

LEARNING WHAT IT IS BY UNDERSTANDING WHAT IT ISN'T

This essay indirectly explains conservatism by correcting misconceptions of it. In so doing, the essay distinguishes conservatism from many of its criticisms.

CONSERVATISM'S WHOLE
ENTERPRISE IS TO IDENTIFY,
EMBRACE, AND THEN
CONSERVE UNIVERSAL AND
ETERNAL REALITIES

The intellectual and political fight to define American conservatism, let alone to lay claim as its standard-bearer, has been a protracted one since the late 1950s and early 1960s. This debate has been guided by discussions of what it is not as much as by answering the question of what it is. The purpose of this essay is to reflect on the historic debate about what conservatism is not.

This reflection will be made clearer if we recall some of the key moments in the historical debate. We can look to Nobel prize-winning economist F.A. Hayek's addendum to his lucid 1960 book, *The Constitution of Liberty*, titled "Why I am Not a Conservative." We may call upon the reactions of some of his friends who opined that he really didn't mean what he wrote. We also can dig into a fascinating dialogue carried out in the pages of America's most prestigious conservative weekly, *National Review*, wherein liberals, libertarians, and conservatives attempted to define, denigrate, or defend the true meanings of conservatism. Lastly, we can call upon local wisdom and experiences peculiar to Utah, perhaps the reddest of red states and, presumably, one of the nation's most conservative.

We will do all this and more, and we will do it in a way that we hope will reveal the plain and simple truths about the most important political philosophy of the modern age.

First, conservatism is not an ideology.

While ideology is defined several ways, in this context we mean theorizing in a visionary or impractical way. Even when descriptive of a body of doctrine, ideology does not accurately portray conservatism.

Over the past several decades since the post-World War II era many political liberals disdainful of conservatism's growing embrace by the American population have projected their own ideological rigidity on conservatism's advocates. In the January 30, 1962 edition of *National Review*, Morton Auerbach, University of California at Northridge professor and author of *The Conservative Illusion*, wrote about "Do-It-Yourself Conservatism?" His thesis was that conservatism always has been a very "flexible" word that has led many modern era advocates into self-contradictory stands – and if self-contradictory among very intelligent people, then fully conscious and shameless defenders of an incongruous hodgepodge of unyielding and competing ideas (i.e., ideologues and their ideology).

Professor Auerbach's critique rested on the idea that organic political conservatism was based on a longing for a return to medieval life derived from opposition to the French Revolution, but that its modern proponents actually favor the underlying tenets of that Revolution. In his *National Review* essay¹ he wrote:

"The tradition against which the Revolution was directed was the heritage of the Middle Ages. Therefore, a conservative was at the time one who defended medieval values against the 'liberals' who supported the principles of revolutionary France."

Professor Auerbach (unbelievably for a "professor" of political science) describes the "good society" sought after by the French "liberal revolutionaries" (i.e., Rousseau, the Jacobins, and perpetrators of the Reign of Terror) as "the embodiment of free enterprise, civil liberties, and limited government," and that, through some unexplained motive, modern conservatives have adopted these very liberal positions while remaining at heart medievalists – thus, the self-contradictory nature of modern conservatism's "ideology."

"...what was once liberalism has now become conservatism. Thus, Barry Goldwater, obviously a conservative of the classical liberal variety [a French Revolutionary in Professor Auerbach's mind], cites Russell Kirk as his favorite theoretician, in spite of the fact that Kirk is an avowed Burkean who deplores the passing of aristocracy."

To drive the point home, he turns his conclusive insights on his host editor, William F. Buckley,

"...when he wants a clear statement of the limits on legitimate government intervention in private affairs he turns to an early formulation of John Stuart Mill or some classical liberal formulation. But when he wants to argue for intellectual conformity to 'tradi-

tion,' Buckley suddenly begins quoting from Edmund Burke conveniently glossing over the fact that he uses 'tradition' to mean specifically the classical liberal tradition, while Burke uses the word to mean primarily the medieval tradition."

And then smugly asks, "Will conservatism continue to offer nothing more than an array of mutually exclusive 'principles' from which all are invited to pick what suits them?"

This critique by Professor Auerbach is clearly the ideological pot calling the kettle black. We could argue that modern liberalism itself is a weird ideological amalgam of mutually exclusive, singly-related preferences centering on the aggrandizement of the state.

Far from Professor Auerbach's characterization, conservatism is an honest reflection on the human experience. It is a testimony about the facts surrounding human nature. Because he turns the whole ideal of the French Revolution on its head, he completely misreads its opponents such as Edmund Burke, and because he gets Burke wrong, it follows that he would certainly mistake the ideas of Burke's modern conservative admirers.

As M. Stanton Evans wrote in response to Professor Auerbach, "what he calls 'inconsistency' is in fact the vital equilibrium, centered in the wisdom of conservatism, of the free society."² Conservatism is exactly the opposite of ideology – it can take the clear lessons from the weaknesses exhibited within both medieval life and revolutionary France, learn from them, and conserve any good inherent in both. It conserves what is good and lasting for a free society and disregards what is ultimately detrimental to it. In this sense conservatism is anti-ideology.

In this spirit Russell Kirk can respond to Professor Auerbach,

“He thinks of political ideas as somehow bound to neat historical periods. In truth, great political ideas transcend particular institutions and periods. The reflecting conservative adheres not to some idealized historical era, but to what Dr. Leo Strauss calls ‘the Great Tradition.’ What Burke championed was not ‘medievalism,’ but the Great Tradition. He was defending the politics of Cicero, the moral system of Christianity, and the civil social order which had developed so successfully in England.

Not being ideologues, people of conservative convictions have modified and improved their practical politics to suit the needs of our age.³

Richard Weaver has written that, “It is my contention that a conservative is a realist, who believes that there is a structure of reality independent of his own will and desire. Further,

“He believes that there is a creation which was here before him, which exists now not by just his suffering, and which will be here after he’s gone. Though this reality is independent of the individual, it is not hostile to him. It is in fact amenable by him in many ways, but it cannot be changed radically and arbitrarily. This is the cardinal point. The conservative holds that man in this world cannot make his will his law without any regard to limits and to the fixed nature of things.”⁴

What do we want to conserve? Weaver responds, “The great structural reality which has been given us and which is on the whole beneficent.” Quoting Francis Bacon, he follows with “man learns to command nature by obeying her,” and then adds, “the same holds for the moral, social, and political worlds. One does not command these by simply trying to kick them over. One commands them as far as it is possible to do so or appropriate to do so by obeying them - by taking due note of their laws and

regulations and by following these and then proceeding to further ends.”⁵

Ideologies fall short of reality. Conservatism’s whole enterprise is to identify, embrace, and then conserve universal and eternal realities and use those lessons and that understanding to create a quality of life, individual and societal, that conforms to the moral order springing from those realities.

Second, conservatism is not a theology. It is not a catechism in religious truth. Neither is it a study of divine things. It is, however, a reverential reflection of a universal moral order within a political setting. This reflection is derided by both liberals and libertarians and leads them to lash out against conservatism as forms of “religious bigotry” or “moral authoritarianism.”

This confusion that conservatism is somehow an irrational expression of religious belief to coerce people to do good, or an American jihad against personal liberty, centers on the political conflict between freedom and virtue. We can find no better explication of this conflict, and for this reason can successfully rebut the idea that conservatism is some sort of imposing theology, than the public debate between libertarian Frank Meyer and conservative Brent Bozell, again, in the early pages of *National Review*.

To his distinct credit, Frank Meyer was an engineer and defender of a strategic school of thought known as “fusionism.” It was his attempt to bind libertarians and conservatives against big government liberals gaining political momentum in the 1960s. This attempt was no easy task given the very fundamental disagreements between the two camps. He explains fusionism thusly,

“[Fusionism] recognizes at one and the same time the transcendent goal of human existence and the primacy of the freedom of the person, a value based upon transcendent considerations. And it maintains

that the duty of men is to seek virtue; *but insists that men cannot in actuality do so unless they are free from the constraint of the physical coercion of an unlimited state.*"⁶
(italics added)

As it turned out historically, communism abroad and unrelenting socialism at home were much better unifiers (or helpful distractions) for libertarians and conservatives than Meyer's fusion theory. And no one proved this more correct than Brent Bozell, senior editor of *National Review*, who skewered his own editorial colleague Meyer (and their mutual friend, M. Stanton Evans) for what Bozell saw as the libertarian fallacy: that the first principle in political affairs is the freedom of the individual person. Bozell saw Meyer's construct of freedom and virtue to be entirely incompatible. In fact, he wondered if the libertarian-conservative coalition was even worth saving.

Bozell summarized the Meyer-Evans argument this way: 1) man cannot pursue virtue without choosing to do so; 2) his ability to choose depends "to a significant degree" on external circumstances; and 3) the more these circumstances favor choice, the better he can achieve virtue. In other words, achieving true virtue cannot be encumbered by outside coercion; if society's rules keep a person from choosing to view pornography, say, when the person would otherwise view it, then the person has not achieved virtue - virtue must come about independent of "external circumstances."

He then used the question of divorce laws to draw out the weakness of an otherwise strong libertarian argument,

X, an American, has tired of his wife; under the laws of his state, he has ample grounds for divorce; remarriage prospects are bright; his friends and professional associates would be sympathetic with the decision. Yet, after duly considering such factors, he decides against divorce on the grounds it is - 'wrong.'

Y, a Spaniard, has tired of *his* wife; Y is unable to get a divorce in his own country and to travel to France would impose a formidable economic burden; remarriage prospects in Spain, in any event, are nil; anyway his religion forbids it - as does his whole tradition; what is more, he would face a heavy measure of social ostracism; in short, Y dismisses the idea without giving it a second thought.

Query: by deciding to preserve his marriage, who - X or Y - has acted more virtuously? Meyer's answer (and who would disagree?): X of course. His decision was tougher by far; Y's choice was almost reflexive, was not therefore really 'free' at all.⁷

However, Bozell correctly observes,

"We can agree that the freer the choice - i.e., the more difficult it is - the greater the *merit*. But if, by definition, the virtuous act is one that conforms with man's nature, with the divine patterns of order - is the kind of heroic freedom envisioned by libertarian doctrine essential to such an act?

Every day on his way to work A slips a dime to the blind lady at the street corner; it is pure habit with him. B supports his family as a matter of course; the thought of abandoning it to seek his own pleasure never crosses his mind. C buys a 'worthwhile' novel at his bookstore, though - let us postulate such a weakness - if a well-advertised volume of pornography had not been banned by the state, he would have picked it up instead.

Now these acts are, in turn - a) reflexive, b) instinctive, c) coerced by state power. Yet each of them, in itself, is a virtuous act if a man's virtue consists in conducting himself in conformity with his nature, with the divine patterns of order."⁸ (underlining added)

And there, in a nutshell, lies the confusion about conservatism as some sort of jihad on America - conservatism holds to a universal moral order. It is a reflection of natural patterns in everyday life. Freedom, more appropriately labeled liberty, is a tool for a grander work, not an end in and of itself. Laws, customs, and traditions serve to assist man in conforming to that which is natural, part of the created order, and that is a part of achieving virtue.

In truth, there is an element of “missionary work,” or evangelism, woven throughout conservatism arising out of the philosophical transition from a focus on the individual to one that includes society. Conservatives recognize they have a sphere of influence that encourages a “public orthodoxy.” Virtue is more than an individual effort; it has a public component. We not only want to be personally virtuous, we want to live in and be a part of a virtuous society.

Bozell notes that, “When a commonwealth builds according to the divine patterns of order, then it is in a position to help man conform to his nature, which is the meaning of virtue. The institutions the commonwealth promotes are the important thing – its family arrangements, its schools, its churches, the kind of government it has to the extent a public orthodoxy tends to reflect the divine patterns of order, it also tends to encourage a virtuous citizenry.”⁹

Ideologies centered on the individual don’t have this problem. Hence, libertarians criticize pushy and authoritarian conservatives and liberals join the bandwagon to jeer us as Puritans. That liberals and libertarians deny a universal moral order, or with some doubt choose not to recognize it as a public experience, becomes the chasm between them and us. Call it a disagreement, if we must; but to criticize conservatism as religious oppression is wrong.

Third, conservatism is not irrational. Doctrinaire libertarians (especially the ones who think they are “real conservatives”) often accuse conservatives of being irrational. The basis of this accusation stems from the linear thinking most libertarians entertain - every idea must square logically and absolutely. Conservatives, on the other hand, govern themselves and others by principles within the context of the human experience - very non-linear thinking.

We may turn here to the esteemed economist F.A. Hayek. In his notable essay, “Why I Am Not a Conservative,” he writes, “Personally, I find that the most objectionable feature of the conservative attitude is its propensity to reject well-substantiated new knowledge because it dislikes some of the consequences which seem to follow from it

“...conservatism fears new ideas because it has no distinctive principles of its own to oppose them; and, by its distrust of theory and its lack of imagination concerning anything except that which experience has already proved, it deprives itself of the weapons needed in the struggle of ideas. Unlike [libertarianism], with its fundamental belief in the long-range power of ideas, conservatism is bound by the stock of ideas inherited at a given time. And since it does not really believe in the power of argument, its last resort is generally a claim to superior wisdom, based on some self-arrogated superior quality.”¹⁰

Hayek’s sentiment has been a common refrain among economic conservatives who disdain social conservatives. We see it arise in the debate over the merits of a flat tax versus a progressive tax that accommodates society’s common interests over its moneyed ones. We see it, too, as scientific “experts” remind the world of their prowess to define human nature in competition with its clerics and philosophers. But taking Hayek at his most kindly self, the criticism is that conservatives simply don’t like new ideas, and that is irrational.

In response, we turn to Russell Kirk. No doubt Kirk would speak of his contemporary friend Hayek as he would of his philosophical enemy John Stuart Mill, of whom he wrote, he “became all head and no heart,” and that since Mill, libertarians “have forgotten nothing and learned nothing.”

In this case, as with most others, the conservative would respond that the libertarian lacks the humane sentiment. After referring to Mill’s “one very simple principle,” (i.e., the sole end for using coercion over someone else is self-protection), Kirk remarked that “the trouble with it is that solitary simple principles, however tidy, really do not describe human behavior, and certainly cannot govern it.”¹¹

In his not-so-subtle retort to Hayek and those of this sentiment, Kirk, in his 1981 *Modern Age* essay titled, “Libertarians: the Chirping Sectaries,” quotes a conservative contemporary of Mill’s, James Fitzjames Stephens who, Kirk says, “set upon Mill with a whip of scorpions,”

“To me the question whether liberty is a good or a bad thing appears as irrational as the question whether fire is a good or a bad thing? It is both good and bad according to time, place, and circumstance, and a complete answer to the question would involve not merely a universal history of mankind, but a complete solution of the problems which such a history would offer.”¹²

Kirk notes that, “In every principle premise of his argument, Mill suffered from an inadequate understanding of human nature and history.”

He then moves on to directly address the notion raised by Hayek, namely the “fear” conservatives have for new ideas,

“It is consummate folly to tolerate every variety of opinion, on every topic, out of devotion to abstract ‘liberty’; for opinion soon finds its expression in action, and the fanatics whom we tolerated will not tolerate us when they have power. Was the world improved by free discussion of the Nazis’ thesis that Jews ought to be treated as less than human?...The real danger [from “sweet reasonableness”] is that custom and prescription and tradition may be overthrown utterly among us by the lust for novelty; and that men will be no better than the flies of a summer, oblivious to the wisdom of their ancestors, and forming every opinion merely under the pressure of fad, the foible, the passion of the hour.”¹³

To place the question of “irrationality” in context, Kirk falls back on the preeminent conservative author G.K. Chesterton and his little known parable “The Yellow Bird.” In this parable, a Russian scholar, Professor Ivanhov, is visiting a friend in the English countryside. The professor had just published a muchpraised book, *The Psychology of Liberty*. In short, he is a zealous advocate of personal liberty and the elimination of all restraints on human conduct and man’s environs.

The guest cottage in which he is staying houses a small yellow canary in a beautiful cage. The canary seemed very happy to be where it was. Its song resonated throughout the cottage. But being the champion of liberty he is, Professor Ivanhov is convinced the little creature would be much happier and more fulfilled out in the world. So he liberates the canary from its cage and out the window the bird flies.

But it does not fly for too long. The wild birds of the woods were not as discriminating as the professor when it came to canaries and soon ravaged the little creature to nothing but feathers and bones.

The next day, Professor Ivanhov set his sights on liberating the poor goldfish swimming contently around their bowl. With a crash of glass, the goldfish were set free.

On his third day at the cottage, Professor Ivanhov, contemplating the arching “round prison” of the sky, ultimately blows up the guest cottage with him in it culminating a life in absolute liberty.

In light of this tragic experience, the professor’s English host poses the question, what is liberty? He replies to himself, “First and foremost, surely, it is the power of a thing to be itself. In some ways the yellow bird was free in the cage. It was free to be alone. It was free to sing. In the forest its feathers would be torn to pieces and its voice choked forever. Then I began to think that being oneself, which is liberty, is itself limitation. We are limited by our brains and bodies; and if we break out, we cease to be ourselves, and, perhaps, to be anything.”

Conservatism does not fear dialogue; it does understand quite well and is quite cautious of human nature. What Hayek calls a “distrust of theory and its lack of imagination” is simply the wisdom of ages and experience that urges all mankind to move cautiously through the night of mortality. Hayek can stand on his principled belief in the merits of unregulated human experience; but there he will also fall. For conservatives, that behavior is irrational.

Brent Bozell picks up on another point of irrationality worth brief mention: the threefold function of the *genus* state. Frank Meyer expresses the libertarian sentiment that there exist only three natural functions of the state - 1) the preservation of domestic peace and order, 2) the administration of justice, and 3) defense against foreign enemies. Bozell responds,

“I do not think Meyer or the other fusionists will ever be able to explain to the uninitiated the mystery of the Trinitarian state. They will certainly not be

able to explain on the strength of an organic view of man and society why, e.g., it is ‘natural’ for the state to lock up a thief, and ‘unnatural’ for the state to launch a program against juvenile delinquency. Nor can they realistically hypothesize future conditions under which the Trinitarian concept will be adopted; nor point to any past moment in history when men have actually organized a society in this way; nor cite any serious thinker in back of the nineteenth century who has suggested men try to do so it is the purest fantasy to suggest that American constitutional theory has anything in common with the libertarian teaching about the threefold function of the *genus* state.”¹⁴

This “fantasy” is drawn from the well of ignorance about the human experience and its long history; and it is this advocacy for a fantasy world that drives libertarians from irrationality to irrelevance.

Fourth, conservatism is not an enemy of government. Conservatives believe that government is ordained of God precisely because conservatives believe in God and His purpose. If there indeed is a purpose, then a moral order reflects it and, if so, government is a natural part of the moral order.

All of this is not to say that conservatives love the United States Congress or any particular body of men and women who collect power they call “government.” It is to say that the human experience requires governing, either self-government or the kind that is imposed from without.

Edmund Burke, as on so many other points, reflects the conservative opinion in this regard,

“He who gave us our nature to be perfected by our virtue, willed also the necessary means for its perfection. He willed therefore the state. He willed its connection with the source and original archetype of

all perfection [government] is a contrivance of human wisdom to provide for human wants [Among the most important of those human wants is] a sufficient restraint upon their passions. Society requires not only that the passions of individuals should be subjected, but that even in the mass and body, as well as in the individual, the inclinations of men should frequently be thwarted, their will controlled, and their passions brought into subjection. This can be done only by a power outside themselves; and not, in the exercise of its function, subject to that will and to those passions which it is its office to bridle and subdue."¹⁵

And Russell Kirk adds, "In short, a primary function of government is restraint; and that is anathema to libertarians, though an article of faith to conservatives."

Fifth, conservatism is not liberalism. Hayek writes without blush that conservatism, "by its very nature cannot offer an alternative to the direction in which we are moving. It may succeed by its resistance to current tendencies in slowing down undesirable developments, but, since it does not indicate another direction, it cannot prevent their continuance. It has, for this reason, invariably been the fate of conservatism to be dragged along a path not of its own choosing. The tug of war between conservatives and progressives can only affect the speed, not the direction, of contemporary developments."¹⁶

Perhaps the quickest response here might be, go tell that to Ronald Reagan and every liberal who disdains him and his memory. But that would be unconstructive and miss the bigger point Hayek represents, namely, that, like most libertarians, he simply does not understand the nature of conservatism in theory or political philosophy. Again, he fails to acknowledge human nature, experience, and purpose.

Hayek's failure here is in his belief that limited government is the highest political objective of every freedom loving person. Of course, conservatives seek limited government, but not for its own sake. That is, the end goal of conservative political philosophy is not limited government *per se*, but *limited* government only as a tool for individuals and society to achieve virtue through conformity with a universal moral order of human existence. Conservatism can in some cases view an *expanded* role of government as a helpful tool as well, and this drives Hayek and his fellows crazy.

Stan Evans argues that "the reign of appetite is most destructive, and the incentives and opportunities for its exercise most plentiful, when fallible man is endowed with unlimited power over his fellow beings."¹⁷ To which Bozell responds,

"... we are looking at nothing more than a restatement of Lord Acton's adage that 'power tends to corrupt; absolute power corrupts absolutely.' But note that Acton did not try to convert this essentially prudential judgment about the dangers of government power into an absolute rule for restricting government power. He did not, that is to say - and neither should we - commit the elementary logical fallacy of turning the proposition, 'the state that governs most will govern worst,' into the proposition, 'the state that governs least will govern best'

"...a thousand times over more often than not - given the kinds of claims government makes these days - the prudent decision will be against the grant of power and in favor of leaving the individual and private groups on their own. But not always. The good commonwealth, taking the measure of its governors, and the prospects for their corruption, may charge them with, say, building roads, or maintaining a

postal system, or passing anti-obscenity laws, or giving tax-exemption to its churches it will look upon the state merely as one potential instrument among many others for articulating and thus defending the community consensus about such things...."¹⁸

And so conservatives are sometimes called liberals by those ideologues who cannot accept the nature of man (i.e., he is corrupt), and his purpose within the moral order of things (i.e., he can transcend his corruption), and that state power, at times, can be an instrument in his transcendence.

In their defense, conservatives might not overlook a recent article by libertarian Cato Institute's vice-president for research, Brink Lindsey, titled "Liberalarians." Lindsey writes,

"Today's ideological turmoil [between libertarians and conservatives], however, has created an opening for ideological renewal - specifically, liberalism's renewal as a vital governing philosophy. A refashioned liberalism that incorporated key libertarian concerns and insights could make possible a truly progressive politics once again. In other words, a politics that joins together under one banner the causes of both cultural and economic progress."¹⁹

Talk about Meyer's "Twisted Tree"! This is how badly ideological our "defenders of liberty" have become - they find common cause, not in political power, but in bad ideas. This suggestion of a not-so-unholy alliance is unsurprising for conservatives; both ideologies, liberalism and libertarianism, ignore the natural moral order - the latter that one even exists and the former that it isn't the one they thought it was. As an aside, conservatives do not have to imagine what this "license alliance" might look like - Babylon meets Sodom - something akin to that bastion of freedom on the liberal-libertarian axis,

New York City, with Hillary Clinton as its king and Barney Frank as its queen.

Sixth, conservatism is not libertarianism. This paper already has discussed this point in several different ways. In closing, we'll put a bow on this subject by briefly reviewing the two schools of thought using Russell Kirk's deft, if not cutting, summation.

Notwithstanding his disdain for libertarianism - he once wrote that the "representative libertarian is humorless, intolerant, self-righteous, badly schooled, and dull"; and that, as a political philosophy, "what doctrinaire libertarians offer us is an ideology of universal selfishness we flawed human creatures are sufficiently selfish already, without being exhorted to pursue selfishness on principle" - for conservatives anyway, Kirk puts his insightful finger on the pulse of both camps."²⁰

First, he writes, "The great line of division in modern politics lies between all those who believe in some sort of transcendent moral order, on one side, and on the other side all those who take this ephemeral existence of ours for the be-all and end-all."

Second, "In any society, order is the first need of all. Liberty and justice may be established only after order is tolerably secured. But libertarians give primacy to an abstract liberty. In exalting an absolute and indefinable 'liberty' at the expense of order, the libertarians imperil the very freedom they praise."

Third, "What binds society together? The libertarians reply that the cement of society is self-interest, closely joined to the nexus of cash payment. But the conservatives declare that society is a community of souls, joining the dead, the living, and those yet unborn; and that it coheres through what Aristotle called friendship and Christians call love of neighbor."

Fourth, “Libertarians generally believe that human nature [fallen man] is good, though damaged by certain social institutions. Conservatives, on the contrary, hold that ‘in Adam’s fall we [sin] all.’”

Fifth, “The libertarian takes the state for the great oppressor. But the conservative finds that the state is ordained of God.”

Sixth, “The libertarian thinks that this world is chiefly a stage for the swaggering ego; the conservative finds himself instead a pilgrim in a realm of mystery and wonder, where duty, discipline, and sacrifice are required - and where the reward is that love which passeth all understanding.”

And, in conclusion,

“If one were to content himself simply with contrasting the beliefs of conservatives and libertarians as to the nature of liberty, still we could arrive at no compromise. There is the liberty of the wolf, John Adams wrote to John Taylor; and there is the liberty of civilized man. The conservative will not tolerate

ravaging liberty; with Dostoevski, he knows that those who commence with absolute liberty will end with absolute tyranny. He maintains, rather, what Burke called ‘charter rights,’ developed slowly and painfully in the civil social order, sanctioned by prescription.”

Libertarians love liberty. Conservatives love freedom – that combination of liberty and virtue conforming to the moral order. And perhaps this describes best what conservatism *is not* as much as it describes what *it is*?

SUGGESTED READING

Freedom and Virtue: The Conservative/Libertarian Debate, edited by George W. Carey, ISI Books, Wilmington, DE, 1998.

The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America since 1945, by George H. Nash, ISI Books, Wilmington, DE, 1996.

The Making of the American Conservative Mind: National Review and Its Times, by Jeffrey Hart, ISI Books, Wilmington, DE, 2005.

END NOTES

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