liberalism, it is a big tent. I think it's sometimes a lot more useful to track the way that what's being a conservative is working as a rhetorical device, like what political work is it doing?

So in this case, we want to say, if we are trying to deal with this question of okay, are conservatives more interested in order and hierarchy? Well, look at what is almost inarguably the most successful deployment of the rhetoric of conservative versus liberal in the last century, which is Reagan's building on Goldwater's. But Reagan's reconception of the conservative as principally committed to small government versus liberal who is the tax-and-spend, big government, big brother style of politician.

If that were the case and in some certain way because Reagan saying it in a very important way for two plus decades made it so then we have an understanding of conservative that takes as its ideological core a contrast with liberals who are more hierarchical, who are more invested in ordering the lives of individuals.

So I always think that when we have a category that we can see demonstrably reversing what it means over what in political terms is a very short period of time, you know you are dealing with something slippery.

Chris Martin: So would it be fair to say that conservatives fear that society will descend into disorder or chaos if liberal policies are implemented?

Christian: Yes, I think that's often the case. I think if you go back to Burke and you read what his fear were about the French Revolution, one big one was that he believed one, that the French revolutionaries were – had already caused disorder in France and he was very worried about that but two, that if their philosophy was taken out by people across the European continent and in the UK then more disorder and more upheaval would arise.

And you see this repeated over time with other conservatives fearing the result of the welfare state for example or the New Deal, et cetera.

Ian: Yeah, if I could just pick up on that. Actually, I think Christian is highlighting another one of those moments where you have to – you can't but see that something really strange is going on with this category, which is that I think if you look at the rhetoric of many of the major contemporary conservative figures, not least of all Donald Trump, you get this strange bifurcation kind of fever dream where liberals will simultaneously both create complete anarchy and chaos and a hyper-authoritarian state, which are in theory antithetical things.

Apparently, the left, and to be clear, we are going to talk about the fever dreams of the left on another – a little bit later, but apparently within this kind organization, liberals result in precisely the opposite things simultaneously. And I think that's part of the power of a category as a rhetorical device because it allows you to attach your opponent to you pretty much anything that you know that your demographic deems bad.

Christian: If I could add something to that. If you look at a lot of leftist critiques of what they call neoliberalism, it's not my favorite term, but of neoliberal policies, that is like

cutting down on social services, privatizing industries, et cetera, a lot of times their critique is that that itself would cause disorder because it would for example, it dismantles state capacity. And in making the government useless or helpless, it throws people into poverty and it causes disorder. So that's another example of the category not being quite right.

Ian: Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. And the ironic flipside of that is that at the same time that your liberalism which is, in theory, a theory about the sort of decoupling of state power and the market, at the same time that neoliberalism is being described as causing chaos and disruption, it is also as a system being described as something which is absolutely dominant and coming out of internationally as fear of national and international governments in a way that it's dominating people's right.

So again, you have this double-sided discourse. Neoliberalism is both causing chaos and anarchy and causing a weird sort of market hyper authoritarianism.

Chris Martin: One definition of liberalism that you both also find flawed is the definition that liberals are people who like state intervention as such.

Ian: Yeah. And this does go back a little bit to that weird split between how the rest of the Anglophone world uses the term liberal, which is to mean people who support the free market and how Americans use the term liberal. So we are in this weird linguistic clash of Reaganism versus Anglophilia.

But I think just historically, if you look at the movements that we most identify now with, liberalism, I'm just going to expand that term a little bit to refer to the left instead. That's a whole another can of worms. But it's hard to actually talk about who liberals are in this country. Before arguably Nixon, certainly Goldwater, but that gives us a really small time slice to deal with.

So if you look at the history of the movements that turned into what we now call liberals, they've always been really thoroughly split between one side that strongly prefers local and sometimes even hyper-local organization. If you think about the early labor movements in this country, you have organizations like the IWW which has strong anarcho-instalments. It's sort of dominated by the anarcho-syndicalists if I – I think that's the right organization.

Anyway – and on the other hand, you then get FDR style or New Deal style liberalism which is a significant intervention of the state economy. So I think a lot of what ends up being called liberal and why now we say liberals like state intervention is the product of specific administrations. Certainly, the version of liberalism that Reagan is talking about, to an extent Goldwater, is using FDR as paradigmatic of what a liberal is.

And the difficulty is that historically, let alone leading up to FDR but also after, that's just not always the case. Certainly, the fight over the last 50, 60 years has been the degree

of federal regulation in both economic and social spheres. But even within that, the lines aren't clean about who wants the state into what arena, certainly much of the left discourse right now that you can see in major left publications in major left movements like the Sunrise Movement, like Black Lives Matter.

Well, actually, that's a contrast. The Sunrise Movement is advocating for an enormous amount of government investment in the problem of climate change. The Black Lives Matter Movement's central issue is the excessive of state power against specific groups of people in this country.

So whether within the present, whether within the past, what we are looking at is the use of specific figures to define what those terms mean, not actually what the movements themselves entail.

Christian: Yeah. Could I add to that? So I think the definition you proposed about leftist being pro big government also misses a very long tradition of left anti-statism, which I'm not quite sure where I'd it begins but certainly Marx's in some ways is – in some ways represents it with the basic view that the state is a representation of dominant social groups. In Marx's case, the dominant social group that controls the state is the bureaucracy, the capitalist class.

But later on, you see the state being represented by for example, antiracist thinkers as the way by which Whites maintain their dominance or by feminist thinkers as a way by which men do the same. And so there is a lot of skepticism in certain modes of left theorizing about state power.

And I would add speaking of contemporary movements that maybe this is a bit of tension because you sometimes see people on the one hand make very – by people, I mean people on the left – make very strong criticisms of the way the American state operates especially in for example, administering racist policies, but on the other hand calling for expansion of state power into investment in climate change and healthcare and other such areas.

And yeah, I wonder if you think that's a bit of a tension. But in any case, even if it can be resolved, somehow it does show that the left doesn't only think in one way about their question of the state.

Ian: Christian is being a little kind to introduce this question because he knows that I'm fairly, fairly in this particular camp that he is describing [Laugh]. But I think you are right to say that's a tension but it's only a tension if what we think we are talking about is relationships to the state as such. And I almost wonder if in contemporary politics, maybe not in 18th – maybe not in 19th century politics, but in contemporary politics, what is your relationship to the state is a bit of a shibboleth particularly in this country which whether in left or right politics has always tended towards a more pragmatic view of electoral contestation.

If you are an antiracist activist on the one hand, it's perfectly logical indeed deeply necessary that you would believe in state intervention into insurance and real estate policies to combat redlining, to combat the deliberate actuarialism that ends up with higher prices for black people.

On the other hand, it is equally pragmatically logical for you to oppose the excessive use of police violence.

So I think on some level, one of the things that distinguishes talk about conservative and liberal in the American context is that relative to Europe, relative to, in some ways relative to East Asia, certainly not so Southeast Asia, but a number of other regions in the world, America is not consistently ideological in the same way. And the only thing that I would say is that I'm not certain that's a bad thing. I'm not sure that having tensions in your relationship to the expression of state power is a terrible thing.

Chris Martin: So conservatives and liberals do seem to have a different set of beliefs about deserving this and who deserves certain rewards and by virtue of what. Some conservatives often feel like some people deserve more rewards by virtue of their position in the hierarchy or in proportion to the effort or in proportion to the innovation that they've introduced.

Liberals often feel like people deserve rewards if they part of a community and things should be divided equitably. So that's one perspective.

So Christian, I'll start off with you. How do you feel about the issue of just deserts and conservatives feeling like the problem with liberals is they want an unjust system of rewards?

Christian: Well, in my reading of the conservative tradition, I don't think conservatives themselves frame the question of just desert as a question of just desert. So in the Burkean tradition, as far as I know, there isn't an explicit discussion of when the inequalities that arise in life are justly deserved.

In the more free marketeering tradition especially in the 20th century, so if you look at thinkers like Hayek, Milton Friedman, and Thomas Sowell, they do not say that inequalities of the market, for example business people, getting larger rewards, are in some sense of justice deserve. They think that it is a consequence of freedom, that freedom will yield inequality. They will say that. But they don't assign a sort of sense of justice to the inequalities that arise, at least not explicitly. So the question of just desert framed as such is – can maybe be a bit difficult for the right.

Ian: Yeah. I mean I think I end up coming down at least on my reading of the right very similarly to Christian, although I might frame it slightly differently just because of my own perspective from the outset. I think that it is certainly true that conservative thinkers

like Hayek, like Friedman, I would actually say Burke is quite different from this scale, but certainly in the sort of 20th century, Hayek-Friedman school of largely free market understanding of what is or is not a just society.

There is a division being made which is when Hayek or Friedman said, “We are not interested in deserving this, just deserving this.” What they are saying is that they are not interested in outcome-based justice. Right.

But what they are proposing is actually a theory of outcome-based justice. It’s just that whatever the outcome is, is by definition just provided that the market process is just.

So my perspective tends to be that both conservatives and liberals are operating under ideas of just deserving this. You see it in the conservative and the liberal rhetoric, contemporary rhetoric. It’s just they are located in very different places.

Liberals at least in the 20th to 21st century traditions tend to locate deservingness as a property of humans as such as opposed to a property of process. So a person is deserving of paradigmatically dignity simply by virtue of the fact that they are human.

So if there is a deficient there, I would suspect the tendencies are on that. But I would make at least one enormous caveat, which is that there is a very strong tradition in this country of Catholic conservatism which has to some extent bloodied to contemporary evangelical conservatism which very strongly centers on the notion of the dignity of the human or the dignity of the human soul. I think as many differences as I have with him ideologically roused out there that is an extraordinary proponent of what a concept of human dignity even if he doesn’t use that exact term, means for contemporary conservatism.

So I’m back to this circle. I can sort of accept the definition to begin with but I’m also deeply uncomfortable with it because some other conservatives right now which despite the differences I have with them I most admire are ones who very much have a concept of human dignity. And we can flip that around and talk about the American left legal community and they are really sharp in some sense defining commitment to process justice. So ...

Chris Martin: So to look people, I need to pick on, maybe it’s an unfair target, but if you think of Ayn Rand, not a serious conservative thinker but a lot of conservatives in America are fans of her. And the recurring theme in her fiction is on entrepreneur is very successful and then the just rewards are taken away from them by the government new taxation. And even in popular discourse, taxation at least in America, conservatives complain of taxation as unfair because it takes your fairly earned wages and a proportion of that is stolen from you so to speak.

And even going back to Burke, there’s implicit in Burke is the idea that the kings and monarchs are vested with some degree of magical divine authority that maybe we

shouldn't question but they deserve that power and so, it is not for us to disturb that order because it is just according to a divine plan.

So in that sense, conservatives do seem to believe that there's this proportionality rather than equality as the key to justice. Christian, do you feel like Hayek maybe an exception there?

Christian: No. So let's see. So I agree that in popular discourse and in some forms of right-wing theorizing there is in some forms, there is a theory of just desert which is if you work hard, if you start a business and you got rich off it, that's perfectly just. And yeah, you see this in Ayn Rand. You see it in popular discourse. I don't mean to deny that.

But I think and this might be a bit maybe charitable, maybe too charitable, but I think the subtler thinkers on the right don't have a theory like that. And the reason they reject it so again like Hayek, like Milton Friedman, and Thomas Sowell, they even lament in their writing, they lament how great inequalities are. But I think the subtler ones do not make a just desert claim because they know that it's a bit too crude to say that a billionaire or like however many multiples of times more deserving of what he has than an average person.

As with regard to Burke though, I think he again, he is a bit more subtle than just defending the divine right of kings. I don't think that's what he is doing. In fact, he had a passage in the reflections on the revolution in France where he calls I think Robert Filmer or other theorist of divine right, he says that they are crude dogmatists that it's not the case that you could simply assign ultimate sovereignty to a king by virtue of his being divinely appointed. So he rejects that.

I think the reason he defended, in particular, the French monarchy and the reason he was against English radicals saying that the only just basis for a government is that its democracy. It's because he felt that if you made that theoretical move, you are rendering the English government that existed illegitimate and thus worthy of overthrowing. And he fears the disorder, the violence, the upheaval that the English public taking up that idea would cause.

So again, I don't read him as just saying well, the king deserves his place because he was divinely appointed.

Chris Martin: Okay. And Ian, one response I have to you is there is the tradition of individual dignity but there is also a sense maybe again, this is more American liberalism, but that every sub-community in America is part of the larger community and thus deserves an equal part of the pie. So African-Americans are a sub-community, white Americans are a sub-community, and so forth and each of those belongs to one larger community. So it is unfair if one of them gets a smaller piece of the pie.

So do you feel like the sense of community being different is also characteristic here?

Ian: Yeah, absolutely. I mean I think that's a good way to make my previous suggestion twist a little bit. And I think in part, that's part of why for me, you can't really reduce the immediate traditions of liberalism or conservatism down to either theories of individuals or theories of communities.

What you have is different kinds of traditions about the relationships between the two. So any attempt you're going to make to make that split between liberals and conservatives on either one of those issues is going to end up looking very messy on the other one.

So let me spit out what I mean a little bit. So you're quite right to say that there's a huge part of the liberal tradition in the United States which is very invested in the value and the importance and yes, the dignity of certain communities especially in the American tradition of antiracism and racial justice.

So I think a sort of funny example of this is when I was first starting in political theory, we were still as law undergraduates that the defining debate of political theory was between liberalism and communitarianism. And in many senses, for a time it was but it's worth remembering that both of those theories were coming out of people who would have self-described as on the left.

John Rawls, the paradigmatic liberal of that time period was a staunch advocate of civil rights movement understood himself as very liberal no less than someone like an Iris Marion Young. It's a little complicated to call her a communitarian but anyone in that tradition.

So the debate between liberalism and communitarianism which is to say on a certain level a debate between where are going to put the primary value of democratic polity was already the centerpiece of leftism's debate with itself.

Chris Martin: So another issue that comes up is meaningful tradition is. Conservatives, it's in the name, want to conserve tradition. In general, liberals do not seem to be as interested in conserving traditions. So do you think that's a line that we can use to demarcate the difference?

Christian: No. For one thing, what we call tradition is always up for debate. So this is one of the problems American conservatives especially have, what do you call tradition in this country? If you call the founding for example tradition, is there may be a sort of radical tradition that exist in America, one committed to liberty and equality? And if so, then that puts – that would put conservatism in a complicated relationship to the notion of tradition.

But more broadly, I think a lot of people on the right don't really care about tradition. Again, going back to the free market thinkers in the 20th century, Hayek and Friedman might occasionally refer to tradition but not really. They care about sending up a free

order, a free social order which minimizes the oppressive power of the state. That doesn't really have anything to do with tradition. I think when a lot of conservatives speak about tradition, they particularly care for example about religion and Christianity, and that is an element of it. So the tradition question gets at this but it doesn't fully capture the phenomenon of conservatism.

Chris Martin: I feel like you are channeling Thomas Paine in his response to Burke. So now, I'm not sure if you're pro-Burke or anti-Burke.

[Laughter]

Ian: A little bit, which is also a little bit alarming because Thomas Paine arguably was – came out of the pro-American socialist tradition. So we've got all kinds of dissonance going on.

Christian: Well, I have to clarify. If I'm channeling Paine, it's totally unintentional.

[Laughter]

Ian: You're a non-intentional socialist, my friend. Admit it to yourself.

Chris Martin: So Ian, what do you think about the purpose or role of tradition?

Ian: Yeah. So I think this is one where I'm a little – I'm more sympathetic to this attempted definition than Christian is. I agree that it's not going to be perfect. There are – it's a partial piece of it. But I do think that there is something to conservatism as a kind of relationship to what role tradition has in politics.

So I think Christian is right. Once you bring tradition into it, what you essentially have is you got a world, what counts as traditional, what doesn't count as tradition, what is one person's tradition is another person's radicalism. There is a radical tradition.

But I do think that for a lot of right thinkers and here I think actually the sort of Hayek-Friedman school of conservatism is an outlier. It is. It is an extremely important outlier with huge impacts on Reaganism and the conservatism. But in terms of conservative thinkers but even more in terms of American conservative politics, I mean it's – there is a sense in which what role tradition has to play in the political sphere is an issue for conservative thinkers who are thinking about national politics in a way that historically it has not been as much in liberalism.

Now, this is a place where I would make a very important distinction which is, if I say that's true, it's true of national style liberalism. But it is worth remembering that there are a lot of the most important largely liberationist left movements whether that's black liberationism especially indigenous liberation movements which are very much centered

on their ways in which contemporary American governance has disseminated the ability of a given people to preserve their cultural and their communal traditions.

So it's a moment where I think it works a little better on conservatism versus liberalism than it does on left versus right, if that makes sense.

Chris Martin: So Christian, what do you think conservatives want to conserve?

Christian: [Laughs] That's a difficult question. There's no easy answer to it because there are a million things – I mean conservatives have written a million especially in America, a million books and essays wondering what it is they or we are trying to conserve. But I really think it varies.

I think in the – and also, going back to the – or staying with the question of tradition, I think Burkean conservatives do have a more positive disposition toward things that we've been doing for a long time. That doesn't mean though that just because you've been doing something for a long time it's right, and any challenge to it is automatically wrong. But it does mean that before you change something, you should reflect. And the sort of impulse is not to quickly tear things down.

Whereas, I would think – I would say, Ian, on the left, something having been done for a long time doesn't really have any normative import for much of a left, not all of it but for much of it. It's not really something you defer to if you are on the left.

Anyway, Chris, I'm sorry I'm evading your question about what it is conservatives wants to conserve. But the answer I think is that it's not clear. So for example, if you are – there are a lot of American conservatives who try to be both libertarians and Burkeans. And I think in most cases, it doesn't work because if you are a libertarian then you have a principled objection to much of the American state as it currently exists. You have a principled objection to the New Deal, to the Great Society Programs, et cetera, et cetera, I could go on to much of the regulation.

But if you are a Burkean then you are skeptical of trying to destroy things. Again, because of the disorder it might cause even if the things that exist are not optimal.

And so, American conservatives are stuck in this trap where they will say, "We want to conserve something about America," but at the same time, they want to tear down a great deal of the way the American state is set up. And I think it's just an internal tension that's not easily resolvable and it's what's behind the inability of conservatives to articulate what it is they want to conserve in this country.

Chris Martin: I do agree that Hayek is different. I mean Hayek seems to leave out an essay called, *Why I Am Not a Conservative*, because he wanted to differentiate libertarianism from conservatism. So there is that distinction there.

One other thing we discussed ahead of time is consequences. So conservatives seem to believe that the long-term desirable consequence of conservative policies in a conservative government is the preservation of useful traditions. And we may not see what the purpose of those traditions is right now but we will see what their purpose was if they are lost.

Whereas, liberals seem to believe that the long-term consequence of liberal policies and liberal government will be the emancipation of all individuals and all communities such that everyone has the right degree of liberty and is an emancipated state.

So let's start with Ian. Do you feel like that distinction is accurate?

Ian: Yes. So as I said, I have a little more sympathy for the reading of conservatism as preserving some form of tradition than Chris does. So I'll let him address that a little bit more cleanly.

I do think that the description that you just gave of liberal – like the relationship between liberalism and I would say between liberalism and liberation, there's a reason they're both derivative of the same block and root is one that's particularly since the rise of the New Left, particularly since I would say the politics of the '80s.

The concept of liberation, whatever the object of that happens to be, has become a core value of liberals. And there's an immense amount of internal contestation about what that means. And here, I want to give Christian a little bit more slack to work with than the initial question might have provided because I do wonder if – there's a difference if we are talking about these things between an orientation and a specific set of goals. So what I would say is that it is probably fairly accurate to say that in the very diffuse grand coalition which constitutes something like what we call American liberalism, which is constantly fighting with itself and has never stopped doing so. The underlying orientation is towards something like liberation.

There are different theories of what that constitutes. I will admit in the set of questions, I've been very influenced by the various readings of these freedom traditions that come out of Professor Neil Roberts' *Freedom as Marronage*. It's a fantastic book. I highly recommend it. But wherever you draw the sort of political theory of the different theories of liberation in liberal movements in the 20th and 21st century, it does feel like that is a kind of irreducible core of liberalism. They are going to fight about what liberation means. They are going to fight about what the outcome of liberation looks like. But the essential orientation sounds right to me.

I will let Christian play with the idea of whether or not there is an essential political orientation towards conservation and conservatism.

Christian: So to answer your question, the way I would frame it is and this – what's about to follow is probably a lot more normative than what I've said before, but in my

view, in left like far left thinking, there isn't really a concern with values being traded off against each other. It seems to be the case that in, again, this doesn't apply to the center left as much, but on the far left, in far left thinking, there doesn't seem to be any sustained reflection on how the value of emancipation is to be traded off against other values. And so, there seems to be an assumption that once liberation is achieved or the liberation can be achieved without there being costs in terms of other values that one might care about.

Whereas on the right, I think there is a far greater concern with how – with value pluralism and with how achieving one thing might come at the cost of another. That doesn't mean it's impossible to achieve a set of circumstances which is better than the one which preceded it but it does mean that you can never simply have a clean solution to a problem. You're only going to be able to trade off – to have a trade-off and make some things better at the same time as you are making other things worse. And it might be not good but it's not – the right I don't think claims that it embodies every value at the same time. I think it has a better grasp of value trade-offs in long-term consequences.

Chris Martin: Do you feel like religious conservatives though, which is a subset of conservatives, the religious conservatives, do you feel like there are some long-term good consequences to preserving many communal traditions and religious traditions even if we don't – even if we can't clearly state what their purpose is?

Ian: Yeah. Would you mind if I come in on this, Chris?

Chris Martin: Oh yeah, go ahead.

Ian: Would you mind if I come in on this, Chris? Because this actually relates directly to how I was going to respond to Christian, which is that I found this to be a deeply slippery answer because it allows conservatives to be able to say, "Well, we are not anything specific over everything else. We are just for their being lots of things." First of all, which is itself a value, right? Pluralism is a value.

Second of all, that description really doesn't track well with the history of conservative politics since at least post World War II. So to take one example of the dominant force in conservative politics since the early '90s which is exactly what Chris just raised, which is the Christian Right, particularly, evangelical conservatism, which least we forget arose out of a specific set of also very hierarchical and traditional places in certain politics, that's the kind way of putting it.

So whether it is a kind of we are on polity and libertarian who has an extremely high valuation of one particularly concept of liberty as overriding all other values or it's a kind of Falwellian style Evangelical Christian on the right who has very strong views about at least one understanding of human life and certainly would in a millisecond tell you that they have precisely a very distinct concept of the highest possible value which is the Divine, which is God, which is in their context, Jesus Christ.

So it may be that conservatives don't agree on what that highest possible value is but I don't think a description of the modern conservative movements going back to Buckley as not having a highest value and in fact embracing value pluralism in an era in which conservatism has consistently taken the anti-pluralist stances on a variety of particularly social issues but also the economic issues doesn't really hold a ton of water.

Christian: Well, so let me maybe distinguish to help out a bit. I think if you introduce and it's unfortunate or maybe it's not unfortunate but if you introduce the expression of conservatism in politics, it makes things a lot more messy than if you look at conservatism or – the same applies to the left, in theory.

So my comment was mainly speaking about the theory and less about the practice because I think they are two different sets of questions. I totally agree that a lot of libertarian conservatism in America does have a highest value and it's very clear what that highest value is. But as for Burkean traditions and even some of the Catholic conservatives, it doesn't seem to me that they have only one value which is as clear cut as the value of emancipation is for left theorizing. So that's what I would respond.

Ian: Yeah, I do hear that. I do hear that. I think my resistance to kind of move is to say that you can talk about how something is in theory being different about than how it plays out in practice. But how it plays out in practice is never an accident. It's a product of the internalization and the interaction between a set of conservative theories, if we want to call them that, ideologies, beliefs, whatever you want to call it, power dynamics in the world, but it's never going to be an accident. It cannot be an accident that with the exception arguably of gun rights we could talk about Second Amendments debates maybe, but every major other, and maybe taxation questions, but the defining issues of I would say post-Reagan conservative movements, the things that have statistically – nine times out of ten – have most consistently driven conservatives to the polls have been in some basic sense anti-pluralist movements.

And I don't think that – so the funny thing is that sounds like an indictment but I think it actually entirely fits with the reality of conservatism whether or not there are the Burkean versions of it that want to disavow having a highest possible value, which is that I do think that even where that theory exists at the highest order level, the forces that drive modern conservatism fit to me. The forces that drove both Bush – George W. Bush's election and the Donald Trump's election in very different ways in some places and similar ways in others were very much about a kind of conservation of a certain kind of image of Americanness.

I don't say that as an indictment. It doesn't fit with my particular views but I don't in and of itself it's a thoroughly defensible value, if not defensible. It might be in the way that some of those figures did. But it is unquestionably an overriding for so many conservative voters to the point that there are a lot – I find it quite silly that a lot of writers on the left for quite some time now, the sort of infamous book, *What's the Matter*

with Kansas, have – and actually all the way back in the 19th century, there have been people on the left sort of banging this drum of why there are all these people who are voting against their interest to vote for the conservatives?

And I've always found that tradition quite silly because they are not voting against their interests. They have a very strong sense of what their interests are, and their interests are in a certain kind of sense of self and a certain kind of conservation of a livingness that they know and understand that fits with the conservative politics better than it fits with the liberal politics in their minds.

So in a way, I think I'm being charitable to modern conservatism to say that, no, maybe there is a consistent political core here even if sometimes the conservative theorists at the top aren't create great fits for it.

Christian: So, on the question of the theory versus practice thing, I totally agree it's not an accident, what practice comes out of theory. But I do think that it's important at least when you're mapping what people are saying, it's important to take people at their word when they are theorizing even if the practice that comes out of it is even antithetical to the theory.

So for instance, I would say that a lot of the Marx's movements in the 20th century were theoretically committed to liberation even if when they came to power they set very oppressive state structures. The theory that legitimated their doing so claimed to do so in the name of liberation from capitalism, from imperialism, et cetera. So anyway, that's just to say that the theory cannot – shouldn't be collapsed fully into one super category, which includes the theory and the practice. I think there are some value to keeping them separate.

And as for conservatism, I wonder – so all right, you would say that the highest value for the sort of voters, that the *What's the Matter with Kansas* describes is preserving a sense of Americanness, that's their highest value.

Ian: I mean I think my suggestion was that the tradition on the left in which that book occurs is sort of failing to understand the importance and the resonance of maybe Americanness to the extent that it's national understanding but a lot of times, it's a deeply specific local communal understanding of what the way of life they are defending and preserving. And that can take very positive tones. It can take very dark tones, the segregation east to south understood themselves as conserving a very specific way of life which was profoundly racist.

But we can also take very positive connotations. I'm not for a moment implying that this is something that is sort of innately malevolent. I just think it's a set of valuations that you can't take out of how the modern conservative movement has evolved. Whatever it tries to designate as it's progenitors like Burke, like Hayek.

Chris Martin: So Christian, what would you argue is the long-term desirable consequence of conservative policies?

Christian: It depends on the conservative you are asking. Are you asking what I think it is?

Chris Martin: Yeah, I'm asking what you think.

Christian: Well, for me, I think – it also depends what you mean by conservative policies. But as I think about it, for me, order is a very important value in my thinking because I think is the precondition for a lot of the other values we care about. And so for example, freedom or prosperity.

And so if I was the sort of philosopher king, not that I should be, but if I was, my policies would be geared toward incremental and slow improvements that allow us to maintain order even as we improve the state of society. Yeah, that's my normative goal I suppose.

Chris Martin: Okay. So I'm just going back to what we said earlier, one consequence of giving away traditions or losing traditions is it creates disorder or chaos, not necessarily buy for you?

Chris Martin: So for you, you feel like there would be chaos or disorder if we lost conservative values?

Christian: In some cases, yeah.

Chris Martin: Okay.

Christian: So I think for instance the left movement of our time namely the social justice movement has a lot of policies that I find disagreeable because among other reasons, because of the threat they pose to social order. So for instance, having an instinctively antagonistic stance toward the police is an anti-order commitment in my opinion. That's not to say there are no good reason to have an antagonistic – or that I think it's indefensible to have such a view but I don't myself agree with it and I think it's not conducive to order.

Chris Martin: Ronnie Janoff-Bulman's conception is that at the communal level, what liberals primarily care about is social justice. Conservatives primarily care about is social order, and libertarians don't really think about things at the communal level. They are focused at the individual level, which make them a different category of people.

So do you think that, and maybe Christian you can go first, do you think that's a useful way of dividing this if you are trying to look for something succinct?

Christian: I think that's pretty good. I might pick some bones. But I think that's pretty good.

Chris Martin: Ian, what do you think?

Ian: Well, at our sort of Crossfire style model here, I feel obligated to say no. [laughter]

I'm just kidding.

This is actually what I would say which is that I think that it was a really interesting articulation and I don't want to disrespect it but I would want to pragmatize one specific thing which in my view is kind of terminal which is that I don't think that that division of categories makes any sense.

I think that social order is a form of social justice, and social justice is a form or social order, at least the ways that different kinds of social justice get articulated of more to social order. And the reason why we have debates within the left of what social justice looks like and the reason we have debates between the left and someone like Christian who worries about some of those commitments of the left is because people have different concepts of what social justice and social order looks like. But they are both – they are two sides of the same coin.

So I'm not sure that it makes any sense to say for example, someone who is a staunch Burkean or Burke himself doesn't have a concept of social justice. I think he has a very rich concept of social justice which has to do with the ability to maintain one's sense of one's community, one's polity, and one's tradition. That is a sense of social justice.

So at the end of the day, I'm not sure that those categories make sense as a conceptual dichotomy. I think that they are profoundly interwoven. What for me is much more interesting is to look at how liberal movements and conservative movements navigate how they define those things, how they define order. How do they define freedom? Left movements have been fighting each other for literally centuries now on concepts of freedom that are antithetical to each other but they are both liberal in some very basic sense.

So it sort of circles back to what I think is the offshoot of this conversation for me which is when you are talking about the differences between conservatism and liberalism, the most important thing is to pay attention to how people are defining it for themselves and how people are defining it for others in order to distinguish themselves. Treating it as a rhetorical device rather than treating it as a kind of essential tradition.

Chris Martin: Well, on that note, I think we will conclude this episode of semi-debate, semi-discussion, semi-Crossfire episode. I don't think I can match Crossfire in terms of popularity or rhetoric.

[Laughter]

Ian: Is that a good thing or a bad thing? I don't know.

Chris Martin: I think – well, the rhetoric, it's a good thing I supposed. I don't know if I want to be a celebrity either so ...

Christian: I think Ian and I are too friendly to be taking too sharp jabs. I think that's why.

Ian: Yeah. We don't really fit the Begala-Carlson model very well. But that's just fine.

[music]

Chris Martin: You can find essays by Christian and Ian in the show notes for this episode.

If you have any comments about today's episode, you can contact me at podcast@heterodoxacademy.org or tag me on Twitter @Chrismartin76.

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