

THE DAILY CALLER

This Political Movement Is Pro-Weed, Pro-Gay Marriage And Pro-Life

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An interviewer once told Jack Kemp he was “[strikingly libertarian](#).” The Cato Institute is frequently described as a “[conservative think tank](#).” Are the Koch brothers [conservative](#) or [libertarian](#)?

With [apologies to Russell Kirk](#) and [the Osmonds](#), many are a little conservative and a little libertarian. Like Reese’s peanut butter and chocolate, these political tendencies are two great tastes that go great together. To see how these ingredients form the perfect peanut butter cup, read Charles C.W. Cooke’s “[The Conservatarian Manifesto](#).”

Cooke, a smart young writer for National Review, spoke with The Daily Caller about his new book.

A lot of the political figures associated with the “[libertarian moment](#),” people such as Rand Paul and Justin Amash, are fairly conservative in addition to being libertarian. With that in mind, what the heck is a “conservatarian?”

Since the late days of the Bush administration, many on the right have been more keen to tell one other more what they are not than what they are. Nobody today describes himself as a “George W. Bush Republican,” and others shy away from “Republican” or “conservative” because they disagree strongly with the party on some issues and are bothered by its recent performance.

You will presumably have heard people say “I feel conservative when I’m around libertarians, but I feel libertarian when I’m around conservatives.” Sometimes they try “liberservative” or other portmanteaus. I chose “Conservatarian” in part because its usage seems to be growing and in part because its more euphonious.

Broadly speaking, the “conservatarians” I have met are unhappy with traditional conservatism for its positions on the drug war, gay marriage, and federalism; but they dislike the libertarian stance toward immigration, foreign policy, and — often — abortion. They’re angry, too, that

conservatives have disappointed them when in power (a good example was No Child Left Behind), and that the Republican Party signed off on TARP. This, of course, is my attempt to divine and to define the meaning of the word, and it is an attempt that is infused with my own political preferences. I'm sure others will disagree, which is great. I'll get emails . . .

What would a conservatarians make of Ferguson and other controversies where race and law enforcement intersect?

Great question. The first thing to note here is that the defense of federalism that is at the heart of the book is not the product of a blind preference for localism, but of a desire to return to the states what can be best done by the states and to the federal government what is best done nationally. Clearly, the protection of essential civil rights is a federal priority, and should be. In such cases as states or locales are violating their citizens' rights, the national government has a responsibility to step in. Localism cannot be an excuse for small-scale tyranny.

As for Ferguson specifically? Given their preference for colorblindness, I would imagine that conservatarians would hope to see each case evaluated on its own merits — justice, after all, is a process not an outcome — and that they would resist the turning of slow-moving criminal investigations into partisan witch hunts.

We are now learning, for instance, that the “Hands Up Don't Shoot” narrative was false. At the same time, given their mistrust of authority, I would also imagine that they would remember that government is force and that this force should be used responsibly. In Ferguson, it does not seem to have been. Rather, the local population was regarded as something of a cash cow. This, let's say, is not the role of the state.

More broadly, it seems to be the case that many of the problems that we are facing are in some part the result of overcriminalization, of the War on Drugs, and of a cycle of criminality and poverty that is not exactly helped by our tendency to incarcerate people at the first opportunity. Everything in life is a balance, but it seems obvious that one way to reduce the tension between police and minorities is to reduce the number of instances in which police are asked to intervene. If a law isn't worth a fight, it shouldn't be a law.

Name three things that could be realistically done by the next president and Congress that would shrink or limit government?

It's worth saying at the outset that the book outlines a long-term case, and I hope that it will change attitudes now that lead to structural reforms over time. As you might imagine, I don't present a list of potential bills because this is primarily a book about ideas and about a much-needed return to localism, and because it would be rather ridiculous to first suggest that communities should broadly be able to live as they see fit, and then to suggest what choices they should make.

That having been said, the three realistic priorities I think are to repeal and replace Obamacare, and to do so in a manner that leaves the states free to experiment and individuals free to buy what they want; to get the federal government to retreat in the Drug War, thereby doing with

legislation what the Court should have done in *Gonzales v. Raich*; and to nix all federal intrusions in education, be they Common Core incentives or the remaining No Child Left Behind provisions. Politically speaking, with the notable exception of civil rights, conservatives need to start drawing a line between government at the federal level and at the state level — and meaning it.

You have a chapter talking about the “myth” of social issues. What do you mean? Isn’t it noteworthy that the most libertarian politicians (again thinking of Amash and both Pauls) are on the more socially conservative end of the libertarian spectrum?

When discussing political ideology, it can be tempting for us to lump together questions that are in fact not similar at all. For some reason, we describe drugs, abortion, and gay marriage as “social issues,” and we treat them as if they were philosophically or electorally comparable to one another. But they’re not. Structurally, the gay marriage issue revolves around the question, “which of civil society’s institutions with the state recognize and sanction, and in what form?”; the abortion issue centers on the questions of at what point a human life begins and of which protections from violence it should be afforded; and the drug issue comes down to the question of whether the state should intrude in the marketplace and prevent free citizens from owning, growing, transferring, and ingesting substances that effect profound physical or psychological changes. There really is no reason that one should approach these questions in the same manner.

Indeed, to look at the numbers is to realize that voters do not do so. Certainly, young Americans are becoming more “socially liberal” on the questions of gay marriage and the legalization of weed. Young Republicans are, too. But abortion is arguably going in the other direction. Indeed, as Gallup has noted repeatedly, young people are increasingly pro-life. For pundits to suggest as they do that Republicans needs simply to become “fiscally conservative” and “socially liberal” is simplistic. Actually, the party has a broadly popular position on abortion (albeit both parties are extreme in comparison to public opinion), and a generational problem on the issues of drugs and gay marriage.

I don’t think that it’s odd that a pro-life, anti-Drug War, pro-gay marriage (at the state level) platform would appeal to a conservative. To hold these positions, one needs only to want to protect life; to hope to reform a failed big government program and to ensure that Washington does not become too powerful; and to leave those questions that are not addressed in the Constitution to the states. Rand Paul has suggested that the state should get out of marriage completely. As I argue in the book, with a government this size that is unlikely to work. But I don’t think it’s odd that a conservative would want that.

Explain how you deal with foreign policy in your book.

My broad view is that the conservatives have the right attitude toward America’s role in the world, and that the libertarians do not. The preference for non-interventionism and a humble foreign policy is deeply rooted in American history, and it bubbles up from time to time. It is virtuous. But it is also unrealistic.

Since 1945, in which year the United States was handed the baton by the British Empire, America has been the nation charged with protecting the global liberal order: making the seas safe for trade and travel and acting as a hegemon that will prevent illiberal nations from rising.

Samuel Huntington argued that we can't have such a liberal order without a liberal force underwriting its security. I agree. If America backs off, someone will step up. Who exactly do we want that to be? This, of course, is not to suggest that all America's actions have been right. I think the Iraq war was a grave mistake. But it is to accept that the United States must remain pre-eminent.

Isn't a lot of what you're talking about a sort of reframing of the old National Review senior editor Frank Meyer's [fusionism](#)? Explain how conservatism and libertarianism, at their best, go together.

It's certainly an attempt to unite those who are generally opposed to more government control but disagree with one another seriously, yes. Increasingly, the American political fight is between those who would nationalize and control and homogenize, and those who would leave the big questions to the states and to individuals and to civil society.

Most people are not purists; by bridging the gap between the right's factions, I hope to expand the appeal to those who are put off by both traditionalist conservatives and doctrinaire libertarians. I imagine most people can vote for a person who agrees with them 60 percent of the time.

But it's also an attempt to work out how those who will not agree can best co-exist. My fundamental argument is that the best way of combining the right writ large is also the best way of saving the country from its present fractiousness: namely, to use the existing federal system to permit those who vehemently disagree with one another to get along.

We are deeply divided in America, and yet we increasingly have a government that imposes uniformity. Forget the intellectual differences between Pat Buchanan and David Boaz; if we want the hipster in Portland and the Baptist in Mississippi to continue to thrill to the word "America," we're going to have to help them coexist. Top-down standards and nationwide laws cannot possibly achieve that.