

THE DAILY CALLER

Tonight's Big Libertarianism vs. Conservatism Debate

By Matt K. Lewis

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The contest between conservative and libertarian ideas is one of the most interesting and significant intellectual debates of our time, and will likely provide the backdrop for the 2016 Republican primary race — if not the General Election.

For this reason, I'm excited to be moderating a debate tonight on libertarianism versus conservatism — featuring interns from the Cato Institute and the Heritage Foundation.

(Follow the conversation on Twitter using #LvCdebate. If you can't make it to the Cato Institute, watch this event live online at www.cato.org/live.)

In the interest of transparency, those of you who know me know that I self-identify as a conservative — albeit as a *contrarian* conservative. My position on immigration is essentially a libertarian one — and I have, for years now, supported decriminalizing marijuana possession.

This is all to say that I'm sympathetic to both points of view, and — in any event — will strive to avoid playing Candy Crowley.

Aside from observing that this debate will also be playing out on the presidential stage for the next several years (especially should Rand Paul run for president — which seems very likely), it's worth mentioning a few additional points.

First, of course, this is not a new debate. It has been around for a long time — although, it has never been more important.

For those unfamiliar with Frank Meyer's efforts to unite these two philosophies, this 2002 *National Review* piece explains his rationale:

Meyer's mix of libertarianism and traditionalism came to be called "fusionism," but he didn't think he was fusing anything. America's Founders were concerned about both freedom and virtue. Only in the 19th century were these ends divided. In the aftermath of the French Revolution, classical liberals became too utilitarian and hostile to religion and tradition. In reaction to them, classical conservatives defended authoritarianism.

Both had part of the truth. The conservative — and, at the time Meyer wrote, the traditionalist — was correct in affirming the existence of an objective moral order and the importance of virtue. The classical liberals, and now the libertarians, were right to oppose statism. These truths were

not at war, but merely “contrary emphases in conservatism” as Meyer was trying to define it. But either emphasis, if pursued to the exclusion of the other, risked error.

Was this “fusionist” coalition merely a marriage of convenience — a necessity so long as communism was an existential threat — or was it evidence of a natural alliance? Hopefully, we will gain insight into the potential for future compatibility and cooperation between these two philosophies during tonight’s debate.

Another reason I’m excited to be a part of this: Although the Left is clearly divided over issues such as civil liberties, drones, etc., they are mostly avoiding these sorts of internecine public debates. To be sure, there is a benefit to not airing one’s dirty laundry, but there’s also this: The side most willing to be introspective — to publicly hash out their differences — is, perhaps, the side most likely to win in the free market of ideas — in the long run.

Let’s get ready to rumble!