



## Leftist Attacks

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A dispute recently erupted at a conference sponsored by the Mises Institute between right- and left-leaning libertarians, that is, between Jeff Deist, President of the Mises Institute, and Daniel Horowitz, who is something of a fixture at CATO. Since Tom Woods has provided a spirited defense of Deist's position, which calls for a combination of liberty with traditional social morality and traditional community identities, I needn't rush to Jeff's defense. Although I've never (to my knowledge) met the Director of the Mises Institute, I fully share his perspective on the necessary preconditions for living in a free society under a constitutionally limited government. And I find the attacks by Horowitz on Deist and Ron Paul to be over-the-top, particularly the efforts to equate a respect for traditional civic morality with Nazism. I also agree with Shane Trejo, writing here that Horowitz's rage against communal loyalties among gentile nations rings hollow, given his own intense Jewish nationalism. Let me quote Shane's brilliant put-down of Horowitz's name-calling lest my paraphrase fails to capture his thoughts:

*"Although Horowitz compares 'blood and soil' libertarianism to Nazism, he has no problem standing for 'blood and soil' when it comes to the state of Israel. Horowitz is an avid Zionist and sees no hypocrisy in his reflective defense of nationalism and ethnic pride when defending his beloved Jewish state."*

Deist, who cites the late Murray Rothbard in support of his position, is not using "cultural conservative" in any antiquarian sense. He doesn't mean by this term a rote, substance-free mention of "permanent things" or an innocuous reference to abstract "values." Deist stresses that the success of people being free depends on "long-suppressed institutions of civil society." Deist designates as "blood and soil libertarianism" what is needed as a barrier to run-away state power and to the destruction of interpersonal morality.

That Horowitz and CATO would identify such sentiments with Holocaust-denial and Nazi intolerance is hardly surprising. Beneath the dispute between the libertarian Left and the libertarian Right is a traditional confrontation between Left and Right. Like neoconservatism, but

unlike Mises, CATO has easy relations with the “Washington policy community” because it shares certain basic assumptions about the social good and about the need to move beyond the bad old times, when people still believed in a Deity and lived in families with assigned gender roles. Traditional national identities are supposedly another harmful relic of the past, unless Horowitz and his well-paid buds are speaking about Israeli exceptionalism.

This brings me to my main point: The term “libertarianism,” like the utterly discredited “conservatism,” blurs more than it explains. It creates or perpetuates the illusion that there is a common creed that unites groups and individuals who are divided by substantive differences, even if they can be made to agree in very general terms about individual choice and economic freedom. For those who aren’t oblivious to reality, it is hard not to notice that “libertarian” institutes and individuals who are cordially invited to join conservatism, inc. are with few exceptions on the Left. The late Murray Rothbard did not receive the same media recognition that has been conferred on the libertarians from CATO; and an obvious reason is that Murray held extremely traditional social views. He didn’t hail the Immigration Reform and Voting Rights Act of 1965 as developments that would bring us closer to becoming a free society. Murray looked at government actions in terms of their likely effects in expanding the American electorate and in generating more demand for “social services.”

On the other side of the libertarian ideological divide we find Stephen Moore, who is closely identified with CATO, National Review, Fox-news and WSJ. Moore wrote an entire book celebrating all the various forms of American progress, including moral and educational advancement, which he believes took place between 1900 and 2000. And Moore certainly doesn’t exclude government social engineering in the twentieth century as one of the things to be celebrated, along with expanded immigration, which supposedly enhances our American liberty. Although these causes for celebration suggest certain contradictions, which Jeff Deist, Tom and I would instantly notice, one shouldn’t dwell on them if one intends to make a career in DC as a “libertarian.” As anyone but a leftist or left-libertarian would realize, expanding one’s political community for the sake of greater inclusiveness or diversity can damage established liberties. Not everyone on the planet values constitutionally limited government equally or will use his vote to preserve or restore it.

The Right-Left division may be far more relevant for understanding what divides political sides than who is or is not a libertarian. Left libertarians like Moore and Horowitz land up buttressing the therapeutic state, as a bulwark against discrimination and insensitivity because for them government is the ultimate safeguard against “prejudice.” In a society in which self-defining individuals are free to gratify their desires as long as they don’t discriminate or cause physical harm, public administration is there to protect their expressive possibilities. A steadily expanding state is also needed in this anti-traditionalist utopia, as James Kalb argues in *The Tyranny of Liberalism*, to assign relative rankings to our demands for gratification. Official, binding decisions have to be made about whose whims and desires are to be given more protection in this world of individuals seeking gratification. For example, do the expressive rights of transgendered black trump those of an Islamicist declaiming against sexual perversion and racially inferior groups? Perhaps administrators and judges will decide the other way. In the Left libertarian

universe, however this decision has to be left to public administrations and courts, since traditional communities and their moral standards no longer enjoy respect or the slightest political standing, unless it occurs to some individuals to treat these antique arrangements differently.

It's easy to explain exactly what the American Right believed in an earlier age. They affirmed free markets, at least domestically, constitutionally restricted government and minding our business internationally. Those who favored such positions were typically practicing Christians, believed in traditional family structures and were quite often restrictionists on immigration and sometimes on free trade. Such limited-government rightists also never referred to themselves as 'liberal democrats,' as I explain in my book *Revisions and Dissents*, but would insist that the US was founded as a constitutional republic. (The first time I heard the term "liberal democrat" praised to the sky was by a Straussian, when I was already in my late twenties; and I thought the speaker was referring to the followers of George McGovern.)

I'm also not surprised that CATO and Horwitz have been raging against Ron Paul as well as Jeff Deist. Why wouldn't they? Unlike his left-libertarian critics, the former Texas Congressman harks back philosophically to the American Right before its Buckleyite reformulation in the 1950s. Paul not only favors free markets and the gold standard. He has no interest in waging crusades worldwide on behalf of the latest version of "American democratic values." And unlike such current libertarian heroes as Jamie Kirchik, Dr. Paul feels no yearning to export gay rights to Putin's Russia or to impose gay marriage through federal courts on the entire country. It's also been rumored that Dr. Paul attends a conservative Protestant church and still hasn't conferred with Bibi.