



**Episode 1,156: Is the Term “Libertarian” Still Useful? Jeff Deist on Libertarian Division**

**Guest: Jeff Deist**

**WOODS:** So let's talk about libertarian. I mean, we are Episode 1,156. This is a pretty fundamental concept to the show. And the premise here I think is that when we think about the way the world looks at us, rightly or wrongly, there's confusion about who we are. But when we drill down even farther, what do we find? That even among ourselves, we have disagreements as to who we are and what the term means and what we're all about and what our priorities are and what comes first and what comes second and what doesn't come in any place because it has nothing to do with libertarianism at all. A lot of times, we can't seem to come to an agreement on that. Or it'll be maybe some grudging agreement that we're all on the same page, but let's try to demonize 48% of the people in the movement. Whatever it is, something has gone a little bit screwy here, and I want to try to sort through this or think about not necessarily replacing the term — because I'm just an old fogey. You're not going to teach this old fogey new tricks. But are there alternative terms that at the very least would be more precise, so if we want to really make clear who we are and where we stand we might use those? That's a big question I just threw at you.

**DEIST:** Isn't it amazing, Tom, how much this has changed over the last few decades? This is a problem of abundance, not a problem of scarcity, thankfully, because I can recall one of my very first cars was a really crappy Volkswagen Scirocco, if anybody remembers those.

**WOODS:** Geez, I'd never even heard of it.

**DEIST:** I think I paid about \$1,500 for it, and I had a bumper sticker on the back that said, "Legalize Freedom. Vote Libertarian." So this would have been around 1990, first car I ever owned. So at that time, not that long ago — what's that, 28 years ago now? — "libertarian" meant generally capital-L Libertarian Party guy, and it meant this kind of weird political idea that you wanted to get rid of the government and you wanted to legalize pot. So it had a much narrower meaning in most people's minds, and it also was not a term that everyone would have known back then.

And of course, today everyone knows the term. It's used in common parlance. It has some very widely varying definitions applied to it depending on the speaker, and that's part of the problem, is that as libertarianism has grown, the use of the term has grown as a moniker by both left and right, and even amongst libertarians, we have these widespread disagreements as to what exactly it means.

And I noticed something interesting the other day. Maybe a week or two ago, I saw that Charles Koch had announced that he's not going to call himself a libertarian anymore. He's

going to start using the term "classical liberal," which of course also is somewhat ill-defined and has a host of good and bad points depending on your perspective. And in fact, I'm actually going to recommend our own David Gordon, who's written some interesting stuff on the etymology of the term "classical liberalism." But I thought it was interesting that Charles Koch did that, and I wondered to myself: is that because he's now seeing more downside than upside to the term? It's a good question.

But I think with so many things in America anyway, there's a French influence. We have to go back to the 19th century French anarchists who used the term in a very different way, Tom. These were free thinkers, so to speak, in the Enlightenment, and they didn't like determinism, and so they meant liberty in a much broader sense than perhaps you and I would today. And of course, the French have always had a different definition of equality and liberty than Americans. Depending on who you want to believe, the person who might have coined the term was an Englishman named William Belsham, who lived in the late 1700s, early 1800s. I'm not entirely sure that that's true, but it may be true. But it was certainly popularized by the French anarchists and apparently because there were French political laws that outlawed being an anarchist, so if you called yourself a libertarian but you held anarchist views, perhaps you wouldn't run afoul of this kind of Lincolnite law against labeling or something yourself something. So some of your listeners might know the name Joseph Déjacque, who apparently popularized the term.

So you fast-forward to the modern age, both the term classical liberal and libertarian went through some changes over the years. And there's no question I think that our left friends are correct when they say that libertarianism was originally a left-wing term. I think that's true. Forget the stuff about the French parliament. It did have left-wing derivations originally, so I think we should acknowledge that. And there's actually as an interesting little form of proof of that, here's something that Murray wrote in *Betrayal of the American Right*, and what's so interesting about this —

**WOODS:** By the way, Jeff, let's bear in mind we have a lot of newbie people. Who's Murray?

**DEIST:** Ugh, well, something Rothbard wrote, something Murray Rothbard wrote —

**WOODS:** Okay, all right.

**DEIST:** — who is certainly in our eyes and in many people's eyes the godfather of modern libertarianism. So he wrote a book called *The Betrayal of the American Right*, and he wrote it — it came out in '79, which means, although at that point Reagan was certainly running and part of the conversation, we didn't yet have the Reagan era. We didn't yet have Reaganite conservatism. So he's saying this in 1979. He writes:

"Libertarians" — putting that word in quotes — "in contrast had long been simply a polite word for left-wing anarchists, that is for anti-private property anarchists either of the communist or syndicalist variety. But now we had taken over, and more properly from the view of etymology; since we were proponents of individual liberty and therefore of the individual's right to his property."

So Rothbard saw that word as correctly belonging to the Misesian tradition of a strong emphasis on property rights. But again, a lot of our left-wing friends would say: hey, that was

our word and it actually had an anti-private property connotation. So there's an interesting truth here about the use of it. But I think nonetheless, if you fast-forward to the second part of the 20th century, the term classical liberal is already ensconced because liberals had sort of taken the term liberal in a left-wing direction, certainly especially in the '30s and '40s. And so libertarian had become a word without a home, and I think Rothbard really grabbed ahold of that word in the second half of the 20th century, certainly beginning in the 1970s, and said: hey, that's our word, and it implies, necessitates a Misesian view of property and a Rothbardian view of the state. And as a result, certainly even today in the general public's eye, libertarianism seems more comfortable on the right.

Now, we eschew left and right. We're not politically left or right, of course, but I think most mainstream people would see it as more comfortable on the right, and this upsets some of our left-leaning libertarian friends, and maybe understandably so. But I think that the reason it's more properly seen on the right today is because there is an anti-state emphasis to the term libertarian, and at least today, you can at least talk to conservatives about areas of life where the state not ought to involve itself, whereas I think if you talked to a dyed-in-the-wool progressive today, people who want to politicize every facet of human life, I'm not sure there's any area of life, Tom, where they would so no, the state not ought to interfere. The bedroom? Well, too late for that. Look at the #MeToo movement. The modern left absolutely wants the state in your bedroom. So although we cringe sometimes at the idea of left and right, there's still cultural forces at play that change and shape the way we use terms.

So for the last 30, 40, 50 years, the Rothbardian conception of libertarianism has been placed somewhere vaguely on the right. Whether that's been a good thing or a bad thing for us, I'll leave that to you. And of course Murray himself flirted mightily from a tactical or strategic perspective with both the left and the right. The Old Right, what he saw as the anti-war right of Taft or Albert Jay Nock. And he flirted with the left: he flirted with the Black Panthers; he flirted with the anti-Vietnam War protesters. So it's interesting how words morph and change.

But that being said, has the word libertarian lost its value? Has it become something that we can't all agree on? I'm not sure. It's very human to want to ring fence things and to classify things and to categorize things. But also, as words become more popular and more widely used, they start to devolve and lose any kind of precise meaning, maybe necessarily so. So it's a tough question.

I certainly consider myself a libertarian, and I use that term in the Rothbardian sense of someone who is anti-state, anti-central bank, somebody who thinks society ought to be organized along private institutions and someone who thinks private property rights ought to be held in very high regard. But there are plenty of libertarians who are opposed to the libertarian emphasis on private property, who think liberty is far more about freedom of movement, sexual freedom, and freedom from landlord, freedom from work, freedom from want, freedom from need.

So within the umbrella of those who today term themselves libertarians, there's a very wide range of views and opinions. I think most of your listeners would know where I come from. I guess they would view me as a right libertarian. That's fine. I don't much care. But we have to I think acknowledge that the term has changed, that modern usage has changed, and perhaps we ought to at least consider whether we all are using it in the same way, because if it's a catchall term for anything, then it becomes meaningless.

**WOODS:** Let me elaborate here a bit just from my own experience, and then I do want to run through some possible competitors in terms of terms that might be used — not to say that "libertarian" needs to be altogether abandoned, but let's say you're in a group of people who are sort of in the know. What would be a term that would make clear to them precisely where you are? I do want to get to that.

But just to clarify a bit, when we say that today there's confusion and we seem to be at odds with each other, it may not be clear to people where that confusion is. For example, we're all against at least most taxation, I can say for libertarians. I mean, there are minarchists who would favor some or whatever, but in general, we want at least low taxes. There are some things that — we want the drug war to be over and stuff like that. We can generally agree on stuff like that.

But then there are things like the other day, I sent out an email to my list — and you should all be on my email list. You can get a free book while you get on it at [TomsFreeBooks.com](http://TomsFreeBooks.com). But I send out good stuff, all right? I send out a good email every weekday, and it's fun to read. So I sent out an email about the new LGBTQ+ acronym. Now, the + of course means that if you really, really wanted to list everything, the acronym would be more like LGGBDTTIQQAAPP. So I sent out an email saying: you know, I'm just not sure I'm going for that, but more than that, this is the state's dream. Because could you imagine the bureaucrats and the lawyers in the service of the state? It must be like kids on Christmas morning looking at this thing, because they know that, given the state's ideological commitment to this, they're going to be able to invade every nook and cranny of civil society.

And I gave the example — just one example. I could give a million. Let's say you're a dance instructor. You don't want to instruct same-sex couples. All right, well, a libertarian would say that's absolutely your right, 100% your right. Now, a libertarian could also as a private opinion say: but that person's a bigot and I don't support what that person is doing. Look, think what you want, but libertarianism is all about coercion, the use of the state to initiate physical force against people.

And my point was: look at that one example. Now, first of all, that guy's going to be demonized anyway, because of course he's a hater so he doesn't even have rights. Now, imagine this trickling through every aspect of life and you see why the state latches onto things like LGGBDTTIQQAAPP: because the crazier it is, the more it becomes fuel for the state. It's the state on steroids, because the more state-driven groupthink, the more coercion there's going to be necessary to impose it on the population.

And I said in the email this is also why the state loves these open-ended concepts like equality. Well, you think you know what equality means. It's equality of opportunity. Okay, but there's no way to limit it to that. The state will use equality as a crowbar to open up every sector of society to state influence. And plus, equality can't ever be reached, because supposing by some miracle you did get equality of resources, let's say. The second somebody trades with somebody else, resources have been exchanged and thereby the disturbing of equality has occurred and now you have inequality again. So you can't ever get there, so again the state loves it because it's an unachievable ideological goal that will lead to the state flexing and building up its muscles.

So I wrote that. I think that is absolutely undebatable. It does not matter what your private view on these questions is. Unless you are not paying attention to how the state operates, you

will see that the state is going to do this. And I was taken to task by one — I don't know, just some guy in a Facebook group. And he of course misstated my view, so I clarified it in my next email. When people attack me, I just write emails about that. But anyway, I know I'm taking too long to talk, but I can't help it. What seemed to be happening there, Jeff, is that this guy is committed to this cultural outcome and so could not perceive the possibility that the state will use it to build up its powers. What he wanted to do was to punish me for being, whatever, insensitive or having right-wing concerns or this or that. But to me, that's just a pretty clear ideological question, that we can't let the state latch on to ideas like this that it then uses to build itself up with.

So what I'm leading up to is the following question: it seems that there are certain cultural preferences that people like you and I may have in common and that people like my critic may disagree with. And what I think some of this boils down to is something you and I talked about before we started this conversation, which is, suppose you had this deal: the state can disappear tomorrow, but the cultural outcome will be very much not to your liking. So let's say we're talking to left libertarians. You're going to get a much, much more conservative culture. Is that a tradeoff you would be willing to make? Or likewise, you and I might have to face a more left-leaning culture. Is that a tradeoff you and I would be willing to face? I think then we really get to see where is libertarianism in your scale of values? Is it number three, four, or five, or is it number one?

**DEIST:** Yeah, absolutely true, and that's why I object both ideologically and tactically, strategically to the idea of using the left's language and using the left's stated goals. If you say: look, I'm just as concerned about equality as you; I just want to use libertarian means to reach a left end, I think that's a huge mistake. But you're right; if we did have this magic button to press, I think a lot of people who might not know me imagine I'm a social conservative or something like that. That's not actually true. But nonetheless, I would say I have bourgeois, boring, suburban sensibilities in certain aspects.

And yet if I could press that magic button and either eliminate or severely diminish the role of the state in society tomorrow and that yielded a society that was, let's say, more libertine or more left-leaning culturally, I would still press that button because I have two kids, and my fears for them surrounding taxation, surrounding regulation, spying, surveillance, and especially war and intervention in other nations are much stronger than my concerns over whether a particular lifestyle with which I disagree moves in next door.

I mean, I view the state as such a malignant, criminal agency in our society, a big mafia, let's just say, the Crips and the Bloods on steroids, that I would want to eliminate that regardless. Would all left libertarians agree? I don't know, but this is a great question. We can eliminate the left-versus-right-libertarian problem simply by saying: do you want to eliminate or significantly reduce the state and take what comes of that? Yes or no? And we can even say that on single issues. Do you advocate eliminating or severely reducing the state on issue X? If so, we are potential allies, and that ought to eliminate a lot of in-fighting.

But it doesn't, Tom, because we're just wired as humans, one, to make gross generalizations and ring fence things, as I mentioned earlier, but two, to draw endless distinctions and divisions between those. And it's funny to me how some libertarians imagine that the right and the left are more unified. Nothing could be further from the truth. There are unbelievable divisions and antagonisms within progressives and liberals and Democrats and

conservatives and Tea Partiers and the Republicans, so we're not the only ones. It's a human thing.

But it interests me a lot, and when it comes to using this term "libertarian," I mentioned Charles Koch had changed his mind on that. I think it's really interesting to go read what the non-libertarian left, the progressive left thinks of libertarians and the term libertarian. Go check out somebody like Matt Yglesias. Go check out *The New Republic*, some outlet like this.

And people like Rand Paul and the Kochs are really getting zero in terms of respect from left liberals, no matter what they emphasize in their own libertarianism. There's this huge effort by the UnKoch My Campus group; there was a *Washington Post* story just a week or so back about how, oh my gosh, the Kochs are using their donations to steer policy at these universities and it draws into question academic neutrality and credibility and this is a huge problem — never mind that virtually every university in the country is a left-wing think-tank on steroids. But my gosh, the Kochs are trying to steer academics to write things that are favorable to oil companies. You know, so it's incredibly facile and I think it's mostly untrue. And I don't care what the Kochs give their money to. What's nice about my job at the Mises Institute is we don't get any Koch money, so we don't have to sort of play defense the way a lot of organizations do.

But to paint James Buchanan as a racist and to say that the Koch brothers are using their money to spread a white supremacist viewpoint on college campuses is so absurd, and it suggests, Tom, that progressivism is not a buffet: you don't get to pick and choose. When Rand Paul goes to Howard University, historical black college, and talks about prison reform, it gets him exactly zero affection or favor from the left. As a matter of fact, when he was attacked by his neighbor, if you actually go into the comments section of some of those news articles at the time, if you actually go into the social media swamp, you will see the left was quite gleeful about this. They hate the Kochs. They're gleeful about attempting to take them down, and they view the Kochs as right-wing oligarchs.

So no matter what the Kochs say about gay marriage, no matter what the Kochs say about criminal justice reform and trying not to imprison so many black men in our country — which is an absolute travesty, by the way. I'll throw in my little virtue signaling. Oh yes, let's talk about prison reform. But it is a travesty. There's a lot of black guys locked up for nonviolent stuff, and as a result, there's a dearth of marriageable men for a lot of black women. That is bad news.

But the Kochs choose to emphasize that sort of stuff over eliminating the income tax, let's say, because that's a form of virtue signaling. And to be fair to the Kochs, they are trying to find an issue where there's some agreement and to actually maybe have a victory as opposed to eliminating the income tax code, which doesn't appear to be happening anytime soon. So I'm not knocking them, but there is a virtue signaling element to it. But it gets them nothing. It gets them nothing because as long as you're opposed to taxation, to things like Obamacare, to a regulatory hyperstate, the left is just going to be forever and ever suspicious and hostile of you.

So this all ties into the greater use of the libertarian moniker. Is it still working for us, and does it gain us any people on the left? I'm not so sure it does.

Now, switching gears a little bit to the right, there are some people on the right who say — and I've heard this a million times — I agree with you guys except on foreign policy. Well that's a pretty big "except," because — Chris Coyne at George Mason has a new book out on how our foreign policy, our bullying of the rest of the world leads to a bigger state at home, both in terms of our police state — it militarizes the cops — but also just in terms of our mentality. It's an interesting book, and I actually hope to interview him soon.

But that's a pretty big "but," because if you go back to the founding period in this country, there was no distinction made between foreign and domestic policy. There's not some magic that makes big government omniscient and competent and efficient at war and killing and remaking foreign societies but hopelessly inefficient at home. No, it's the same organization. It's the same entity, and it's bad at both.

But killing people is the worst thing the state does, and it's the most important libertarian issue in my opinion, and it's the one thing where we ought to be — well, not the one thing, but it is one thing where we ought to be unyielding and uncompromising as libertarians and say: unless the self-defense requirements of an action are entirely justified in the sense of, let's say, just war doctrine, the United States should not be engaging in these military exercises. We all ought to be able to agree on that, and we ought to be able to reach out to people on the right who aren't interested in these endless wars and the debt that they incur as a result and to the left, what's left of the antiwar Code Pink left. You'd think we'd be better at that.

But in order to be better at that, we have to be dogmatic. We have to say that the term libertarian means noninterventionist, both militarily and economically. It means nonintervention in the economy, and it means not intervening in the Middle East, for example. But yet, within self-identified libertarian circles, there's plenty of disagreement about whether Iraq was justified, about whether Afghanistan — or we're still fighting. Yemen, Syria, our relationship with Israel, all of these are still big questions. So it's awfully tough to have faith in a term where people who use the term don't agree on bombing and killing when we're at no risk here. There's no self-defense justification for it. That's what gets me down, and that's what makes me worry about whether "libertarian" as a term is still useful.

**WOODS:** I want to unpack a couple things you said there. You were talking about the UnKoch My Campus project, and let me just add an interesting point to that, because that project, of course, being a progressive project, they can't tell the difference between — this is what I always say — Bob Dole, Newt Gingrich, Donald Trump, Pat Buchanan, the Rockford Institute, the Mises Institute, the Cato Institute. They're all the same thing as far as they know. The Libertarian Party, they're all the same thing.

But what's interesting there is that they lump in George Mason University with the Mises Institute. Now, there are a lot of people — not just GMU, but a lot of people — now, I've had GMU people on the show. I have no beef with them. But the point is there are people who have gone out of their way to distance themselves and say, "I'm not part of the Mises Institute." But you know what? To the left, you are.

**DEIST:** Yeah, well —

**WOODS:** So there's no point. There's no point in bothering to signal to the 12 people who care that you're not. As far as they're concerned, you're the founder of the Mises Institute, so you might as well just embrace it. That's one thing.

Another thing is — and I hope my listeners have patience with me in this, because I hope they see that generally I try to — when I have guests on, I'm generous with them. I point out their good points. I thank them for their important service. Thank you for your service, my friend. I like to point out the good things people are doing. I like to bring to the fore work that people might otherwise not have heard of. And the show is not about: I'm a crazy ego case and I'm the only libertarian who matters. Anybody who's listened to me knows that's the case.

But I do have to toot my own horn on one thing on this. When we're talking about division between libertarians, there are some who think Woods just spends too much time attacking the left and he's virtue signaling to the right in his own way. Now, a couple of things can be said about that. If you read my book *Real Dissent*, which is the last book I wrote, it's almost all against the neocons. There's almost nothing against the left in that book. So I got bored with that. All right, I've beaten these people to a pulp; now I want another project. But I still have plenty, plenty of reserves for anybody who deserves to be smacked around.

But what's interesting is those people who say that about me, I've actually had — for all their talk about we're going to reach out to the left, what do they have to show for themselves other than, as you say, people biting their hands off? They have nothing to show for themselves. Whereas, if I may just take a couple of quick examples, Murray Polner and I — Murray Polner is a great — I mean, he's super left-wing. He's an awesome guy from Long Island. He turns 90 this week. And he just wrote to me to say: you know, Tom, you and I should write another book before they start World War III. He's 90. But he's an awesome guy, and I thought, you know what? I don't agree with him on domestic stuff, but let's work together on a project. So we did that, and the result was the book *We Who Dared to Say No to War*, published by Basic Books, got a starred review from *Publisher's Weekly*. And Ralph Nader, who's also a little bit known on the left, wound up buying 1,200 copies of that book to distribute to people.

Now, I could go down — I did a paper, thanks to the Mises Institute and the scholar's conference, I did a paper on Seymour Melman, who was the late professor, I think industrial engineering maybe, at Columbia University. He was the best — even though he was on the left, he was the best analyst of the economics of the Pentagon. And I did a paper that was a tribute to him and it wound up later in my book *Rollback*. And then I got great feedback from his current-day students who were really glad, and so we engaged with each other.

So I do this sort of thing without a lot of fanfare, and I actually have something to show for it. And yet the funny thing is I'm supposedly the great demon who makes this impossible, but I'm the one who's actually out there accomplishing something instead of just writing nasty comments on Facebook all day.

**DEIST:** Yeah, absolutely true. I think there's no question about it. And what's interesting to me, if you'll allow me a little bit of self-indulgent self-defense when it comes to libertarian in-fighting is that sometimes people within the world of Koch libertarianism treat the Mises Institute much like they're now being treated by the Nancy MacLean types.

**WOODS:** Yeah.



**DEIST:** In other words, they impugn our motives; they imagine that we're racists; they don't go to the original sources and actually read them before they attack them, blah, blah, blah. So this whole thing can be a little discouraging.

But getting back to our topic here, the use of the term libertarian, I think we just have to get beyond it and I think we have to say what does this term mean, what do we stand for, and then we have to sort of go out there and cheerfully take a machete to the world and get after it. None of us has any right to be depressed about anything. This isn't the Great Depression. This isn't the Civil War. This isn't World War I or World War II. We're not working in sweatshops. So let's just sort of understand the natural human tendency to fight and to want to pick battles, but then let's get on with it.

So I notice this stuff. I don't spend too much time worrying about it, but from my perspective — maybe I'm jaundiced or maybe I'm blinded as sort of a right libertarian, but from my perspective, you're an ecumenical guy who appeals to people across the spectrum. So keep doing what you're doing.

**WOODS:** And you know, just the other day, we saw Ray McGovern get dragged out of that hearing room at the Senate. Now, Ray, not everybody's a fan of Ray, but I love the guy and Ray is a Bernie Sanders guy, but doggone it, that guy means business. I was just talking to Scott Horton the other day, and I said I can't believe — I was just talking to Ray on the phone, and he didn't even tell me he was going to go do this thing where they dragged him out of the hearing room. They were treating him, physically roughing him up until it was clear there was a camera on him, and suddenly they became a lot nicer. But I said, "Scott, this is unbelievable. The guy was just going to do this and didn't even think it was worth mentioning." And he says, "Yeah, it's the same thing with me. I have him on and then like then like the next day he's getting arrested at some nuclear silo somewhere." This guy means business.

And so I showed that video. I saw a video just of him being pulled out of the room and then it stopped, so then I got another video; I didn't realize it showed him being taken out of the room and roughed up. And I'm not sure I would have wanted all my kids to see that, actually, but I said to them, "Here's a guy I'm probably a million miles away from on some issues, but when this guy is right, he is so right. And that is a good man. He's just trying to alert anybody who might still care in the world about something really important. And here he is, 78, 79 years old, you've got to respect that." And my kids, my family, we love Ray McGovern. And that's the thing. I don't see that happening, with a few noble exceptions — there are people who call themselves libertarians who are incapable of treating you and me the way I treat Ray McGovern without even giving it a second thought.

**DEIST:** Well, it's absolutely true, and the first thing I thought when I saw the video was I wonder if they could charge him with some kind of felony or something that might affect his CIA pension. That would be a pretty ugly trick to pull on an older gentleman who apparently worked there a couple decades, three decades, whatever it was.

**WOODS:** Yeah.

**DEIST:** But yeah, it is interesting that we make better in-roads with people on the left like Ray McGovern and Ralph Nader than we do with *The New York Times* and *The Atlantic* and the *Daily Koses* of the world, and we just have to identify those people who are still well-

intentioned. I think that's the key, is are people even coming to the table with good intentions. And as libertarians, frankly, we're still sort of fighting to be at the table, not the state's table, but the national conversation, the discussion.

And I'm going to throw out the name Nomi Prins. Nomi's a deep, dyed-in-the-wool Bernieite progressive, but she's also become a dear friend of mine. She writes incredible books about the Fed and central bankers and the collusion between them and Wall Street and this sort of unholy elite as opposed to a genuine elite who made their own money honestly. And she's really a fantastic person, and she and I have conversations about things upon which we disagree. She's got a brand-new book. She's out on tour. Her new book's called *Collusion*. She's going to be at our event in Dallas-Fort Worth in a couple of weeks. So these kind of conversations are possible.

**WOODS:** Right.

**DEIST:** But the first thing you've got to do is stop being mealy-mouthed and stop trying to talk to people on their terms and apply our own terms and let's move the conversation. If we've seen anything from the past few years — Trump, the rise of people like Jordan Peterson — the old conversation is done. It's boring and we ought to drop it and we ought to try to move in some new directions. And even if that means approaching libertarianism in terms of single-issue coalitions or in terms of decentralized approaches — I really like the idea of private cities. I really like the idea of federalism and moving power away from the federal government.

And God knows, if the Republicans somehow manage to survive these midterms and if Trump somehow manages to get reelected in 2020, our progressive friends are just going to go ballistic. I mean, they're going to be so much more interested in federalism. They already are as a result of Trump winning, because it really shocked them psychologically. It really shook them. Their whole arc of history is that there's an inevitability to progressivism and the next thing comes, and the next thing is Hillary Clinton. And when that didn't happen, it really caused them to start asking some existential questions.

And that's a great opportunity for those of us to say: you know, part of liberty is political subsidiarity, self-determination. Mises was a huge democrat. He absolutely believed that democracy was a necessary part of securing property rights and that you had to have democratic mechanism to — I don't agree with that, but nonetheless, localized democracy is an easier sell than anarchocapitalism, and it's also a step in the right direction. I don't have any problem with approaches like that. So it's an interesting time where people are open to new ideas and we can change the conversation. But if we allow the term libertarian to become gelatinous, then we're not doing ourselves any favors, Tom.

**WOODS:** All right, then having said that, let's say a few — I know we're going longer than I said we would, but I think we're on a roll, baby. I think we've got to just let this go where it goes. One quick comment and then a question for you. One of the things I said in one of my emails this week is that a sure sign of a fanatic is somebody who is incapable of saying: such and such person is really good on issues A, B, and C, but I disagree with that person on issues X, Y, and Z. If you're incapable of doing that, you're probably a fanatic.

So let's talk about other terms. There are a lot of other terms people use other than libertarian. Some of them are synonymous. Some of them are just flat-out synonyms for

libertarianism. So people use anarchocapitalist, which is not necessarily a synonym because there are minarchist libertarians. People use voluntaryist. There are a number of possible terms. You could say Rothbardian. What are the pros and cons of these? Other than – I'm not saying we have to start a whole new term from scratch. This would be like starting a new political party: nobody's going to join it. So what do you think about these different terms, though?

**DEIST:** Yeah, it's interesting. I also hear propertarian or propertarianism used. They're all interesting, but they're mostly inside-baseball terms that we're talking about amongst ourselves, and so they're probably not that helpful. And maybe we're stuck with libertarian. But if we're stuck with it, let's defend it. Let's not allow it to be seized in the same way the term liberal was seized. Let's develop it and come up with some core principles and let's defend it.

I really like to use the term private. I love the term private because it means non-state. I think society can organize itself around non-state institutions. I think markets and civil society are just fine for running everything humans need, and that would include police and courts and so-called national defense. Now, a lot of people are going to disagree with that and are going to say: well, come on, Jeff, we need at least police and courts and a military. And that's fine. I can work with those people.

But the idea of private law or private property, a private society, that appeals to me and I think it appeals to a lot of people who are saying we're tired of government being involved in everything, we're tired of the politicization of what ought to be non-political issues like sexuality, for example, like religion, for example, like music, entertainment, all of the cultural issues that ought not to be political in the first place. Well, the way to make them non-political is to make them private. So I don't like the idea that we as libertarians ought to be fighting all of these political battles and cultural battles. That's not really our place. Let's narrow it down and say: you know, whether you agree with us on X, Y, or Z culturally, here's a way that we can live together; here's a way that you can have sort of your localized community and someone else can have theirs.

And this is what I keep coming back to, is that we tend to think of libertarians as people who spend all of their time trying to get people to agree with us, if we just give them the right books, if we just give them the right training. And I'm a big believer in those books and that training. I think we need to capture that 5 or 10 or 15% vanguard of the population. There's no question in my mind that we need to do that. But that's all it takes in most societies. You don't need 51%. Instead of constantly focusing on how we can get people to agree with us, how about if we all spend more of our time trying to figure out how we can get people who disagree with us to live together?

And the way to do that is through decentralization and subsidiarity. There's no question about it. The Swiss government, their website even says quite openly that we view the principles of subsidiarity as part and parcel of social cohesion. Switzerland is a very diverse country. You've got Romani people, you have cultural German people, cultural French people, cultural Italian people, six or seven languages flying around. But they don't have riots. They don't have all the cultural battles that we have, and I think there's a reason for that. I think it's because you don't need to fear other people as much because they lack the political and bureaucratic mechanisms to sort of gang up on you and threaten you.

**WOODS:** Right.

**DEIST:** Why should people in San Francisco worry about Roy Moore becoming a senator from Alabama? Well, they have good reason to worry about it, Tom, because if he is, he's going to be casting votes. He's a guy they hate, and he's going to be casting votes that affect them. I mean, this seems so obvious. It's sitting there in front of us. But the problem is that people like federalism when they're losing. They don't so much like it when they're winning.

So if the left, if the Democrats win the 2018 midterms, take control of the House and Senate, and then if they install a Democratic president in 2020, all of this Calexit and federalism stuff and sanctuary cities is going to go out the window, and they're going to get back to federalizing and nationalizing everything. But if they lose, they're going to be a lot more interested. I wish I could say that hypocrisy in politics was some kind of sin. That's like saying the tail gunner in an aircraft has dandruff. I mean, hypocrisy in politics, it scarcely matters at this point.

But it's interesting how some of these terms work and how the term libertarian has morphed and how we might do better with the term. But for me, I like to talk about private society versus so-called public or state society. If I had to ever replace the term, and I don't think I'll be able to, but I would use something along the lines of a private law or a private property society to describe what I have in mind when I say libertarian, but to describe it a little bit more accurately.

**WOODS:** All right, well, let's finish with this because of course you are the president of the Mises Institute. The Mises Institute is dedicating to teaching Austrian economics from the Austrian school of economics. But it does also speak in its tagline about a free society and freedom, so these things are not entirely separable. So how does the mission and work of the Mises Institute mesh with the discussion we've had today?

**DEIST:** Well, it's interesting. There are plenty of people in libertarian circles who reject Austrian economics.

**WOODS:** Yeah, no kidding.

**DEIST:** They don't agree with its view of the entrepreneur and capital, the structure of production. They don't agree with its individualist methodology. In fact, they think that empiricism is the correct method of economics. They don't agree with its emphasis on property. They don't agree with interest rates as prices. So not all libertarians accept Austrian economics or even Chicago or any kind of free-market economics, so we shouldn't kid ourselves there. There are still divisions.

But if you go and read, it's somewhere near the beginning of Mises' book *Liberalism*. I don't have it in front of me, but he has a great sentence where he says something like, if I could distill the entire liberal program down to one word, it would be this: property. And then he says he actually was, for his time writing that in the 1920s, a bit of a neoliberal in that he also added to that single definition of liberalism, property, he also added that we also need individual liberty and peace. Whereas the old order, the 19th century liberal order would have just said property is everything. So for his time, writing in the 1920s, he was actually a neoliberal in that he was appending a couple of new requirements on the liberal program:

peace and individual liberty. And of course, we all view those things as very, very important as well, because they're holistic. What flows from your mind and your body and your actions is property, but you need to be able to live and work as you wish in order to hopefully obtain or create that property.

So just like the term liberalism has morphed, the term libertarian has, and we hope that people come to liberty or a greater degree of liberty-mindedness through the Mises Institute, but it's not our broad focus. Our broad focus is teaching people what we would consider proper or correct economics. But proper or correct economics is not enough. None of us can live or thrive or operate in a politically authoritarian culture or society, and that's where it seems like we're headed, so we need to keep beating our head against the wall and trying to find new ways to reach people. And whether that's a 5 or 10 or 15% vanguard or whether that's single-issue coalitions or whether that's just finding people in San Francisco who don't want to be part of Jeff Sessions' America – whatever that takes, I think we need to be flexible on strategy, but I think we need to be stubborn on ideology.

**WOODS:** Well, the Mises Institute, before I forget, is having an event coming up June 2nd in Fort Worth, featuring Nomi Prins, as you mentioned; also you'll be there; Yuri Maltsev, who's the Soviet defector, has been a guest on this show; a number of great speakers are going to be there. If you are a member in good standing of my Supporting Listeners program, you get in for free. And if you'd like to join that program, just go to [SupportingListeners.com](http://SupportingListeners.com), sign up, and you can get into that event for free. Just send me a note over at [Bonuse@TomWoods.com](mailto:Bonuse@TomWoods.com) and I will get you set up to get into that event for free. Otherwise, people who are in the area should go to that event. In fact, check out the Mises Institute's events at [Mises.org/events](http://Mises.org/events) to see if there's anything going on in your area.

Jeff, as always, thanks so much for being here. It's terrific talking to you.

**DEIST:** All right, thanks a million, Tom.